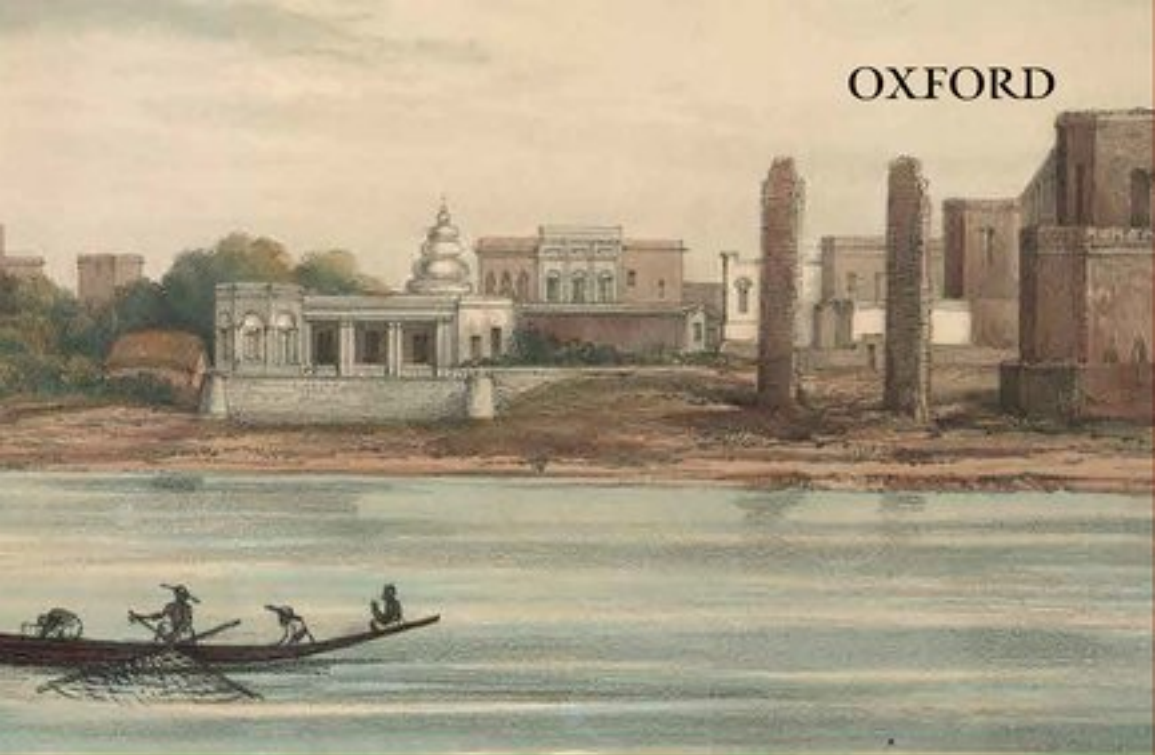




OXFORD

RECASTING *the* REGION

Language, Culture, *and*
Islam in Colonial Bengal

Neilesh
Bose



Recasting the Region

Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal

NEILESH BOSE

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To my teachers and my parents

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Abbreviations

AIML	All-India Muslim League
AMK	Awami Muslim League
BPML	Bengali Provincial Muslim League
BMSS	Bengali Muslim Sahitya Samaj
BMSP	Bengali Muslim Sahitya Patrika
BSP	Bangiyo Sahitya Parishad
CPI	Communist Party of India
DSP	Dacca Sahitya Parishad
EPRS	East Pakistan Renaissance Society
KPP	Krishak Praja Party
ML	Muslim League
MSS	Muslim Sahitya Samaj
PPSS	Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sammelan

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Note on Terminology, Transliteration, and Non-English Terms

I have used the old spellings 'Dacca' and 'Calcutta' for the cities which are now spelt Dhaka and Kolkata respectively. I have used the term 'East Bengal' to refer to the general landmass of eastern Bengal that became East Pakistan in 1947. The term 'East Bengal' was used officially in Pakistan until 1956.

This book uses several Bengali words, some of which have origins in the Arabic, Persian, or Urdu languages. Except for proper nouns, place names, or words familiar to English readers, all such words are italicized in the text. The meanings of all such words are defined either in the context, parenthetical remarks, or endnotes. I have omitted diacritics in favour of phonetic transliterations attuned to idiomatic English.

I have listed both the Bengali Satabdi (Bengali Year) (BS) and Gregorian Common Era (CE) systems of notation for dates as per the listings in the original Bengali sources consulted. Whenever a Bengali source has listed only the Bengali date, I have also included an approximation of the CE year as well.

Introduction

One should not forget that a true Muslim is a born rebel. His obedience is to Allah alone and none else. Everything on the earth and in the heavens belongs to Allah and none else.... The establishment of Pakistan was for the Muslims of Bengal a *revolution* similar to the great French revolution. This was the first time in the history of the sub-continent that an oppressed agrarian people had established a state of their own by removing at a single stroke the tyrannous foreign rulers and the indigenous vested interests such as the caste Hindu *zamindars*, *talukdars*, moneylenders, professionals, merchants, and industrial capitalists.

— Abu Jafr Shamsuddin, 1973¹

The renowned Bangladeshi writer Abu Jafr Shamsuddin, a member of a generation of intellectuals reared in the latter years of colonialism in the 1940s, wrote these impassioned words just two years after the formation of Bangladesh, a state constructed out of East Bengal, for the protection and promotion of the Bengali language and the political and economic self-sufficiency of the East Bengal region. This state

was also built by many of the same Bengalis who ardently supported the establishment of Pakistan twenty-four years earlier. Shamsuddin's romanticization of the creation of Pakistan in his aforementioned words may be dismissed by historians of Muslim South Asia. Such scholars may question his appellation of 'revolution' to the establishment of Pakistan, the marker of 'oppressed agrarian people' for Bengali Muslims, and the implication that rebellion against unjust authority is binding on Muslims. But for a historian of regional consciousness, his *perceptions* of Pakistan hold great importance for an understanding of Bengali Muslim intellectual and cultural history during the late colonial era and decolonization.

Shamsuddin, a native of Gazipur district of Dacca, was well-placed to observe the major social transformations of twentieth-century Bengal. His grandfather was a follower of Maulana Karamat Ali, one of Bengal's most famous travelling Muslim preachers who vigorously promoted a 'purified' Islam amongst eastern Bengal's Muslim masses in the nineteenth century. As a young man pursuing a journalistic career in Calcutta, Shamsuddin wrote for Muslim publications like *Soltan* and *Azad* from the late 1920s through the 1947 construction of East Pakistan. During the postcolonial transition, he shifted from Calcutta to Dacca and energetically began to write for the new Pakistani *Azad* in Dacca. As a journalist in East Pakistan he wrote for several newspapers in the 1950s, such as Maulana Bhasani's *Ittefaq*. He joined the Awami League and participated in the language movement to establish primacy of Bengali in Pakistan from 1952.

From the late 1940s, he began to establish his name as a writer of Bengali novels and short stories, the most famous being *Padma Meghna Jamuna* (1974), an epic novel about the rise of peasant movements in the East Bengali countryside and the triumph of the Bengali Provincial Muslim League and the formation of Pakistan through the eyes and feelings of rural villagers. After having lived through the tumultuous creation of Bangladesh and the dismemberment of Pakistan, Shamsuddin *still felt* in 1973 that the formation of Pakistan was a legitimate revolutionary change in the lives of Bengali Muslims.

As Shamsuddin wrote these observations after having experienced the creation of Bangladesh, the presence of such perceptions in the post-Bangladeshi era raises larger questions. How did Bengali Muslim intellectuals conceptualize the Bengali language *before* the creation of Bangladesh?

If many Bengali Muslim intellectuals spoke out against the Pakistani state's policies in the 1960s through the 1971 war, then how did Bengali Muslim intellectuals perceive Pakistan in 1947, when someone like Shamsuddin was making the trek from Calcutta to Dacca? Furthermore, what does the particular Bengali Muslim history demonstrate about the history of nationalisms based on language, culture, and Islam in modern South Asia?

In the pages that follow, I address these questions through a history of Bengali Muslim literary culture from the early twentieth century to 1952. By literary culture, I refer to the literal texts that Bengali Muslim writers and critics were creating—prose, poetry, polemical essays and debates, literary-critical discussions—as well as the relationships between their social contexts and the worldviews of politicians, public intellectuals, and their audiences.² Rather than presuming a fixed literary tradition, I examine traditions of writing and reception in formation, since the formation of literary culture in this case involved political acts and engaged directly with larger political discussions motivated by both the colonial context and pre-existing debates in literary criticism.

This book, therefore, is a study of the relationship between the development of literature and political choices. In South Asia, literary critics and writers formed traditions that involved political acts, but at the same time, they also set the agendas for broader discussions about politics amongst formal politicians and public intellectuals.³ There are many examples where literary culture served as a conceptual link between political change and cultural identities, or as Sheldon Pollock puts it, a 'culture-power complex.'⁴ In my case, I interpret the history of Bengali Muslim literary culture for what it reveals about the history of Bengali literature as well as the history of politics in Bengal from the early twentieth century to the mid-twentieth century.

Although historical literature is replete with analysis of how modern literary criticism and literary cultures directly reflect the political environment,⁵ it is not clear how writers and critics engaged with political discussions and consequently shaped political choices for the broader public sphere. Though the politics of Bengali Muslims' myriad relationships with Islam has been analyzed in various ways, their specific relationship to changing conceptions of regional identity, folklore, and enrichment of language alongside Hindus in the late colonial period has not been fully examined.⁶ This study offers the first detailed examination of this process,

thereby sidelining the tremendous emphasis that has been historically placed on the role of Bengali Hindus in the making of these very same processes. The history of Bengal, by virtue of including Bengali Muslim discussions and usages of literature, language, and folklore, rather than just history, becomes more discursive and complex.

The insights gained from such a focus engage current debates in modern historical studies of South Asia. First, such a focus enables a comprehensive view of Bengal's modern history outside of narrowly communalized (Hindu or Muslim) or nationalized (India, Pakistan, Bangladeshi) perspectives. As I discuss throughout the book, Bengali Muslims making choices about language and politics seldom did so without being in direct or indirect conversation with Hindus and the local political and linguistic environment in which they worked. Bengali Muslim history, therefore, is necessarily not only a history of a Muslim community contrasted with other communities, but a history that is reflexive of conversations and contestations between Hindus and Muslims that have occurred within Bengal. Therefore, the history of Bengal is enlarged not only by showcasing the Muslim component of it, but by demonstrating how its history cannot be understood without Muslim interactions with Hindus at multiple levels. This work, therefore, situates an attention to literary and linguistic change in conversation with regional history.⁷

Using this approach allows me to focus on how embedded the resolutions to marginalities were within discussions of literary culture in late colonial politics. As Dilip Menon has shown in his study of Malayalam novels, and in his study of the thought of Balakrishnan Pillai, colonial Indian writers often imagined Europe and the 'West' in ways that differed greatly from the dominant 'colonial modern' view.⁸ If Bengali Muslims function as a paradigmatic example that represents how a large group of South Asian Muslims have attempted to resolve particular types of marginalities, as many felt alienated from canonical versions of South Asian Islamic culture in their Urdu and Persian variants and simultaneously are alienated from colonial-vernacular versions of Bengali literature, we then find a modern Muslim variant of Bengali as a political and historically vibrant answer to the challenges facing many Muslim Bengalis in late colonial India.

Scholars have apprehended the meanings and markers for exclusion based on a Hindu nationalist version of Bengal,⁹ and so we are left with a fairly precise sense of how Muslims were 'othered', that is, how they were

stereotyped, judged, and exploited in the service of nationalisms authored by other groups. But the field has yet to encounter a full-fledged study of how Bengali Muslim literary critics and writers saw themselves, not simply as a reaction or constraining force against those at the centre of power, but rather, on their own terms. This element of late colonial Indian politics and thought contributes, therefore, to the increasingly rich analysis of the vast global history of nationalism itself.¹⁰

The study of nationalism and modern collective identities of Bengali Muslims necessitates a reflection on the major markers in South Asian Muslim political history, such as the emergence of a movement for Pakistan in various portions of British colonial India in the late 1930s and 1940s. Jalal's signature examination of north Indian and Punjabi late colonial history shows how relational and embedded in late colonialism the entire idea of 'community' was for Muslims, as well as how the colonial state defined and delimited arenas of politics for Indian Muslims.¹¹ In a Punjabi context, she delinks partition from the aspirations for Pakistan, and shows how many Punjabi Muslims opposed the partition of the province, as 'arrangements at the centre, [which do not particularly concern] ... the problem of individuals and communities inhabiting contested space in the regions, enabled Mountbatten to dictate the terms of the all-India settlement'.¹² For Bengal in particular, I further the investigation of South Asian Muslim regional and religious identity by examining what exactly Pakistan meant for many of those Bengali 'individuals and communities inhabiting contested space in the regions'.¹³ Regardless of the outcome of the 1947 transfer of power, Pakistan held intellectual and literary value and meaning for many Bengali Muslims.

A focus on language and literary criticism within a colonial context inevitably takes us to Edward Said's critique of Western knowledge systems on modern colonized writers, as delineated in his landmark 1978 *Orientalism*.¹⁴ South Asian historians such as Ronald Inden, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Sumit Sarkar, and Gyan Prakash have engaged Said's insights relative to the creation of knowledge about the South Asian past.¹⁵ In the Bengali literary context, Anindita Ghosh's *Power in Print* formulated a response to the limited vision of the agency of the colonized in a Saidian approach. Her work rather shows the 'subtle nuances of internal power play' that are 'completely elided in Said's framework'.¹⁶ Her rich study highlights the vibrancy of responses of the colonized to colonial knowledge systems in the nineteenth century. I follow her and Sumit Sarkar's

proscriptions to 'handle more effectively the nuances, ambiguities, and interrelationships of multiple kinds of power and oppression'¹⁷ by focusing on the Muslim trajectory of self-fashioning in a Bengali context in the twentieth century. However, with other models of literary criticism, in particular, Said's final words in *Culture and Imperialism* (written nearly fifteen years after *Orientalism*),¹⁸ I view instantiations of aggressive cultural difference not as dismissible mode of thought that is shared exclusively by a group, but as important components of cultural history. I therefore, 'revisit texts produced in the name of culture without being governed by the same obsession with authenticity crucial to their own reception.'¹⁹

My approach highlights the contestations and contingencies inside Bengali Muslim constructions of communitarian selfhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My focus on literary cultures includes sociological, legal, religious, and cultural dimensions of the Bengali Muslim historical experience. These various dimensions appear in the diverse types of politics that I analyze after the formation of a literary identity in the 1910s, such as brief flirtations with Communism in the 1920s, and the peasant politics of the 1930s. I also examine the multiple imaginings of the idea of Pakistan in the 1940s. Islam was not a limiting predictor of the politics of Muslim communities, but rather a point of reference and the basis for a particular social identity that connected all of these different historical developments.

My first chapter begins with a brief overview of Bengali literary history as it has impacted, and in turn be impacted by, Islam in the medieval and colonial periods, including the many works of Bengali translations patronized by Muslim sultans as well as the diverse form of writing termed 'Musalmāni Bangla' in the nineteenth century that include Arabic, Persian, and Urdu words. The significant marker of time in the early twentieth century includes the first partition of Bengal in 1905, which created a separate East Bengal and Assam province (perceived at the time as a 'Muslim majority' province) and saw a rise in writing by Bengali Muslims about social critiques and Islam. I examine this connection in the late 1910s during and right after the Khilafat movement, a mobilization of political energies designed to restore the holy lands of Islam to Ottoman Turkey after the settlements of World War I. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of language and literature as debated by the members of the BMSS, the first Calcutta-based literary society for Bengali Muslims, active from 1911 to 1918.

In my second chapter, I discuss the continuation of conversations about being Bengali and Muslim—along with a consideration of how social justice and social change related to these conversations—from the 1918 emergence of Kazi Nazrul Islam as a writer of Bengali poetry and prose. Nazrul's emergence serves as the beginning of the study as he was the first Bengali Muslim writer to actively combine various ideological commitments, like Bengali regionalism, Islamic universalism, and modern European ideologies of social justice, such as communism. I analyze his work within the broader debates about Islam, Indian society, and Bengali culture in journals such as the *BMSP* and *Samyabadi* (Egalitarian). After these debates about literature, I examine formal communist politics via its major exponent and founder of the Communist Party of India, Muzaffar Ahmad.

My third chapter concerns the appearance of debate and investigation of Islam, Muslim identity, and Bengali language and culture in the other major urban location of Bengal—Dacca—a previous Mughal capital and home to iconic Muslim aristocratic families of Bengal. In this chapter, I analyze two particular arenas of writing and debate within Dacca and East Bengal. The Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS), an organization of teachers and students, including the Bengali teacher Kazi Abdul Wadud or the literary critic Mohitlal Majumdar, who gathered frequently to discuss issues like modern education, the role of Islam in public life, and Bengali Muslim underdevelopment, forms the first arena. This organization published their papers in a journal, *Sikha* (Flame), and developed a widespread following in Bengali intellectual society. Many of the writers of Calcutta surveyed in chapter two, such as Kazi Nazrul Islam, contributed often to the group's discussions. The other arena includes the growing world of textual production from locations in the *mufassil* (countryside) of East Bengal. Khalilur Rahman's 1927 *Bartaman Muktir Path Ki?* (What Is the Path to Freedom Today?), along with Abul Hashem Khan's 1930 *Siksha Kshetre Bangiya Musalmandiger Durabasta O Tahar Pratikarer Upay* (The Horrid Situation of Bengali Muslim in the Field of Education and Its Solution), continually emphasized how Islam would help in upholding and promoting communal development. As the urban intellectuals also argued, writers from the *mufassil* often sponsored by recently spawned Muslim societies, promoted the learning and usage of Bengali in religious settings.

In my fourth chapter I discuss how conversations within Bengali Muslim circles about language and cultural identity transformed between

1933 and 1939. As the political centres of change shifted from the urban locations of Calcutta and Dacca to the rural interior in the 1930s, a political identity based on peasant experiences entered the discourses of Bengali Muslims in public life. In the 1930s, given the monumental changes in the world economy and the disappearance of credit mechanisms in the East Bengal countryside, organizations like the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) arose in the middle of the decade. From the elections of 1937, in which the KPP and the Bengali Provincial Muslim League (BPML) rose to prominence, peasant politics in Bengal interacted with a developing discourse of Bengali Muslim literary identity. This combination occurred as intellectuals and writers sharpened their notions of Bengali Muslim selfhood in the literary and journalistic world.

In this chapter I examine one such example of literary journalism in the form of *Bulbul* (Nightingale), a magazine active between 1933 and 1938. Published in Calcutta, this magazine was the touchstone of Bengali Muslim intellectual life, much like the *Muslim Sahitya Samaj* of the late 1920s, or Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmed of the early 1920s. *Bulbul's* writers cultivated a growing sense of cultural distinctiveness by constructing the boundaries of a specifically Bengali Muslim language, literature, and culture that was to be distinguished from Bengali Hindu counterparts. The year 1936 marked a critical phase in the development of Bengali Muslim politics of the decade. As prominent activists of the era have documented, electoral politics began to focus on the masses of Bengali Muslim peasants from this year onwards. Bengali peasants were organized politically before, but from this point onwards they entered centre stage in Bengali politics. Central to the consciousness of Bengali Muslims was the enlargement of the electorate, alongside developments in literary culture which laid the foundation for the demand of a culturally based Pakistan in the 1940s. My chapter's latter portions examine the ways in which the KPP grew in scope and how Bengali Muslim literary critics began to associate with the party. By the end of the 1930s, major activists like Abul Mansur Ahmed had declared that the KPP was the sole representative party of Bengali Muslims.

The fifth chapter examines the ways in which this growing literary sensibility developed during the end of empire in the 1940s. Titled 'Ideas of Pakistan and the End of Empire', I assess the regional politics of A.K. Fazlul Huq, by this time a veteran politician in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, and famous for his support of the political rights of

Bengali Muslims. I discuss his career alongside the rising cadre of younger literary and intellectual activists, like Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, both of whom pioneered a Bengali version of the idea of Pakistan through the East Pakistan Renaissance Society. Far from being either a mere imitation of centralizing dictates of the All-India Muslim League and their 1940 Lahore Resolution, or simply being an unfolding of a Bengali regionalism, the varied expressions of Bengali Pakistanism united an investment in the Bengali language, a specifically East Bengali literature, and a conception of socially just governance, inspired in part by Islam. By 1944, due to the efforts of various Pakistani literary societies and the work of mobilizers like Abul Hashim, the idea of Pakistan received impetus in literature following political mobilization.

My final chapter discusses the ways Islam manifested in the thought-worlds and activities of leading activists like Abul Hashim and Maulana Bhasani, two of the most renowned Bengali Muslims leading the charge for Pakistan who formally held 'religious' credentials. They also both held strong convictions about Bengali Muslim linguistic and cultural autonomy. I demonstrate how their politics and support for Pakistan fit within a long-standing tradition of Islamic universalism, following other Muslim South Asian pioneers like Muhammad Iqbal. The idea of Pakistan they promoted was based on principles of social justice for minorities, not just a vague principle of Muslim separatism from India. I also demonstrate how social justice for minorities and a Bengali Muslim literary identity occupied the same discursive space as the medium and marker of the Pakistan ideal. Rather than just being expressed by politicians or activists, the ideal was promoted in poetry and the active creation of a particular type of literature in practice. Simultaneously, Pakistan-wallahs, *avant la lettre*, such as Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, advocated the literary development of Muslim ideals in the Bengali language.

I also discuss the divergence between the ideals of Islamic universalism that partially underpinned the rhetoric behind *Purba* (eastern) Pakistan and the actual formation of the new state from 1947 to 1952. Though a large portion of the entire pre-1947 conception of Pakistan was based on the just treatment of minorities, in these five years the new East Pakistan state overlooked horrific violence against minorities. In the midst of extreme violence, theorists of Pakistan, such as Abul Hashim, continued to write on Islamic universalist themes. Bengali Muslim writers, literary critics, and linguists, some of whom attained positions in the

new state, continued to press for Bengali Muslim linguistic recognition and development in the new world of nation-states. Though the dislocations and changes in political space wrought by the partition of Bengal in 1947 were monumental, they did not alter the continual link between language and Bengali Muslim politics that had been developing since the 1910s.

Rather than present a narrowly construed perception of Pakistan that emerged from the early-twentieth-century stirrings of Muslim identity politics to the one that emerged in the 1940s, I offer multiple perspectives as brought forth by a variety of historical actors towards the construction of Bengali Muslim communitarian selfhood. Various individuals like Fazlul Huq (1873–1962), the popular East Bengali leader, public intellectuals like Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894–1970), poets like Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), and social activists like Abul Hashim (1905–74), contributed significantly to the Bengali Muslim identity, and therefore, to Bengali selfhood.²⁰

I discuss the actual content and form of Bengali Muslim discourse about their regional, cultural, and linguistic identities before, during, and after the transfer of power between the British Empire and the Indian political leadership in 1947. I examine Islam, as one of the many sources of identity for Bengali Muslims, and establish that this religion was not simply a path toward separatism in the form of Pakistan, but rather one of many sources of identity and politics for Bengali Muslims. Like Hinduism, Islam held reference points, symbols, and inspirational narratives for Bengali writers. Moreover, I revisit the meaning of the concept of Pakistan, not as an entity that was created from afar that duped innocent and unsuspecting locals,²¹ but rather, as a concept embedded in the literary and cultural history of Bengal. Finally, I delineate the role of Bengali Hindus, and their literature, symbols, religion, and culture in the definition of Bengali Muslims.

Bengali Muslim intellectuals and writers in this time period created a unique and multi-faceted conception of ‘culture’, inclusive of Hindu and Muslim symbols and reference points, but stridently inclusive of Muslim ones. This version of ‘culture’ formed an answer to the problems posed by the complex configuration of a hegemonic outlook that was vying for control of Bengali Muslim consciousness in the early twentieth century. By the mid-1940s, this strand of Bengali Muslim regional aspirations consciously separated itself from Bengali Hindu literature, traditions of

language, and 'culture'. But as I will demonstrate, though the concept of a regional identity was dependent on difference, and a fragile recognition of sameness, such difference was not the only impetus in creating a state of Pakistan. The impetus for this state rested in ideals and civic conceptions of a new postcolonial future, not only on cultural difference. Such cultivation of ideals and civic duties also reflected back on growing notions of 'culture' for Bengali Muslims.

* * *

As in any historical process, the boundaries and ideological contours of Bengali Muslim literary culture were roughly composed and hazily demarcated between lines of religious identity, linguistic and literary self-sufficiency, and a collective project of cultural regeneration within the ideal of Purba Pakistan. It is the essence and tenor of the hazy lines connecting all of these phenomena that this book hopes to capture in the pages that follow.

Notes

1. Abu Jafr Shamsuddin, *Sociology of Bengal Politics and Other Essays* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1973), p. 26.

2. Sudipto Kaviraj defines literary cultures as 'the sensibilities or mentalities constructed around a common core of tastes, methods of textual production, para textual activities (like performance, recitation, or other use in religious, nonliterary contexts), reception, and the social composition of audiences' in 'The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal' in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 503.

3. See the two most recent edited volumes about literary history in South Asia: Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: UCP, 2003), and Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia (eds), *India's Literary History* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

4. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of Gods in the Worlds of Men* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), p. 563.

5. See Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) for this approach.

6. The literature on Bengali Muslim political history and Bengali Muslim interpretations of Islam is vast. For the late nineteenth century, the classic work remains, Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims, 1871–1906*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Other works include Muhammed Shah, *In Search of an Identity: Bengali Muslims, 1880–1940* (Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1996), Taj-ul Hashmi, *Pakistan as Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920–1947* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), Dhurjati Prasad De, *Bengali Muslims in Search of Social Identity, 1905–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1998), Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims: A Study in their Politicization, 1912–1929* (Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1991), P.K. Lahiri, *Bengali Muslim Thought, 1818–1947: Liberal and Rational Trends* (Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1991), Asim Pada Chakrabarti, *Muslim Identity and Community Consciousness: Bengal Legislative Politics, 1912–1936* (Kolkata: Minerva, 1995), Ashok Kumar Chakrabarty, *Bengali Muslim Literati and the Development of Muslim Community in Bengal* (Simla: Institute for Advanced Study, 2002), Harun Ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1905–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2003), and Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937–1947* (New Delhi: Impex, 1977).

7. My approach is influenced by Lisa T. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), which demonstrates how Telugu's contemporary pulls on the imaginations of modern-day actors emerge from complex literary and intellectual histories.

8. Dilip Menon, 'A Local Cosmopolitan: "Kesari" Balakrishna Pillai and the Invention of Europe for a Modern Kerala' in Kris Manjappa and Sugata Bose (eds), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave, 2010), and 'A Place Elsewhere: Lower-Caste Malayalam Novels of the Nineteenth Century' in Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia (eds), *India's Literary History* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

9. See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially chapters 2 and 4. In a 2010 panel convened by the author titled 'Margins and Centers in South Asian Islam' at the Madison Conference in South Asia, Yasmin Saikia announced that though much scholarship has examined how Muslims have been 'othered' by various groups, the precise contours of how Muslims have imagined their political affiliations, especially in areas marginal to Urdu-speaking, Sunni Muslim cultures have not yet been precisely delineated.

10. This book cannot offer a new theory of nationalism, but argues that the historical experiences of groups such as Bengali Muslims, and their

contestations and conversations, must be included in any consideration of nationalism's definition. The role of modern Islam as well as intra-cultural and intra-regional conversations must be inputted systematically in order to advance our understanding of colonialism and nationalism in twentieth-century South Asia. Debates about nationalism in the colonial and postcolonial world most influential to this study include responses to Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) such as Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Claudio Lomnitz, 'Nationalism as a Practical System: Benedict Anderson's Theory of Nationalism from the Vantage Point of Spanish America' in Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando Lopez-Alves (eds), *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). These works, though, have yet to consider how the intra-regional discussions, and in particular, the presence of Islam, has shaped an important portion of the historical terrain of nationalist thought.

11. See Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000), and Ayesha Jalal, 'Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia' in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (eds), *Nationalism, Democracy, and Development: Reappraising South Asian States and Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

12. Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, p. 537.

13. Ibid.

14. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

15. See Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India' *Modern Asian Studies* 20, 3 (1986): 401–46, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), Sumit Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited: Saidian Frameworks in the Writing of Modern Indian History' *Oxford Literary Review* 16, 1–2 (1994): 205–24, and Gyan Prakash, 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, 2 (1990): 383–408.

16. Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 300.

17. Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited', p. 221, quoted in Ghosh, p. 307.

18. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

19. Michael Elliot, *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xvii.

20. My approach to viewing the history of this period is informed by similar endeavors in other historiographies. Terry Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: The Partisan Review and its Circle, 1934–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986) demonstrated the centrality of a particular group of intellectuals to the same time period in U.S. history. A recent depiction of African American literary history in a similar vein is Lawrence Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

21. This approach is taken in Taj-ul Hashmi's *Pakistan as Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920–1947* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

1. *Modern Bengali Muslim Literary Culture*

At your call, the world awoke, the barbarian European countries awoke
On receiving the light of your education we are able to put on civilized clothes
However I don't understand the pace of time, as everything went haywire
Muslims lay dying due to their lack of education as there is no sound from
their mouth

Although there is no freedom now why do you feel anxious
Islam is freedom, Muslims are free, human beings are always free.

—Anonymous Bengali 'Khilafat' song, 1921¹

The immediate aftermath of World War I in India has often been seen as the moment of arrival for the convergence of trans-regional and local politics of solidarity for Indian Muslims. The Khilafat movement, which aimed to restore the Ottoman caliph after the Central Powers' loss in the Great War, received support from Indian Muslims of many different regions, ethnicities, and social classes.² In Bengal, the region that housed the majority of colonial India's Muslims, and the region that demonstrated a strong localization of the Pakistan

movement nearly twenty-five years later to establish a Muslim state within an anticipated independent India, the Khilafat movement found thousands of adherents. The Bengali face of the movement also merged with pre-existing politics of pan-Indian Muslim solidarity that had been brewing for decades, just as in many other regions of India.

As a reflection of this merging of pan-Indian Muslim solidarity with local idioms and concerns, this anonymous song cited above, probably written in the early years of the Khilafat movement and published in 1921, not only extolled Islam but was also part of a published collection of songs styled after pre-existing Bengali forms, such as 'Turkey's Soil, Turkey's Water', composed in Bengali, a variant of Rabindranath Tagore's *Banglar Mati, Banglar Jol* (Bengal's Soil, Bengal's Water). Other songs include forms patterned after the nationalist Bengali Hindu songwriter Dwijendralal Ray, such as a song about the glories of Turkey composed around the pattern of the Swadeshi song *Banga Amar Janani Amar Desh* (Bengal is My Mother, My Country).

As these songs were written and composed in Bengali in the immediate post-war context, their presence signals the link between modern Muslim political solidarity and an investment in the Bengali language. In the midst of the Great War and the emergence of the Khilafat movement, Bengali Muslims formed modern institutions to debate issues regarding language and politics that would be accessible to Hindus and Muslims. Calcutta, as the centre of vibrant educational and literary activity, began to witness associations that promoted Muslim literary culture, based in the medium of Bengali. What was important about these developments was not only the fact that the Bengali language was used as a medium and as a marker of identity, but that these new institutions accommodated political activists and migrants from rural areas. Indeed, literary culture was the vehicle for multiple political forces in Bengali Muslim circles.

This space of literary culture also challenged the dominant role of the old-world landed elite in Muslim politics in Bengal that was prevalent in the late nineteenth century. The Bengali Muslim challenge to dominant social institutions through literary criticism began with the Calcutta-based Bengali Muslim Literary Society in 1911. Issues central to the formation of the institution of language and politics, such as grappling with the marginality of Muslims in the literary terrain colonial Bengal, however, originated well before the 1910s.

The emergence of language in modern political discussions about Bengali Muslims began in the early nineteenth century with the rise of a standardized, Sanskritized Bengali as well Muslim revivalism during the latter portions of that century. Coloured by pan-Indian Muslim politics, but also reflective of local changes, the development of Bengali Muslim literary culture before the 1910s included creating a modern, forward-looking, multi-religious Hindu and Muslim audience for Bengali literature, fighting stereotypes of Muslims authored by Hindus, and creating institutional links for the transmission of Bengali Muslim writings. This chapter surveys these developments in order to demonstrate the background of Bengali Muslim literary cultures from the late nineteenth century to the end of the Great War in 1918.

Bengali Muslim literary cultures in the pre-modern era include a rich and diverse history of writing, patronage, and literary history. The period of 1204 to 1764 CE, known as the 'Middle Period' of Bengali literary history demonstrates the connectedness of Muslims and Hindus in pre-modern Bengali literature.³ During this period of almost continuous rule by various Muslim sultans such as Sultan Sikander Shah (1359–89), Sultan Giasuddin Shah (1389–1410), Sultan Jalaluddin (1418–31), Husein Shah (1493–1519), and Nusrat Shah (1519–32), poets, both Hindu and Muslim, worked under court patronage and began to develop a local tradition of writing in Bengali. These poets included Chandidas, Krittibas, and Paramewsar Das, along with Sayyid Sultan, Shah Muhammed Sagir, and Sayyid Hamza.

This officially sponsored tradition of Bengali writing countered the earlier dictates by Hindu *pandits*, who stridently opposed any literary activity in local languages. According to Dinesh Chandra Sen, a late colonial Hindu scholar of Bengali, who conducted intensive research on the history of Bengali in rural eastern Bengal, *pandits* of the eighteenth century believed that 'if a person hears the stories of the eighteen Puranas or of the Ramayana in the language of the people, he will be thrown into Rourava hell'.⁴ Some scholars have attributed the willingness of Muslim sultans to invest in the local language as an indication of their intention of denigrating the *pandits'* inwardness, and to reduce the central role of Sanskrit in intellectual culture, and to concurrently glorify Muslim rule.⁵ In any case, many poets during successive Sultanates wrote in Bengali during the pre-modern 'Middle' period. Hindus, many of whom are now revered as poets of high stature, were patronized by various dynasties.

Hindu epics were translated from Sanskrit into Bengali by writers like Kasiram Das with the Mahabharata. Krittibas' much heralded translation of the Ramayana into Bengali was patronized by the early fifteenth-century Sultan Jalaluddin. Other Hindu writers active from the fifteenth century through the seventeenth century include Maladhar Basu, whose *Sri Krishna Vijaya* was written in 1480 under the patronage of Sultan Rukunuddin Barbak Shah. Parameshwar Das was given the title of 'Master Poet' by Paragal Khan, a general of the Husein Shah dynasty, and produced a translation of the Mahabharata in the 1510s.

In addition to Hindus, Muslims also produced a range of literature in the pre-modern era. Shah Muhammed Sagir, the first Muslim to write extensively in Bengali, produced literature under the reign of Sultan Giasuddin Shah (r. 1389–1409). Sagir authored a version of *Yusuf-Zulekha* that was extensively studied in the twentieth century by Bengali Muslim critics.⁶ From the late fourteenth through the early eighteenth century, Muslim writers wrote in Bengali about both religious and secular themes. Alaol (1607–80) was a prominent Muslim to write in Bengali during the seventeenth century. An author of many translations, notably a Bengali translation of *Padmavati*, based on Malik Mohamed Jayasi's Hindi *Padmavat*, he also wrote extensively on music and was patronized by the Arakan court, though he was born in Faridpur and spent much of his life in Chittagong.⁷ Daulat Qazi (1600–38), also from the Chittagong region in southeastern Bengal, composed romantic narrative poetry as well as poetry influenced by his Sufi upbringing and a medley of influences from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and Vaishnava *padavali*. Vaishnava *padavali* (lit. collections of song verses) in the medieval Bengali environment focused on the theme of love between Radha and Krishna, and were composed in Bengali in the writings of Sri Chaitanya (1486–1533) until the eighteenth century. Also, *mangal-kavya* (lit. poems of benediction and auspiciousness) or verses written in honour of local folk deities like Manasa (Snake Goddess) and Chandi (the Supreme Goddess), were a visible portion of the literary landscape of medieval and early modern Bengal.⁸

Muslim writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also frequently demonstrated self-consciousness about writing in Bengali even at a time when its status was questionable alongside traditional languages like Arabic and Persian. Sagir expresses ambivalence to his readers for using Bengali, but at the same time emphasizes to his readers about the

value of writing in one's 'mother tongue'.⁹ Though Mitchell demonstrates how the language of 'mother tongues' became comprehensible in South Asia only from the 1890s, through the creation of new technologies and practices of linguistic reproduction and literary meaning,¹⁰ Bengali writers like Sagir and others such as the sixteenth-century Sayyid Sultan and Muttlib show self-consciousness about writing in one's 'mother tongue'.¹¹

Of most immediate relevance to the early twentieth century is the pre-existing form of Bengali familiar to many readers: *do-bhasi* (two-language) or *Musalmani Bangla*. The two terms, 'do-bhasi' and 'Musalmani', are not exactly accurate, as words and phrases from many languages, including Persian, Arabic, and Urdu, were used without a self-conscious religious identity in this form of Bengali. Additionally, though the bulk of writers who used this form were Muslim, Hindu publishers of books in the nineteenth century clearly promoted this sort of literature by selling their books and at times writing in the form. In literary criticism, the term 'Musalmani Bangla' refers to the genre that emerged from the late eighteenth century that used a host of words and neologisms from Arabic, Persian, and Hindustani linguistic registers in creative ways.¹² One of the widely read modern writers of this form in the nineteenth century was Shah Garibullah, a resident of rural west Bengal in the late eighteenth century. Garibullah's famous works of this genre include the narrative poems based on Islamic themes, such as the love story *Yusuf-Zulekha*, the life of the Prophet's uncle, Hamza (*Amir Hamza*), and the religious and cultural character of Satya Pir, a much venerated personality in pre-modern Bengali literary and religious culture. In addition to Garibullah, others such as Sayyid Hamza and Abdul Majeed Bhuiyan wrote in this form from eighteenth century onwards.¹³

The important historical innovation for the purpose of understanding Bengali Muslim literary culture in the twentieth century is the burgeoning world of print culture in the mid to late nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, *do-bhasi* literature was extremely popular among Muslim readers, through the agency of the 'Battala', or local Bengali press, which oversaw the reprinting and sale of many manuscripts of works like *Yusuf-Zuleikha*, *Amir Hamza*, and *Hatem-Tai* in Calcutta during the late nineteenth century. Precise data about the parameters of Bengali publishing and circulation of printed books exists from the late 1850s onwards. From this time onwards, both religious-didactic literature and secular fairy tales and romances written in this form of Bengali enjoyed high

circulation in Calcutta. The city in 1857 held forty-six Bengali presses and over 500,000 Bengali books for local readers were published that year. Only twenty years later in 1877, government reports show sixty-one presses, including sixteen presses in *mufassil* areas. Therefore, the book market included large numbers of readers in the late nineteenth century. Though the bulk of published books were almanacs, educational literature, and texts about Hindu mythology, literature about Muslim themes also commanded a visible place in the Bengali book market of the era. One representative press active in this period, *Sudhasindhu Press*, published 3,000 copies of 'Muslim Bengali' works, in comparison to 7,500 copies of epic extracts, 6,000 almanacs, and 4,000 copies of indigenous medicine.

In Dacca, the other urban centre of Bengal in the eastern part of the province, printing and publishing culture came comparatively later than in Calcutta. In Calcutta, printing presses were established in 1800 and by the end of that century thousands (as opposed to hundreds of thousands in Calcutta) of books were being published. In Dacca, the first press arrived in the 1840s and the first newspaper in the 1850s. Battala-type books (particularly derived from *punthis*) did get published and circulate in Dacca, from the 1870s through the 1900s. Though quantitatively smaller than the Calcutta market, as scholars have found approximately ninety *punthis* produced in Dacca compared to thousands in Calcutta, many of the same issues were covered—Islamic themes, social satires, and love stories. The significant difference between the two urban markets was that Muslim press owners, proprietors, and compositors appeared to have played a greater role in the publishing of Muslim-authored *punthis* in Dacca. In Calcutta, Hindus dominated the production of these 'Muslim' works.¹⁴

In official educational and government circles, this literary form became deviant compared to the newly standardizing Bengali language which was developing from a variety of spoken and written forms into a standardized modern vernacular with a teachable grammar and identifiable origins by the late nineteenth century. This progression occurred through the agency of colonial-era missionaries, Orientalists, and Hindu pandits. Standardization began with the Orientalist Nathaniel Halhed, who in 1778 noticed that spoken Bengali was laced with Persian and Arabic, even though Hindu pandits (or at least those he spoke with!) 'despised Bengali as a *prakrit* dialect, fit only for demons and women, though it arose from the tomb of Sanskrit'.¹⁵ Soon afterwards, missionaries like William

Carey, Joshua and Hannah Marshman,¹⁵ and William Ward, focused their attention on the Bengali language and produced the first printing press, the Serampore (Srirampore) Mission Press, which began in 1800.

The press printed books in various languages and on various themes, but focused on Bengali and included Bengali translations of the Bible and Bengali versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as the English language *A Friend of India*. In collusion with Hindu pandits like Ramram Basu, hired by Carey, Orientalists slowly developed Bengali grammar and dictionaries that depended heavily on Sanskrit, Sanskrit-derived words, and Hindu terms. It is important to note that different approaches to writing Bengali did exist within the circle of Carey's colleagues, as Ramram Basu's prose was reflective of a knowledge of Persian, though Mritunjay Vidyalkar, a pandit, wrote in a heavily Sanskritized style. The Sanskritized style, though, won out in the end. Until the early nineteenth century, no standardized conception of Bengali had existed as large amounts of Persian and Arabic were included in Bengali speech and writing in various registers. Also, a large portion of the scribal and bureaucratic elite communities of Calcutta, Hindus and Muslims alike, were conversant in Persian as a manner of practical necessity. Therefore, Persian words and forms were well known to literate Bengalis of the early nineteenth century. But Perso-Arabic elements were gradually purged from the standardized form of the language through the late nineteenth century, when Persian and Arabic words were seen as altogether foreign to the newly minted standardized Bengali by these progenitors and Bengali Hindu writers educated in the vernacular educational system.

This Sanskritized standardization, along with later prose literature by authors like Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, started to transform the Bengali language for a readership that reflected a 'Hindu' idiom. Words of Sanskrit origin were accepted as proper Bengali, and Sanskrit was crowned as the mother of the language. A profusion of literature on Hindu themes, such as gods and goddesses like Krishna, Siva, and Durga, and Hindu topics like the Upanishads and Vedas started to appear from the 1860s onwards.¹⁶ Books about Muslim themes, such as folk tales of *Yusuf-Zuleikha* and *Hatem Tai* continued to appear in the Bengali book market, but the forms of language these books represented were perceived as marginal to the standardized and allegedly 'proper' version of the language. But by the latter half of the nineteenth century,

with the growth of literature by and about Bengali Hindus, and the usage of this literature in school and college assignments, the so-called Musalmani Bangla and any literature by and about Muslims was considered to be deviant in comparison to the standardized form of standardized Bengali.¹⁷

Regarding Muslim Bengali literature during this time, the political context of the 1857 Mutiny/Rebellion and its consequences directed government officials to closely monitor and define 'Muslim' literature. One of the prominent rebels in nineteenth-century Bengali linguistic circles, Reverend James Long, authored *A Descriptive Catalog of Bengali Works*, first published in 1855. In this book he invented the term 'Musalmani-Bangla' after having surveyed Bengali literature at this time, calling it a 'mixture of Urdu and Bengali, very popular among Muslims in Calcutta and Dacca'.¹⁸ Soon after this moment, in 1857–58, during and after the Mutiny/Rebellion, he also worked to create a report on Bengali, titled *Returns Relating to Publications in the Bengali Language in 1857*, published in 1859, aimed at monitoring seditious literature, but also, to identify with precision 'Muslim' sorts of Bengali.

Another reason that the 'Muslim' component of Bengali literature gradually became separated from Hindu forms was the gradual rise in Muslim revivalist itinerant preachers and organizations that developed in the latter portion of the nineteenth century. It would be a mistake to assume, though, that Muslims only read Muslim revivalist or Muslim-themed literature and the Hindus only read Hindu-authored literature. Particularly, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Hindus and Muslims were both ardent readers of romance and love stories involving Islamic characters. But not all literature produced by Muslims was in this Musalmani Bangla style, as much of it lay somewhere in between the newly standardized Bengali and Musalmani Bangla.

The space of Musalmani Bangla was one of literary and cultural distinctiveness, from both the Hindu-colonial tandem of standardization, as well as the Muslim *ashraf* classes of Bengal, who stayed far away from such language. Therefore, this sort of language existed outside the scope of both elite Muslims (who learnt Persian and Urdu and wrote in Urdu and English) and formally educated Bengali Hindus, who would distance themselves from this language. This separation in socio-linguistic terms formed a particularly unique community in the nineteenth century and appealed to those left out of the elite-level linguistic and literary changes

occurring at the time. One scholar of Bengali literature has gone so far as to say that Musalmani Bangla in literary form and content presented 'happy tales of the marvelous and the supernatural which offered meaning and stability, community, and fraternity. The virtues of Hatem or Yusuf, the healing powers of Satya Pir¹⁹ and the bravery of Almas, seemed comforting and familiar amidst a disorderly and harsh contemporary environment'.²⁰ Whether the presence of Musalmani Bangla was revolutionary is debatable, but a social sentiment and linguistic form existed in nineteenth century Bengal that belonged neither to the drive of Hindu and missionary standardization, nor clearly in the camp of Muslim distinctiveness and revivalism.

However, Musalmani Bangla did resonate outside of the simply oppositional space of linguistic distinctiveness. The great Muslim revivalists and preachers who flooded East Bengal from the 1820s onwards did not focus on Arabic, Persian, or Hindustani in their perorations and writings. They also did not use the sort of Bengali that was being standardized into a Hindu Sanskritic idiom. Many used a form of Musalmani Bangla, already enmeshed in Bengali Muslim life from the usage of it in popular narratives written by Garibullah and Sayyid Hamza. Karamat Ali, an influential Muslim revivalist preacher of the nineteenth century, along with his disciples like Munshi Janab Ali, both used Musalmani Bangla in their poems about Islam and included Bengali Muslim literary registers that had begun with Garibullah nearly a hundred years before.

Islamicization of Karamat Ali's variant, though vigorously opposed to Hindu rituals and influences in everyday Muslim life in Bengal, did not avoid the diversified linguistic registers of Bengali Muslims but rather used and developed them.²¹ The difference between this sort of Bengali, and the earlier versions of *do-bhasi*, is that this sort emerged as a didactic strategy to impress upon audiences the meanings and markers of Islam, in a context when such questions were becoming relevant. This language was not a direct carry-over from the pre-colonial period, but rather emerged out of the politics of colonialism. Many of these works aggressively sought to create an ideal reader, whereas works from the fourteenth through the eighteenth century that included Arabic or Persian did not pursue Islamicization in a didactic or proscriptive way.

Though a complicated literary and social history of Bengali Muslim writing in the late nineteenth century that took on non-standardized forms—didactic literature, romances, a localized Bengali *qissa* (*keccha*

in Bengali) tradition—remains the province for further research, the history of how Bengali Muslims confronted standardized Bengali, and the implications of that confrontation, forms the immediate background of late colonial Bengali Muslim literary cultures.

This confrontation began from the late 1860s onwards as literary production in Bengali Muslim circles gradually embraced the Sanskritic, standardized Bengali that had been used by Hindus since earlier in the century. Reformers and preachers like Munshi Meherullah and his one-time nemesis, but later disciple Jamiruddin,²² started to participate in debates with Christians, and write in standardized Bengali in the late nineteenth century. From this point onwards, Bengali writers started to emulate them when writing on Muslim themes. Mir Musharraf Hussein was the most visible symbol of the new Bengali Muslim writer who wrote in standardized Bengali. Hussein's 1869 novel *Ratnavati*, reviewed in 1870 by the English-language *Calcutta Review*, appeared as the first novel by a Muslim writer in standardized, Sanskritic Bengali prose. His 1872 play *Basuntakumari Natak* (A Play for Basantukumari), a complete departure from Musalmani forms of the language, was written in a Bengali indistinguishable from Hindu writers of the era.

By the 1870s, the burgeoning scene of Bengali prose literature, dominated by Bengali Hindu writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, included prose written on multiple themes such as social reform, as well as fiction, became increasingly popular amongst literate, educated middle-class Bengali readers. In this context, Hussein appeared as one of the very few voices in Bengali Muslim letters whose work was recognized positively by the Hindu literati. A prodigious writer, he produced thirty-six books in many different genres, such as prose fiction, autobiography, poetry, essays, and dramatic literature. Starting out as a journalist, he wrote for many mufassil newspapers, such as *Sangbad Prabhakar* in his youth. He was a contemporary of Bankim Chandra, but unlike the Brahmin Hindu who benefited from a Western education at Presidency College, Mir Musharraf Hussein learnt Bengali from his father and did not receive a formal education. Regarding social critiques and reflections on colonial society, Hussein produced a great number of works from the 1870s onward, such as the play *Jamidar Darpan* (The Landlord Mirror) (1873), which critiqued zamindar abuses of peasants in rural Bengal. Hussein observed many details about life on estates in eastern India run by zamindars, as he worked for the management of

estates in Faridpur and other regions of Eastern Bengal in the 1860s and 1870s.

In many ways, Hussein was a pioneer for Muslim writing in Bengal, though his work fit in with established trends within Bengali writing of his generation. His play *Jamidar Darpan* (The Landlord Mirror) was written after many other Bengali plays using the theme of 'darpan' (mirror) as a methodology of social critique. These included plays such as Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan* (Mirror of the Indigo Plantations) in 1860, which stirred anti-colonial sentiment as it depicted the abuses of peasants on indigo plantations. Other works included Amritalal Basu's 1875, *Gaekwar Darpan* (Mirror of the Gaekwar Prince of Baroda), which showed the harassment of the Maharaja of Baroda by the colonial government, and Dakshina Charan Chattopadhyaya's 1875 *Chakar Darpan*, about the abuses of workers on tea plantation in Assam. Other works he composed on social themes included *Go-Jivan* (1888), which encouraged Muslims to give up cow-sacrifice out of concern for Hindu neighbours (which earned him a fatwa from Naimuddin). The 1890 novel *Udasin Pathik Moner Katha* (Secrets of an Indifferent Traveller), like *Jamidar Darpan*, described the plight of peasants in a plantation economy.

A vehicle of this new wave of Bengali writing by Muslims demonstrated by Hussein was the burgeoning Bengali Muslim press. Friends and associates of Meherullah and Jamiruddin formed their own group, the *Sudhakar* group, and their own newspaper, the *Sudhakar*, active from the late 1890s to 1906. Inclusive of writers like Musharraf Hussein, this paper published impassioned exaltations of Islam, Islamic history, and refutations of Christian missionaries in Sanskritic Bangla. This signalled a rise of religious literature by and for Bengali Muslims written in the newly standardized Bengali. In the 1880s, Reazuddin Mashadi's biography of Jamaluddin al-Aghani, *Samaj O Samskarak* marked the beginning of an Islamic modern political sentiment in this sort of Bengali. In addition to the *Sudhakar* writers, a growing cadre of writers and reformers contributed to journals such as *Musalman Bandhu*, *Musalman*, *Islam Pracharak*, and *Kobinur*, all of which started to appear in the 1880s and 1890s.²³

The last two decades of the nineteenth century also saw the rise of *tafsir* (translation and exegesis of the Qur'an) literature in the Bengali language. The first such text came from the work of Girish Chandra Sen in 1881, on behalf of the Brahmo Samaj. Aiming to find universalist

monotheistic concepts that would apply to Indian society as a whole, Sen used many Sanskrit terms, such as *iswara*, as opposed to Allah, for God, and addressed a middle-class Western-educated audience. After Sen's pioneering efforts, *tafsir* literature appeared from the late 1880s onwards, first by Mohammed Naimuddin in 1891. Naimuddin wrote for a Bengali Muslim audience which presumably knew little about Islamic thought, religious practice, and Qur'anic commentary.²⁴

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, not only were Bengali Muslims reading high-brow Bengali literature produced by Hindus like Bankim Chandra, but were writing critiques of it as well. In addition to these critiques, Bengali Muslims were producing their own literature in this type of Bengali. This fact slowly began to infiltrate the Hindu reading public, as most responses to Bengali Muslim writing in standardized Bengali were believed to have surprised editors of Bengali Hindu journals. Muhammed Qasim al-Qureishi, otherwise known as Kaikobad, a Bengali Muslim poet of the era, also demonstrated how Muslims started to write in Sanskritic Bengali, while encompassing both Muslim and Hindu themes in his work. He garnered acclaim for his 1895 book of poems, *Asrumala* (Garland of Tears), written in standardized Bengali and inclusive of poems about Islamic festivals like Eid and humanity's creation from a Muslim point of view. It also includes an elegiac poem about Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the Bengali Hindu reformer who had died in 1891. Also, he wrote poems singing the praise of the Bengali language. Significantly, in one of these poems, 'Bangabhasar Prati' (Toward the Bengali Language), he uses maternal imagery of the Bengali language and Bengali region, and in doing so unabashedly and confidently reflects Hindu interpretations of Bengali language and culture in his own writing.²⁵ In the late 1890s, the editors of the *Bangadarshan*, a Bengali Hindu publication, wrote that 'we were not aware of the fact that there was such a person in this country who in spite of the fact that he was a Muslim, could write such beautiful poems in pure Bengali'.²⁶

Mir Musharraf Hussein wrote such high-quality Bengali in the 1869 *Ratnavati* (acclaimed as the first Bengali Muslim novel), that the *Calcutta Review* stated that doubtlessly 'the author has concealed his real name under the nom de plume of a Mussalman'.²⁷ About the periodical edited by Hussein, *Mihir*, the Bengali Hindu editors at *Samay* wrote that 'even a few days ago, the Mussalmani Bangla was unreadable to the Hindus; but with the progress of education, the difference in writing between the

Hindus and Muslims is fast disappearing. The Mussalmans are writing pure Bangla like the Sanskrit-learned scholars of the Hindus. This is a subject of pride for the land of Bengal'.²⁸ Hussein did not engender only surprise from Hindu journal editors, but he also evoked praise for potentially reducing Hindu–Muslim conflicts through such high quality prose. This praise revealed the assumption that standardized, Sanskritized Bengali must be the type of Bengali that all Bengali writers must use out of both taste and propriety to uphold social cohesion.²⁹ An 1885 editorial stated that Hussein's 'command of Bengali is truly impressive.... For a Muslim Bengali, this is a matter deserving of no small pride and praise.... Let us hope that Bengali Hindus, by reading this work [*Bishad-Sindhu*]³⁰, shall learn to call Muslims brothers, and that Bengali Muslims, after reading it, shall learn Bengali, pure Bengali'.³¹ As a contemporary scholar of the nineteenth century has remarked, Bengali Hindus presumed that Muslims writing in Bengali must be overwhelmed with Persian and Arabic and would have hardly expected them to know and write in standardized, Sanskritized Bengali.³²

Social Critique at the Turn of the Century

Furthermore, the question of standardized versus non-standardized literature, issues such as economic under-development and social mobility faced Bengali Muslims at the turn of the century. In the late nineteenth century, government officials like W.W. Hunter started to comment on the educational and social backwardness of the Muslims in comparison to the Hindus of Bengal. Hunter wrote a frequently cited book, *The Indian Musalmans* (1871), which detailed the economic factors surrounding the position of Muslims in India in general, and Bengal in particular. Before the emergence of Hunter, Calcutta-based Muslim elites like Nawab Abdul Latif wrote about Muslim backwardness and advocated on behalf of Muslims to learn Bengali and English and also participate in modern educational institutions. Latif started the *Mohammadan Literary Society* in 1863, for discussion education, science, literature, and pushed for educational advancement among Muslim community. Significantly, the discussions took place in Urdu and English, did not include Bengali, and included only elite, princely, or landed Muslims.

But from the 1890s onward, Bengali Muslims started to critique local social relations and they discussed about the economic underdevelopment

in the Bengali language. These critiques emphasized Islam as a vehicle for economic development.³³ They also emphasize modern, Western education, and at times, the identity of peasants as Muslims. A range of texts published in cities like Calcutta and Dacca as well as texts from mufasssil locations throughout rural Bengal began to address these issues.

One impetus to the increase of such writing was the creation of a new East Bengal and Assam province in 1905, initiated by Lord Curzon, who acted as the Indian Viceroy for six years. Curzon established the partition for the ostensible reason of providing more infrastructure and manpower to rule eastern Bengal, as the riverine and swampy portions of the land were unmanageable for the British colonial state. Additionally, the Curzon administration declared that their goal was also in line with the discourse of backwardness about Muslims at the time, to uplift the Muslim population through the promotion of government infrastructure, educational institutions, and jobs for Muslims in public services. Though certainly a subject of vast controversy, as nationalists based in Calcutta opposed the partition, the first partition period was a time when increasing numbers of texts were written by Muslims in Bengali.

Sympathy for peasants and an embrace of education was highlighted during the six years of this first partition period with texts like *Unnati Sopan* (Stepping Stones to Improvement), written by M.I.A. Ahmadi in 1910. In this verse book from Dinajpur in northern Bengal, the author declared that 'the Muslim community, particularly the peasants and illiterate sections, are still wrapped up in a deep slumber.... With their eyes tight shut they are silently bearing the torture of insult, hunger, and indebtedness, and are losing respect for their own religion.... It is for the sake of justice and religion that I am placing this *Unnati Sopan* before this decaying society'.³⁴ Focus on education continued with M.D. Ali's *Samaj Siksha* (Learning for Society), a collection of verses encouraging development and upliftment. This book, from Nadia in West Bengal, reaffirmed the down-graded status of Muslims in Bengal. Like Dilawar Husein Ahmed a generation earlier, Ali advocated trade and commerce as a way out of the economic malaise experienced by Muslims.

The problems of peasants and zamindars is also examined in the multi-faceted *Burir Shuto* (Old Woman's Thread), written by Muhammad Mahsenullah in 1909 from Natore, in the northern location of Rajshahi. This text functions as a representative account of the changes that occurred in Bengali Muslim circles in its dual emphasis on the backwardness of

the Muslim community and its multivalent recognition of the changing political landscape. Containing essays, poems, and reprinted articles from the *Mihir-O-Sudhakar* (The Sun and the Moon), as well as extracts from the organization's reports that sponsored the distribution of the text, rarely does a narrowly defined 'Muslim' identity or interest find mention. Though the plight of Muslim peasants is explicitly mentioned and the book underlines the need for spreading education about Muslims, the text emphasizes the actual political contours of Muslims as peasants. One petition that is included, 'An Appeal of Gunu Pramanik', mentioned how he lost land due to the collusion of government officials and unscrupulous zamindars. This, along with the emphasis on building peasant associations and the need for peasants to overcome the constraints of post-Permanent Settlement laws,³⁵ led one scholar to state that this text outlines the conditions for the organized peasant movement that began in East Bengal in 1914.³⁶ The Muslim portion of *Burir Shuto's* message derived not from an adherence to proper Muslim ritual or belief, but in the advocacy of greater representation for peasants in local government. If these higher numbers could be effectively mobilized, it would enhance the Muslim representation in government. Here, the nexus of identity politics and electoral mobilization became an inescapable reality. An article from the *Mihir-O-Sudhakar*, dated August 1909, appears in the text to remind readers that 'fifteen-and-a-half of sixteen Muslims in Bengal are peasants, hence Muslim and peasant interests are interdependent'.³⁷ By constantly emphasizing the importance of peasantry in Bengali society via occasional quotes of Adam Smith and Aristotle, and by connecting this to the political fate of Muslims in Bengal, *Burir Shuto* describes a new age in political culture. By the 1910s, discourses of social change intertwined with religious identity appeared in Bengali Muslim writing.

At the same time, Muslim intellectuals from East Bengali rural locations began to write about their place in society vis-à-vis Hindus and development. The rise in texts by mufassil authors points to the partition as a period of qualitative change in ideological parameters. A few well-traversed texts emanating from the first and second decade of the twentieth century initiated a genre of literature about development, Islam, and identity. Unlike the previous era in the nineteenth century, these writings about society were being produced and consumed in villages throughout East Bengal and were written in Bengali.

Nearly all texts encouraged one to embrace Muslim identity. But all of them also include factors such as social upliftment, development, economic progress, and political economy as a world force. One particular text, Garib Sayer's long verse poem *Krishak Bandhu*, attends to identity as much as it attends to economics. Published in 1910 from Calcutta, this text began a tradition of linking the grievances of Muslim peasants with an awareness of socio-economic and socio-religious relations. The author urges peasants to simultaneously embrace Islamic values of thrift (such as avoiding spending lavish sums on weddings and festivals) and learn contemporary techniques of farming and agriculture. Though the text does briefly mention the oppression of non-Muslim peasants, class solidarity that cut across religious lines does not appear. This was a tactic as the identity emphasized had to be based on a sense of difference from an Other, which could only be the Hindu community.

The text urges against excessive hoarding of wealth and advocates religious solidarity in order to prevent upwardly mobile Muslims from oppressing other Muslims. The author links the cultivation of land in specific places, like Sylhet or Assam, to the acquisition of proper Islamic values, as such work would leave no time for syncretistic and allegedly 'un-Islamic' practices. Muslim peasants are to both migrate and cultivate, as well as focus on reading the Qur'an regularly and paying *zakat* to the village *mullah*. By linking 'Muslim' with 'peasant' after the new East Bengali province had been in existence for four years, the text functions as 'an almost copybook instance of class issues being simultaneously evoked, and effectively subordinated, to developed communal discourse'.³⁸ *Krishak Bandhu* was published in the office of *Islam Pracharak*, edited by Muhammed Reazuddin Ahmad. Reazuddin, a visible writer for the *Mihir-O-Sudhakar*, was linked to Munshi Meherullah, the popular preacher, and Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura, a popular Muslim leader of the 1920s.³⁹ The first partition and social critiques written by Bengali Muslims aimed, not to create a reader of an ideal type of Muslim out of abstract Islamicization, but rather, a productive, prosperous Muslim bolstered by community upliftment and development.

Defining Modern Bengal: Bigotry, Stereotype, and Language after the First Partition

By the re-instantiation of pre-1905 Bengal boundaries in 1912, a set of stereotypes defining Bengali Muslims as a mass of unruly peasants

armed with dangerous ideologies of self-serving liberation that threatened zamindar, Hindu, and colonial power began to appear in popular literature and Bengali periodicals. This set of stereotypes has been termed in recent scholarship as 'Muslim popular' as seen from the vantage point of Swadeshi and other Hindu nationalists, such as Aurobindo Ghose.⁴⁰

In this constellation of stereotypes, Muslims occupied three positions. One was the self-serving peasant, as noted by Hindu zamindars who were exasperated by generations of the Faraizi Movement and itinerant mullah.⁴¹ Second, enshrined in the provocatively biased literature of Hindus like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, and Nabin Chandra Sen was the stereotype of Muslims being foreign to Bengal. A third stereotype included the itinerant Muslim revivalist as a danger to stable society. All of these constructed Muslims as a community wholly apart from the Hindu *bhadralok* in the post-Swadeshi era.

All these stereotypes contained the seeds of Hindu bigotry in the realm of identity politics from the 1910s onwards.⁴² These communal stereotypes find confirmation in Bengali Hindu memories of the Swadeshi period. Nirad Chaudhuri records his experiences of rural East Bengal (in Kishoreganj, Mymensingh) before and after the Swadeshi movement. In his autobiography, he lists four types of attitudes embodied by Hindus towards Muslims during the turn of the century. Besides 'utter indifference' and 'friendliness for the Muslims of our own economic and social status with whom ... [one] came into personal contact',⁴³ Chaudhuri also cites contempt for Muslim peasants and resentment of a past domination of Muslims over Hindus. Hindu stereotypes about Islam did not just come from adult literature, but began in childhood itself. Chaudhuri recounts how 'even before we could read we had been told that the Muslims had once ruled and oppressed us, that they had spread their religion in India with the Koran in one hand and the sword in the other, that the Muslim rulers have abducted our women, destroyed our temples, polluted our sacred places'.⁴⁴ A range of experiences in his school life in the 1900s and 1910s in Chaudhuri's life reflected the change in political consciousness of the time. When he was in school, Chaudhuri and his family interacted with Muslim lawyers in polite terms, had Muslim friends and 'never associated them with the abstract entity labeled Muslim, existing in our historical consciousness, for which we had such hatred, and it never occurred to us that anything could happen which could make us modify our behavior towards our Muslim neighbors in the light of collective emotions generated by collective rivalries'.⁴⁵

In 1906, however, he noticed that 'our Muslim school-fellows were beginning to air the fact of their being Muslims rather more consciously than before and with a touch of assertiveness'. Muslims students in his school protested the enactment of certain scenes from a Bengali drama because they were offensive to Muslim feelings. Chaudhuri tellingly informs his readers that 'of course they [the scenes] were [offensive], because no Bengali historical play written by a Hindu is complimentary to the former Muslim rulers of the country'.⁴⁶ After this period, Chaudhuri recalled only growing tension between Hindu and Muslim students in Kishoreganj, and furthermore, fear of reprisals due to growing Hindu-Muslim riots. The details of this history remain the subject of a treatise on Bengali Hindu politics, but for Bengali Muslims, these images—Muslims as selfish peasants, as preaching revivalists, and as foreigners—fuelled the strategic and conscious valorization of the Muslim part of Bengali Muslim identity. Muslims writing in Bengal, with the background of propaganda about backwardness and upliftment, formed narratives in reaction to this highly specific type of bigotry. Though a stream of thought already existed that linked peasant identity with Muslim community upliftment, this bigotry added fuel to the fire of Muslim political self-fashioning.

A trenchant critique of the Bengali Hindu negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims began with Siraji's 1903 essay 'Musalman O Hindu Lekhak' (Muslim and Hindu Writers).⁴⁷ In this oft-cited essay, Siraji castigated everyone from the poet Iswar Gupta, Rangalal Bandyopadhyaya, the novelist Bankim Chandra, the poet Hem (Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay), and Nabinchandra Sen, and they were referred to as 'any Hindu Tom, Dick, and Harry', and he says that none of them 'hesitate[d] to diabolically abuse the Muslim race and to vilify their glorious ancestors [and] take immense pleasure in exhuming from their peaceful marble tombs the Muslim Emperors of Delhi and depicting them in the pages of their novels and poems as wicked, tyrannical, dissolute devils, and hateful lecherous dogs...'⁴⁸ Siraji believed that 'the first word a Hindu author has to write, when taking up his pen, is *yavana*, otherwise, his pen does not move'.⁴⁹

This anti-Muslim sentiment, taken mostly from a reading of Muslim characters in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novels like *Durgeshnandini*, *Sitaram*, *Anandamath*, and *Rajsinha*, appeared throughout the 1900s and 1910s in the editorials of journals like *Naba Nur*, *al-Eslam*, and *Saogat*. Abul Mansur in his 1905 attack on the Hindu religion, '*Hindu Dharma Rahasya O Deb Lila*' (The Mystery of the Hindu Religion and the Play of

Gods), revealed a highly political and temporal, as opposed to theological orientation. He notes in his preface that he has 'kept a note and record of the many instances where Hindu writers, of high and low caliber alike, for more than a century have delineated the pure religion of Islam and its society in an ugly and devilish manner'.⁵⁰ Like his colleagues in journals like *al-Eslam*, he also compiled a list of complaints against Bankim's caricatures of Muslim characters in novels like *Rajsinha* and also listed other authors, like Damodar Mukherjee and Dinabandhu Mitra, who insulted Islam through their characterizations of Muslims.

The characterization of anti-Muslim prejudice residing in writings by Hindus, mostly by novels by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, deserves historical contextualization. Of his many novels and prose polemic writings, Bankim Chandra contributed various depictions of Muslims that corresponded with a growing interest in constructing a 'new' Hindu political identity that emphasized physical strength, violence, and masculinity, that are to be contrasted with Orientalist stereotypes of the effeminate Hindu. Of crucial concern is the highly racialized context of the 1880s, in which post-1857 Mutiny policies resulted in greater discrimination against Indians in the public sphere merged with racism during the Ilbert Bill agitation in the early 1880s. During this time, Bankim abandoned his earlier focus on pre-existing social problems of inequality and caste-based oppression (as evidenced in his essay *Samya*, published in 1879), and turned to defending Hindu traditions in response to aggressive missionaries. Also, he turned to valorizing a version of Hindu masculinity by presenting them as morally upright and powerful agents of change, as exemplified in his novel *Anandamath*. In this novel, Muslims are presented as obstacles to Hindu empowerment. In *Rajsingha*, Aurangzeb is treated as an adversary. These depictions must be understood in the context of Bankim Chandra's own complex history of producing defences of Hinduism in an aggressively racialized environment.

Trans-regional Political Islam and Bengal at the Turn of the Century

Muslim self-fashioning in this time period was not only a localized affair. Pan-Indian conceptions of Muslim solidarity galvanized political energy in the Bengal countryside by connecting local political grievances with a

global sense of Muslim identity.⁵¹ Many factors bolstered this universalism in the Bengal region from the late nineteenth century until the early 1910s when Ottoman Turkey was trying to defend itself on various fronts. These factors include the writings and tours of Jamaluddin al-Afghani in India and Calcutta in the 1870s, a rise in Christian missionary activity in the 1890s and 1900s, and the growing awareness of Turkey's military and political fate amidst hostile European powers in the 1910s.

Al-Afghani found a large following amongst the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Calcutta, and his writings were often published in the local *Dar al-Saltanat*, a Calcutta-based Urdu journal. He was admired in Calcutta Muslim society and 'during his visit to Calcutta in 1879, he was welcomed as a hero, and he soon became the idol of the pan-Islamists'.⁵² One Bengali, Reazuddin Ahmed Mashadi, followed Afghani closely and wrote a biography of the great leader, *Samaj O Samskarak*, which was quickly proscribed by the government after it appeared in 1889.⁵³ As Ayesha Jalal has shown, al-Afghani's politics of anti-imperialism were an inspiration to South Asian Muslim intellectual responses to colonial hegemony, which served as 'the building blocks of Muslim anti-colonial politics in Asia and Africa'.⁵⁴

In addition to al-Afghani's popularity, from the 1880s and 1890s onwards Bengali society also experienced a surge in Christian missionary activity, and vigorous debates took place between Christians and Muslims as to what constitutes 'true' religion. Christian missionaries produced many provocative and aggressive polemics against Islam that insulted the Prophet Muhammed and Islamic ideals during this time. This galvanized Muslim preachers and *ulema* to participate in debates, and sometimes bitter back and forth polemics on paper defending Islam against the onslaught of Christian missionaries. Muslim newspapers, like the popular *Mihir-O-Sudhakar*, often printed reports of Christian polemics along with activities of highly respected preachers, like the energetic, turn-of-the-century Bengali Muslim preacher Munshi Mohammed Meherullah in the Bengal countryside.⁵⁵

The final factor includes the newspaper reports about the treatment of Turkey, and of Muslims, from the 1910s onwards. The Urdu *Roznama-i Muqaddas Hablul Matin* and the Bengali *Mohammadi* carried frequent stories about the oppression of Muslims in the Balkan Wars in the early 1910s, and this lifted the sentiment of Islamic universalism to an even stronger level.⁵⁶ The image of the European colonial powers and their

treatment of Muslims was further entrenched in a world of discontent when the Indian press reported that Europeans gave these seemingly never-ending wars a religious sanction and used the language of the crusades.⁵⁷ European religious and colonial power, in the Indian Muslim press, was found to pursue a policy of eradicating Muslims wherever they were found. Also, Europeans were seen as undermining Islam in other ways, for example, by encouraging the Young Turks to revolt and depose Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1909 and thereby endanger the presence of Islam in Turkey's public life. Italy's alleged threat to blow up the Kaaba was publicized widely in the Indian press.⁵⁸

By 1912, just after the partition of Bengal was annulled, fear for the future of the Ottoman Empire grew in Bengali circles. In the middle of 1912, the *Anjuman-i-Ulama-Bangla* (Association of the Ulama of Bengal) was formed. The personnel in charge of this organization included some of the soon-to-be influential Bengali Muslim politicians and activists. Mohammed Akram Khan, a rising star of Bengali Muslim politics, was appointed secretary. Along with Khan, another popular and politically important cleric, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, played an important role in cultivating modern educated ulama and the preaching of Islam across the Bengal countryside in the early 1910s.⁵⁹

Though such universalism and trans-regional identification had been occurring in other parts of South Asia, this institution marked an important shift in local Bengali Muslim politics. The ulama were now focused on local concerns and grievances. One particular Bengali Muslim writer and activist in the 1910s contributed many writings on the subject of global Muslim identity in the wake of these changes. This activist, Ismail Hossain Siraji (1880–1931), sacrificed two years in jail from 1910–12 for *Anal Prabaha* (Flow of Fire), a book of poems extolling Islam. Written and published in 1900, the book was deemed to be seditious by the British Empire. After his release from jail in 1912, Siraji left for Turkey as a member of a medical mission and commemorated his time there in a travel narrative, *Turusk Bhraman* (Travel to Turkey). Unlike the luminaries of early twentieth century Indian Muslim politics, like al-Afghani, Azad, or the Ali Brothers, Siraji's writings were all in Bengali. Siraji not only wrote in Bengali, but he also wrote articles promoting the usage and literary development of the Bengali language, fitting into the Bengali Muslim commitment to both language and religion shared by nearly all Bengali Muslim writers of the time period.⁶⁰

From the Literature of Politics to Literary Criticism: The Bengali Muslim Literature Society

Just after the East Bengal province was disbanded in 1911 and Bengal's boundaries returned to the earlier colonial spatial order, Bengali Muslim writers and community leaders such as Mohammed Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Muzaffar Ahmad, Mohammed Shahidullah, and Mozammel Huq constructed the *Bangali Mussalman Sahitya Samiti* (BMSS) in 1911. This organization, which lasted until 1923, met to discuss ways to promote Bengali literature amongst Muslims, encourage Bengali writings about Muslim themes, and also to promote friendly relations between Hindus and Muslims. Inspired by a feeling of alienation from the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*, a literary organization patronized by Hindu luminaries like Romesh Chandra Dutt, Nabin Chandra Sen, and Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali Muslim *samiti* aimed to redress the relative lack of Muslim writers active in Bengali literature and held several conferences, at Calcutta, Chittagong, and throughout West Bengal.⁶¹ In addition to providing a meeting space for budding Muslim writers in Calcutta, the society and its *patrika*, the *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Patrika* (BMSP), aimed to educate Bengali Hindus about Muslim history and civilization, because in the words of Muzaffar Ahmad, 'generally, the educated Bengali Hindu did not know much about Muslim civilization.'⁶² The feeling of alienation from the Bengali Hindu literati was felt by many. The scholar and linguist Mohammed Shahidullah wrote that Muslims in the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad* felt like poor people invited to the house of wealthy relatives.⁶³ To escape this feeling of inferiority, an association had to be specifically started for Muslims. It is noteworthy that several previous attempts by modern Bengali Muslims to create literary associations did occur in Calcutta and beyond, including Calcutta's 1860 *Bangiya Sahitya Bishaini Mussalman* and the 1863 *Mohammadan Literary Society*. In 1899, another *Bangiya Sahitya Bisayini Mussalman Samiti* was formed in Calcutta, by Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury, a zamindar of Dhanbari. In 1905, the *Kohinoor Sahitya Samiti* in East Bengal's Faridpur district also rose and fell quickly. All were managed by old-world elites with connections to landed wealth or princely titles and failed to make any impact on the diverse and non-elite populations of Muslims in Calcutta. Also, none of these associations made any attempt to substantively investigate the Bengali language as a medium, and possibly, as marker of identity for Muslims in Bengal.

The BMSS was also the first association in Bengali history to function as a meeting-space for Muslim migrants, students, and political activists, and also promote the creation of Bengali literature by and for Muslims. Previous attempts at creating a public space for Bengali Muslim literary development and discussion were started and executed by the wealthy and established members of the Bengali Muslim landed gentry or wealthy denizens of Calcutta. For the first time in modern Bengali history, a Calcutta society manned by students and young activists, most of whom were seeking routes towards personal advancement in the city of Calcutta, and also, those who were invested in challenging established political truths, began to gain currency.

Partially because of the young upstart, and student-led, nature of the society, as opposed to being a narrowly construed society for 'Muslim' gains and recognitions, the society maintained a close association with Hindus and the *Bengali Sahitya Parishad*. As a society of minority intellectuals that aimed to address the centre of educational and literary activities, that is, activities manned by Hindus, the society aimed to produce literature in a distinctive style. Also, society members actively worked towards productive relations between Hindus and Muslims and a platform for shared understanding of each other. Hindus were invited to visit the samiti and to write for the patrika and many contributed articles that would be of interest to both Muslims and Hindus.

This association appeared in the midst of changes in the demography and migration patterns into Calcutta, the economic and educational centre of Bengal. Though recently dismantled as the imperial capital, it still held out promises of economic upliftment for many migrants who journeyed into the city from all corners of Bengal, but particularly, for Bengali Muslims travelling from their natal homelands into the city.

It was a meeting space for budding Bengali Muslim authors and also a clearing house for political intersections. As a society with a reading room and a frequent seminar schedule, it provided one of the only spaces where Muslims could both develop networks with each other in this way for Bengali literary development and politics as opposed to other sources of public culture. Other sources included Islamic revivalist organizations or Indian nationalist organizations led by Bengali Hindus. Members of the organization who would be found in the reading rooms included socialists like Abdur Rezzaq Khan and Abdul Halim, religious leaders like

Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Muhammed Akram Khan, and academics and scholars like Muhammed Shahidullah.

In 1914, Muzaffar Ahmad arrived in Calcutta from his East Bengali Noakhali home in search of work. The literary society also had a set of connections that helped members find jobs, as the vast majority of members were seeking employment and/or education. So Ahmad during the war years found a series of odd jobs, including a madrasa teacher, a slaughterhouse clerk, and a tutor. Ahmad also had established a reputation in Noakhali as a promising writer in Bengali and had published essays about Muslim education and politics and Noakhali history in local journals. The writer Kazi Emdadul Huq was another member of this society and collaborated with Muzaffar Ahmad to create a publication, *Abdullah*, a novel written in standard Bengali, about the migrant conditions of Muslims seeking a better life, who escape from reactionary and hierarchical politics, and education in Calcutta. The novel represented the life of many migrants to Calcutta, seeking to escape the conditions of their upbringing and acquire prosperity in a new environment.

Mozammel Huq, another leader in the small but increasingly visible Bengali Muslim literary community of the 1910s, formed another sort of voice in the group. Born in 1860 in Shantipur, in the West Bengali Nadia district, Huq shared his predecessors' origins in journalism. Like Mir Musharraf Hussein's early work in that field, Huq also learned from his father, who travelled throughout rural Bengal, and started to publish poems early on in his life in *Som Prokash*, *Bani*, *Mussalman Bandhu*, and others. In the 1890s and 1900s, he started to publish essays in journals like *Kohinur*, *Naba Nur*, and *Islam Pracharak*. He wrote poetry and life histories, but unlike many others active in the society, he wrote do-bhashi literature, as he wrote four punthi-styled texts about various folk themes in the 1890s. But he also learnt and wrote in standardized Bengali for mixed audiences.

Shahidullah, alongside Muzaffar Ahmad the political activist, and Mozammel Huq the journalist and writer, formed yet another pivotal component within the society. Born in 1885, in Basirhat in West Bengal, a division of 24-Parganas district, he hailed from an illustrious family of caretakers of a popular *pir* who preached Islam in the fourteenth century in contemporary Basirhat. Shahidullah embraced both an education in local folklore and Western-styled formal advanced education in linguistics and languages. In the 1890s and 1900s when many fellow Bengali

Muslim writers and critics were writing for mufasssil newspapers or poems for magazines, Shahidullah excelled in his village schooling in Sanskrit, and also acquired Persian and Urdu training through his family, as well as Bengali from his schooling. He passed the BA examination in Sanskrit at Calcutta University in 1910, but when he applied for MA studies, he was refused because a Hindu-Brahmin teaching staff refused to teach Sanskrit in an MA course to a non-Brahmin. As the society began to meet in 1911, he joined the newly formed department of Comparative Philology, as their lone MA student, and continued working with Sanskrit, Bengali, and Urdu linguistic issues in Calcutta.

Mohammed Akram Khan also joined the society as a journalist and *maulana*, formed yet another face of the organization. An editor of various magazines that addressed the burgeoning Muslim public sphere of Bengal such as *al-Eslam* and *Mohammadi* in the 1910s, he also attended the historic meeting of Muslim politicians in Dacca in 1906 that led to the foundation of the Muslim League. Like his academic counterpart Muhammed Shahidullah, he was born in rural West Bengal, in the 24-Parganas district, in 1868. From a long line of Muslim *alem*, Akram Khan's father Bari Khan studied with Sayid Nazir Hussain, a relative of Shah Waliullah of Delhi. Bari Khan's father and Akram Khan's grandfather, Torab Ali, was a contemporary of the nineteenth century rebel Titu Mir. His early education began with his father, in which he read the Qur'an along with Arabic and Persian-language texts. In the 1870s and 80s, he studied in madrasas in Burdwan, in West Bengal, and then in Calcutta at the famed Aliya Madrasa in the 1890s. His arrival to Calcutta was in search of more religious education, as the other recent migrants to Calcutta in this cohort were young, and in search of new opportunities and new horizons. In the early 1900s, he wrote frequently for Muslim periodicals and began his own weekly newspaper, the *Saptahik Mohammadi*, in 1910.

By this time, he was a rising political star, and he had formally supported the Congress, the Swadeshi movement, and the mainstream nationalist pushes to fight British colonial rule. Simultaneously, he obtained a traditional Islamic education. Interestingly, as a measure of how connected Hindus, Muslims, and changing socio-political movements were during this period, Khan's contact with the Brahmo Samaj and Girish Chandra Sen, who first translated the Qur'an in the early 1880s, and the efforts of the Brahmos to research Islam (along with other religions like

Christianity and Buddhism) in order to publicize and promote education about Islam to a Bengali-language audience, formed an important part in his coming of age in the 1890s and 1900s. His contact with Brahmos like Sen motivated like many of his fellow Bengali Muslims to spread the word of Islam at the turn of the century. As he moved to Calcutta to pursue journalism and the propagation of religion, he gave a formally religious side to the BMSS' activities. .

The BMSS was therefore a home for many different currents in Bengali Muslim literary cultures—the academic, the budding socialist, the journalist/poet, and the formally trained maulana. Unlike earlier iterations of Bengali Muslim literary conferences that were held either in places like Faridpur or in Calcutta, in the BMSS we find Western educated youth not formed and sustained by landed wealth, but rather, conditioned by changing currents in world politics. The first meeting space for the society was a mess run by Muslim students on Choku Khansama Lane, which itself named after Muslim butlers (*khansamas*), thereby signifying the working-class character of the society, in distinction to earlier public associations run by Muslims in Calcutta. The location of the society changed a few times, as it shifted to Mirzapur Street, an area of the city long associated with Muslim institutions, and then shifted to 32 College Street, in the middle of Calcutta's vibrant literary, book-publishing, and politically charged environments.⁶⁴ After irregular meetings throughout the 1910s, the society issued its first magazine edition in June 1918. The *patrika*, the *BMSP*, was headed by an editorial staff of Shahidullah and Mozammel Huq. From Mirzapur Street in Calcutta, the *BMSP* started publication from April 1918 and lasted until 1921.

The first issue featured a strong manifesto regarding progress, culture, and the status of the Muslim community in Bengal. It urged Bengali Muslims to join the rest of the world in developing their community according to modern ideals through the cultivation of Bengali literature. This manifesto listed goals such as an emphasis on the past glory of Muslims in Bengal, a call to write their own history, and a push for this history to be written in high-quality Bengali.⁶⁵ Bengali Muslim readers accepted this high standardized form, perhaps in line with the popular pan-Bengali conception, shared by Hindus and Muslims, that the modern form was the preferred literary form for educated Bengali literature.

This was by no means the first time that Bengali Muslims were promoting Bengali amongst their co-religionists through the magazine.⁶⁶ But it was the beginning of a sustained intellectual effort to analyze the linguistic situation of Bengali Muslims, their history, and a proposed future for Hindu and Muslim audiences. It was also a reaction to the use of Urdu as a symbol of universal Indian Muslim identity. Mohammed Shahidullah's 1917 address to the samiti, published in the first issue, explained how Bengali Muslims had to use five languages: Arabic for religious instruction, Persian for high culture, Urdu for daily life in Indian Muslim social circles, English for jobs, and Bengali at home. This was far too much for the average person to learn and the result was often a lack of fluency in all five languages. Shahidullah argued a way forward through the development of a vernacular language. He cited the examples of English's emergence from Latin, Germany's focus on creating a national vernacular language, and the translation of the Bible into various European languages. This vernacularization made these nations strong and therefore Bengali Muslims, if they were to progress and transcend 'backwardness', had to develop their own specific language and literature. Bengali had to be the first language that Bengali Muslim children learnt, with other languages taking a secondary place.

Along with others of this group, notably Mohammed Akram Khan, he cited how the religious leaders had neglected Bengali because of their suspicion of it as a 'Hindu' language. Though Shahidullah kept in tune with the trends of this samiti by advocating Hindu-Muslim unity, he entered a debate about Bengali that started in the 1910s regarding the usage of various words of Perso-Arabic origin. The Bengali language includes words like *iswar*, *swarga*, *narak*, *upashana*, and *upabash*, words that are unmistakably Hindu and so the usage of 'Muslim' words such as *paigambar*, *behesta*, *dojakh*, *feresta*, *namaz*, and *roza* had to be fully accepted if Hindus and Muslims were to share the development of the Bangla language.⁶⁷ Shahidullah, in 1917, embraced both sameness and difference. Sameness included an unabashed participation in Bengali culture that was recognizably both Hindu and Muslim, but also a concerted effort to establish a distinctively Bengali Muslim literature, style, and sensibility. Unlike the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century who could use words without concern about how any particular community would interpret their usage, and unlike nineteenth century revivalist writers, here we find a balance in between the stridently aggressive tone of earlier periods.

Incorporating Arabic or Persian words into Bengali was an issue of debate amongst intellectuals of the time. The society decided to stop worrying over the bagatelles of words and to instead focus on the inclusion of Islamic ideals into Bengali literature. In Syed Emdad Ali's landmark 1918 essay 'Bengali Language and Muslims', the author argued that importing Arabic and Persian words will make little difference to Bengali Muslims, but incorporating Islamic ideals in the literature should be the goal of modern Bengali Muslim writers. This view was shared by most of the contributors including the famous scholar of Bengali Muslim folklore and culture, Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad. In 1918 at the third conference of the samiti in Chittagong, Sahityabisharad asked 'why [should] we ... complicate our language with foreign imported words? It is not impossible for us to create Islamic feelings in the Bengali language; it is not just words, but true feelings that are necessary for a national language'.⁶⁸ This view was also shared by Mohammed Akram Khan, whose presidential address at the same conference summarized the views and goals of the society and magazine. Akram Khan also saw the development of Bengali Muslim literature, replete with positive images of Muslims, glorification of Muslim ideals, and proper treatment of Muslim and Bengali Muslim history, as a way to ameliorate conflicts between Hindus and Muslims and to erase stereotypes. Like Muzaffar Ahmad, he also believed that most Bengali Hindus knew little about Bengali Muslims or Islamic civilization. But with proper knowledge and treatment in literature, such a situation could change. He stated that the emergence of Islam in Bengal and the development of the Bengali language were inextricably linked, as pre-Mughal Muslim sultans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries patronized Bengali and commissioned works in the language, including the first-ever Bengali translations of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. This historical fact was one that Bengali Muslims should be happy to advertise to their Hindu fellow-Bengalis.

As a maulana, Akram Khan was well aware of the intricacies of Islam, of Arabic, and of Islamic history. Unlike many maulanas in the countryside, he was also highly skilled in the Bengali language. He believed that the only way forward for Bengali Muslims was to encourage the *alim*, the religious scholars and leaders, to write and speak in Bengali in order to communicate with the masses of Muslims. By citing the first editor and founder of a Bengali periodical by a Muslim (the *Mohammadi*),

Maulvi Abdul Khaleq, in 1877 in Calcutta, he showed the long history of religiously minded Muslims taking up Bengali. Like many others of his generation, he believed that the Bengali literary world was bigoted in its approach to Muslims. He felt that the premier organizations of the time, the *Bangiya Sahitya Sammelan* and the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*, neglected Muslims and their writings.

This perception led Akram Khan to emphasize his Muslim identity. He made his position unmistakably clear: 'when it comes to *jati* or nation, Muslims are committed to *swatantrata* (difference or distinctiveness)'.⁶⁹ He clarified that, even though Bengali is the mother tongue and first language of Bengali Muslims, Arabic as a Muslim language must be respected. Urdu, as the lingua franca of Indian Muslims, should also be respected. Like many public figures, he saw Hindus and Muslims as brothers from the same Mother Bengal and that fraternity, brotherhood, and friendship should be the goal of Hindu-Muslim relations. But tellingly, he ended his address by clarifying that true brotherhood and true unity can only occur when Muslims are proud of themselves and their own culture, language, and literature.

Khan's sentiments were seconded by another prominent writer of the time, M. Wajed Ali. In his 'Bengali Language and Muslim Literature', in the same 1918 issue, Ali noted that *swatantrata* must be safeguarded through a particular literature. Though he did not support importing Arabic and Persian words into Bengali, he asserted that Arabic and Persian were central to an internationalist Muslim belonging and that such languages should not be erased from the Bengali Muslim cultural landscape.⁷⁰ The BMSS embodied a commitment to a particular type of political identity, one quite at home with both sameness and difference. Sameness in the form of the Bengali language and territorial space and difference in religion defined these intellectuals and their particular context.

* * *

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Bengali Muslim connections to the broader pan-Indian Khilafat movement, growth in Bengali Muslim literature, and reactions to hurtful stereotypes, formed a foundation of Bengali Muslim literary culture that would grow in the subsequent decades. In the nineteenth century soon after the official

naming of Mussalmani Bangla a form of language, writers like Mir Musharraf Hussein did not write only for Bengali Muslims, but rather for a multi-religious Bengali reading public. Indeed, colonial India, like earlier periods in Indian history, saw the usage of language not allied with a singular notion of identity, but with multiple languages serving multiple purposes of religion, literature, public discourse, and practical needs.⁷¹

But with the advent of a Bengali Muslim press in the latter portions of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century, various articulations of Bengali Muslim grievances were voiced over and were merged with broader Indian Muslim politics with Bengali energies. In this crucial time period, Bengali Muslims constituted 'an amorphous and growing group of readers and writers increasingly unified by linguistic and religious identity'.⁷² Most significantly, the rise of texts about social improvement and Islam from the 1900s onward expanded the trajectory of Muslim identity politics in the countryside, through a simultaneous emphasis on practical education alongside specific elements of Islam, such as thrift and economic self-sufficiency. Termed by a contemporary scholar as an 'alliance between the spiritual and the practical', the 1900s and 1910s saw a 'new Muslim identity grounded in religio-economic power'⁷³ gradually occupying a larger part of the Bengali Muslim social and political world.

The end of the 1910s saw the beginning of a new period in the social and political history of Bengal Muslims. Termed by a scholar of Bengali literature as a new phase in the history of Bengali writings to tackle social and political themes,⁷⁴ this new era included Nazrul Islam's writings and politics, the emergence of the Communist Party of India led by Bengali Muslims, and the continual appearance of texts of self-improvement and Muslim identity in the mufassil, made comprehensible by the politics of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Notes

1. Found in a book of 'Khilafat songs', published in 1921 by Mir Abdul Matin in Mymensingh, in eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh).

2. See Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), *passim*.

3. For details, see Kazi Abdul Mannan, *The Emergence and Development of Dobhasi Literature in Bengal* (Dhaka: Dhaka University Press, 1966) and Afia Dil, *Two Traditions of the Bengali Language* (Islamabad: National Institute of Cultural and Historical Research, 1993), esp. chapter 2.

4. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1911), p. 7.

5. Afia Dil, *Two Traditions of the Bengali Language* (Islamabad: National Institute of Cultural and Historical Research), p. 53.

6. The literary critic, folklorist, and collector of medieval manuscripts Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad (1890–1953) wrote extensively on *Yusuf-Zulekha*; in the contemporary period Dr Muhammed Enamul Huq edited a full translation of the work in 1984.

7. See Chapter 4 of this book, 'Regional Confidence and the Rise of Folklore', for an extensive discussion of Alaol's writings. Alaol's writing and sensibilities were of great importance for folklorists and literary critics of the 1930s and 1940s.

8. For detailed analysis of Vaishnava literature and the Vaishnava movement from which the Vaishnava *padavali* emerged, see Edward Dimock, 'Doctrine and Practice among the Vaishnavas of Bengal', *History of Religions* 3, 1 (Summer 1963): 106–27; Tony K. Stewart, 'Encountering the Smallpox Goddess: The Auspicious Song of Sitala', in Donald Lopez (ed.), *The Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 79–87, along with Tony K. Stewart, *The Final Word: The 'Caitanya Caritamrta' and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). About *mangal-kavya*, see Asutosh Bhattacharya, *Bangla mangalkavyaitihasa* (The history of mangal-kavya) (Kolkata: E. Mukherji, 1975) and Edward Dimock, 'The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature', *History of Religions* 1, 2 (Winter 1962): 307–21.

9. In *Yusuf-Zulekha*, he writes that 'people are afraid of writing *ketabs* in Bengali, but they shouldn't be...If what is written is true, it does not matter what language it is written in...I have heard wise men say that one's mother tongue is the most precious jewel in the treasury of wealth', quoted in Dil, *Two Traditions of the Bengali Language*, p. 60. See also Mohammed Enamul Huq's translation in *Yusuf-Zulekha* (Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1964), and 'Pustak Rachanar Katha' (About the Writing of the Book), pp. 4–5.

10. See Lisa T. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 31–4.

11. See Dil, *Two Traditions of the Bengali Language*, pp. 60–1.

12. See Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bangla Sahitya* (Kolkata: Ananda, 1993) and Qazi Abdul Mannan, *The Emergence and Development of Dobhashi Literature in Bengal (up to 1855 A.D.)* (Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1966).

13. Garibullah wrote three narrative poems: *Yusuf Zulekha*, *Sonabhaner Puthi*, and *Satyapirer Puthi*, along with a didactic and elegiac poem. See Dil, *Two Traditions of the Bengali Language*, p. 64.

14. See Mumtassir Mamoon, *Source Materials of the Cultural History of Dhaka City* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2001).

15. Cited in M.F. Rahman, 'Bengali Muslims and English Education, 1765–1835' PhD thesis, University of London, 1948.

16. Thousands of books were published on Hindu themes, in particular the Hindu epics and the Puranas, in Bengali. These were not the only sorts of books being published, other forms like almanacs, educational books, science books, and plays were also published. These works created a strong impression in the minds of many Hindu readers (who, in all likelihood, did not read many 'Muslim Bengali' works) that 'proper' Bengali was linked to Hindu subject matter.

17. See Sisir Kumar Das, *Early Bengali Prose: Carey to Vidyasagar* (Kolkata: Book land, 1966), pp. 45–8 and Ghosh, *Power in Print*, p. 71.

18. Quoted in Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society*, p. 60.

19. See Tony K. Stewart, *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) for a translation of eight folktales written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries about Sarya Pir.

20. Ghosh, *Power in Print*, pp. 293–4.

21. See Rajarshi Ghose, 'Literary Practice in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Case of Musalmani Bangla and the Tariqah-I-Muhammadiya', Unpublished paper. See also Chapter 1, 'Islamic Themes in Premodern Bengali Literature and Life' and Chapter 2, 'Nineteenth-Century Religious Reform Movements', and Arif Billah, 'The Development of Bengali Literature During Muslim Rule' in Sufia Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

22. Jamiruddin was a Muslim who converted to Christianity, but after hearing the speeches of Meherullah, re-converted back to Islam in the late nineteenth century. See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) and Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884–1912* (Dhaka: Oxford University Press, 1974).

23. See Anisuzzaman (ed.), *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra* (Journals of Muslim Bengal), 1831–1930 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969); Sufia Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh*, p. 73, reproduces a representative list of journals from Anisuzzaman.

24. See Sufia Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh*, chapter 3, 'Breaking New Ground and Transgressing Boundaries', for a discussion of Naimuddin and this important strand of Bengali Muslim literature.

25. The book was re-published by the Pakistan government as Muhammed Qasim al-Quraishi, *Asrumala* (Dhaka: Pakistan Book Corporation, 1969).

26. Quoted in Sufia Ahmed, *The Muslim Community of Bengal, 1884–1912* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1974), p. 249.

27. The review appears in *Calcutta Review* 50 (1870), p. 235 and is cited by Clinton Seely, 'A Muslim Voice in Modern Bengali Literature: Mosharrarf Hossein', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretive Essays* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2001), p. 120.

28. *Samay* 8, Agrahan, BS 1307/1900 C.E.

29. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

30. *Bishad-Sindhu* (The Sea of Sorrows) is a three part prose work that started to appear in 1885. It narrates events such as the battle at Karbala, the rescue of Zainul Abedin and his rise to power in Damascus. This work uses standardized Bengali and bears little influence from the Sunni-inflected revivalist forces working in Bengal in the nineteenth century.

31. *Caruvartta*, 23 Jyaishta 1292 BS/1885, cited in Clinton Seely, 'A Muslim Voice in Modern Bengali Literature', pp. 128–9.

32. Sufia Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh*, pp. 110–16. This sort of perception on the part of sections of the Hindu literati formed quite an ironic position as only a few generations earlier at the turn of the century, Hindu scribal elites were definitively educated in Persian.

33. Regarding the place of economic development in Islamicization of Bengal, see P.K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press), chapter 2, 'Muslim Peasant Improvement, Pir Abu Bakr, and the Formation of Communalized Islam'.

34. M.I.A. Ahmadi, *Unnati Sopan* (Stepping Stones to Improvement), p. 3, cited in Sufia Ahmad, *The Muslim Community in Bengal*, p. 274.

35. Two issues facing peasants in the wake of the Permanent Settlement included the legal right to dig ponds wherever they wished and also to use weapons to drive off wild animals from their lands. See Sarkar, 'Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants: Bengal, 1909–1910', p. 107 in Sumit Sarkar (ed.), *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, and History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002) and Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 23 in Abul Mansur Ahmed, in *Islam, Rafiqul*, ed. Abul Mansur Ahmed Rachanabali, *Tritiya Khanda* (Collected Works of Abul Mansur Ahmed, Third Volume). Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2001.

36. See Sarkar, 'Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants', pp. 107–109.

37. *Burir Shuto*, pp. 29–34, cited in Sarkar, 'Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants', p. 109.

38. Sarkar, 'Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants', p. 98. Sarkar has analyzed this and related peasant improvement texts in this essay and in the book, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), pp. 462–4. Additionally, P.K. Datta's, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999), chapter 2 studies these sorts of texts and addresses the issues of the 1920s.

39. See Sarkar, 'Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants', p. 100.

40. See Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008).

41. The Faraizi Movement (from the Arabic *faraid*, meaning obligation), was a Muslim revivalist movement that took shape in rural Bengal begun by Haji Shariatullah in 1818, and continued until the late nineteenth century. Motivated both by religious revivalism and social justice for peasants, the movement focused on an emphasis on social Muslim identity of peasants who were often harassed, ridiculed, or otherwise exploited by Hindu zamindars. The movement also focused on outward appearance and symbols. The classic work on the subject is Muinuddin Ahmad Khan, *History of the Faraizi Movement, 1818–1906* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1965). For a recent interpretation from the perspective of social ecology and environmental history, see Iftekhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State, and Social Change, 1840–1943* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), chapter 4, 'Political Ecology of the Peasant: the Faraizi Movement between Revolution and Passive Resistance', pp. 67–92.

42. As Sartori has indicated, the energy vitalizing this communal spirit derived not from inherent antagonism but from the failures of Swadeshi politics on the parts of Bengal Hindus: 'Swadeshi leaders became increasingly ambivalent, combining an overall commitment to a non-communal conception of national integrity (without which "Bengal" could only be an empty shell) with the sometimes thinly disguised—and for that matter, the sometimes completely overt—deployment of communal stereotypes to explain the willingness of the anti-Swadeshi movement [that is, Muslims] to cooperate with the British against the national interest'. See *Bengal in Global Concept History*, p. 248.

43. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 225–32.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

47. *Islam Pracharak* 5th year, Agrahan-Paus (1903), cited in Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1973), pp. 117–18.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Abul Mansur, *Hindu Dharma Rahasya O Deb Lila* ('The Mystery of the Hindu Religion and the Sport of the Gods') (Kolkata, 1905), p. iv, cited in Sufia Ahmed, *The Muslim Community of Bengal*, p. 261.

51. Khilafat politics merged with local grievances, such as an opposition to increased political repression and an opposition to the extreme act of government-led violence against innocent people in the 1919 Jalianwallah Bagh incident. Khilafat demands resonated also with the demand for self-government, or *purnaswaraj*, a phrase coined by Mohandas Gandhi. See Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) for a discussion of the local, Indian nature of the Khilafat movement. For a discussion of the territorial and local identities in Indian Islam that co-existed alongside expressions of Muslim identity, see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 10–26, part 1(b) 'The City as Identifier' and part 1(c) 'Region and Language in Muslim Consciousness'.

52. Mohammed Shah, 'The Bengali Muslims and the World of Islam: Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial Bengal as Reflected in the Press' in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretive Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 87. See Shah, 'The Bengali Muslims and the World of Islam', 2001, *passim*, for a discussion of Islamic universalism in Bengal during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other works include Abu Yusuf Alam, *Muslims and Bengal Politics (1912–1924)*, pp. 192–258 and Ahmed, Rafiuddin, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*, *passim*.

53. Amalendu De, 'The Social Thoughts and Consciousness of the Bengali Muslims in the Colonial Period', *Social Scientist* 23, 4/6 (April–June 1995): 21. Al-Afghani, though, did spend much of his time in colonial India advocating Hindu–Muslim unity. See Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 192–3.

54. Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*, p. 192.

55. In chapter 4, I examine a text that memorializes Meherullah in 1934, titled *Karmavir Munshi Meherulla*, published from Calcutta. Meherullah was active in the late 1890s and early twentieth century in preaching Islam across the Bengal countryside and defending it from attacks from Christian missionaries. The memory of his work a generation earlier remained to inspire Bengali

Muslims to both better their condition and take pride in their religion, as evidenced through this text.

56. See Alam, *Muslims and Bengal Politics (1912–1924)*, pp. 119–28 and Shah, 'The Bengali Muslims and the World of Islam', pp. 90–2.

57. An example would be widespread reports alleging that the bishop of Italy during the 1911–12 Turko-Italian war gave religious sanction to fight and exterminate Muslims.

58. The veracity of the anti-Muslim attitude that papers like the *Moham-madi* and the *Roznama-i Muqaddas Hablul Matin* attributed to Italy and European colonial powers of the era is debatable. There may have been exaggeration in these reports, but the fact remains that due to a perceived threat to Islam, Muslims of Bengal were politically identifying with a global Muslim community in the 1910s. See Shah, 'The Bengali Muslims and the World of Islam', pp. 90–2, for a description of some of these reports and the effects they had on Calcutta Muslim society of the time.

59. See Shah, 'The Bengali Muslims and the World of Islam', p. 96, for an introduction to the anjuman. Alam, *Muslims and Bengal Politics (1912–1924)*, pp. 240–1 also briefly deals with this development.

60. About Siraji, see Shah, 'The Bengali Muslims and the World of Islam', p. 97, and Anisuzzaman, 'The World of the Bengali Muslim Writer in the Nineteenth Century, 1870–1920', in Anisuzzaman (ed.), *Creativity, Reality, Identity* (Dhaka: International Centre for Bengal Studies, 1993) and the introduction to Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, pp. 21–55.

61. See Dhurjati Prasad De, *Bengali Muslims In Search of Social Identity 1905–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1998), pp. 57–8. Regarding the BMSS, see *ibid*, pp. 57–62, Muzaffar Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha* (Kolkata: National Book Agency, 1965), pp. 17–21, and Muzaffar Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920–1929* (Kolkata: National Book Agency, 1970), pp. 23–6.

62. Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party*, p. 25.

63. Sukumar Sen, *Bangali Sahityer Itihash, Chaturtha Khanda* (The History of Bengali Literature), vol. 4, p. 217, cited in Muzaffar Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, p. 60.

64. See Muzaffar Ahmad, *Samakaler Katha*, pp. 19–23, and an analysis by Suchetana Chattopadhyaya, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, 1913–1929* (Delhi: Tulika, 2011), pp. 29–36.

65. First issue, Baisakh, 1325 BS/1918, pp. 74–5, cited in Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, pp. 202–3.

66. Scattered appeals of support did appear throughout the 1910s in journals such as *Al-Eslam*.

67. See the first issue, Baisakh, 1325 BS/1918, 'Dwitiya Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Sammilaner Sabhapatir Abhibashan', cited in Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, pp. 203–5. The words Shahidullah cited on the 'Hindu' side are mostly Sanskrit words that exist as *tatsama* (complete loan words) in Bengali. English equivalents are *iswara* (God), *swarga* (abode of the gods, sometimes loosely translated as heaven), *narak* (hell), *upashana* (prayer), and *upabash* (fasting). 'Muslim' words in English translation include *paigambar* (prophet), *behesta* (heaven), *dojakh* (hell), *feresta* (angel), *namaz* (prayer), and *roza* (fasting).

68. 'Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Sammelan-Abharthana-Samitir Sabhapatir Abhibashan', first year, 4th issue, 1325 BS/1918, cited in Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, pp. 213–14. This address was given at the third conference of the samiti in Chittagong in 1918. For a list of each conference along with location and date, see Dhurjati Prasad De, *Bengali Muslims in Search of Social Identity, 1905–1947*, fn. 39, p. 87.

69. 'Tritiya Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Sammilan—Sabhapatir Abhibashan', first year, 4th issue, 1325 BS/1918, Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, p. 214.

70. As a testament to the level of debate in the society, the editor raised an issue in a footnote to Ali. The editor claimed that a national language is the language of the inhabitants of a region regardless of religion and that the Arabic language is the universal language of Muslims, not the national language of Bengali Muslims.

71. See Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue*, passim.

72. Sufia Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh*, p. 74.

73. P.K. Datta, *Carving Blocs*, p. 78.

74. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra*, pp. 19–25.,

2. *Ideological Traffic in Calcutta*

When we go to Bengali literary conferences, we feel like poor people at the house of wealthy relatives. We have to develop our own Bengali Muslim literature.

Muhammed Shahidullah, 1911¹

Who says that this Bengali language is a foreign one and belongs to non-Muslims? Since we are born in this land, the Bengali language too is our own language ... however various communities have used this Bengali language and gave names to various activities and it is our duty to give up expressions that contradict our religion.

Muhammed Emjad Ali, 1922²

Though Bengali Muslim writers had been producing modern literature in Bengali for decades, they still felt alienated in the 1910s and 1920s.³ Muhammad Shahidullah remarked about feeling so alienated from Bengali Hindu literature, embodied as it was by the larger-than-life luminary Rabindranath Tagore. Shahidullah belonged to one of the growing groups of Bengali Muslim intellectuals

who in the 1910s and 1920s debated the nature of Bengali Muslim literary sensibility. Shahidullah and his peers—Nazrul Islam, Muzaffar Ahmad, and other Bengali Muslims active in literary organizations like the BMSS—established their politics from Calcutta, the centre of political and cultural life in colonial Bengal. These individuals participated in debates that were not just confined to urbane Calcutta, but extended well into the mufassil regions of eastern Bengal, or what is now Bangladesh. Mohammed Emjad Ali, a writer and teacher from this rural East Bengali world, stridently defended the Bengali Muslim's right to speak, write, and use the Bengali language in as strong terms as his English-educated, Calcutta-resident peers did. Though Ali and Shahidullah were from vastly different socio-economic worlds, they were united in their resolute promotion of the Bengali language and their adherence to a Muslim identity. Ali and Shahidullah represent the changing perceptions of the role of language and literature among Muslims in Bengali society of the early twentieth century. These changing perceptions address broader debates about the historical trajectory of cultural and religious difference, sameness, and community identity.

The politics and aesthetics of the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam from his emergence in World War I will be discussed at length in the first section of this chapter. His emergence in 1918 as a writer of Bengali poetry and prose is analyzed within debates about Islam, Indian society, and Bengali culture in journals such as the *BMSP* and *Samyabadi* (Egalitarian). After these debates about literature, I examine formal Communist politics via its major exponent and founder of the Communist Party of India, Muzaffar Ahmad. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of Nazrul, Muzaffar Ahmad, and Calcutta-based debates about literary criticism and language in the late 1920s.

Nazrul Islam, 1918–26

Nazrul Islam's poetry, politics, and persistent interrogation of social life, religious boundaries, and colonial rule not only created new horizons for Bengali Muslim writers, but, as a contemporary Bangladeshi historian claims, he also 'represented the variety, conflict, and the fusion of diversified ideas that existed in Bengali society in the first half of the twentieth century'.⁴ As an activist of the era reminisced, Nazrul 'set the politics of M.N. Roy to poetry'⁵ and charted new paths in Bengali Muslim politics

of the immediate post-Khilafat era. As a poet and a thinker, he held a sense of pride in Islamic culture and opposed bigotry in the name of religion.⁶ At times, he questioned the efficacy of religious identity itself. Though he often critiqued the bigotry practiced in the name of religion he saw around him, he also combined a belief in God with a fervent anti-colonialism.⁷

In 1899, Nazrul Islam was born in Churulia, a village in the Burdwan district of West Bengal. He spent much of his childhood earning his livelihood through calling prayers at the village mosque, and he attended a *maktab* for his early education. Through much of his adolescence, he toured with a *leto* (wandering singers and folk drama performers) group. From his early years as a *muezzin* and through his *maktab* schooling, he learned the essentials of Islamic teachings, rituals, and the Arabic language. Through his four years with *leto* performers as a singer, composer, songwriter, and dramatist, he learned a great deal about Hindu mythology and puranic characters, as many of the songs and *nataks* (dramas) he composed centred on Hindu deities and stories.⁸ At one point, Nazrul left school as he could not afford the fees, but in 1914, a kind sub-inspector named Kazi Rafizullah noticed Nazrul's talents and sponsored him to attend high school. In school, he came across a teacher and 'Yugantar' revolutionary, Nibanchandra Ghatak. Ghatak reportedly encouraged him to join the war effort. He attended school in both Mymensingh and his own village of Churulia until 1917, when he joined the British Indian army's call for soldiers.⁹

Nazrul's time in the Bengal 49th Regiment,¹⁰ stationed in Karachi, was crucial for his development as a political thinker and poet. By the time he entered the army at the age of 18, he held a background relatively uncommon for most Bengali Muslim youths of his generation. He was proficient and well-versed in Hindu mythology and was emerging as a promising writer of Bengali. During his time in Karachi in the late 1910s, Nazrul developed an interest in the political and aesthetic principles of Islam and derived inspiration from it. He showed solidarity with the Muslim world, especially because it was getting destabilized following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹ The war put him in contact with Muslims from other regions and broadened his sense of Muslim identity and culture. He also nurtured his passion for Bengali literature by reading literary journals from Calcutta, such as *Saogat* and the *BMSP*.¹²

In 1918, these two Calcutta journals spoke to progressive concerns amongst the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, such as women's education

and rights, communal harmony, and social justice. Both served as platforms for Nazrul's talents, as the *BMSP* published his first poem, 'Mukti' (Freedom) in 1919,¹³ and the *Saogat* published his first prose work, 'Baunduler Atma Kahini' (Life Story of a Vagabond), also in 1919. The *BMSP*, in circulation from 1918 to 1921, represents a milestone in the rising trend of Bengali Muslim literary and cultural identity growing amongst intellectuals and community leaders from the 1910s onwards. *Saogat* was started by Mohammed Nasiruddin, an insurance salesman, who had spent much of his young life travelling in rural parts of Bengal. He arrived in Calcutta in 1917, just as the *BMSP* was gathering steam for its publication aspirations, and gathered financial and logistical support from individuals like Mujibur Rahman Khan, editor of the English-language *Mussalman*, and other wealthy members of the Calcutta Muslim community to put together the first edition of *Saogat* in December 1918. Though like the *BMSS*, this new journal did focus on new literature and Bengali Muslim voices, *Saogat* focused also on women's education and women's empowerment. Their first issue included a short essay by the famous female writer Rokeya Sakhawat Hussein, entitled 'Open Sesame', detailing how women's issues needed to be foregrounded in progressive politics. Additionally, the issue included images of modern women from Turkey and throughout the Muslim world.

Two stories that displayed his budding political consciousness, 'Hena', and 'Byathar Dan'¹⁴ caught the attention of Muzaffar Ahmad, Nazrul's friend and interlocutor. Ahmad wrote that these literary works strengthened Bengali literature and paved the way for a new consciousness.¹⁵ Once Ahmad read 'Mukti', the *BMSP* was determined to publish and promote all of Nazrul's works.¹⁶

Nazrul returned from Karachi in early 1920s. Muzaffar Ahmad had been corresponding with Nazrul through letters, noticed his prodigious talent, and finally met him in person in April 1920 as soon as Nazrul landed in Calcutta.¹⁷ By this time, his name was reaching literary circles and his novel *Bandhan-Hara* (Free from Bondage) was being serially published in *Muslim Bharat* (Muslim India),¹⁸ a journal which began in early 1920. Ahmad helped Nazrul find his way in Calcutta and provided accommodation for him at the office of the *BMSS*. The office was located at the famed 32 College Street, a long-standing centre of intellectual and political *addas*. This location was also the current home of the *BMSS*, which had moved from Choku Khansama Lane to Mirzapur Street and

now to College Street. During this formative period in Nazrul's life, he came into close contact with great personalities of Bengali letters, such as Kazi Abdul Wadud, Muhammed Shahidullah, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and Satyendranath Datta.¹⁹ Between 1919 and 1920, the BMSS office served as a literal meeting ground. It had a library and a discussion room, and it provided accommodation for many who would later develop as key figures in the development of Bengali Muslim literary culture, such as Kazi Abdul Wadud, the East Bengali writer and intellectual who was visiting the city and Afzalal Huq, the editor of *Muslim Bharat*. It was a site of alternative adda, as this space not only enabled discussions drawn from the folklore of contemporary Bengali intellectuals,²⁰ but its very nature and scope of Muslim political interest in the practice allowed for a questioning of social boundaries across the 'communal divide'. It was a 'topological space characterized by intersections and convergences of different circles and segments'²¹ that included 'middle-class writers, activists, demobilized soldiers, and unemployed youth', all of whom gathered to discuss literature, politics. But unlike most addas held in Calcutta, these discussions were led by Muslim migrants, working-class activists, and poets on the fringes of the society. The open and radical space of the BMSS allowed for various divides of Calcutta society, particularly the religious ones, to be questioned by those who visited the BMSS as fellow intellectuals. Pabitra Gangopadhyaya, a well-known Hindu writer, commented about how open, fluid, and inspirational such a setting was for the young Bengali writer.

The years between 1920 and 1922 saw Nazrul develop his talents and reputation as a poet, journalist, and anti-colonial critic. He wrote and published a variety of poems that reached a wide audience in Calcutta. After the appearance of *Bandhan-Hara*, Nazrul became recognized amongst literary critics, both Hindu and Muslim. First serialized in 1920 in *Muslim Bharat*, but then published as a book in 1927, *Bandhan-Hara* shows the beginnings of Nazrul's rigorous critiques of hypocrisy in religion, the oppression of women, and the necessity for rebellion.

In 1920, Nazrul entered the field of political journalism. In the summer of 1920, he often met with Muzaffar Ahmad, the writer and critic M. Wajed Ali, the noted journalist Moinuddin Hussein, and the rising politician Fazlul Huq. This group decided to publish a daily journal in Bengali suffused with progressive ideas and anti-colonial writings. The journal would be named *Navajug* (The New Age). Huq would finance

and publish the venture, while Nazrul would edit the journal. Nazrul dazzled readers with his sharp writing and literary knowledge and skill, as he graced many an article with lines from Bengali literary giants like the fifteenth-century Vaishnav poet Chandidas and Nazrul's contemporary Rabindranath. Nazrul's writings were highly provocative and radical, so much so that the government banned it after a few issues.²²

Two particular writings noted for their aggressive critique of the British government are Nazrul's 'Muhajirin Hatyay Dai Ke?' (Who is Responsible for the Deaths of the Muhajirs?) and 'Dharmaghat' (Strike). In the former, Nazrul lambasted the British government for their attacks on Muslims leaving India for Afghanistan in 1920. In the wake of the failed Khilafat movement, tens of thousands of Indian Muslims conducted a *hijra* (exodus) to the Muslim kingdom of Afghanistan in the summer of 1920. This *hijra* was advocated by many Muslim clerics who advocated the move into a *Dar ul Salaam* (abode of peace), as India was seen as a *Darul Harb* (abode of war), controlled by the British and populated by a majority of Hindus. Mostly peasants from Sindh and the Northwest Frontier Province, these migrants expected fertile lands and friendly rulers. Though initially welcomed by the King Amanullah, the Indian Muslims soon found that the Afghanistani government had no space for them. By the end of 1920, the majority of these Indian Muslims were sent back.²³

In a condemnation of colonial violence and repression, Nazrul asked if Indians are not as human as the British. In 'Dharmaghat', Nazrul recounted the struggles and sorrows of workers and cites how the feeling of revolt and revolution is natural in any oppressed people. He refers to the ways European and American companies and governments treat their workers, because for Nazrul, democracy in these areas has worked to prevent human suffering in the context of work and labour. Though not at all a Communist or a labour agitator in 1920, Nazrul wrote, just as Abul Hussein did in 1921 in *BMSP*, that a workers' revolution is inevitable if conditions don't change.²⁴

In addition to these two critiques of colonialism, Nazrul also wrote a piece titled 'Muslims in Bengali Literature'. As in the work of *BMSP*, Nazrul here argues that Bengali is indisputably the mother tongue of Bengali Muslims and that it needs to be cultivated for progress. He referred to Rabindranath as a guide for creating a nationalist, anti-colonial literature in Bengali, by Bengali Muslims, as 'very few writers other than Rabindranath have been able to produce uncontrollable desire

for independence'.²⁵ Nazrul urged Bengali Muslims to create a vital, socially relevant literature open to the world of other cultures, nations, and languages, as great literature is produced only by those 'whose minds are open and liberal'. But this openness and liberalism should not conflict with one's national identity in literature, as it must be distinctive, particular, and arise from the conditions of Bengali Muslim life. Nazrul displayed the haunting presence of Bengali Hindu literary eminence in the background. Rabindranath proved to be a standard reference point since his literature showed the way forward for Bengali Muslims. Nazrul identified with Rabindranath in a way that complicated normative approaches to sameness and difference. A heavy investment in the Bengali language along with recognition (at times reluctant) of how language and literature was shared by Hindus and Muslims was as integral to being Bengali Muslim as a distinctively Muslim identity.

The *Navajug* was not meant to last for long. The state perceived it to be a 'seditious' paper, according to the Governor of Bengal, Zetland, who forfeited the paper's deposit. Zetland thought the paper 'incited the populace to boycott the army and police'.²⁶ Additionally, disputes between Muzaffar Ahmad and Fazlul Huq contributed to a tense environment in the newspaper's offices. According to Ahmad, Huq enlisted the services of Maulvi Abdur Rahim, whose politics Ahmad thought to be too communalist for a progressive paper like the *Navajug*. Huq did not back down, and Ahmad left the paper in late 1920. The paper stopped circulating before the end of the year.²⁷

Nazrul's poetry transcends easy characterization into 'Muslim' or 'Hindu', as it included varieties of sentiments of belonging, political action, and consciousness in a Bengali context. In 1920, with the Khilafat movement gaining currency in Bengal, the Muslim world was alive with political re-generation and growing disaffection with European colonialism. Nazrul found himself squarely in this world, reflecting a Muslim ecumenical feeling, but also keeping Bengali culture and identity never far from his line of vision. This combination starts in its most earnest when he published a string of poems in *Muslim Bharat* in 1920, along with *Bandhan-Hara*. 'Qurbani', 'Moharrum', 'Shatt-il-Arab', 'Fatwa-i-doaz-daham', 'Marami', and 'Snehabhita', all appeared in 1920.²⁸ Additionally, two poems about Muslim politics of the time, 'Kamal Pasha', and 'Anwar', both commentaries on the battle for Turkey's identity in the wake of World War I, also demonstrate Nazrul's political consciousness.

'Shatt-il-Arab', one of Nazrul's most well-known poems from this era, expresses the feeling of a Bengali soldier in Iraq, near the Shatt-il-Arab, and his loving feeling of admiration for Arab heroes in Iraq, the 'land of martyrs'.²⁹ Repeated laments over the spilt 'blood of valiant Arabs' and pure Arabian riverbanks establish the poem as a paean to Arabic culture and Islamic civilization in that region.³⁰ The poem also sings a song of fondness to that ancient land between the Tigris and Euphrates as a measure of universalist Islamic identity. The end of the poem places the suffering of the Bengali soldier, the pain, sorrow, and hurt felt in war, and in death, alongside the Iraqi army: 'Iraq army! Here in this story/We in the Bengal army/Can say your suffering is ours!'³¹ Regarding Muslim identity, Nazrul places the Bengali and the Iraqi into a common Muslim world of mutual love and admiration. The Bengali protagonist remains a Bengali, never to be shorn of a particular cultural location. Muslim identity is part of a larger universalism which doesn't exclude, but rather, actively includes the local sense of identity.³² It is one of the first poems to appear after World War I that combines a look towards the future with a feeling of belonging in the Muslim and Bengali world.³³

'Muharram' and 'Fateha-dowaz-daham', both detail epic elements fundamental to Islamic history and culture. 'Moharram' narrates the story of Husein through cries and laments about the suffering of Husein, Fatima, Kasem, and Sakina, historical personages in early Islam beloved to Shi'a Muslims. Like in most of Nazrul's 'Islamic' poems, he calls Muslims to wake up, and arouses passion and sentiment for Muslims in battle. This fits in line with his war writings ('Hena', 'Byathar Dan', 'Mukti'), but now in a context of Islamic history and culture. Demonstrating his love for both Shi'a and Sunni Muslim cultural symbols, he encourages his readers to join in commemoration:

Wake up! Get up, Muslim! Make the Call! Let the day of martyrs be filled
with red blood! Get ready, get dressed This is the day to go to the Maidan
Take poison as Hasan Take Husain's curse Will take all of Asgar's chil-
dren and give the Koran Will take revenge against the tyrants, will make
his tomb!³⁴

'Fateha-i-dowaz-daham' details the Muslim religious festival held on the birth and death anniversary of the Prophet Muhammed, the twelfth of the lunar month Rabial Awal. Nazrul's work is a two part poem that

narrates the world from creation to destruction, the rise of Islam, the world before Islam, and the world after it. As in 'Muharram', he details the great personages of Islam and poetically describes lament, grief, and happiness. This makes Bengali a storehouse of imagery from the Muslim ecumenical world of creation, destruction, of angels Michael, Gabriel, of individuals like Fatima, Khadija, and others, all who make up Islamic life, culture, and history. Nazrul merged Muslim images and feelings, as the BMSP advocated, into the Bengali language by invoking places like Uraz, Yemen, Najd, Hejaz, Iraq, and Sam and 'the great names of Egypt, Oman, and Tehran'. Rather than only be concerned with classical Islamic civilization in this and other poems, he also states how 'true religion comes from those who truly practice!'³⁵

'Kheya Parer Taruni' is an uplifting piece that uses Bengali cultural imagery of boatmen and the idea of crossing the river and finding rescue and love, a prominent idea in Bengali culture, inside a Muslim motif, celebrating Islam and its salvation. Muzaffar Ahmad recounts how the poem arose, as he tells readers in his memoirs how Nazrul was mesmerized by a picture, drawn by the wife of Khan Bahadur Mohammed Azam's wife, of a boat.³⁶ He was inspired to describe this picture, and out came this display of love and appreciation for Islam, about how Islam rescues, offers salvation and solace to those who seek it:

On the right path these travelers without sin, The heart is safe in the armor
of religion Helmsman Mohammed, provision for the journey! Abu Bakr,
Osman, Omar, Ali Hydar The helmsman of this boat, not to fear! The
head of this boat The song of these boatmen—la sharikallah!³⁷

'Qurbani' formally describes the institution of sacrifice in Muslim ritual. Written in the presence of Muzaffar Ahmad while the two were roommates, the poem urged its readers to merge the Muslim ritual of sacrifice into a language of anti-colonialism. The sacrifice should not be in the name of violence, but in the name of the greatness of man and of the nation, as he continually mentions how 'today is not murder, but a time for the strength of *satyagraha*'.³⁸ The great day of sacrifice, supposed to be celebrated, is to him a time of real strength, for the establishment of truth and justice, for God, and for the nation.³⁹ Comparable critiques by Indian Muslims such as Maulana Kalam Azad occurred at the exact same time.

Nazrul's investment in Islam did not equate support for the Khilafat movement, as he wrote poems ridiculing the goals of the endeavour.⁴⁰ Poems extolling Mustafa Kemal, denigrating the motives of the Khilafat movement, and also ridiculing the politics of Khilafat appeared in 1921 and 1922.⁴¹ In 1922, he wrote that 'neither the Caliphate nor the country can be protected by keeping beards, eating meat, fasting and praying... Islam cannot be salvaged by those religious hypocrisies [of Khilafat]'.⁴²

In 1921, two political poems 'Kamal Pasha' and 'Anwar', later to be published in book form in *Agni-Bina* (The Fiery Lute), displayed his attitude towards Turkey, the end of World War I, and aggression against Muslims. As a supporter of progressive movements around the world (both the Young Turks and Kamal Atatürk's secularizing endeavour as well as the Russian Revolution), Nazrul saw Kamal as a hero to be emulated and recognized, and Anwar a force of backwardness of the world that Bengali Muslims should leave behind. Nazrul draws a sharp comparison between the joy and elation of victory, the way that Kamal was loved, and how so many soldiers gave their lives, how much pain and misery and suffering they had to go through. Like his stories 'Hena', and 'Byathar Dan', Nazrul inserts sympathy for Muslims on the battle fields of World War I. He also creates an internationalism inspired by both global Muslim politics and the Russian Revolution, the first of its kind in Bengali Muslim literature. The struggles of the Turks against the oppressive powers of Europe were linked to the struggles of many countries, many peoples, as Nazrul's hero often showed blood of many lands, many peoples, who were all linked in a common pursuit of freedom.⁴³ As Sugata Bose has opined, Nazrul's 'dream of anticolonial liberation was never to be bereft of a universalist dimension'.⁴⁴

'Kamal Pasha' and 'Anwar' both display Nazrul's politics near the end of the Khilafat movement. In 'Anwar', he called Muslims 'tame creatures', and lambasted Anwar Pasha, who functioned as a symbol of backwardness and conservatism for Muslims worldwide:

Who says he is a Muslim, tear his tongue apart
Traitor he is, knows nothing but saving his own life
Terrible Anwar With sword he had once been
taught to protect independence Has a bag on his shoulder for alms...

Worthless Anwar.⁴⁵

Brother of secular hero Kamal Pasha, Anwar joined British counter-revolutionary forces and hoped to secure his own government in

post-World War I Turkey. He also was a pan-Islamist and did not support secularism or progressive views on education and society, as Kamal did. Nazrul put both of these great personalities against each other in his poetry, with admiration for Kamal and disdain for Anwar.

Nazrul's Perspective on Khilafat

The Khilafat movement of Bengal served to solidify the link between a pan-Indian Muslim politics and local concerns. After the official panic throughout the Muslim world about the fate of Ottoman Turkey in the light of upcoming European conferences and treaties, Bengali Muslims started to participate in formal Khilafat politics in greater numbers. Both the BPML and the Congress in Bengal threw their complete support behind petitioning the government and organizing agitations towards guaranteeing the sovereignty of Turkey in any post-war settlement. Fazlul Huq, chair of the February 1919 BPML council meeting, declared full support for the Khilafat movement.⁴⁶ Nazrul's critiques and observations about the Khilafat movement appear all the more important in an era when political energies amongst Muslim political figures in Bengal began to support the Khilafat cause.

As reported in the *Mohammadi* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, by late 1919, Bengal was observing Khilafat Day, which included fasting, closing of businesses, and joint Hind-Muslim public meetings. In 1920 and 1921, the Bengal Khilafat Committee became a large, visible entity with membership covering a wide ideological spectrum. Congress, the Muslim League, and the Bengal Khilafat Committee were all actively touring Bengal on contiguous political platforms. During 1920, when the Congress was debating Non-cooperation and the demand for *swaraj*,⁴⁷ the Bengal Khilafatists toured Bengal in support of the Khilafat-Non-cooperation goals. In 1920, the leadership of the Bengal Khilafat Committee was still in the hands of 'up-country', Urdu-speaking Muslims, non-Bengalis, like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. He did not have the time or interest to personally tour the mufassil, as that work was mostly being done by Congress volunteers. In the middle of 1921, Bengali Muslim politicians, like Akram Khan, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, and Mujibur Rahman forced Azad to relent and allow Bengali Muslims leadership roles in the organization.⁴⁸

Though certainly inclusive of sentiment and Bengali feelings of belonging in a trans-regional Muslim community, the political drives behind much Khilafat agitation and collaboration with the Congress' concurrent Non-cooperation movement also stemmed from economic disempowerment. As Rajat Ray has demonstrated,⁴⁹ given a serious economic downturn and widespread unemployment of the educated after World War I, the main issue animating Khilafatists in Bengal was the role of economic inequality, capitalist domination, and economic disaster. Speeches by Bengali Muslim Khilafat leaders like Maulvi Ismail Emanuddin in 1921 showed how economic exploitation by European capitalists was as much the enemy as the occupiers of Turkey.⁵⁰

One factor that emerged during the Khilafat movement within this confluence of interests was the indigenous critique of agrarian oppression in the early 1920s. The main feature of these texts was a critique of the system of landed social relations that would appear recurrently in texts written by Bengali Muslims throughout the decade and well into the 1930s. Significantly, these texts appeared after Muslims began to write about peasant concerns from the first partition onwards. In 1921, four classic texts about peasants, *Krishak Bilap*, *Krishak Boka*, *Adarsha Krishak*, and *Krishak Marmabani*,⁵¹ were published in rural Bengal. Though certainly not coded in religious-communitarian terms, from this point onwards a Bengali recognition of peasant problems began to seep into conversations about Bengali identity and social justice. Like texts that emanated from the first partition period (1905–11), they do not betray a unified or cogent movement but rather the foundations of a social critique that would continually be cited in the decades that followed. Though Nazrul's political positions did not merge with those at the helm of organized politics, his focus on the broader Muslim world along with local economic concerns fit into the larger forces at play in early 1920s Bengal.

Having cemented the glory of Muslim pasts, presents, and futures, in 1922 Nazrul moved into another phase of ideological and literary development, that of radical social critique. Since his war days in Karachi, he had been closely following the Russian Revolution, sometimes with banned literature being smuggled into his barracks in 1918 and 1919. He also followed the politics of internationalism gathering steam near the end of the decade.⁵² His interest in the Russian Revolution and this internationalism began to appear in his stories, 'Hena' and 'Byathar Dan'. But before

this developed into a more organized social critique, he wrote 'Bidrohi' (The Rebel), a poem displaying rebellion against all social norms, published in early 1922 in the journal *Bijali* and also later in *Muslim Bharat*. Written in late December of 1921, on a rainy night, Nazrul woke up his then roommate Muzaffar Ahmad to read him a poem he had just written about shattering all the shackles of society.⁵³ Muzaffar Ahmad then, after hearing such powerful words, became Nazrul's first-level interlocutor and Nazrul would always show Muzaffar Ahmad his new material first during the stormy 1920s.

Somewhat akin to the internationalism of his earlier work, Nazrul revels in a rebellious spirit that matches the Vedantic concept of *aham*,⁵⁴ which posits that the self and God are inseparable. He repeatedly stresses the 'I', who is all, he is the creator, destroyer, rebel, critic, fighter. He attains all identities in a quest against the negative aspects of modern identity. As a contemporary activist has stated, this poem 'was that of a rebel I, rebel against all worldly bondage, but rebel for life and love and for the beauty and truth of it'.⁵⁵ Here he does not link up with Muslim soldiers or Kamal Pasha, but Hindu gods like Dhurjati (Shiva, god of destruction), Brahma, Vishnu, Parasuram, Balaram, all deities of both destruction and creation. He lays the foundation for later poems about social critique and revolt, as after many stanzas of identification with various gods and various emotions, such as 'the bitter tears of the widow's heart' or the 'burning pain and the madness of the jilted lover', he raises the image of Parasuram, the destroyer, whose image the protagonist of the poem assumes, as 'the cruel axe of Parusaram/I shall kill warriors/ And bring peace and harmony in the universe!' Adorning the ends of each stanza by including the lines, 'I am a rebel eternal/I raise my head beyond this world/Ever high is my head!', he then ends the poem by merging a Vedantic conception of monistic belief in divinity with social critique:

I shall uproot this miserable earth effortlessly and with ease
And create a new universe of joy and peace
Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel
Shall rest in quiet only when I find
The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed
Only when the battle fields are cleared of jingling bloody sabers
Shall I, weary of struggles, rest in quiet
I, the great rebel.⁵⁶

'Bidrohi' caused a stir in the Bengali literary world. His work was eagerly supported by Rabindranath and the editors of journals like *Basumati*, in addition to *Bijali* and *Muslim Bharat*. When Afzalul Huq heard the poem declaimed by Nazrul, he decided at that moment to publish it.⁵⁷ 'Bidrohi' represented a bridge, in 1921 and early 1922, to his later political work in the journal *Dhumketu* (the Comet), to appear from August 1922 until early 1923.

In 1922, soon after the success of 'Bidrohi', Nazrul travelled to Comilla in Eastern Bengal, contributed pieces to the *BMSP* and other journals, and often commuted back and forth between Comilla and Calcutta. In early 1922, he was invited back to Calcutta by the editor and writer M. Wajed Ali to write for another periodical, *Sevak*. This publication included Muhammed Akram Khan on the editorial staff. Khan cringed at any 'Hindu' material creeping into what he saw as a 'Muslim' publication. When Nazrul wrote a eulogy to Satyendranath Datta, the Hindu poet who suddenly died in 1922, Khan allegedly cleansed the essay of any 'Hindu' references. When Nazrul found this edited version in print, he left the paper in disgust, never to return.⁵⁸ He was then approached by Mohsin Hamid, who would fund a new newspaper. Hamid invited Nazrul to edit and lead the new paper, which would be of Nazrul's thematic choosing. Frustrated with the exclusionary attitudes of Khan and *Sevak*, Nazrul agreed to start this new paper. In August 1922, the new *Dhumketu* appeared in Calcutta.⁵⁹ Muslims, from the perspective of the government, seemed at this time most receptive to communism from Europe, as the most striking feature of 'Muslim papers' in Bengal was the 'revelation of class consciousness and increasing emphasis on different interests of zamindars, capitalists, middle-classes, all due to the influences of Indian Communists who were in Europe'.⁶⁰

In the style of 'Bidrohi', and of his earlier poems about Islam, *Dhumketu* charted a new phase in Bengali journalistic and literary life. On 11 August 1922, this journal inaugurated a new age, being adorned with the blessings of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and the revolutionary Barindra Kumar Ghose, brother of Aurobindo and close confidante of Nazrul. Rabindranath wrote a glowing poem about how Nazrul should move forward to educate, enlighten, and inspire the masses.

In 1921 and 1922, Bengal, like the rest of India, was searching for an alternative to the sputtering gears of Congress after the Bardoli

resolution and after Gandhi's rousing appeals to the people had failed to achieve *swaraj*. Terrorism, seen by many Bengali Hindu revolutionaries as following Ireland's Sinn Fein, was one alternative path, along with the brewing Leninist one, favoured by the radical M.N. Roy. Nazrul chose to respect his own rebelliousness, tinged with a great love for a type of socialistic world, a world free of religious bigotry and free of class and caste based discrimination and violence. His poem 'Dhumketu', published in the first edition, continues the tradition of 'Bidrohi', in his aggressive call to arms, in quasi-religious imagery, against the chains of modern identity, subjugation, and oppression. Representative of much of his poetry of this period, he mixes religious and revolutionary imagery:

I know that trick of creation,
 so I kick at all rules and regulations,
 and hit hard with my hammer on God's stony breast.
 I know that what the hollow stuffed God could not achieve would still
 be achieved!
 Therefore I rebel and welcome Revolution, I
 Therefore I dance and sing merrily!
 I spit at the face of death and blow out the burning fires of a thousand hells.

Like 'Bidrohi', the language of 'Dhumketu' is aggressive and uncompromising. He adorned most stanzas, in religious and millennial tones, with his line 'I am coming for the great revolution', undoubtedly referring to a great social change in colonial India. The influence of the Russian Revolution, workers' consciousness, and political freedom was never far from Nazrul's mind during his *Dhumketu* days.

This inaugural issue included, according to Muzaffar Ahmad, the first complete declaration of complete independence. As an editorial of the first issue stated, 'We don't know what *swaraj* and other such words mean ... If we want independence we have to, before everything else, revolt against all rules and canons, all bans and bonds ... religion, society, king, or God—don't be scared of any of these.... If you can revolt in a worthy way—if you can invoke the *pralaya* (cataclysm), Siva will wake up and Good shall prevail.'⁶¹ Variations on this *Dhumketu* style of fiercely aggressive poetry invoking God, destruction, creation, revolution, and vehement demands for social change appeared throughout the paper's tenure, including by Nazrul himself and others, such as Subodhchandra Ray and Mozammel Huq.

In addition to anti-colonialism, the *Dhumketu* also displayed an internationalism whose reference points were not only modern Europe's changing world in Russia and China and nationalists of the age, but also the Muslim world.⁶² A culture of modern progressivism was highlighted in these two ways. In each issue, a section on the Muslim World appeared, with coverage of Muslim politics in the Middle East and at times East and Southeast Asia. Like other Muslim papers of Bengal, such as the *BMSP*, *Mohammadi*, and *Saogat*, *Dhumketu* also reported on the politics of Turkey, Afghanistan, and Egypt. Entire essays were dedicated to luminaries in the Muslim world such as Kamal Pasha, Anwar Pasha, Jaglul Pasha, and Jamaluddin al-Afghani.⁶³ Many issues contained a section on *jihad*, usually about proscriptions of a good Muslim life, and often advocating praying instead of fighting, for *jihad*. Muslim identity was also evidenced through constant appeals to and appreciation of Arabia, the bravery and courage of Arab peoples, and how equality and honour is a part of Arabic culture.

On the European side, many articles were written by Nripen Chattapadhyaya about Europe's great nationalists and heroes, like Mazzini and Garibaldi. Also Tolstoy and the Russian Revolution were covered by Chattapadhyaya and others during 1922. Religion, orthodoxy, hatred, violence, and bigotry were attacked as enemies of true religion. Though confidently identifying with Islam, *Dhumketu* aspired to a higher religion beyond labels and differences. This would be a religion of Man that did not oppose pre-existing religions in and of themselves: 'He who has faith in his own religion—has known what it is—can never hate the religion of another.'⁶⁴ An editorial of 17 November 1922 discussed what religion means in the social context of nationalism and urges people to break free of religious bigotry, especially after Khilafat-NCO failed, and they were of the opinion that 'the keepers of religion will not protect us if enemies come'.⁶⁵

In addition to that, issues like religion, social oppression, discrimination, and poverty appeared through 1922. Nazrul's articles like 'Mein Bhukha Hun' and 'Bhikha' denounced the poverty he and his associates saw in the Calcutta of their time. In editorials, slavery was analysed more than a few times, as the condition in which workers and peasants both find themselves. *Dhumketu* often sold out and found great popularity amongst the youth.⁶⁶ The combination of a fierce anti-colonialism in a progressive globalized frame, inclusive of Muslim and European references, and

without fear of utilizing religious imagery, provided an extraordinary combination for Bengali Muslims reading about issues of the day during the 1920s.

One particular instance of the use of religious imagery is the landmark poem that landed Nazrul in jail, 'Anandamayir Agamane', the advent of the goddess of Joy, or Durga, a goddess venerated in Bengal. This poem is a supreme example of all the ideological forces in *Dhumketu*: a rejection of religious bigotry but an embrace of religious sentiment paired with an anti-colonial spirit. The poem invokes Durga, the mother goddess, who slays the demons, as arriving in Bengal to fight the tyrants, the monsters, in the form of the British Empire. The poem narrates the rise of Durga: 'How long would you be concealed in the image of clay, mother?/ When the paradise is conquered/By the tyrant of evil, monster.'⁶⁷ But it also references the pitiable state of political affairs in a colonized world: 'Listening to the slogan of peace, in fury my heart bleeds/Trampled peace remains indeed, in the land of atrocities.'⁶⁸ Additionally, the poem critiques the upholders of organized religion as slaves to the colonial system, as evidenced in the following passage:

Shake the beard, pronounce the verdict, go to mosque Say the prayer
Slaves they are, forbidden in prison of fortress, they don't care Hell with
the slaves, they salute the oppressor. Flying the religion-flag of beard
They recite the Qur'an with stink breath They bow to the giants then pay
obseance to God In the palace of entertainment today Over 30 crores of
eunuch slaves
Receive kicks and cry out for mercy Save me your honor!⁶⁹

As a poem which places the goddess Durga at the centre of a poetic attack on colonial rule, it roused the police to monitor *Dhumketu* quite closely. Its publication led to a raid on the office on 8 November 1922, after only three months of circulation. The police went straight to the *Dhumketu* office and were soon met by Muzaffar Ahmad and Abdul Halim, who were heading to work for a normal day. Nazrul was in Comilla at the time, but on 23 November 1922, along with Afzalul Huq, the manager, he was arrested under Penal Code 124-A.⁷⁰ The publication continued until early February 1923. While Nazrul was detained and awaited a sentence in Calcutta, on 7 January 1923, he wrote and later published, in the 27 January 1923 issue of *Dhumketu*, a prose piece of protest literature, 'Rajbandir Jabanbandi' (Deposition of a Political Prisoner).

In this work, later published as a book, Nazrul launched an all-encompassing assault on the criminal justice system in colonial India. He juxtaposed the rule of colonial law with a force of righteousness he claimed to possess, through his belief in God and in truth. He opened the essay with a description of his trial, on one side, the Crown, and on the other, the Comet, the former being a king with a scepter, the latter being truth with adjudication. Many people are in favour of the King, but on the other side, he proclaims God 'is the king of all kings, judge of all judges, true through limitless ages, [and] is in my favor'.⁷¹ This essay, then, put in further opposition the worldly, unjust colonial law and a law for universal truth, the law that he, as a poet, is proud to follow. Nazrul claims that he is a 'poet who has been sent to expose the hidden and to make the absolute into the abstract. God Himself responds through the poet's voice. My words are the exposures of truth, the message of God'.⁷² Similar to his tone in the poem 'Bidrohi', he employed shades of Vedantic philosophy again when he claims that truth will expose itself and that God, in the form of the truth emanating from him, has always existed and will always exist. He emphasized God and truth repeatedly, but also included social justice and protest in his framework, as his 'aim is to worship God. [He] is the truth, the sword and the tears of God's eyes in favor of distressed humanity'.⁷³ But he is not just the tears of God. He sees his work not just as God's work, but as political protest, as he 'did not protest against the king, rather against injustice'.

In no uncertain terms, he castigated the political system of the time. Crime, punishment, and justice were caught up in a web of strange relations with truth and falsehood. The angst of the poet is expressed in the following lines: '[T]o call a slave a slave and to call a crime a crime is sedition in this country. Can truth bear it if truth is termed false, unjust is termed just and day is termed night forcefully?'⁷⁴ Nazrul also turned his specifically Indian anti-colonialism into internationalist protest, as his protests were not his alone, nor India's alone, they 'are the expression of the whole distressed and silent humanity.... [T]his cataclysmic roar is not mine alone, it is the roar from the suffering of the entire world'.⁷⁵ His faith in God was as strong as his faith in his own critique of the world around him. He states that his revolt is not just against the injustices perpetrated by the king, but against society, people, and nation. As a believer in God, he believed that his poetry and protests are not owned by him, but are simply emanating from him, and will find another messenger if

he is subdued. His protests are actually 'the torch of the hand of God and [will] destroy all injustice and tyranny'.⁷⁶ He ended the essay with a forceful statement of his feelings toward Gods and the political situation:

The tyrant's oppression of truth must diminish
That truth My God shall establish.

This functions as a signature of the new political thought ushered in by Nazrul's aesthetics: a fervent faith in God combined with a fierce anti-colonialism.

Nazrul was in jail from January of 1923 through the end of that year. Classified as a special prisoner, as he was arrested for his political beliefs, he first spent several months at Calcutta's Alipore Central Jail in early 1923. On 14 April 1923, he was transferred to the Hughli Jail in a ploy by the state to shift his status to that of common criminals and thereby to symbolically deny his voice as a political prisoner. When Nazrul realized this, he commenced a hunger strike. Rabindranath, Sarat Chandra, and many others urged him to give up and to eat. Rabindranath allegedly urged Nazrul to stop, as 'our [Bengali] literature claims you'. The famous poet dedicated his drama, *Basanta* (Spring) to Nazrul. After thirty-nine days, on 29 May 1922, he gave up his fast at the request of his mother-in-law, Biraja Sundari Devi. He was soon transferred again to the Berhampur Jail in northern Bengal in June of 1923. On 15 December 1923 Nazrul was released after nearly a year in prison.

The *Dhumketu* moment in Bengali Muslim history from 1921 to 1922 represents a confluence of various elements of Bengali Muslim politics of the era. First, a sense of pride in Islam, not through separatist claims to identity, as often voiced in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, was established in Bengali literature through Nazrul's poems. This sense of pride began with the Islamic poems published in *Muslim Bharat* in 1920. Alongside developing interest and political commitment to Bengali Muslim literature by the BMSS and through writings in their *patrika*, a post-Khilafat Bengali Muslim cultural identity began to develop in which Islam was invoked for political reasons by a community, though not in a narrowly exclusionary sense. Second, Nazrul's work pointed the way towards an aggressive anti-colonialism amongst Bengali Muslims that transcended an exclusively religious social identity. Unlike an earlier phase in Muslim politics in Bengal, characterized by loyalism, government petitions, and

representation in government,⁷⁷ *Dhumketu* heralded a new phase in the history of Bengali Muslim politics and cultural life, as religion combined with anti-colonial politics without the trappings of cultural difference.

Muzaffar Ahmad and the Communist Party of India

In 1921, though the Congress was the most strident promoter of anti-colonialism in Bengal, the Communist Party of India by the mid-1920s became another prominent anti-colonial political party that challenged the colonial state. One of the most important exceptional figures drawn to communism was a Bengali Muslim, Muzaffar Ahmad. A friend and confidante of Nazrul, he was the moving force behind the creation of Indian Communist Party. Ahmad's life and activism provide a window into the larger historical development of ideological forces in Bengali Muslim society in the 1920s that relate to changing views on Islam, anti-colonial critique, and Bengali culture. He was at the forefront of new politics through his association with the Communist Party, his relationship to Islam, and his relationship to Bengali culture. Just as the three sites of ideological change—Muslim identity, Bengali literature, and anti-colonialism—were represented in Nazrul's writings, Muzaffar Ahmad's life and work, particularly in the 1920s, also represent these changes.

In the 1910s, during the Swadeshi movement, the anti-partition agitations, and the rising Khilafat movement in the latter part of the decade, Ahmad was a practicing Muslim in ritual and politics. Between 1914 and 1919, he held the influential post of a secretary in BMSS, and was also an active contributor to the BMSP. Part of his consciousness about Bengali culture, Hinduism, and Islam, came from his reactions to Bankimchandra Chatterjee's novels, many of which were filled with villainous Muslim characters. He described Chatterjee's novels, the prize of cultured Bengali Hindu society, as 'vitiated by communal hatred'.⁷⁸ He felt that the revolutionary terrorists of the early twentieth century were infected with the communal disease, as he saw their inspiration in Bankim's *Anandamath*, a novel 'filled from beginning to end with communal hatred and typified by the song Vande-Mataram, hail to the mother goddess, a song designed to inspire revolutionary sentiment, but a song placing that sentiment squarely in a Hindu frame of reference'.⁷⁹ Ahmad saw the terrorist movement as a Hindu revivalist movement, aiming to restore Hindu rule. As late as 1923, he witnessed a terrorist in jail request

a poster of Maa Kali for inspiration. According to one of his political memoirs, Ahmad, later to become a staunch secularist and communist, formed his political consciousness in 'Muslim' terms, that is, in terms of a social Muslim identity. He was neither a Swarajist nor a Khilafatist but he exactly practiced Muslim rituals and attended meetings that were designed specifically to meet the demands of the Muslim community.⁸⁰

Ahmad's formal politicization began at the age of 17 when he started to attend both Congress and Muslim League meetings in Calcutta.⁸¹ Ahmad recounts his coming of age into politics with both the Congress and Muslim League cooperation in 1916. In 1917, the Russian Revolution ended the rule of the czar and by the end of the year, a proletarian revolution and the emergence of the ruling Communist Party in Russia came to be. By November 1918, when the war had come to an end, Ahmad wrote in his memoir that 'the Russian Revolution held aloft a beacon of hope also before the workers of our country'.⁸²

From the Russian Revolution in 1917 until 1921, when Ahmad found communist ideology, colonial India was in the grips of particularly new types of repression at the hands of the British Empire. In preparation for quelling revolutionary activities feared to be instilled in Indians by revolutionary currents in Europe, the government established the Rowlatt Committee to determine ways to stop revolution. Economic unrest was looming on the horizon since the immediate post-war economy saw the loss of many jobs and the organization of disgruntled workers. This committee began in 1917 and by early 1919, implemented laws authorizing the use of force in prosecuting seditious political crimes. This led to a great hue and cry on the part of Gandhi, who was perfecting his methods of political protest at the time and experimenting with non-violent politics. The backdrop to the arrival and absorption of communist and leftist ideas by Ahmad was coloured by this context of Rowlatt repression, the Jalianwallah Bagh incident in April 1919 and pan-Islamic fervor heightened by increasing Ottoman losses in treaties after World War I. Sitting in Calcutta, working closely with the BMSS, writing essays on Bengali culture, Islam, and Bengali literature, Ahmad felt a sense of 'great agitation' as he first encountered communism through reading the works of Lenin.

In 1919 and 1920, Ahmad worked for the BMSS and also entered active politics of the labour movement, supporting strikes in Calcutta and keeping abreast of labour grievances throughout India. He formally embraced communist ideas in 1921, when near the end of the year he

bought several books related to labour, problems and politics from an underground godown that sold Marxist books, all of which were illegal in colonial India at the time. These were all related to Marxist ideas and/or communist ideologies, such as Lenin's *Can the Bolshevik Retain State Power?* and *Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*. He also purchased *A People's Marx*, which included an abridged version of *Capital*.⁸³ At this time, after he had acquired Marxist literature, individuals like Nalini Gupta approached him to encourage terrorist and revolutionary activity, but none had apparently given Ahmad a satisfactory explanation of communist ideas.

There exists no documented account of Ahmad's ideological transformation of how he became someone who was interested in Bengali culture and how he developed a Muslim identity and became one of the leaders of the Communist Party of India. He was like most of his political counterparts in the Muslim community who saw themselves as progressive, working towards Hindu–Muslim unity, but also working for Bengali Muslim uplift, just as all the members of the BMSS were. One factor to consider is that like a small section of young Indian Muslims of the 1910s and 1920s, he felt a great deal of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, but because of the perception of terrorism and mainstream nationalism as 'Hindu revivalist',⁸⁴ he felt alienated from such politics and then turned the Communist route.⁸⁵

In 1922 he met Abdul Halim, a young Bengali Muslim who had participated in the Khilafat movement. Ahmad and Halim jointly started on a path towards Communist politics in earnest. In the 1910s he had worked in the BMSS to establish a sense of progressive identity, education, and information for Bengali Muslims, but he had yet to take a leap into a life in literature or in politics. He also travelled with sailors through Bengal and helped them find a voice in the *Navajug*. In 1922, he found his calling in politics within the Communist Party. The 32 College Street office of the BMSS also housed a library full of the society's magazine as well as other Bengali and English publications. One day in 1922, Abdul Halim, after being released from prison in connection with Khilafat–NCO, met Ahmad in the BMSP office library. The two formed a friendly partnership until Halim's death in 1966. As noted in his memoirs, Ahmad then began a lifelong study of Marxism, as he always saw himself (and Halim) as students of Marxism. Wherever he lived, he had a library of Marxist literature and was always staying informed of ideas,

theory, and current events relating to Marxist politics, internationalism, and workers' struggles in the world.⁸⁶ Between 1922 and 1925, Ahmad worked closely with Nazrul to continue the journalistic aesthetic that focused on themes of social justice, in the form of a Bangla language Communist Party newspaper, the *Langol* (Plough), in circulation from 1925 to 1926 (Figure 2.1). *Langol* ended in 1926 but picked up with *Ganavani* (Statements of the People). In both of these journals Ahmad played a central role and Nazrul contributed articles and poems.

Ahmad represents a variety of ideological elements in Bengali Muslim society that were changing in the early twentieth century. Described by Ranadive as a 'devoted Muslim boy who had been repelled by the Hindu revivalist appeal, who had tried to find solace in literature to serve the people [through his work with the BMSS]...who had not been able to identify himself with the Khilafat revivalism',⁸⁷ Ahmad turned to communism as a way to contain the new energies affecting colonial India in the early 1920s. The struggle to create a new society was felt acutely by many, but Ranadive stresses how those Muslims, born before the twentieth century, but trying to work effectively for a better society in the twentieth, had an especially hard road to traverse as they were confined to prisons of



Figure 2.1 Cover of *Langol* (The Plough), 1925

Source: Reproduced with permission from the Journals Division, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

inhibitions emanating from both religious conservatism and exclusionary Muslim identity politics.

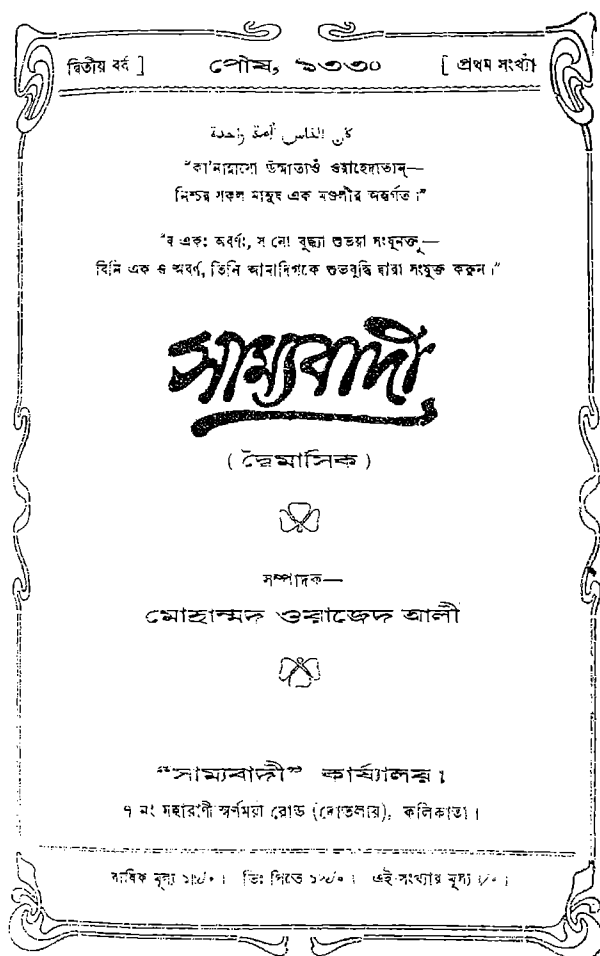
Ahmad was therefore an exception, like Nazrul. However, they both hailed from rural locations (Nazrul from Burdwan in West Bengal, Ahmad from Sandwip in Noakhali district, southeastern Bengal) where forces of religious conservatism and defensiveness were prevalent. Therefore, their struggles transformed the energies of previous efforts at social critique in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century into a concrete ideological form.

***Samyabadi*, 1922–25**

As Ahmad, Nazrul, Abdul Halim, and the Communist Party were at the forefront of examining new aesthetics and politics, another journal, *Samyabadi* (Equality),⁸⁸ appeared in Calcutta (Figure 2.2). This unique periodical provided a forum where Islam, as a source of inspiration and of cultural reference, and ideas of social and economic equality, combined in a formal apparatus. This journal was alive from 1922 to 1925, was edited and run by Muslims, targeted a Muslim audience, and counted many *maulvi* son their editorial staff. Though being written and published at the same time as *Dhumketu* and *Langol*, direct evidence confirming collaboration has yet to be located. But it is an example of how the coming together of Islam and ideas of social equality occurred in a formally 'Islamic' framework at the same exact time that secular literature and politics amongst writers like Nazrul and activists like Muzaffar were changing with respect to Bengali culture, identity, Islamic culture and identity, and social change.

Published at various locations in Calcutta, with editors like Khan Bahadur Moinuddin, and Muhammed Wajed Ali, this journal stands out as the first attempt by Bengali Muslims to consciously address the Muslim community about the relationship between Islam and social equality. It is not the first combination of religion and nationalist politics amongst Bengali Muslims, as the *Mohammadi* in 1921 commented that securing self-government was tantamount to jihad for protection of Islam, and moreover, that 'without free India, Islam cannot be saved'.⁸⁹

Samyabadi's first issue appeared in February 1922, just as Ahmad was developing his politics for labour and was soon to be engrossed in Marxist literature. The journal professed that Islam was a religion of equality,



Islamic tenets. Also, in this essay, immediately after Islam is referenced, the social condition of modern Bengal, in materialist terms, finds description into a world of peasants and cultivators and upper-classes, those who do not work. Though romantic, Selbarshi claims that there is no *jatibhed* (communal or caste-based conflict) in the world of workers and peasants, but that the upper-classes maintain conflict for their own interests.

In that same issue, several *ayats* (verses) from the Qur'an are included in Bengali. These include verses like 'Je srenir nijera bosta paribartan korena Allah taharo bosta paribartan korena' (Those who do not change their own condition, Allah doesn't change theirs) and 'Maanush! Aami tomadigke aeki purush ebong nari hoite sristi koriya bibhinno jati ebong sampraday bibhakto koriya achhi. Kintu tomader moddhe je dharma parayan se srestho' (People! I have created various communities of people from one man and woman. All are equal but those who follow dharma are doing the best). The opening issue held a line from Qur'an on its cover: 'Nischoi sakal monush akmandali antargata' (Certainly all humans are one). Though the authors in this journal do not have a precise reason for why *jatibhed* and division does occur, many lambast this condition as a wretched element of the past to be discarded. In an essay without an author, titled 'Somman Labher Upai' in the first issue, the writer claims that *jatibhed* happens because of tradition, ancestry, and fear of falling out of tradition, but that somehow Islam never advocated or supported such traditions.

As Bengali Muslims in 1922 found themselves in a position where community upliftment was paramount, an inability to see past tradition was interpreted as conflicting with the tenets of Islam. In a call to work and development, this author claims that the way forward is for different social classes to look at their own responsibilities and also respect the responsibilities of others. This is also reminiscent of Gandhi's early writings about caste wherein the argument held that if all groups did their own duties and respected the duties of others, conflict would not occur. Dr Mohammed Lutfur Rahman also wrote in this issue, in 'Maanusher Apaman' (An Insult to Humanity) that being human is not defined through being Hindu or being Muslim. Being a Muslim for Rahman meant to 'love all and to work for the well-being of all. Service should be toward humanity, not for a particular *jati* or group'.⁹¹

The themes of *Samyabadi's* mission were outlined in two key essays in the first issue, 'Samyabad' and 'Islam O Samya', the latter written by

Maulana Ali Wali Ahmed Islamabadi (no relation to Maniruzzaman Islamabadi), and the former by Sheikh Abdul Gafr Jalali. The rise of the Prophet Muhammad is seen as the coming of an avatar for justice and freedom through the unity of Arab groups, the rising above of internal differences, differences in identities, tribal loyalties, and the like. Islam came to the world to provide a socially just framework for human society. Like Selbarshi, Hinduism is referenced, by Jalali, as a contributor to the downfall of Indian Muslims' relationship to social equality, as social division was already present in the caste system, and Muslims simply inherited that from the environment. The material conditions of Bengali life appear in the form of peasants and how they internalize their class, their position, and their lowly status compared to the *bhadralok*. According to Jalali, they are self-sufficient and do not have to depend on the state, on institutions, and other instruments of material modernity for their survival, like the *bhadralok*. As the rise of the *bhadralok*, or 'cultured' office workers dependent on Western work discipline for their livelihood⁹² gained in importance in critiques of society, Jalali emphatically asserted that *ashraf-atrap* (high and low culture divisions in Muslim society, often seen in Bengal through the Urdu-Bangla divide) has no place in Islam and does not derive from anything Islamic. Jalali even goes so far as to say that when Adam was working the fields and Eve was making clothes, there were no *ashraf*, no *bhadralok*. A final point made by Jalali is that, work is the fundamental activity of man, and at the beginning of humanity, in Islamic terms, no class distinctions were present.⁹³

Islamabadi's introduction to the goals of *Samyabadi* discusses how Islam unified previously fragmented human social relations, fissured by tribal loyalties. He cites an ayat from the *al-Imran sura* regarding brotherhood, that humans were all endowed with the capacity to live amongst each other as brothers, friends, and in peace. In another addition to the theme of material social conditions finding a place in an Islamic discourse, the role of worldly affairs, of how to deal with difference, with *jatibhed*, is *Samyabadi's* goal, to understand that the practical aspects of Islam, or the ways Islam can offer ways to deal with the pressures of modern society, particularly colonial Bengal, is stressed by Islamabadi. *Jatibhed*, over and over again, is stressed to have no place in Islam and to be among the worst social ills of the era. And in Islam, not just for Muslims, but for humans, a way out of *jatibhed* and a way out of *ashraf-atrap* is found.

The idea of development comes up again in the work of the second year, in 1923, as Nazrul's rise and Muzaffar Ahmad's engagement with communism were dominating Calcutta Bengali Muslim progressive circles. Development is related to class, for an unidentified editorial author, in 'Development of Society'. In this piece, the author makes a point that resonates with Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmad's views, that the development of society is dependent on the lower-classes, or as the author says, 'those who work in the fields, with their hands, in their clothes', not the upper-classes who spend meaningless time in offices obsequiously serving their masters. Unlike the liberal definition of development which relies on its middle-classes, this version focuses on peasants and artisans, and finds an inspiration in Islam to make such development happen. In the same issues, Sri Satishchandra Ghosh, a Hindu writer, repeats the strong arguments that Islam contains no place for caste or *jatibhed*, but that somehow, ancestry, tradition, lineage have a pernicious presence in India and have to be eradicated. Unlike liberal arguments to improve society simply through Westernization or Western education, Ghosh and his co-workers in *Samyabadi* use Islam as a way to fight *jatibhed*.⁹⁴ It is a spirit of social critique that finds expression in a Muslim idiom in Bengali society. This spirit sometimes takes on a hagiographic quality of glorifying Islam, as in Moulvi Mir Abdul Matin's song 'Samyabadi'. This song charts the appearance of the Prophet Muhammad, his liberal sweetness and the messages of equality he brought to the world. Matin pressed upon his readers that this sweetness, equality, and love is for all of humanity, the rich, poor, old, young, and all people. Though the glory of Islam is emphasized in the poem, what is distinctive about Islam to these writers is not an exclusive identity of Islam, but its formulas for a socially just society.

Professor Mohammed Sanaullah took the content of Islam a step further and explains why social divisions took place in human history. He argued that God had created difference among humans in the form of class, race, nation, and language, to test human potential, to test their goodness, which they all have. But God created humans in an equal way, so the differences in society that are causing pain must be transcended, and living in difference, and respecting caste, culture, class, and so on, over God's way, which is equality, will only continue violence and tension. He notes that *sudras* are not permitted to read Sanskrit and blames Hinduism for Indian social divisions. Like some others, he claims that many Indians embraced Islam to escape Hindu oppression.⁹⁵ He also

cites plebian revolts in Rome as showing the way for individuals to fight against social ills like *jatibhed*. In the third edition of the first year, Sureshchandra Mitra explains how equality (*samya*) is a religion of love. In this religion of love, hatred, nation, oppression have no place. In fact, a close attachment to one's identity, to one's ancestry, even to one's Muslim identity, is seen as irreligious throughout the pages of this journal.

During the second year, between 1923 and 1924, the journal even more stridently used Islam to promote social justice. The frontispiece now showed the line 'He who is abstract, God, he who has no race, color, caste, creed, shows us the way toward enlightenment'. God is not for Muslims, Hindus, or for a group, God is for humanity. In a comprehensive, intellectual analysis of *samya*, the concept of equality, in that same issue, Mohammed Barakatullah discusses how nature is actually always testing humans to be in equal, giving them reasons to enjoy inequality or to cling to stations, to identities, to privileges. But humans, like Gautama Buddha and Hazrat Muhammad, do arise and challenge this system, and they came to establish equality, to establish democracy. In a related piece, 'Barnabhed' (Colour/Race conflict), Srijogendrakishore Bhattacharya, another Hindu intellectual, dissects the ways in which identities, violent identities, take root in all religious traditions. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, all of these thrive on distinction, hierarchy, and conflict. In Christianity, in the context of the British Empire, whiteness and race figured prominently, in Hinduism, caste, and in Islam, class in the form of a high-culture/low-culture *ashraf-atrap* divide all play pivotal roles in how people understand their religious duties.

Mohejuddin Ahmed argued that Islam is about respect, respect for all of humanity, not just one group. He cites Hazrat Ali's Hadith that it doesn't matter which group you are born into, but that you are human, as God did not create *ashraf* and *atrap*, but humans did. In that same year, in the next edition, Moulvi Muhammed Sanaullah discussed how physical labour is valued in the Qur'an; Islam does not respect class differences, but respects those that work, those that produce. When Khan Bahadur Moinuddin took over as editor in the second year, Mohamed Nurul Huq wrote in 'Islam's Education about Equality' that physical labour is mentioned and supported in the Qur'an and he lists those prophets who cared about work and labour.

In addition to social issues, Bengali literature did arise as an issue for the Bengali Muslim community. In his essay 'The Self-Centredness of

Literature', famous maulvi and educationist A.F.M. Abdul Huq stated that literature and art should not exist for their own sake, but for the sake of the community, not just for beauty but for social upliftment. Bengali Muslims, (argued in a manner comparable to the BMSP writers, of whom Nazrul and Ahmad were all-star members), need literature with ideals, ethics, with a realism that will move Bengali Muslim society into a better, less 'backward' place.

In the third year, a new slogan was added to the journal by the poet Satyendranath Datta, that 'Let equality happen, hope, desire, solutions—equality let it happen. Let it happen in the song of equality in a real person'. *Samyabadi*, in circulation from 1922 to 1925, at the same exact time that Nazrul's politics and anti-colonial, and Muslim poetics were developing, provided a religiously minded forum for discussion about social justice, equality, and inequality. It is the first attempt by modern Bengali intellectuals, led by Muslims, but inclusive of Hindus, to use reference points and imagery from Islam in the service of broader social critiques.

A few of the writers who contributed to *Samyabadi* were Hindu. Like nearly all of the 'Muslim' publications in Bengali from the early twentieth century through 1952—from the *Samyabadi* to *Saogat* to *Bulbul*—combinations of social justice and engagements with Islam for Bengalis was never a narrowly-construed socially Muslim practice. Though certainly the majority of writers for these journals were Muslim, it was the ideas and linguistic medium of Bengali, and a shared commitment to local issues, as opposed to a Muslim communitarianism, that drove this connection.

Langol, 1925–26

Though not formally religious, the next engagement with social change led by Bengali Muslims was *Langol*, the mouthpiece of the Labour and Swaraj Party (renamed the Workers and Peasants' Party). This journal was written in Bengali, edited and managed by Ahmad, and included many contributions by Nazrul. On 1 November 1925, the party began with four Bengalis at the helm: Qutbuddin Ahmed, a radical who was involved in workers strikes and secret revolutionary work since the late 1910s; Hemantakumar Sarkar; a Bengali Hindu revolutionary, philologist and close friend of Subhas Bose, Nazrul; and Shamsuddin Hussain, a labour activist and elder brother of the Communist activist

Abdul Halim.⁹⁶ At their office on Harrison Road in Calcutta, the constitution of this party was printed in its second issue on 31 December 1925. The publication began on 16 December 1925 and continued until 12 August 1926, at which point its name changed to *Ganavani*.⁹⁷ Soon after this name change, as a result of the Hindu–Muslim riots in Calcutta of 1926, support for the paper often ran along communal lines. Financial backing from the Hindu community had stopped. Additionally, because of Nazrul's relatively publicized marriage to a Hindu girl, conservatives from the Hindu community stopped supporting the paper due to Nazrul's involvement.

Langol's first issue proudly displayed Nazrul's poem with the title 'Samyabadi'. Nazrul's book of poems, with the first poem of the same title, along with a blessing from Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, headed this issue. Nazrul's work would headline most issues of *Langol*. 'Samyabadi' along with several more short poems, including 'Iswar' (God), 'Maanush' (Humanity), 'Pap' (Sin), 'Chor Dakar' (Thieves, Robbers), 'Barangana' (Women), 'Mithyabadi' (Liar), 'Nari' (Women), 'Raja–Prajā' (King–Peasant), 'Samya' (Equality), and finally, 'Coolie–Mojur' (Labourer) were included in the inaugural edition. The poem 'Samyabadi', (literally, Egalitarian) or as it is often translated, 'I Sing of Equality' is a statement of abstract equality:

I sing of equality in which all the barriers and estrangements are dissolved in which Hindus/Buddhists/Christians/Muslims are united... Who are you? Parsi, Jain, or Jew? Within you lie all the religions and all the prophets...your heart is the universal temple of gods and goddesses.⁹⁸

The point is to dissolve all differences and to find a path to liberation that applies to all human beings. Religion, in its organized ritualistic form based on outward differences and appearances, is seen as a disease, as the author urges readers to look not to scriptures, but to truth. Nazrul in this poem also claims that there are no doors to God. Rather, priests and mullahs attempt to lock humans out, which is folly. He questions his readers as to 'why you would stuff your brains with the Koran, the Vedas, the Bible, the Triptika, the Zend-Avesta, the Granth Sahib, why waste this labor?' as the heart is the universal temple, church, or mosque.

Unlike his earlier writings extolling the glory of Islam in the early 1920s, Nazrul now began to see organized religion as an enemy to progress.

Though he never denounced any form of spirituality, and at times claimed it for himself, from this period we find a marked distaste in his writings for organized religious identity. This poem 'Samyabadi' started off this thematic of the early to mid-1920s in Bengali Muslim public culture—a questioning and forming of identities, in various ways. *Langol* did not aim to destroy religion, but rather to see religious identity in a new light, as a product of particular conditions, that are often quite miserable.

Unlike his collaborator Ahmad, Nazrul was not an energetic student of Marxist philosophy and literature. But, from the *Langol–Ganavani* phase of 1925–26, ideas that approximate Marxist thinking appeared in his poetry and essays. As a result of his close collaboration with Ahmad, his sympathy for workers and peasants and his observation of the ills of colonial capitalism grew. He had been in touch with a variety of ideological influences and eagerly followed the state of the world in the 1920s. It is likely that when 'Samyabadi' was written in 1925, he was touched by the way that Marxist ideas about religion applied to the Indian landscape. He most likely approached expressions of bigotry stemming from religious identity as a social problem, the way Marx did in his 1844 'On the Jewish Question'. In this 1844 essay, Marx observes that in the nineteenth-century Christian Europe, religion 'has become the spirit of civil society, of the sphere of egoism, of *bellum omnium contra omnes*. It has no longer become the essence of community, but the essence of difference'.⁹⁹ It is not known whether Nazrul ever read Marx. From memoirs of his contemporaries, it is unlikely that he did. But from his *Samyabadi* days, we find a curious convergence in his poetic opposition to bigotry in the name of religion and Marx's appraisal of the social role of religion.

This *Samyabadi* section of the first issue included many instances where religiosity's dictates find a rebuke in Nazrul, as he derides social division on account of caste, *ashraf-atrap* divides, mullahism, and any inhumanity on the basis of religion, particularly in *Coolie-Majur*, *God*, and *Equality*. In the next edition on 23 December 1925, Nazrul's 'Song of the Peasant' appeared next to a biographical and pragmatic essay about Karl Marx by Sridebabrata Basu. In that same issue, 'Sabyasachi' (the Ambidexter, another name of Arjun in the epic *Mahabharata*) was published. In this period, though Nazrul clearly laid out poetic opposition to religious bigotry, he used Hindu imagery, as he had done in 'Anandamayer Agamane' (The Arrival of the Goddess Durga) in *Dhumketu*, and showed the complexity of references and images in Bengali Muslim political and

social thought. In 'Sabyasachi', he turns the Mahabharata into an anti-colonial allegory, as the Kauravas represent the British captors of India, the Pandavas, who in the actual story end up victorious, as Indians. Because of so many sins in past lives, the British, as the Kauravas, will pay for their sins and lose their India to the Pandavas. In addition, the Ramayana story which involves Ram and Sita is invoked near the end, as Ravan, Sita's abductor is understood as the British Empire, and Sita, the blessed India. In 'Song of the Peasant', we are now living in the Kali Yuga, an age where we, workers, suffer, our Mother, is crying: 'Our life is being sucked away, children are being taken away. We are sons of the soil. We are Ram, the crop is Sita, and Ravana is taking the crop away. There is nothing to fear, peasant: see how strong you are, victory to you'.¹⁰⁰ Nazrul's writings throughout this period, on peasants, religion, humanity, all focused on the nature of individuals beyond, or unrelated to their ascribed religious identities. He lamented the plight of peasants in his two songs for peasants and also published a formal letter to the Mymensingh Peasant Conference in early 1926 in the 7 Magh 1332 BS (January 1926) edition.¹⁰¹

Langol demonstrated a change in Bengali Muslim debates about social justice and equality. First, writers of *Langol* advanced the idea that communism should productively deal with religion. Religion was not advocated or understood as an identity, so the Muslim world was not addressed in such terms, even though the writers and editors were largely the same as *Dhumketu*'s. Rather, religion was a force to be engaged with productively. By January 1926, articles discussed how communists felt about religion:

We welcome religion! We support all sorts of religion and we support freedom. We support people from all religions, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim and we recognize all those who don't have religion. Some Muslims think that communism is its enemy, this is not true. Instead, Islam is against capitalism. Zakat must be done as no one has the right to excessive wealth when others are poor. Islam is against 'interest' and Communism is also against 'interest'.¹⁰²

During the 1922–23 *Dhumketu* moment, religion was a point of pride, bolstered by the growth of literary societies centred on the ideal of a Bengali Muslim cultural identity. By 1925 and 1926, religion was tied into a larger movement of opposing social and cultural inequality as an extension of earlier developments.

Secondly, as Ahmed claimed, communism was a solution:

[Rather than] discuss the foundation of religion, if the young educated people do not think about this communalism (as communal violence had been escalating in Bengal ever since the failure of Khilafat/Non-Cooperation), then we will be in trouble. Selfish people are using workers and peasants in the name of religion. Communism is one thing that can save India from destroying itself, because it looks after humanity, it is not communalist, it wants to destroy the upper class, taking the rights of the state, [if that happens] the nation will take care of the property, Communists will distribute the resources to people, for a permanent peace, which is not possible if religion and state are connected, the way they currently are in nationalist politics [referring to Gandhi, the Congress, and the Muslim League].¹⁰³

Here, religion is something to be friendly towards, but not if it impacts the ways a future state would be handled. In *Langol*, as in *Dhumketu*, an internationalism that initiated a new, modern age, not based on liberal democracy, or British liberal culture, but on communist international boundary-less visions of the world appeared as prominently as Nazrul's poetics and Muzaffar Ahmad's strident focus on political economy, religion, and state.

From 1922 to 1926, Nazrul also contributed to Bengali Muslim political and social thought outside of his work in *Dhumketu* and *Langol*. After his release from jail in December 1923, Nazrul published two books in 1924: *Bisher Banshi* (The Poisoned Flute) and *Bhangar Gan* (Song of Destruction). Both of these publications were quickly proscribed by the colonial government. As the Bengal Library librarian dutifully reported to the director of Public Instruction of the Government of Bengal, *Bisher Banshi* was felt to be 'of a most objectionable nature, [with the] writer revealing in revolutionary sentiments and inciting young men to rebellion and law breaking. The ideas, though often extremely vague, have clearly a dangerous intent, as the profusion of such words as blood, tyranny, death, fire, hell, demon and thunder will show'.¹⁰⁴ First published in August 1924, *Bisher Banshi* included some of the 'Islamic' poems earlier seen in *Muslim Bharat*, such as 'Fateha-i-Doyaz Daham' and many poems on serving one's country, such as 'Sevak' (Volunteer) and 'Mukti Sevaker Gan' (Song of the Servant of Freedom), and many others, which touched on anti-colonialism, the oppression of Indians by the British,

and rebellion. *Bhangar Gan*, also published in August 1924, contained poems about destruction of the old and regeneration of the new as well as poems about Islam, such as 'Shahidi Id' (Martyr's Id).

His 1926 book *Sarbahara* (One Who Has Lost All) was also proscribed for more specific ideological reasons, as the government reported this book to be a 'collection of poems preaching views akin to socialism... [as the] government and upper classes of society, especially the zamindars and the capitalists are represented as tyrannizing over the lower classes'.¹⁰⁵ This included political poems of a directly secular nature, such as 'Krishaker Gan', (Song of the Peasant), 'Sramiker Gan' (Song of the Worker), and 'Dibarar Gan' (Song of the Fisherman). However, this book also contained works that address religious as well as political concerns, such as 'Phariad' (Seeking Redress). In this work, Nazrul talks of the creation of men, white, yellow, and dark, but complains that God did not ordain that the Sun and the Moon and Fire should only supply light to the White Island and that it is not God's dispensation that the white should rule supreme by strangling all. In a long ode to the oppressed of the world, painted in contemporary anti-colonialist terms, Nazrul equates victory with a victory for a new society, as he declares that 'from the very bones which a hundred countries have failed to break, the song is imbuing faith... Victory to the oppressed masses! Victory to the new rising! Victory to God!'¹⁰⁶ In the same manner of his earlier work that included anti-colonial politics inside a religious poetic imagery, such as *Anandamayer Agamane*, he asks 'Will not Truth be freed from the transgression of the demons? Will there not be a remedy? O God, O God!'¹⁰⁷ It goes without saying that the God Nazrul referred to in this passage was confined to neither orthodox Hindu or Muslim conceptions of divinity.

Nazrul developed a more mainstream political consciousness during this period as he wrote a letter to the Mymensingh Peasant Conference, which was read out by Hemanta Kumar Sarkar and published in the January 1926 edition of *Langol*. He frequently expressed concern for peasants and also attended meetings of various sorts, such as Congress meetings throughout East Bengal, in locations such as Feni, Jessore, Khulna, Daulatpur, and Sylhet, in 1926. He also attended Bengal Conferences in Faridpur in 1925 (also in East Bengal), and Muslim society conferences in Chittagong and Dacca during this period. Though from 1922 to 1926, he worked closely with Muzaffar Ahmad, helped in the formation of the Workers and Peasants Party in 1925, and wrote a

great deal about social inequality and made observations about society, he never formally affiliated with a political party or ideology.

Nazrul's politics functioned as the centre of debates about what it meant to be Bengali Muslim, and what it meant to be Bengali, in the 1920s. At both ends of this decade, he was castigated by conservative sections of society for his allegedly blasphemous treatment of Islam. In 1922, he was accused of heresy by the writers of *Islam Darshan* (Vision of Islam), a conservative Bengali Muslim journal. In 1928–29, Mohammed Akram Khan and his associates in the *Mohammadi* attacked Nazrul's writings, particularly for his use of Hindu imagery. In both of these attacks, a sense of urgency about what Bengali Muslims need to understand and promote about Islam and Bengali literary culture coloured the anti-Nazrul attacks. Nazrul's insistence on including non-Muslim, Hindu portions of the Bengali literary landscape into his writings enabled such urgency and worked as the fulcrum between differing sides of a Bengali Muslim identity in formation in the 1920s.

In the *Islam Darshan*, after the popularity of 'Bidrohi' in 1922, the September–October/Ashwin 1922 edition of the paper published a guideline to writers of Muslim Bengal in which the themes, types of language used, and subjects must conform to commonly accepted versions of Islam, and not to Nazrul's strange thoughts, which were considered heretic. In Muhammad Abdul Hakim's forceful editorial in this issue, we find little substantive difference in content from the declarations of the BMSP a few years earlier. But, because of Nazrul, the definition of Islam at the forefront to exclude any mention of Hindu gods, or revolutionary ideas, is foregrounded in this type of literary identity politics.¹⁰⁸ In a subsequent issue, this same writer claimed that Nazrul was aping the language, style, and content of Hindu writers. Nazrul's craving for popularity amongst Hindus accounted for his 'strange' usage of Hindu images and rebellious sentiments. Hakim also contributed a satiric poem lampooning 'Bidrohi' entitled 'Bidrohi-daman' (Rebel subdued). Accusing Nazrul of sins such as irreligiosity, infidelity, and ignorance, the author also ironically referred to Hindu epics by comparing Nazrul with Duhsasan of the Mahabharata. Hakim's reaction, along with a few others of *Islam Darshan*, reflects a great anxiety about an issue central to Bengali Muslim writers carving out a space for their own literary identity, that of Hindu imagery and the Bengali language.¹⁰⁹ Nazrul usage of such imagery, and the explosive reaction to it, displayed that the Bengali

language's Hindu gods, goddesses, and Sanskrit inheritance could not simply be wished away.¹¹⁰

Throughout the 1920s, sporadic attacks on Nazrul, for much of the same reasons, continued in *Islam Darshan*, *Muslim Hitaishi* (Muslim Well-Wisher), *Muslim Jagat*, and *Islam Darpan* (The Mirror of Islam). At times, these critiques emphasized an attack on Islam and at times, on the integrity of the Bengali Muslim community. The haunting nature of Bengali Hindu dominance lingered, though, in any assessment of Nazrul in the Bengali Muslim literary world. Ibrahim Khan, a well-known educationist of the era, along with others in the mid-1920s, appreciated Nazrul's talent and encouraged him to work towards building a Bengali Muslim literature, filled with Muslim images and ideas, not Hindu ones.¹¹¹ As Khan wrote in a publicized letter to Nazrul, he looked forward 'to the day when the central message of Islam will resound through your voice... the throne of the kingdom of Muslim literature in Bengal is lying vacant, you only need to occupy it'.¹¹² Nazrul responded harshly by repudiating the possibility of dividing literature on religious lines and rebuffed any positive outreach from the Muslim literary community that necessitated the elimination of the Hindu element in Bengali literature.

Writers of Akram Khan's *Mohammadi* ended the decade with another statement of Hindu-Muslim identity tension in Nazrul's literature. In Nazir Ahmed Choudhuri's 1928 'Ecchlam O Nazrul Islam' (Islam and Nazrul Islam),¹¹³ the critiques resembled the need for a distinctive Muslim literature, as stated earlier in *Islam Darshan* in 1922. But, here, Nazrul's literature goes a step further, as it purportedly insulted the Muslim literati who are working hard to make Bengali literature palatable for the Muslim community. Many writers aimed to bring down Nazrul's popularity through writing inflammatory articles about the poet in *Mohammadi* in the late 1920s. This prompted a slew of defenses of Nazrul in *Saogat*, a journal that had started Nazrul's career at the end of World War I.

* * *

As he defined the boundaries of communitarian discourse, Nazrul's literature of the 1920s defined many of the terms of debate for Bengali Muslim identity via language and literary consciousness. Debates about language and literary consciousness, though, were by no means confined

to Nazrul and his Calcutta cohort. As I discuss in the following chapter, these changes in identity politics occurred abreast in both Dacca, the intellectual centre of East Bengal, and throughout the hinterland regions of the Bengal countryside.

Notes

1. Shahidullah reportedly said this to a group of Bengali Muslim writers who felt alienated from the Hindu dominated Bangali Sahitya Parishad (Bengali Literature Association). This is cited in Muzaffar Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha* (Kolkata: National Book Agency, 1965), p. 65.

2. Kuriti Barjan, published from Dhaka, 1922. The author hails from Barisal, a district of rural East Bengal. This quotation is the response to a fictional question a student poses to a teacher as to why children should study Bengali when it is seen as a 'foreign' language by some religious leaders.

3. See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), pp. 418–43 for a description of this alienation.

4. Rana Razzaque, 'Some Aspects of Bengali Muslim Social and Political Thought, 1918–1947', PhD diss., University of Dhaka, 1997, p. 333.

5. Interview with Tazul Hussain, November 14, 2005. Hussain, a medical doctor, was active as a student in Bengal politics of the 1930s and 1940s and supported the idea of Pakistan as a movement for self-determination in East Bengal. Additionally, he was a major player in the revolutionary war against the Pakistani military that resulted in the state of Bangladesh. Hussain is included in the Bangladesh National Museum Oral History project which features interviews with several figures of East Bengali history, such as the poetess Sufia Kamal, the famous journalist Mohammed Nasiruddin, and the historian Tapan Raychaudhuri. Abstracts of the interviews are found in A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed (ed.), *A Handbook of Oral History: Abstracts of Interviews Taken by the Oral History Project* (Dhaka: Bangladesh National Museum, 1992). M.N. Roy was another radical of the era who was instrumental in forming the communist party in India with Muzaffar Ahmad and forming his own socio-political ideology of radical humanism.

6. For an introduction into the political context of Nazrul's emergence, see Mustafa Nurul Islam (ed.), *Samakaler Nazrul* (Contemporary Nazrul) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2003) and Mohammed Jahangir, *Kabi Nazruler Sangbadik Jiban* (The Journalistic Life of the Poet Nazrul), (Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 2002).

7. As a prominent analyst of this phase in Bengali Muslim history states, 'before him [Nazrul], with the exception of Mir Musharraf Hussain, there was

no author of comparable genius who portrayed the place of Muslims in Bengal as boldly and clearly'. See Tazeen Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengali Muslim Discourses, 1871–1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 148.

8. A prominent example of work drawn from Hindu themes is his *leto* drama based on the epic blank verse poem *Meghnad Badh Kavya* (The Slaying of Meghnad), originally written by the nineteenth-century poet and social critic Michael Madhusudhan Dutt (1824–73). Unfortunately nearly all of Nazrul's *leto*-era compositions are lost.

9. A number of biographical works cover Nazrul Islam's adolescence and school life before he emerged as a famous litterateur in the 1920s. See Rafiqul Islam, *Nazrul Jibani* (Life of Nazrul), (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1972), pp. 1–62; Rana Razzaque, 'Some Aspects of Bengali Muslim Social and Political Thought, 1918–1947', pp. 336–7; Hossain, Mozaffar and Subrata Kumar Das (eds and trans.), *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Speeches* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2005), pp. 81–90. Additional biographies include Serajul Islam Choudhury, *Nazrul Islam: Poet and More* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1994); Rezaul Karim Talukdar, *Nazrul: The Gift of the Century* (Dhaka: Mannan, 1994), pp. 13–35; and Gopal Halder, *Kazi Nazrul Islam* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1983). Muzaffar Ahmad's *Kazi Nazrul Smritikatha* (Memories of Kazi Nazrul Islam) (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1965) details the early 1920s blossoming of Nazrul poetics and political philosophy.

10. Nazrul's entrance into the war effort, given his anti-colonial education and background, would make such behaviour quite inexplicable. A popular myth, mentioned in Muzaffar Ahmad's biographical work, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, p. 225, holds that he became a soldier in order to learn methods of warfare that he could take back with him to the anti-colonial front.

11. Though the extent of influence is not clear, Nazrul was familiar with Azad's *Al-Hilal*, in circulation since 1912.

12. For a discussion of the BMSP, see Chapter 1, pp. 46–56.

13. This appeared in the Srabon (2nd edn) of the magazine in 1326 BS/1919.

14. 'Hena' appears in the Kartik issue (3rd edn) of the magazine in 1326 BS/1919 and 'Byathar Dan' was published in the Magh (4th edn) of the magazine in 1326 BS/1919.

15. Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, p. 20.

16. Ibid, p. 30.

17. Mohammed Jahangir, *Nazruler Sangbadik Jiban* (Nazrul's Life as a Journalist), (Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 2002), p. 11.

18. *Muslim Bharat* was also housed at 32 College Street and served as another venue for the development of Bengali Muslim radicals and progressives.

19. Wadud (1894–1970) and Shahidullah (1885–1969) were prominent figures in twentieth-century Bengali Muslim social and intellectual history. Sarat Chandra was a famous Bengali writer and author of popular novels about Bengali social life, such as *Pather Dabi* and *Palli Samaj*. He also wrote stories that later find popularity in the twenty-first century, such as *Parineeta* and *Debdas*. Satyendranath Datta, the grandson of the nineteenth-century Brahmo activist Akshay Kumar Datta, was one of the most prominent Bengali poets of the early twentieth century. Like Nazrul, and unlike most twentieth-century Bengali Hindu writers of his generation, he possessed proficiency in Persian as well as Sanskrit. Datta was amongst the first Bengalis to introduce Persian words into modern Bengali poetry.

20. For an example of recent memorialization, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Adda, Calcutta: Dwelling in Modernity,' *Public Culture* 11, 1 (1999): 109–145.

21. Suchetana Chattopadhyaya, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, 1913–1929* (Delhi: Tulika, 2011), p. 66.

22. See Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, pp. 65–96 for a summary of the *Navajug* story.

23. See Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 113–15 for a discussion of the hijra from India to Afghanistan.

24. These two essays of Nazrul are reprinted in their entirety in Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, pp. 75–81.

25. Cited in Subrata Kumar Das, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Selected Prose* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2004), p. 39.

26. *My Bengal Diary, 1919–1922*, in MSS Eur 609/2, p. 43. Though the material was certainly powerful, the possibility of a boycott of the army and the police based solely on this publication was a complete exaggeration.

27. See Mohammed Jahangir, *Nazruler Sangbadik Jiban*, pp. 12–15, and Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, pp. 96–8 for conflicts between Huq and Ahmad. After the commencement of World War II, *Navajug* reappeared, this time when Huq was the Chief Minister of Bengal. Nazrul again edited the journal. At this point in history, Nazrul's health was severely deteriorating, his finances were in arrears, and his debts were preventing him from contributing to public life. Soon, he had to withdraw and the paper ended, forever, in 1944. Extant issues of *Navajug* have yet to be recovered, though many of the essays published in Nazrul's 1922 book *Jugabani* appeared previously in the *Navajug* of 1920.

28. A complete list of poems published in *Muslim Bharat* in 1920 by Nazrul appears in Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, p. 55 and also in Haldar, *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, p. 18.

29. The full text of the poem appears also in *Agni-Bina* (FieryLute), (Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 2002), pp. 53–4.

30. As Gopal Halder stated in a 1973 retrospective, Shatt-il-Arab 'is a typical Nazrul piece with a flood of patriotic sentiments and judicious admixture of musical Perso-Arabic words and the equally charming Bengali word-stream'. See Halder, *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, p. 19.

31. *Agni-Bina*, p. 55.

32. See Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 10–26, for a discussion of how the local and territorial facets of Muslim identities in South Asia overlap with a broader Muslim universalism.

33. See Razzaque, 'Some Aspects of Social and Political Thought of Bengali Muslims', p. 345.

34. 'Muharram', in *Agni-Bina*, p. 54.

35. 'Fateha-i-doaz-doham', in *Agni-Bina*, p. 98.

36. Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, p. 57.

37. 'Kheyar Parer Taruni', in *Agni-Bina*, p. 55.

38. 'Qurbani', in *Agni-Bina*, p. 57.

39. *Agni-Bina*, pp. 57–60.

40. See Razzaque, 'Some Aspects of Bengali Muslim Social and Political Thought', p. 342.

41. On Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the Turkish nationalist movement, see 'Rana-Bheri', 'Kamal Pasha', and 'Anwar', all written in 1921. See his essay in *Dhumketu's* 13 October 1922 edition, which sarcastically comments that those pan-Islamic Khilafatists meeting at Gaya during the Congress convention should die a sacred death at Mecca.

42. 'Kamal', *Dhumketu*, 17 October 1922.

43. The poem appears in *Agni-Bina*, pp. 31–43.

44. Sugata Bose, 'Asia in the Bengali Imagination: Three Journeys with Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore' in Emajuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Golden Jubilee Volume, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (1952–2002)* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: 2005), p. 60.

45. *Agni-Bina*, p. 47; see also Razzaque, 'Some Aspects of Social and Political Thought of Bengali Muslims', pp. 344–6.

46. See Abu Yusuf Alam, *Muslims and Bengal Politics (1912–1924)* (Kolkata: Raktakarabee, 2005), pp. 218–21, 227–8, 240–1, and 253–8.

47. After much debate in August and September 1920, Gandhi's plan of Non-cooperation to attain complete independence or *purnaswaraj*, was ratified in December 1920. As a mark of cooperation between the Congress and the Muslim League, after this resolution, both organizations modified their mission

statements to include the 'attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means' as a main objective. See Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents*, vol. 1 (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1963), p. 554.

48. See Alam, *Muslims in Bengal Politics*, pp. 240–2.

49. Rajat Ray, 'Masses in Politics: The Non-cooperation Movement in Bengal, 1920–22' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11, 4 (December 1974): 343–410.

50. File #150, 'Khilafat-NCO Speeches', Central Intelligence Branch, Government of Bengal, 1921; see Rajat Ray, 'Masses in Politics: The Non-Cooperation Movement in Bengal', pp. 363–4.

51. Shah Abdul Hamid, *Krishak Bilap* (Mymensingh, 1921), A.F.M. Abdul Hai, *Adarsha-Krishak* (Mymensingh, 1921), and Abdul Samed Mian, *Krishak Boka* (Mymensingh, 1921).

52. Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Smritikatha*, pp. 197–8.

53. Ibid, pp. 227–9.

54. Literally translated as 'I' in Sanskrit, the term refers not only to the literal self, but to a transcendent self that is indivisible from God.

55. Haldar, *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, p. 34.

56. Agni-Bina, pp. 11–17.

57. Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, p. 229.

58. See Priti K. Mitra, 'Dissent in Modern India (1815–1930): Concentrating on Two Rebel Poets—Michael Madhusudhan Datta and Kazi Nazrul Islam (Bengal Renaissance)', PhD diss., University of Hawaii, 1985, p. 342 for details of this incident.

59. See Mohammed Jahangir, *Nazruler Sangbadik Jiban* (Nazrul's Life as a Journalist), pp. 17–20, and Muzaffar Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, pp. 283–317, 'Dhumketur Udai' (The Rise of Dhumketu) for historical accounts of how Dhumketu began.

60. Report on Administration of Bengal, 1922–23, p. 132.

61. First issue, 26 Sraban 1326 BS/11 August 1922.

62. In this regard, Dhumketu resembled *Al-Hilal*, the journal begun by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad about a decade earlier.

63. As mentioned in Chapter one, al-Afghani's anti-colonial politics and Islamic universalism appealed to broad sections of Asian and African Muslim intellectuals of the era. See Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, p. 192.

64. Quoted in Haldar, *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, p. 41.

65. 1 Agrahan 1329 BS/17 November 1922.

66. Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, p. 260, and Haldar, *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, p. 40.

67. An English translation of this poem exists in Rezaul Karim Talukdar, *Nazrul: Gift of the Century* (Dhaka: Mannan, 1994), pp. 46–7, and the Bengali version is printed in Muzaffar Ahmad, Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha, pp. 305–6. The poem appeared in the 9 Aswin 1329 BS/26 September 1922 issue.

68. Talukdar, *Nazrul*, p. 46.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

70. This law, which originated in Macaulay's drafts starting in 1834 was a law against anyone who 'attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government of Her Majesty in India... [T]he term disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity', quoted from Reginald Nelson, *The Indian Penal Code*, 3 vols, 6th edn (Allahabad: Law Book Co., 1966), p. 568. Section 124A was added in 1870. In addition to exciting disaffection, the law also covered sedition or 'disloyalty in action', p. 573.

71. Das, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Selected Prose*, p. 46.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

77. On the 1900s and 1910s, the era of the first partition of Bengal, see M.K.U. Molla, *The New Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1905–11*, Richard Cronin, *British Policy and Administration in Bengal, 1905–12: Partition and the New Province in Eastern Bengal and Assam*, and John McLane, 'The Partition of Bengal, 1905: A Political Analysis' in Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh, 1704–1971*, vol. 1, *Political History* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992). With the exception of chapter 5 in Molla, 'Some Aspects of Literary Activity', these works show Muslim politics as developing their own elite and loyalist voice.

78. Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920–1929* (Kolkata: National Book Agency, 1970), p. 6.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.* Ahmad's memoir, as any political remembrance, must not be taken at face value, as he certainly may have wished to use his memoirs as a vehicle to promote a romanticized version of his political coming of age that may not match with the vision of others who worked with him at the time. I include analysis of his and other memoirs with caution, but I am forced to rely on such information given the paucity of sources regarding the topic of Bengali Muslim religious, cultural, and linguistic identity from the early and mid-twentieth century. I have aimed to balance my usage of Ahmad's political memoirs in this chapter with a consideration of how Kazi Nazrul Islam's aesthetics and other

works of the era, such as the writings in *Samyabadi*, compared with Ahmad's recollections. See Milton Israel, 'Indian Nationalist Voices: Autobiography and the Process of Return' in George Egerton (ed.), *Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1994) for a discussion of political memoirs by leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Kalam Azad.

81. Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920–1929*, p. 16.

82. Ibid, p. 17.

83. Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920–1929*, p. 81; Khaled Mortuza, *Muzaffar Ahmad and the Communist Movement in Bengal: A Study in Leadership* (Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, 2001), p. 4. See Chattopadhyaya, *An Early Communist*, passim.

84. This opinion is voiced by B.T. Ranadive, a Communist activist closely associated with Ahmad, who stated that 'there is no doubt that a large number of Muslim youths wanting to identify themselves with the anti-British upsurge in those days [the 1920s] were repelled by this [Hindu] revivalist expression', in his essay 'Muzaffar Ahmad and His Times' in *On Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad: A Birth Centenary Publication* (Kolkata: National Book Agency Limited, 1989), p. 14.

85. Current historiography often claims this alienation as the reason for 'Muslim separatism' that gained ground in the 1920s and 1930s. But in the case of Ahmad, as in the case of Nazrul and the BMSS, a politics of emancipation from rigidly defined socio-religious identities, and not a 'separatist Muslim identity', was not the result.

86. Saroj Mukherjee, 'Muzaffar Ahmad', in *On Comrade Muzaffar: A Birth Centenary Publication*, p. 67.

87. Ranadive, B. T., 'Muzaffar Ahmad and His Times', p. 18

88. Nazrul's poem of the same name appeared in a booklet of the same title, first published in 1925. This poem was written just as formal Communist politics rose to prominence in Bengal.

89. Report on Native Newspapers, 1921, cited in Srilata Chatterjee, *Congress Politics in Bengal, 1919–1939* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), p. 46.

90. 1st issue, Magh 1329 BS/1922.

91. 1st issue, Magh 1329 BS/1922.

92. Recent work on the role of the *bhadralok* includes Tithi Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal (1848–1885)* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

93. This theme is taken forward in various ways by writers outside of Calcutta, and outside of formally educated Muslim *maulvi* or scholars in the *mufassil* as I discuss in Chapter three.

94. This may be loosely compared to the reformations of Hinduism in the nineteenth century about the issue of caste, sati, and other practices/institutions that did not fit with the modern mission of critically assessing traditions for the good of public life. These 1920s Bengali Muslims, like the nineteenth century reformers Rammohun Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, sought solutions to what they considered contemporary problems by recourse to the religion itself.

95. Of course, this is a contestable claim that starts from the 1870s in the writings of British colonial officials. See Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), for a critique of the position that the rise of Islam derived from low-caste Hindus fleeing oppression.

96. See Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India*, pp. 414–36, for a memoir account of 1925 and 1926 in Ahmad's political life.

97. Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India*, p. 416. See also Ahmad, *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha*, pp. 354–60, for accounts of this party's emergence as well as Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmad's political activities in 1926, mostly in Krishnanagar.

98. 16 December 1925, Poush 1332 (BS). The poem appears on page 5 and continues with each subsection until page 10.

99. Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question' in *Early Writings, 1881–1883* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), p. 31.

100. *Langol*, 7 Magh 1332 BS (January 1926).

101. At this moment, in 1925, the Communist Party of India's members have been travelling to Europe, and European newspapers are publishing stories about Indian communists, and many Indian communists have travelled to Central Asia to attend the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. A sense of an international consciousness was in formation.

102. *Langol*, 7 Magh 1332 BS (January 1926).

103. *Langol*, 14 Magh 1332 BS (January 1926).

104. Letter from A.K. Dattagupta, Librarian, Bengal Library, to the Director of Public Instruction, Government of Bengal, 24 September 1924. Cited in Subrata Kumar Das, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Selected Prose*, p. 100.

105. File no. 486/1926, Central Intelligence Branch, 'Kazi Nazrul Islam'.

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

108. 'Banga-Sahityer Bartaman Abasthaebong Jatiya Sahityer Adarsha' (Present Condition of Bengali Literature and the Ideal of a National Literature), *Islam Darshan* 3, 1 (September 1922): 1–11.

109. There were other, more vulgar attacks on Nazrul in this journal in the early 1920s. Reyazuddin Ahmed's 'Lokta Mussalman Na Saitan?' (Is the Person

Muslim or Satan?), *Islam Darshan* 3, 2 (October 1922) was the most scathing criticism launched on Nazrul at that time.

110. Other Muslim writers in Bengal shared an intense interest in seeing Islam and Hinduism in compatible and inter-related frameworks. Khondokar Maulvi Abdul Halim wrote *Discourses of Faith in Islam* in 1924, as a way to 'explain Islam through Hindu scriptures', p. 3. Muhammad Shahidullah also contributed several sections to the journal from Dacca, *Peace*, in the late 1920s dedicated to this same theme. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of these writings by Shahidullah.

111. In addition to Khan, such sentiments were voiced in *Saogat and Islam Darshan* in the middle of 1926.

112. Written in 1925, this letter was subsequently published in Mustafa Nurul Islam (ed.), *Samakale Nazrul*, this portion appearing on pp. 331–2.

113. Nazir Ahmed Choudhuri 'Ecchlam O Nazrul Islam' *Masik Mohammadi* 2, 1 (October 1928): 7–9. This and other inflammatory articles about Nazrul may have been penned by Golam Mostafa, writing under pseudonyms. Mostafa was allegedly jealous of Nazrul's fame and used various devices to attempt to thwart his popularity. See Rafiqul Islam, *Nazrul-Jibani*, pp. 203–4.

3. *Literary Publics in Dacca*

It is regrettable how narrow minded Bengali Muslims are in the practice of their religion. People are ready to die for religion but they have idea of what it is... [T]hey practice rituals and go to festivals but ask no questions. The literature society can lead the way.

—Abdur Bahadur Rahman Khan, 1927¹

At a 1927 meeting of Dacca's Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS), a group of Muslim intellectuals who met regularly to discuss Islam and modern issues, the East Bengali educationist and community activist Abdur Bahadur Rahman Khan mentioned how deeply connected a literary sensibility and religious reform were in the Dacca of the late 1920s. As the other urban centre of Bengal, Dacca held an illustrious Muslim history distinguishable from Calcutta. Dacca boasted a longer history of Muslim political culture, since it was a one-time capital of the Mughal province of Bengal, and it also was home to numerous mosques and Islamic cultural institutions, and the centre of an eastern Indian Ocean trade network from the early modern period onwards.

But just as in Calcutta, debates about Islam and Muslim identity were couched in multiple languages. Central to all intellectuals' concerns was a consciously carved out linguistic and literary space of autonomy alongside growing emphases on a religious social identity. Furthermore, prominent Calcutta-based intellectuals like Nazrul Islam, well known in Bengali literary circles by the late 1920s, frequently visited Dacca and participated in literary events and other social gatherings.

Also at the same time, rural writers and peasant leaders began to write more and more locally published materials, such as Abul Hasem Khan's well circulated Chittagong pamphlet *Siksha Kshetre Bangiya Musalmandiger Durabastha O Tahar Pratikar* (Bengal's Miserable Plight regarding Education and Solutions to the Problem). This popular text emphasized the importance of education in the Bengali language for Muslim peasants in the mufassil regions.

This chapter will investigate the intellectual debates about Islam, a social Muslim identity, social justice, and Bengaliness from the mid-1920s through 1932. My discussion begins with an analysis of the MSS, a Dacca University-based organization of writers, professors, and students who discussed various aspects of Islam and Muslim identity in a Bengali context from 1926 to 1932. This group published their papers in their own journal, *Sikha* (Flame) along with other journals of the late 1920s, such as *Saogat* (Gift) and *Peace*. This chapter investigates the social context of the emergence of these journals along with a consideration of changes in ideas within the Muslim intelligentsia of the late 1920s. Finally, I end this chapter with an analysis of the rising politics of linguistic and peasant identity as discussed in the Bengal Legislative Assembly in the late 1920s.

The Muslim Sahitya Samaj, 1926–32

During the early decades of the twentieth century, tens of thousands of migrants from East Bengal settled in Calcutta seeking employment and accommodation. However, the history of Dacca shows an equally strong movement of population growth and development during the same period. The population of Dacca increased steadily from the 1872 census, when its population was 69,000 to 119,000 in 1921, which records an increase of 82 per cent.² The main period of increase was the 1905–11 partition period, when the East Bengal region held its own government and educational centres. During this time, the city saw a population explosion

and the creation of an engineering college, a medical college, and several English schools. Though it was discussed during the partition period, a university was finally granted in 1921 in the form of Dacca University.³

Education and expressive culture reached high levels during the late nineteenth century, as urban historians of Dacca note a rising number of *bhadralok* or middle-level professionals such as teachers, lawyers, clerks, and doctors by mid-century. The Brahmo Samaj, an organization designed to reform Hindu practice, established a presence in Dacca in 1846 and started its own schools from the 1860s. The number of periodicals and magazines compared well with Calcutta, as historians note over seventy journals in circulation in East Bengal from 1847 to 1905.⁴ Muslims were comparatively a small part of formally educated *bhadralok* professional culture, but they did own and produce fourteen journals in Dacca from 1831 to 1930.⁵ Included in these journals were *Abhijan*, a literary magazine, and *Ainul Islam* and *Eslam Suhrid*, both religious magazines. Hindus had a slight majority in the population of Dacca (compared to Calcutta, where Hindus were in a much larger majority in 1921) and formed a large majority of the Dacca *bhadralok* community. Though Muslims were certainly actively producing literature and discourse from the late nineteenth century and were clearly a demographic majority of all Bengalis, they formed a minority population in the Bengali literary intelligentsia. Inside this Hindu majority intelligentsia, several intellectuals began to carve out a particularly *Bengali Muslim* space in Dacca in 1926. This space, conceived of in Dacca University, enabled the production of new interpretations of Islam for the modern age and also, concurrently, continual investment in the Bengali language.

In Dacca, a group of writers, university teachers, and students joined to discuss issues pertinent to Muslim society in the halls of Dacca University. Led by Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894–1970), a public intellectual and professor of Bengali, and Abul Hussain (1897–1938), a lecturer of economics, law professor, and social critic, the MSS met regularly from early 1926 to the middle of 1938 to discuss papers about a range of subjects. These included modern Islam, Bengali culture and identity, socio-economic problems in the Bengali Muslim community, literature, and philosophy. Captured in its journal *Sikha*, this group's thoughts heralded a new era in Bengali Muslim society—an era of open-ended rational critique of Islamic ideas, practices, identities, written in the Bengali language for a local Bengali audience. From Dacca, a centre of aristocratic Muslim, and at times,

non-Bengali Muslim culture, this critique follows from the developments in Calcutta in the mid-1920s as yet another in the changing course of entanglements of language, culture, and Islam in colonial Bengal.

By the middle of the decade the dominant trend amongst Dacca intellectuals included a greater practical interest in the mainstream political process, as witnessed by the MSS and its journal *Sikha*. In this chapter I also analyze two other journals of the late 1920s, *Saogat* and *Peace*, both of which promoted Bengali Muslim literary journalism and social critique. Other factors of the time period I examine include the rise of Muhammed Akram Khan as a journalist and literary figure whose writings about Islam in the Bengali language gained popularity. Finally, I outline the rise of a Bengali Muslim peasant identity in public discourse, as exemplified by debates in the Bengal Legislative Assembly in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Though earlier radicals like Nazrul were hailed by the MSS and intellectuals of the late 1920s, the majority of intellectuals, writers, and government servants were transforming social critique into a practice that brought forth change in the public sphere.

The MSS started in 1926, when in sporadic outbursts of violence, over 100 people were killed and hundreds were injured between April and October.⁶ These riots started in Calcutta in April and, later in the year, spread to Kharagpur in the west and then Pabna, in the west-central region of contemporary East Bengal. From 1926 onwards, a spate of inflammatory leaflets rallying for the defence of religious community, on both the Hindu and Muslim side, appeared in Bengali and Urdu throughout Bengal, most notably in Calcutta. The highly charged sense of identity that these pamphlets invoked, with titles like 'Muslims Beware, Hindus Will Eat You Up!' or statements like 'Oh Hindu! No one will be able to live in Hindustan except in amity with the Hindus. Let the *lathi* in your hand prove this!'⁷ provoked intense divisiveness in the major newspapers of Calcutta, such as the *Mohammadi*, *Soltan*, and the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*.

Before these riots dominated the news about Bengal politics, in January of 1926, a small group led by Wadud and Hussain met 'to cultivate the intellect and to create a desire and a taste for the pursuit of knowledge and with this in view, to bring together and relate all kinds of information, both old and new, irrespective of national or religious differences.'⁸ In January of that year, Muhammad Shahidullah, a BMSS member, and other intellectuals like Kazi Motahar Hussain, a physicist

and writer from Dacca, and Abdul Kadir, a Dacca University student, and A.F. Rahman, the provost of Dacca University, began to meet and discuss various topics. They published their findings from 1927 to 1932 in the journal *Sikha*, though the MSS continued through 1938. Through the course of the MSS, the need for Islam was at times questioned, and Islamic ritual was often held under scrutiny. This led to various attacks on MSS members like Wadud and Hussain, who were forced by Ahsan Manzil, the ancestral residence of an old aristocratic Dacca Muslim family, to recant their statements about Islam. In 1928, Hussain was threatened with his life. As the surge of critique represented in this society declined in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the same issues that animated legislators and public politicians like education, language, and economic grievances continued to find official platforms in the late 1920s and early 1930s. But with the introduction of the MSS, the development of Bengali Muslim literary cultures and its relation to issues of social change, amelioration of economic injustices, and changes in the public sphere, would set foundations for further work in the 1930s and 40s. By way of comparing the ways in which Nazrul and Ahmad's politics and ideas grew in the early 1920s, it is instructive to examine the biographies of both Wadud and Hussain, the leaders of this Dacca-based movement, to clearly understand the dynamics of the processes of change in Bengali Muslim society of the time.

Wadud was born into a middle-class family in Faridpur, a district of East Bengal, known for its Muslim majority population, and in the nineteenth century, for Faraizi politics and agrarian movements. However, Wadud did not receive an 'Islamic' education or upbringing, as he received an English education from a young age and grew up amongst elders who were *jotedars*, like his grandfather who raised him, and police constables and railway officials like his uncles.⁹ His diaries reveal a long-standing commingling with Hindus in Bengal, including those involved in the Swadeshi movement in the 1900s. He attended the English-medium Dacca Collegiate School and formed friendship with Subhas Chandra Bose, Pramath Sarkar, and *Dhumketu's* editor, Afzalul Huq, at Calcutta's Presidency College in the 1910s. He hailed from a predominantly Muslim environment, but he grew up in a world filled with English education, Hindu-Muslim cooperation, and political diversity in his early years in Faridpur, Dacca, and Calcutta. Wadud's education and intellectual orientation leading to the MSS were all coloured by an environment far from

centres of conservatism in thought and life practice. Unlike Nazrul and Ahmad, he did not receive a classical Muslim education.

Hussain, like Nazrul and Ahmad, but unlike Wadud, did come of age in a 'Muslim' environment. He grew up in Jessore, near the border between west and east Bengal, and learnt Arabic, Persian, and Urdu from his father and learned about Islam from his grandfather, Maulavi Mohammed Hasim, a *sufi* who was trained in Islamic studies in Calcutta. Like Wadud, Hussain attended Presidency College in the 1910s and began contributing to the intellectual life of Bengali society in the 1920s. Though Hussain grew up in an environment that included a formal Muslim education and tales of *sufi* divinity, he was the sharpest critic of Islam on rational grounds, and even surpassed Wadud in his oppositional stance towards an exclusive Muslim identity and towards Islam in general.¹⁰ Wadud and Hussain rose to inhabit a space of liberalism and rationalism, unlike Nazrul and Ahmad who advocated social revolution and communism.

These two, one a middle-class son of a *jotedar*, the other, the grandson of a famous *sufi*, led Bengali Muslim intellectuals into a type of engagement that Nazrul and his associates did not enter: a rational critique of Islam, Muslim rituals, and the assessment of texts like *Hadith* and the Qur'an. This critique, headed by Hussain and also joined by many others of the group like Anwaril Kadir, Mohammed Abdur Rashid, Motahar Hussein Choudhury, Kazi Motahar Hussein, and Wadud himself, became the first full-scale modern investigation of Islam by the twentieth-century Bengali Muslim intelligentsia. As Wadud stated in the first session of the MSS on March 27, 1927, they aimed to question how Islam has 'supported the seclusion of women, cursed the taking of interest, objected to the cultivation of fine arts.... All these, we have to think anew'.¹¹ This quest to consider Islam objectively, with the goal of understanding truth, was not an attack on Islam by any means. Kazi Motahar Hussein, a full-time contributor, in a speech in 1928 had said: 'We do not want to have a struggle against Islam. We want that Muslim society would get rid of many debilitating superstitions and rubbish that have accumulated for many years.... We want that by our hard work, the glory of Islam would rise in the future... We want to perceive, as well as to help others to perceive, the material world and world of thought.'¹² It was fitting to conduct such investigations in an institution like Dacca University, founded five years earlier in 1921, mainly to provide a space

for Bengali Muslims to study and pursue professional careers long denied to them.¹³

The university was a space of advanced study and employed well known scholars from Calcutta. However, this space, like the high schools and colleges of East Bengal, was primarily the province of Hindus. Even though the numbers of Muslims in primary institutions was rising quickly in the first decade of the twentieth century, nearly doubling from over 300,000 at the turn of the century to nearly 600,000 by 1912, and over one million by the early 1930s, the secondary schools remained mostly privately-run institutions, managed mostly by Hindus with traditional connections and capital. Dacca University was a government-funded institution, but the schools training pupils for potential entry into the university, like Jagannath College, Pogose School, or Female Adult School, were run and staffed by Hindus, Armenians, or Brahmos. Though the university was in principle open to all, the vast majority of Muslim peasants were unable to send their children to Dacca to study in schools or in the university. Many aristocratic Muslims chose to educate their children in traditional non-secular ways.¹⁴

One Muslim educationist, A.F.M. Abdul Ali, had commented on the economics of starting a residential university only at Dacca. If it did not expand beyond the proposed five-mile radius and include affiliated colleges in the rural hinterland of East Bengal, it would be accessible only to the affluent classes, these being mostly wealthier Hindus.¹⁵ Also the staffing of the university was designed as such to preserve the local power brokers of Dacca in the governing of the university through an Executive Council. Half of the members had to be Muslim, but nearly all were landowning, aristocratic Muslims. Council members were from the Dacca *nawab* family or connected to landlords' associations. Even though individuals supportive of mass education like Fazlul Huq, Khan Bahadur Aminul Islam, Altaf Ali, and Shamsul Huda were in the council, 'the Court was hardly a radical body, even though the Muslims had a substantial presence on it'.¹⁶

At the opening of the university, out of 60 teachers, eight were Muslim, and six of those were in Arabic and Persian studies. This percentage of thirteen per cent grew to only twenty per cent in 1924, when twenty-four out of 122 teachers were Muslims. Still only six of these twenty-four were not affiliated with Arabic and Persian. In the late 1920s, many Muslims, like Ahmed Ali, an editor of the Dacca publication *Jagaron*, complained

that Hindus in the management were severely biased against Muslim scholars. Even with degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, or Gottingen, 'no justice can be hoped for them from the Hindu selectors... When Muslims fail to vote solidly for Muslim candidates, then surely there can be no hope for the Muslim community'.¹⁷

The low numbers of Muslim students also struck the administration as a sad reflection of economic disparities between Muslims and Hindus in rural Bengal. Many more Hindus initially attended the university in the early years of the 1920s. In 1921, the number of total students was 854, with 170 Muslims compared to 684 Hindus, that is, merely 19 per cent was represented by Muslims. Just before the MSS began in 1925, the number of Muslim students had risen to 371 out of a total of 1304, increasing the representation to about 28 per cent. It was not until the mid-1940s that the attendance rates began to approximate the actual demographic reality of Bengal in which nearly half the population was Hindu and half was Muslim. As warned by many of the original commentators on the creation of the university, the disparity was due to the fact that even with scholarships, most Muslim families from the mufassil regions simply could not afford to send their children to Dacca. The university's report of 1926, echoing the feelings of legislative council members and politicians, declared that 'the poverty of the Muslim students is a very serious problem and it is hoped that well to do Muslim gentlemen will be generous enough to spare something for the education of their fellow Muslims'.¹⁸

Dacca University has been described as the institution that allowed 'young Muslims of East Bengal with the opportunities of intellectual regeneration'.¹⁹ This regeneration 'compelled the Muslims of Bengal to think about their own tradition and values and reconsider their efficacy and significance'.²⁰ The MSS was the forum for these young Muslims who led this regeneration out of the highly marginalized condition of being the few Muslim academics in a university and academic culture dominated by Hindus in every corner. The critiques and examinations of Islam from the MSS, then, sprung from a time in East Bengal when the mere presence of Muslim students and teachers, much less critiques of Islam itself, were quite rare. Therefore, the presence of the MSS is all the more extraordinary. These individuals and this institution confronted these rarities from the first paper, Anwaril Kadir's rationalist exposé of Islam, 'Bangali Mussalmaner Samajik Galad' (Social Problems of Bengali Muslims), delivered in March 1927. The environment was lively as many

teachers, mostly from the Bengali, English, Economics, and Philosophy departments attended, along with many students. Though the numbers never topped the hundreds, it was the premier location for Bengali Muslim debates and discourse on Dacca University campus at the time.

The MSS initially met in the Muslim Hall union room of Dacca University, a popular meeting point for students and professors on campus. In the early years, the group was small and presided over by famous local Dacca University professors like Shahidullah, Wadud, and Abul Hussein and students like Abdul Kadir and Anwar Hussein, both enrolled at the time in Dacca Intermediate College. In the first few meetings, papers were delivered to an intimate group of eager students and local writers. The format resembled both the modern university seminar with professors and students actively engaged in dissecting topics of contemporary interest but also recalled the conversations of Nawab Abdul Latif in the 1860s. As the group gained recognition in the Bengali intellectual and literary worlds, a variety of notables started to attend the meetings by the late 1920s, such as Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, the great Bengali Hindu novelist and a variety of Dacca-based scholars such as Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar, the historian, and Sushil Kumar De, the linguist and professor of literature.²¹ As in the Calcutta experience of the BMSS, the rendering of Dacca Muslim Bengalis as minorities resulted in an openness and willingness to embrace Hindu voices.

Like many of the members of the MSS, Kadir aimed to eliminate the defects in the way Islam was practiced, rather than out rightly denouncing it or rejecting it. Termed by one scholar of the MSS as an 'Islamic liberal',²² his essay clarifies that although Islam contains lots of positive qualities, it is a matter of regret that in modern Islamic society (at least the society Kadir was aware of, presumably Indian Muslim society), there was no 'Herbert Spencer, Rousseau, Rammohun, Bankim Chandra, Piari Charan, Ramtanu Lahiri, Rajnayaran Basu, or Asutosh'.²³ He goes on to cite practices like *purdah*, polygamy, and opposition to music before mosques as evidence of Muslims not applying their rational apparatuses to their problems. Islam is stagnant, as it is in the hands of maulanas and religious power-brokers who cannot explain the divine in logical and scientific terms because human beings do not approach their *namaz*, their religious texts, and religious ideas in a rational way.²⁴

The most devastating critique of Islam to be seconded by many of the MSS, however, came from Abul Hussein. Hussein's positions on viewing

Islam rationally, and the ways Bengali Muslim society dealt with this critique are summarized in his essay 'Adeshes Nigraha' (Coercive Nature of Commands), read in July 1927. This essay, a comprehensive critical attack on the blind nature of following Muslim ritual, was discussed in the MSS for several days. It stirred the minds of MSS members so much that a reply to Hussein, in as lengthy and strident a language, was produced by Rushid in 'Mukti Agraha Banam Adeshes Nigraha' (Interest in Freedom Versus the Coerciveness of Commands), later that year. The essay also motivated Mohammed Akram Khan and his associates to publish virulent attacks against Hussein in the *Mohammadi*, and it also prompted a death threat from members of the Ahsan Manzil. Therefore, the ideas in this essay, and the politics surrounding it, displayed the variety of currents swirling in Bengali Muslim society around the question of Islam.

Hussein's starting point was an inquiry about whether the purported immutability and eternal nature of Islam's message cause pain, bondage, and tension in human life. The claim that Islam is applicable to all people across time and space 'can only be sustained by brute force; not by reason or by the norms of the flow of human history or of nature'. Hussein opined that: 'If I consider Islam to be unchanging, a monolithic reality, an eternal religion and attempt to apply that to life, the attempt will turn into useless torment. Islam is for humankind, humankind is not for Islam'.²⁵ This torment was displayed in various practices such as purdah, widow remarriage, practices of charity like *zakat*, and mindless adherence to rituals such as *namaz* (prayer) and *roza* (fasting). Purdah, according to Hussein, downgraded women's intellectual development and contributes to their physical, mental, and emotional instability, dependence on others, and ill-health. The fundamental thrust behind Hussein's critique was an attack on blind belief (*biswas*) in rituals that allegedly promised other-worldly rewards. As opposed to worrying about other-worldly rewards, Hussein urged his readers to think of Islam as being in the service of human problems and situations, not a manual to simply be followed without consideration. Hussein strongly advocated a rational approach to ritual, as he asked:

What are Muslims going to achieve, when you say that "if they perform *namaj* and *roza* they will receive seventy thousand rewards of God?" Try to talk about how *namaj* and *roza* could contribute to humanity in this world. If, by rejecting these acts, we could achieve humanity by other simpler

means: tell them not to rigorously insist upon these obligatory rituals.²⁶ Hussein appealed to how intellect was the presupposition of being human. When the intellect (or rational judgment) was denied, the human aspect was denied in the adherence to a ritual.²⁷

His conception of blind belief is incompatible with rational judgment, as: 'No Muslim would be able to comprehend by intellect the real character of *dojakh* (hell) and *behesta* (heaven)... [T]o understand these things, the Muslims' last resort is *biswas* (belief). *Biswas* is a notion that cannot be grasped by the intellect, so it cannot be abided by humans.'²⁸

This essay drew a maelstrom of response in and outside the MSS. He was defended by Wadud, Kazi Morahar Hussein, and a few others, but many, including Abdul Aziz, Kazi Nurul Huq, and Naziruddin Ahmed, accused Hussein of attacking, misunderstanding, and aiming to destroy Islam.²⁹ A response shared by many was voiced by Mohammed Abdur Rashid, who wrote a counter-argument in the form of 'Muktir Agraha Banam Adesher Nigraha' (Interest in Freedom Versus the Coerciveness of Commands) in November of 1927. In this essay, Rashid addresses the points made by Hussein, but attempts to provide logical reasons as to why coercion has always existed in human society. Marriage and social rules have always existed, but always hand in hand with freedom. Such social proscriptions have also always supported the cause of human welfare. Also, another point Rashid makes is that many prophets, particularly Sufis like Hafiz, were lovers of freedom, but chained themselves to a higher command of God. He differs with Hussein in his view of the evolution of commands in Islam, as he claims that 'Islam did not impose as much coercion of commands upon humans striving for freedom as did other religions... The commands of religion do not act as an obstacle on our road to cultivation of knowledge, they rather inspire us'.³⁰ He then cites the example of the Prophet Mohammad who encouraged Muslims to go as far as China to seek out knowledge. Any truth that science, research, and philosophy can discover, according to Rushid, has its roots in the higher truth of Huq or God's truth.

Hussein's thoughts on faith and belief in Islam compare with Kazi Morahar Hussein's ideas in 'Dharma O Samaj' (Religion and Society), a paper read to the group in 1929. Though he admits that he sees faith as necessary in human life to provide explanations for helplessness, pain, and suffering, he does not view faith as above knowledge or history.

Indeed, conceptions of faith, belief, and human and extra-human power have always been changing, and should always be accommodated, as he cites individuals like Columbus, Bruno, Galileo, Magellan, Copernicus—all of whom had changed the belief systems of their societies about the world around them. This, for Muslims, is integral to leading a fulfilling life, as unless religious beliefs conform to changing attitudes, there will only be blind superstitions.³¹

One aspect of Islam that was questioned in a way that had not occurred before in modern Bengal was the quality and character of the Prophet Muhammad. Both Wadud and Hussein contributed dense essays about this topic, inquiring about the human nature of the Prophet and how human beings in their time should view him. This process of thinking about how to view the Prophet was started by Wadud in July 1926, just as Pabna was engulfed in communal riots. In his essay 'Sanmohita Musalman' (Infatuated Muslim), Wadud addresses the Prophet not as a *rasul* or *paigambar* (Arabic and Persian words for prophet) as is customary but as a *mahapurush* or a great man. This is the same way he would treat his other worldly heroes, like Rabindranath, Rammohun, Goethe, Sheikh Saadi, and others. He started to see him as a human, not a prophet. Wadud was not contravening Muslim thought and practice, as Islamic tradition has held their Prophet as human, and not as a divine incarnation. Rather, Wadud was writing against the dominant (and in Wadud's view, un-Islamic) deification of the Prophet.

Wadud praised Muhammad life and work, because like Rammohan Roy and other great men, he broke orthodoxies, challenged people to live thoughtful lives, and led a good life, helping others, and attempting to reform his society. But he critiqued the Bengali Muslim society, especially the modern Muslims, of his time for not learning from the Prophet's actions, and instead, worshipping him as an idol. He said that: "They are not only idol-worshippers but they have reached an extreme state of idolatry. All their rational intellect and riches of thought are strangely dumb."³² Instead of surrendering to a deified image of Mōhammad, Wadud stressed that he was human like any other, but that he was great because of his work at a particular point in history, that he was a reformer, someone who changed his society, but not necessarily a prophet. Whether he was a prophet or not is a point that would distract Muslims from Islam. To be worried more about his prophet-hood rather than actions in life would be 'a serious insult to human efforts of great men to believe

that the words and thoughts of great men have fixed a definite path forever for humans, because, as a result of this belief, awareness of God, which is the root of all effort, will be closed to human vision'.³³ Wadud links the openness of interpretation to the true realization of God, which cannot be closed by blind faith in the infallibility of a particular prophet.

Hussein also questioned the extra-human nature of the Prophet. Wadud's essay drew ire from Mohammed Akram Khan, who proclaimed Bengali cultural identity as proudly as he proclaimed its Muslim manifestation. Khan saw Wadud's essay as an attack on the Prophet and so published a response in the 1928 *Masik Mohammadi*, entitled 'Naba Parjayna Naba Biparjay?' (New Phase or New Disaster?). Khan wrote from Calcutta whereas his associate Daliluddin Ahmad protested Wadud's piece from inside the MSS in Dacca.

Abul Hussein's questioning of the Prophet arose in his defence of Wadud in an essay 'Sab-Janta' (All-Knowing), published in 1928.³⁴ The debate between Hussein and Khan typifies the ways in which Bengali Muslim society was changing in the mid to late 1920s. Khan represented a 'neo-orthodox' position of a rising modern Bengali Muslim spokesman class, which 'de-spiritualized Hazrat Mohammed's life from the supernatural image of Mohammed given by traditionalists, pirs, and *mullahs*'. But Khan attempted, through his many writings in the *Mohammadi* in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and in his biography of the Prophet, *Mostafa Charit*,³⁵ to re-vitalize Islam for Bengali culture through an emphasis on the Qur'an as the invincible word of God. Khan's Prophet was human, as it says in the verse, 'anabasrummeslokum' (I am human like you), but he was the best human (*manusher atit purush*), not a super-human, and not God. This rising proactive mentality to define and defend this approach to Islam was taken in the midst of attacks from various groups, including European Orientalists, Christian missionary polemicists, and rationalists.³⁶ Abul Hussein represents a lively strand of the latter—the *buddhir mukti*, or freedom of intellect force that both developed its own sense of Islam and Muslim ritual as well as engendered a parallel force of neo-orthodoxy in leaders like Khan.

This issue of the prophet's humanity and the concomitant issues of ritual and belief were certainly not confined to Bengal nor were they initiated by these Bengali thinkers. These sorts of debates had been going within Islamic intellectual circles since the ninth-century Mu'tazilite movement within the Abbasid Empire. In India, similar debates also

occurred at least since Sayyid Ahmad Khan's pioneering work from the 1860s onwards. For the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, though, it was an innovation of the late 1920s.

Hussein argued that Khan's position—that the Prophet Muhammad had no influence on how the word of God came to be in the Koran, that the Prophet was faultless, and that all of his actions, knowledge, and being contain eternal truth—does not have any basis if the Prophet truly was a human being.³⁷ If so, Hussein asked if the Prophet was faultless at birth, or did he attain perfection at some point in his life? The basic difference between Hussein and Khan is that the former saw Muhammad's life as a struggle that provides a role model for human beings to follow in this world. If there was no struggle in Mohammed, then he was not human, and cannot show us how to become better humans. He goes on to say that 'unless one agrees that Muhammad was imperfect, but later, through effort became perfect, or tried to become perfect, the example of his struggle would be of no use in our struggle to be perfect. Because for one who is perfect, what need is there for him to have a struggle?'³⁸ Though Khan was not arguing that he had no struggle in his life, Hussein was relentlessly pushing to establish the Prophet's humanity. Hussein also opposed the idea that the Prophet Mohammed is the last great man to have been born, because that would render meaningless the Qur'an's injunction to embellish the virtues of God, not of Muhammad.

The most sensational quality of Hussein's essay is the fact that he questioned the divine authorship of the Qur'an and instead suggested that perhaps the human being Muhammad, with his emotions, thoughts, and different perspectives, actually shaped the Qur'an.³⁹ Radical for Bengali Muslim society, Hussein was the first Bengali Muslim to provide a coherent argument as to why Muhammad shaped the words of the Qur'an as a response to the particular conditions in his life and time. Hussein stated that it would be impossible and unrealistic to intellectually accept that the Qur'an is the absolute word of Allah and that no human had any part to play in how that word came about. Rather, he said that 'if this means that Hazrat's devotion, thought, and emotions had in no way touched upon it, then the question will arise: Why was it so essential for Muhammed, having so many difficult problems, to wait until forty years of age to receive the divine revelations of the Qur'an?'⁴⁰

Trained in modern methods of viewing history and the present, Hussein viewed the Prophet as living in his time and dedicated to solving

problems of the day, which were not at all the same problems of India in the 1920s: political identity, ritual, women's education, modern, technical education, language and language policy, and so on. Rather than show the Prophet as an infallible creature, he was seen to have been blessed by God to think and utilize his powers of reason: 'We know that for solving problems, especially of the Arabs and Medina, Hazrat Muhammed was engaged several times in deep thought. It was during this time of deep thought that Muhammed, inspired by God, understood the solution to problems, and reported these.'⁴¹ The Prophet, in using his judgment, arriving at new conclusions and solutions, should be a role model, not an idol to imitate. Like Wadud, Hussein also sees the Prophet as a great man, but one like Rammohn or Rabindranath, as a revolutionary of their time.

Both Wadud and Hussein received physical threats and attacks as a result of their radical writings about Islam and the Prophet. In 1927, they had stirred up the passions of writers of the *Soltan*, a Calcutta Muslim journal that also declared them both *kafirs*. In 1928, both were forced to sign notes of apology, at the orders of a wealthy and influential zamindar, Kazemuddin Ahmad, a Dacca-based associate of Akram Khan. In 1928 the *Mohammadi* published these apologies, which claimed that both were sorry for hurting the feelings of Muslims and also asked for forgiveness from Muslim society.⁴² Hussein was approached by members of the conservative Dacca nawab family. In December 1929, at the Ahsan Manzil, he signed another note of apology. Soon after this second apology, he was allegedly harassed on his way home. After these two episodes, he resigned from the MSS, and then in 1932, left Dacca for good and went to Calcutta. Since the early 1930s, after Wadud and Hussein were publicly embarrassed, the MSS' attendance and vitality reduced until the entire organization collapsed in 1938.

What is important about the opinions on the Prophet offered by Wadud and Hussein was not their originality. Their precedents would stretch back both to nineteenth-century India as well as the early days of Islamic philosophy in the Mu'tazilite tradition. In a Bengali context, the radical critique of Islam as it was practiced, not of the faith itself, brought about a stridently defence attitude and self-consciousness within Bengali Muslim society. Though the critical appraisal of the Prophet was the most newsworthy contribution of the MSS, they discussed other issues as well. These all relate to a broader investigation of Bengali Muslim society in its

past and present states, the place of Bengali culture and language, and the concept of backwardness that was critiqued with futurity in mind.

One of the biggest issues underneath this banner was the issue of education of Bengali Muslims. In this regard, Hussein contributed several articles, in addition to many essays by his colleagues. Hussein's three pivotal essays, 'Bangali Mussalmaner Siksha Samasya I' (The Problems with Bengali Muslim Education Part I) (1927), 'Bangali Mussalmaner Bhabishyat' (The Future of Bengali Muslims) (1928) and 'Bangali Mussalmaner Siksha Samasya II' (The Problems with Bengali Muslim Education, Part II) (1928) all critique madrasa education as narrow, communal, mindless, and one of the biggest factors responsible for Bengali Muslim backwardness. Hussein used quite a strong language to condemn the present state of madrasa education in 1928: 'madrasa education does not increase curiosity about truth but increases narrow communalism, a passionate urge to prove others' religion as the worst, blind veneration of one's own religion... These madrasas are increasing moral depravity, a heartless attitude toward one's nation and people, and extreme ignorance about acquiring knowledge... Think for a moment about what kind of creature the Muslim is becoming by learning everyday a *musalmāni* way of smiling, coughing, dressing, etiquette....'⁴³ As in his attitude towards the Prophet, his attitude towards Muslim education derived from his belief in a rational approach towards life, with Islam coming after that foundation. Because the Qur'an and Islam proclaim themselves to be both spiritual and scientific, that is, the end of all knowledge, a mentality has crept into Muslims that they don't need to learn and discover other forms of knowledge. This mentality had stunted the intellectual potential of Muslim students.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Hussein created a proposal, included in part two of 'Bangali Mussalmaner Siksha Samasya', to reform Muslim education. In this remarkable proposal he recommends that madrasas be open to non-Muslims, particularly Hindus, so that both may learn from each other. This would also work towards ameliorating stereotypes and misconceptions about religions. Also, in this proposal, the scope of study about Islam would be greatly reduced, and only a skeleton of the traditional Islamic curriculum would be covered. The entire Qur'an in Arabic would not be studied, but only excerpts. He also demanded that courses of study about non-Muslim peoples be included.⁴⁵

This proposal did not turn into a reality, but the 1928 Hartog Committee, headed by the former vice-chancellor of Dacca University,

Sir J.P. Hartog, convened to reform primary and secondary education in India, did pay attention to Hussein's ideas and interviewed him for his insights. They did conclude that a reduction in religious education may benefit the young people of India. Hussein's radical stance on education veers far from the mainstream discourse about Muslim education at the time that focused on inclusion in pre-existing institutions.

In the very same year he wrote his proposal, Sir Abdel Karim Ghuznavi, a prominent Bengali Muslim politician, submitted a memorandum to the Hartog Committee entitled 'Bengali Muslims Entitled to Reparations'. The arguments made by Ghuznavi summarize the position of the Muslim representatives in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, pushing for more Muslim representation. Ghuznavi claimed that resumption proceedings during the nineteenth century, in which hundreds of thousands of pounds were seized by the colonial government, destroyed the system of Muslim education which depended on rent-free grants. This lament was shared by William Hunter, who wrote in his 1871 *Indian Musalmans* that Muslims were shut out of political and intellectual power because of this act. Because of this, Ghuznavi argues that reparations to a sum of one crore rupees a year in funding should be spent on Muslim education, because of how the State has injured the Muslim community. Ghuznavi had 'no hesitation in saying that purely on the grounds of fair play and the injustice, consciously or unconsciously inflicted on the Bengali Muslims by the State, the Muslims of Bengal are more than justly entitled to this sum'.⁴⁶ In a manner completely different from the way Hussein would argue, Ghuznavi stated the State's responsibility is to make up for the backwardness in education caused by the State's negligence over the last several generations. Additionally, in Ghuznavi's view, the lack of Muslim managers and teachers 'account for the smaller proportion of Muslim scholars in higher stages of instruction'.⁴⁷ Ghuznavi offered more and more affirmative action pleas, such as a demand for more Muslim hostels, more Muslim headmasters, and more Muslim administrators in Calcutta University. Constant re-statement of the fact that Muslims form over 50 per cent of the Bengal Presidency and that their numbers should be considered into account fill the pages of the report as well. Suffice it to say, Hussein's recommendations arise from a thoroughly different ideological space: one of radical revision of the meaning of Muslim education, not a bid for more numerical representation in institutions.

In addition to education, another issue that animated the writers of the MSS, and particularly Hussein and Wadud, was the fact of 'backwardness' and an effort to overcome that by way of striving towards a better future. In a series of articles in 1927 and 1928, such as 'Bangali Mussalmaner Samajik Galad' (Social Problems of Bengali Muslims) by Anwaril Kadir, 1927, 'Bangali Mussalmaner Arthik Samasya', (Economic Problems of Bengali Muslims) by Rakibuddin Ahmad, 1927, 'Mussalmaner Arthik Samasya', (Economic Problems of Muslims) by Anwar Hussain, 1928, and 'Europe Siksha Adarsher Chromobikash', (The Development of Educational Ideals in Europe) by Abdur Rahman Khan, 1928, 'Siksha Samasya', (Educational Problems) by Mamtuzzin Ahmad, 1929, and Abul Hussein's aforementioned articles on the problems in Muslim education, backwardness is seen as one of the definitive aspects of Bengali Muslim life when compared to Hindus, or to Europeans. Two factors are responsible for this backwardness: a slippery foundation in education and a lack of tenacity in the material realm.

Unlike Nazrul and Ahmad's insistence on an economic system being the problem, these writers show how Muslims have to take responsibility for their low educational standards and the high levels of poverty in their community. As Rakibuddin Ahmad, at the time an undergraduate student, stated, 'Muslim society has reached a stage where it is universally associated with poverty'.⁴⁸ Bengali Muslim society is stagnant and backward for a variety of reasons and Ahmad outlines a list of reasons such as: dependence on nature, ignorance of the masses, indebtedness, and laws like the Permanent Settlement. Islam is not the issue, rather it is an accident of political economy that Muslims, as a community, happen to be economically backward than their Hindu neighbours. But the author makes it a point of mentioning that Muslims are backward than Hindus, because in their lives, there is comparatively less literature, art, and enjoyment. And, rather than creating a social revolution, Muslims ought to form associations, discuss issues in public, and create their own social models for economic upliftment, and not question the ways in which economic relations are constituted. However, like most of the MSS commentators, he recognized that the Permanent Settlement of 1793 was a force that created more tax collectors, more intermediaries between farmers and the State, and consequently, poorer farmers and poorer Bengali Muslims.

In a related essay in 1928, 'Musalmaner Arthik Samasya', Anwar Hussein argued that because of poor educational facilities and outdated

superstitions and traditions, Muslims were poor and unable to rise in economic terms. The Permanent Settlement and the economic relations between tenant and tax collector were noted, but there was no recognition of an entire system of socio-economic relations underpinned by the idea of capitalism or of liberalism. Instead, the emphasis was on how factors like a tenacious attachment to a dying Muslim aristocratic way of life, with no regard for thrift or saving, or old family entitlements, or outmoded education contribute to Muslim impoverishment.

In three essays on the theme of backwardness and the way forward, modern European education and its lack thereof among Bengali Muslims is understood as the issue behind the entire problem. In Abdur Rahman Khan's 'Europe Sikshar Adarsher Chromobikash', 1929, and Anwaril Kadir's 'Bengali Mussalmaner Samajik Galad', 1927, we find examples of how, somewhat different than Hussein's effort at revamping madrasa education, Western education is a model for ameliorating backwardness. In the case of Abdur Rahman Khan, finding a national identity becomes paramount. Abdur Rahman Khan's essay begins by proclaiming a 'deep relationship between the objective of education and the governing of a nation'.⁴⁹ He then recounts European history in relation to education, from Greek and Roman society to the rise of medieval Christian education, Renaissance, Reformation, and finally, to humanism in thought and nationalism in political practice. Education as a key component of how modern people live and find their identity is the main idea of Abdur Rahman Khan's piece. Kadir, in a similar way, sees 'an indifferent attitude toward education' as the cause of the stagnation in Bengali Muslim society. The author urges Muslims to use their intellect, in line with the mission of the MSS, to perceive problems and find solutions. What all the authors about education have in common is their insistence that reformation in educational practices will lead to something new, a new age, a new society. In the words of Mamtuzuddin Ahmad, author of 'Sikha Samasya' in 1929, 'one must be aware of the universal truth—that it is through true education that society progresses'.⁵⁰

This yearning for something new, this striving to create a new society is voiced in the early 1920s in the pages of Nazrul's poems, in Muzaffar Ahmad's politics, and in the pages of *Dhumketu* and *Langol* as much as it is in the writings of the late 1920s Dacca-based writers. In *Sikha* and in the deliberations of the MSS, several of the writers implore their interlocutors to conceive of a new day, or to celebrate the coming of a new age.

In the first issue in 1927, Munshi Habibullah wrote 'Abahan' (Call) to signify a new day in Bengali Muslim society. He used the imagery of the singing of birds and the blooming of flowers. He draws attention to a proud Bengali Muslim past, filled with great Muslim rulers like Islam Khan, Sayesta Khan, and Nawab Ratan, and the city of Dacca's long-standing mosques and Muslim communities. The MSS will bring forth the light of knowledge and inquiry into Bengali Muslim society, something that is indispensable in a time dominated by superstition, fear, and backwardness. Unlike the ways in which Nazrul and Ahmad heralded a new type of society, these Dacca-based writers herald a revitalization of the old, a type of pride and investment in their identities and lives as Bengali Muslims, not a thoroughly new idea of organizing society.

However, Nazrul himself contributed a poem in 1928, 'Nutaner Gan' (Song of the New) in which he also urged his fellow Muslims to 'lend their ears to the *azan* to welcome a new day', but looks at the past with a critical eye. He does not want Muslims to shed tears at the past, but rather to live in the present to build a better future. Like Wadud and Hussein's attitude towards Muhammad, Nazrul's attitude in this poem towards great Muslim civilizations of the past reveals a distanced respect, wherein the past should be seen as an example to be emulated, not as a death to be lamented. He cites great civilizations which have fallen, like the Greek, Roman, Persian, and Russian civilizations, where modern peoples have taken from the past in order to shape their present. Sadly, Muslims have not yet been able to take from previous civilizations and ground themselves in the present day. In addition to Nazrul and Habibullah, many pieces by Kazi Motahar Hussein, Wadud, and Hussein extolled the idea of a future and of a new society heralded by this new practice of the 'emancipation of the intellect'.

The final issue that the MSS engaged with was the role of the Bengali language and literature in the world of Bengali Muslim society. Just as their predecessors in the Calcutta BMSP, the MSS thinkers emphasized the importance of a specifically Muslim Bengali language and literature. In the first address to the group in 1926, A.F. Rahman started his speech by arguing that 'literature is the way toward strength of life.... It is the one way to paint the past, future, and the beauty of the present'.⁵¹ For Bengali Muslims, not just literature in general, but a literature that captures the culturally specific nuances of a national group is essential for progress, for uplift, and good feeling between other groups, like Bengali Hindus.

And this endeavour is not situated only in romance or ideas, but in history. He cited many instances from history that show how Bengali Muslims of the past have cultivated literature. For example, Husein Shah (r. 1494–1519), sultan of Bengal, ordered translations of the *Bhagavat Puranas* as well as other classic Hindu literary and religious texts into Bengali. As someone highly interested in Bengali, Husein Shah also ordered further translations of the Mahabharata and other Hindu texts into Bangla, unlike Brahmin pandits or Buddhist *bhikkus* of pre-Muslim Bengal.

In addition, from the early Muslim period (thirteenth century) until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, innumerable Muslim poets wrote folk songs and other compositions at the behest of royal patronage. So, Rahman concludes that there is no way to say, as many in the community would have one believe, that Bengali has nothing to do with Muslims. On the contrary, Muslims have nourished Bengali from its beginnings, and a return to a serious cultivation of Bengali by Muslims would only revive their dignity as Bengali people.⁵²

Rahman's address brings to mind S. Wajed Ali's address to the BMSS one year earlier, in 1925, as *Langol* was getting off the ground, concerning the place of Bengali literature in the world of Bengali Muslim development. In this address, Ali argues that backwardness of Bengali Muslims intellectually derives in great measure from the fact that they have neglected their Bengali in modern times. Vis-à-vis Hindus, and internally, Muslims of Bengal have painted themselves into a corner, as 'we shouldn't forget that so far Bengali language and literature has been nurtured in the lap of the Hindu community and nourished by the Hindu mind and morality. We need to equip this language to make it suitable for our religion and community'.⁵³ The chaos that the modern world has brought in with its strange relationship to mother tongues and religious tongues requires serious consideration. Ali goes on to argue that 'our leaders don't know Bengali and Muslim common people don't know Urdu or English. What the leaders say commoners don't follow; what the commoners say the leaders don't follow... As a result, our leaders have become leaders without a battalion and our commoners a battalion without a leader. Who can doubt that the future of such a community is fraught with danger?'⁵⁴ The Dacca group, including Hindus like Mohitlal Majumdar,⁵⁵ consistently invoked a Bengali Muslim literary and political past, one that cultivated Bengali in the past and therefore should do so in the present and future.

In subsequent MSS addresses, by Tasadduk Ahmed, also in 1926, in Mahmud Assan in 1927, Abdur Rahman in 1927, Muhammed Shahidullah in 1928, Abul Muzaffar Ahmed in 1928, and Nasiruddin Ahmad in 1929, there appears a constant emphasis on how the Bengali language is the vehicle of expression for Bengali Muslims. They should cultivate it both for the sake of respecting the past and for forging a new society in modern times. This cultivation, as both A.F. Rahman and Mahmud Assan explained in early addresses, will go a long way to address problems of communalism and ill-feeling, because the lack of literary investment is one of the reasons Hindus know so little about Muslims. There is also a sense that as a Bengali Muslim, being modern, not looking to past aristocratic glory, not putting children in madrasas, not being aloof from the developments in the rest of the world, has a great deal to do with creating and sustaining a great literature in one's mother tongue.

Though the MSS was the pre-eminent intellectual institution of late 1920s Dacca, it was by no means the only institution or journal dedicated to literary and intellectual pursuits from East Bengal at that time. A parallel history to Calcutta's literary and intellectual history concerning Bengali language and culture also exists. In 1911, the same year that the BMSS started in Calcutta, the Dacca Sahitya Parishad (DSP) came into existence. This organization followed the lead of the Calcutta Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, established for the preservation of Bengali language and culture. This Dacca organization, unlike its Calcutta counterpart, did not have a Muslim imprint, as its goal was to simply promote Bengali, whereas the BMSS' goal was to promote Bengali by and for Muslims. The DSP also started a journal, *Protiva*, in 1911 that continued throughout the 1920s, dedicated to many of the same issues as all the Bengali literary organizations, like translations of Sanskrit, early Bengali folk tales, science, archaeology, and proverbs from East Bengal. What made the MSS and its journal *Sikha* exceptional was their uncompromising focus on the critical analysis of Islam in addition to its focus on Bengali language and culture.⁵⁶

Beyond *Sikha*: Peace and Saogat

Dacca also saw the publication of another journal devoted to examining Islam as its focal point. An active member of the MSS, Shahidullah also edited *Peace*, a monthly journal devoted to Islam and Islamic culture in the

late 1920s and early 1930s. The very same topics do appear, such as educational backwardness, pride and investment in Islam, and an engagement with literary development and sensibility for the promotion of collective identity. However, Shahidullah managed a journal that included topics that charted new territory in the intellectual world of Bengali Muslims, such as comparative passages of the Qur'an and the Vedas to show similar ideas in both religions, the Prophet as a social reformer, and Islam and contemporary social movements, such as Marxism.

Similar to the MSS and *Sikha*, its early editions contained exhortations to critical thought and reflection. Mujibur Rahman, editor of the only English-language paper focusing on Bengali Muslims, the *Musalman*, contributed an address to Muslim students published in its April 1930 edition. In this address, he deplores using poverty and backwardness as an excuse for Muslim backwardness in intellectual pursuits. Rather, Muslims have 'cultivated a mentality that does not make for independent thinking, not conducive to self-reliance and self-respect', as the necessary 'will-to-live' is not present among most Muslim students of Bengal. He hoped that the 'spirit of freedom rampant nowadays would pervade young generations of Muslims and force them to think independently, as independence of thought and ideas leads, ultimately, to independence of action in politics'.⁵⁷

As editor, Shahidullah contributed several sections, entitled 'Islam and Hinduism: Parallel Thoughts', in many issues of the journal in 1929 and 1930. In these short sections, Shahidullah compared parts of the Qur'an with portions of the Vedas and the Upanishads. The omnipresence and all-knowing power and impact of God was a theme carried forth in these sections. Shahidullah was one of the few Bengalis proficient in Sanskrit, Bengali, and in Arabic who could actually maintain such comparisons by reading the primary sources.

More than comparing Hinduism and Islam, the journal carried many articles on the Prophet as a social reformer, underscoring the practical and rational examinations of Islam occurring in the Bengali Muslim environment at the time. A.T.M. Abdul Hai in 'The Prophet as a Social Reformer', began his study with the centrality of reason in the Prophet's life, that 'reason is the gift of the Lord.... By his emphasis on reason, he passed the way to his followers for miracles in learning, science, commerce, and industry'.⁵⁸ Just like the MSS writers, Hai placed the Prophet Muhammad into a context of European modernist historical time, and

placed his focus on reason in a galaxy of the world's growing emphasis on human equality, citing the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, and modern socialism, as other milestones in the concurrent march of progress.

Socialism's similarities to the Prophet's emphasis on equality did not receive a direct examination in Hai's essay, but this topic did appear in A.K. Ahmad Khan's article titled 'Socialism in Islam'. Here, Khan concluded that socialist ideas are compatible with Islam. In fact, Islam is the perfect combination of a socialist ethic and a humanist way of life, as it 'limits private property and ownership in order to free mankind from cruelties of social inequalities'.⁵⁹ In his view, Islam is a 'rational socialism' where humans enjoy the benefits of an 'individualism' and a 'socialism' free from the evils of both, as Muslims may own property, but are compelled to give excessive income to the poor (through the traditions of *zakat*).⁶⁰

As a reflection of the different points of view about 'religious' identities and politics, each issue contained a humour section. One such joke included a comment about the nature of identity as instrumental: 'Babu: You do not believe in the Koran nor in the Prophet Muhammad. Then why do you call yourself Musalman? Muslim: Oh! You know that it is easier for a Musalman to get into government service!'⁶¹ This piece, edited by Shahidullah himself, shows that in this strand of Bengali Muslim leadership, the precise difference between religion as faith, and religion as a social identity, was not only understood but lampooned.⁶²

In addition to *Sikha* and *Peace*, the journal *Saogat*, closed down in 1921 after three years of circulation, re-appeared in 1926 in Calcutta. A contemporary of the BMSS, it soon came to be identified with the most promising Bengali Muslim writers of poetry, short story, plays, and novels. Even though Bengali Muslim journalism was seen as being spurred on by communal conflicts, as the government states that 'the greatest motive force in the press during the year 1926 was the intensity of communal feeling'⁶³ and also that 'nine Muhammadan papers started that year...as a result of the communal riots'⁶⁴ that took place throughout 1926. *Saogat* as a forum for the rising intellectuals of the day re-appeared precisely to combat such communalism in literary and journalistic life. As Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, a young journalist coming of age in the 1920s, records in his autobiography, *Saogat* became the main platform for literary journalism and the arts for Bengali Muslims.⁶⁵ Started as a monthly in 1918 when the BMSP came out, in 1928, with Shamsuddin and Premendra Mitra

as editors, it transformed into a weekly magazine. Many involved with the BMSP and the MSS, like Muhammed Wajed Ali, Nazrul, S. Wajed Ali, Shamsuddin himself, Abul Hussein, Wadud, and others contributed to the magazine.

Saogat's rise, parallel to the rise of the MSS, was accompanied by stiff resistance from conservative quarters. In two occasions in the late 1920s, as a mark of both *Saogat's* broad-mindedness and opposition to it, Bengali Muslim society's changes were reflected once again in the cultural sphere. Once when Shamsuddin and Muhammed Nasiruddin, the original editor and founder, were walking down Calcutta streets, Nasiruddin was attacked by a gang of *goondas*. The attackers were never caught, but it was clear that *Saogat* was supporting various reforms, like the education of women, the promotion of literature, music, and the visual arts. Most likely conservative members of society had produced these *goondas*. Also, *Saogat* had invited the first female Muslim M.A. mathematics graduate of Dacca University, Faizulutenessa, to speak in Calcutta. Many conservative elements of society opposed this and forced others not to attend the function. Like the attacks on the MSS, *Saogat* could not function without being monitored by what Shamsuddin called the '*alem Samaj*', the society of *alem*, or Muslim scholars, who tended towards conservatism in social matters.

Indeed, one of *Saogat's* main goals was the promotion of women's education and empowerment. In addition to being a literal meeting ground for progressive writers and critics, as the BMSS had been in 1910s Calcutta, *Saogat's* express goals (two of the seven listed in the original manifesto in 1918) included women's advancement. The editor Mohammed Nasiruddin, given the dearth of women writers, and the potential fear of reprisal if women writers actively sought a voice, started a separate *Mahila Saogat* or Women's *Saogat* in 1929. In this, he actively sought out poetry, short stories, and novellas by women as well as published articles about women's rights and news about women from around the world.

Muhammed Akram Khan and the Late 1920s

One such *alem*, Akram Khan, reputedly supportive of the attacks on Wadud and Hussein, and also the author of numerous books about Islam, led a late 1920s drive towards Bengali writing about Islam. Meanwhile, writing about Islam in Bengali intensified. We may consider the writing

in literary, literary-critical, and sociological environments about Islam to be 'Islamic', but also traditionally 'Islamic' writing, including tafsir, and histories and biographies of the Prophet began to appear at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s.⁶⁶ Muhammad Akram Khan is the leader of this genre of literature. In 1926, the first edition of his *Mostafa Charit* or biography of the Prophet appeared. In 1930, the first volume of his five-volume *Tafsirul Koran* (Exegesis of the Qur'an) also appeared, with the last part appearing in 1959.

What is important about this spurt in Bengali Muslim literature on Islam is that it resembled the work of the MSS and its intellectuals in content if not in form. In both the *Mostafa Charit* and in *Tafsirul Koran*, Akram Khan attempts to place Islam and the Prophet Muhammad into a rational and scientific framework in which the non-rational aspects of Islam to be taken on faith should be critically assessed. These aspects of Islam to be taken critically for Akram Khan include the descriptions of heaven and hell, the opening of the Prophet Muhammad's breast, and his ascent into heaven. These should be understood as symbols guiding righteous action, not understood literally. Akram Khan, Wadud, and Hussein all promote positions that are self-styled as rationalist, though they differ in respect to the Prophet's infallibility.

Akram Khan's message, 'Back to the Qur'an', was a recurrent theme that was typified in an essay of that name published in the *Mohammadi* in 1929. In this essay and books of the late 1920s, he consistently focused on the concept of *adl* or justice. The conception of *adl* in the Koran should be merged with an appreciation of the local context:

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 [in Bengal] we find that their national life is filled with injustice... The Muslims are not practicing *adl* with respect to the Qur'an. They have not placed the Qur'an in its proper place. They have rather brought down the Qur'an from the highest place and put the Hadith (traditions of the Prophet) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) above the Qur'an... Put the Qur'an in its proper place and Allah will place you in your proper place.

Khan devoted his life to the promotion of both Islam, as a rational, and just, entity, and the acceptance of Bengali as a language by Muslims.

In 1913, along with Maniruzzaman Islamabadi he founded the Anjuman-e-Bangala, as a social service organization that assisted in primary education drives for both illiterate and educated peasants about Islam. During the Khilafat Non-cooperation movement, Khan started a newspaper sympathetic to the movement, *Sevak* in 1922 and at the very same time, an Urdu paper, *Zamana*, for the propagation of Khilafat and Non-cooperation in the Urdu speaking community in Calcutta. In all of these, and in his many essays in *Mohammadi* and later, from 1936, in *Azad*, Akram Khan promoted an Islam interpreted via rational, worldly progress allied with a local identity, just as the intellectuals and writers in other environments did. The difference between Akram Khan and Wadud and Hussein, their public feuds notwithstanding, was a matter of degree and form, as Wadud and Hussein advocated quite similar positions, but unlike Akram Khan, they also maintained an active skepticism of Muslim social identities.

The three themes that maintain a continuous presence throughout the decade include an emphasis on an Islamic identity, Bengali linguistic and literary identity, and a focus on backwardness and upliftment, all compatible with modern notions of identity, nation, and communal belonging. As Nazrul wrote 'Fateha-i-doaz-doham' in 1920, a poem on 'Islamic themes' for the journal *Muslim Bharat*, in 1924, Wadud wrote an essay with the same name, but this time with the intent of critically investigating Muslim society. The social revolution heralded by Nazrul and his associates in the early 1920s transformed into a practical and public approach towards Islam, Bengali culture, and the idea of progress in Dacca. The Calcutta and Dacca approaches were not in opposition to each other conceptually, but rather formed two complementary strands towards the definition of modern Bengali Muslim selfhood.

Bengali versus Urdu and the Late 1920s

At the end of the 1920s, even with the sustained work of intellectuals and writers in Calcutta and Dacca promoting and using Bengali, a public force in Calcutta supporting Urdu instruction for Muslim boys in Calcutta University gathered steam. This agitation had been going on since the early 1910s when it was initiated by Fazlul Huq. Nicknamed *Sher-e-Bangla* (The Bengal Tiger), in a 1913 statement about the construction of Dacca University, Huq strongly advocated the option of Urdu for Bengal

Muslim students, as 'it is no use arguing that our vernacular is Bengali and we find Sanskrit more congenial and easy to master than Persian or Arabic. Our natural inclinations are towards Persian, if not Arabic, and not towards Sanskrit'.⁶⁷ In 1922, he also promoted the cause of Urdu as the medium of instruction for Bengali Muslim students and Bangla for Bengali Hindus, to which the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* replied that 'what should be the mother tongue of 99 per cent of Bengali Muslims who speak Bengali from the cradle? Not even a few thousand of over two crores of the Bengali Muslims can speak any Urdu or Persian'.⁶⁸ The sentiment that Muslims have a specific need for Urdu instruction, even though Bengali is the language spoken at home, informed a heightened Urdu-Bangla controversy in the legislative sphere and was reported in Calcutta papers from 1926 to 1929.

In 1926, Sir Abdur Rahim publicly stated his support for creating an Urdu medium of instruction in Calcutta University. He referred to the importance of both the Urdu-speaking minority in Calcutta (as the beacons of Islamic culture), and of Urdu to Muslims throughout India.⁶⁹ The mainstream Hindu paper *Bengalee*, in early 1926, took more than one occasion to deride Rahim as a 'communalist' who mistakenly interprets Hindus and Muslims as two distinct communities or peoples. It reported that 'probably to him the difference approximates that between the Americans and the Red Indians [*sic*] or between the white immigrants in South Africa and the native inhabitants!'⁷⁰ Later in the year, the same paper's editorial claimed that Rahim's 'knowledge of Bengali language and literature might be disproportionately lower than his knowledge of Islamic lore' and suggested that he may not even be aware of great Bengali Muslim writers who have written in high-standard prose and poetry, like Mir Musharraf Hussein and Kaikobad!⁷¹

In addition to Rahim, Muslims of Calcutta continued to publicly support the need for Urdu and evinced support for his proposals. Bedar Bakht, the secretary of the Muslim Graduates Association in Calcutta, wrote a memorandum in 1928 addressed to the Royal Statutory Commission to consider the idea of supporting Urdu-medium instruction specifically for Muslim students in Calcutta University. Familiar with the reports of long-time supporters of Muslim education like Sir Philip Hartog, the first chancellor of Dacca University, and Arthur Dash, a Bengal civil servant, Bakht proposed that Urdu should be the lingua franca and educational medium for all the Muslims of India. Through the joint effort of both

the Muslims and the Hindus, Urdu not only claimed a regional, but a trans-regional status. This placed it above regional languages like Bengali or Punjabi. It also was a language that Muslims required for cultivating an education, unlike Hindus.⁷² Citing W.W. Hunter's influential 1871 book *The Indian Musalmans* extensively, Bakht claimed that the legacy of the disempowerment of Muslims continued through the 1920s in the form of Hindu majoritarian tyranny. He lists several anecdotal examples in Calcutta which he claims to represent the feelings of most Muslims in Bengal. These experiences include Hindus not taking medicine prescribed by a Muslim doctor for fear of contamination, Muslims being refused instruction in Sanskrit at Calcutta University because of fears of pollution, and Muslim commerce graduates denied interviews at Hindu companies.⁷³ Familiar with the debates about Muslim education at the time, including critiques of colonial official accounts,⁷⁴ Bakht cites Nurul Huq Choudhury, whose extensive research into the problems of Muslim education concluded that the government spent disproportionate amounts on caste Hindus in their educational endeavours, whereas they formed a small minority of the population.⁷⁵

In a private letter to Hartog, Bakht seconded the claims of the memorandum, and spoke as a Bengali Muslim that, Urdu and Persian are required for their education and that they would only benefit from Urdu medium of instruction. Bakht argues this point by claiming that since Bengali Muslims have to learn some Urdu, Persian, and Arabic for their social and cultural status, they could not possibly compete with Hindus whose skills in Bengali are naturally higher since they don't have to study Urdu, Persian, or Arabic. Also since the form of Bengali that Bengali Muslims speak is 'not pure Bengali, but replete with Arabic, Persian, and Urdu words' so why not allow Muslims to learn Arabic, Persian, and Urdu properly?⁷⁶ This idea was seconded by another Calcutta Muslim, Mahmood Suhrawardy, in a 1929 statement to the press. In this statement, he recorded his surprise to those supporting Bengali, like Sir Abdel Karim Ghuznavi, who in opposition to Sir Abdul Rahim, promoted Bangla as a medium instruction for Bengali Muslims. Suhrawardy argued that Ghuznavi cannot speak for all Bengali Muslims, as at least from his vantage point in West Bengal, most Bengali Muslims prefer Urdu and even claim it as their first language. In a claim unsubstantiated by any evidence, but supported by popular folklore, Suhrawardy proffered that Muslims of Calcutta, Dacca, Murshidabad, Midnapur, Malda, and Birbhum all speak

Urdu, and the rest speak some form of Bengali in which nearly half the words are in Urdu anyway.⁷⁷ Like Bakht, he couched his arguments in terms of being a Bengali Muslim and feared that if Bengali was the medium of instruction for all Bengalis, Hindu or Muslim, the Bengali Muslims would face the risk poor performance and linguistic problems.

Though the matter received attention in the press, it was put to rest by Sir Abdel Ghuznavi's long rejoinder in the 8 January 1929 *Forward*. In this issue, Ghuznavi took up Suhrawardy's challenge and stated that if one were to conduct a poll, they would find that probably ninety-five to ninety-nine percent of Bengali Muslims speak Bengali in their homes, write it in their letters, accounts, and personal diaries. Even though it may be true that Muslims of Murshidabad in north Bengal, Calcutta, and Dacca speak Urdu, it is doubtful that the majority of them actually can understand and produce literary Urdu. He argues, as members of the BMSS and MSS had, that it is because of a lack of committed education in Bengali that Bengali Muslims face educational and employment problems. In addition to education and employment, he challenges Urdu-wallahs to produce a Bengali Muslim whose Urdu writing was of any stature, whereas he easily could produce a list of Bengali Muslims, from Mir Musharraf Hussein in the nineteenth century, who wrote high quality Bengali.⁷⁸ Calcutta University, after these debates, did not change its medium of instruction to Urdu for Muslim students.

The presence of such Calcutta-based thrust for Urdu, from someone as dedicated to Bengali as Fazlul Huq, shows how multifaceted the politics of language were in the 1920s. Even with the BMSS and MSS' insistence on Bengali for a host of practical and emotional reasons, the idea that Muslim culture was to be represented by Urdu maintained its presence through the end of the decade. Rather than deny Bengaliness, many Urdu supporters separated their cultural and religious identities. So individuals like Bakht cited Bengaliness as a part of his identity, but placed learning Urdu as an essential component of their Muslim identity.

Backwardness, Bengalis, and 'Muslim' Issues in the Legislative Council

Though the MSS and the mere presence of Dacca University represented an advance in educational activities by and about Bengali Muslims, the baggage of backwardness remained in the thought-worlds of Bengali

Muslim writers. Some carried this with them in their travels to other regions. S. Wajed Ali, in a 1926 essay, memorialized his times at Aligarh in the 1900s in a bittersweet fashion, as he 'observed the smart, proud dress of Muslim boys, unlike those in poor, depressed Bengal'.⁷⁹ In such a poor, depressed Bengal, 'the Mahomedan boys form a very small fraction of the student population and the majority of them go to school in *dhoti* and *chaddar* (common forms of dress for bhadrakalok Hindus) in order to hide their identity, as they are not particularly proud of their culture or community'.⁸⁰ This relationship to 'culture' was unlike the one in England to which he travelled in the 1910s. For Ali, this England showed differences in dogma and sectarianism, but not competing claims towards culture or religion. In Muslim India, there appeared to be no consensus about what made a 'Muslim'.⁸¹

In a prescient analysis of the Muslim cultures between Bengal and north India, he found a deepening rift that only tended towards bigotry. Like his Bengali contemporaries Nazrul and Wadud, S. Wajed Ali celebrated a specific type of Islamic culture, typified by Omar Khayyam, Hafiz, Jami, and Rumi. Particularly that of Omar Khayyam, as he called it a type of literature that 'typified the modern age, as it had no specific creed, dogma, but it did have religion, it oscillated between faith, negation, belief, doubt, and Epicureanism and stoicism'.⁸²

Another part of being Muslim in Bengal was a persistent idea of Muslims as backward agriculturists and cultivators. Alive in the minds of Dacca-based students and intellectuals, this conception was also being thrashed about in Calcutta's Bengal Legislative Council in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The range of these ideas reflected in debates about two important bills, the Bengal Tenancy Bill, aimed at reforming laws about landlord-tenant relations, and the Bengal Education Bill, aimed at providing compulsory primary education for Bengal's peasants in the late 1920s.

In 1926, debates ensued about the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill in the Bengal Legislative Council. Crucial for the Bengali Muslim identity politics of the decade was the focus that all legislators placed on the identity of Muslim as 'peasant' in Bengal. It was widely acknowledged that 'there are more peasants among Muhammadans than among Hindus' and from a Hindu perspective, 'it is quite possible that Muhammadan peasants will try to take advantage of this opportunity to place their zamindars in a tight corner'.⁸³

Commenting on the consciousnessⁱ of the peasantry, Maulvi Azizul Huq concluded that 'the cultivator of the soil is not the actual owner of the soil'.⁸⁴ Fazlul Huq lambasted those opposed to the amendment (mostly Hindus), as the so-called leftists. As Maulvi Nurul Huq Chaudhuri said, 'practically there are no representations of the raiyats in this house [and] the depressed classes are not here. It is only *we, the few Muhammadans, who have taken up the advocacy of the tenants' cause* [emphasis original]... who support the cause of raiyats'.⁸⁵ Hindus agreed, as P.C. Mitter said that 'whenever I referred to the Muslims as friends of the tenants, I did so because I found their speeches were delivered by many Muslims in favor of tenants'.⁸⁶ Muslims, like Nurul Huq Chaudhuri and Fazlul Huq defended tenancy legislation because it was based on principles of social equity and distribution for Muslims and Namasudras.

This sentiment in Muslim legislative arenas also arose in the 1927 and 1928 debates about the Bengali primary education bill, which would have forced a compulsory primary education onto Bengal's peasant masses. On this question, the Central National Mohammadan Education published a report encouraging its audiences to 'remember that the Muslim population formed the majority of Bengal's population, so their interests (as Bengali Muslims) are most affected by this bill'. The report stated how it was clear that 'in Bengal, Muslims have not been able to assert their proper position in the body politic due to their illiteracy, victimization at the hands of moneylenders, rack-renting landlords, and crafty lawyers'.⁸⁷ All of the institutions who publicized official comments, like the District Muslim Association in Dacca, the Bogra National Association, the Hooghly District National Mohammadan Association, the Anjuman-I-Islamia in Pabna, and the Bogra National Mohammadan Association, stressed how the majority of Bengal's residents were both Muslims and cultivators. All of them supported the idea of universal, compulsory primary education, recognizing that the 'majority of the persons affected by the Bill are undoubtedly the Musalmans'.⁸⁸ This, in turn, spurred on efforts to support more Muslim representation on district boards and in the legislative council, as the Faridpur District Board reported that 'the bill intends to give a popular education. Musalmans are backward so their community should be adequately represented on the committees [for education and legal change]'.⁸⁹ The Muslim part of Bengali Muslim identity gained representation through these associational venues. However, the actual content of their politics, like those of the

Faridpur Anjuman Islamia in the early 1930s, referred to socio-economic issues like compulsory education, prayer in courts, and appointments in government service appropriate to their population distribution. This organization conducted a welcoming address to Governor John Anderson in 1933 during his tour of East Bengal. Though the fact that most of Faridpur's residents were Muslim was emphasized, the content of the address focused on jobs, appointments in government post, and primary education. Members of the Legislative Council like Tazimuddin Khan and Abdul Gafr Siddiqi signed a document from the address.⁹⁰

In addition to the local issues of tenancy and education, legislators were most concerned with the Round Table Conferences in London, held in 1930 and 1931. Comments arose about the nature of Muslim representation, given the fact that they produced the wealth of the country and that they were the majority of producers and cultivators. In 1931, Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin spoke of the failure of the Round Table Conferences in London to treat Bengali Muslims fairly. A perception of failure arose because 'of all the provinces, Bengal has got the largest Musalman population in India, more than a quarter of the whole Musalman population of India, and yet Bengal has got only two representatives while the UP and Bombay have been much more liberally treated'.⁹¹ Given this situation, Bengal was the most important province in India, but Muslims were not represented according to their numbers. In the midst of this debate, Azizul Haque and Abul Kasem discussed the role of Namasudras and Muslims, as both constituted the groups that produce the wealth of the country and so should have a 'proper, legitimate, and just share in the administration of the country'.⁹² In the legislative arena, as in the intellectual environment, what it meant to be a Muslim had a lot to do with their marginalization from power and their status as cultivators. In Indian Muslim politics of the late 1920s, Bengal serves as a reflection of a majority-Muslim regional consciousness to be distinguished from northern and central India, though debates about being Muslim and social and public entitlements to Muslim communities were certainly taking place at exactly the same time.

The years 1930 and 1931 witnessed intense political violence, as evidenced through the Chittagong Armory Raid in 1930, the assassination of Commissioner of Dacca in 1931, protests at the prosecution of the Armory Raiders, and heightened responses in the Muslim press.⁹³ In late 1930, it was reported by the Dacca Disturbances Enquiry Committee

that 'a new permanent source of jealousy, the political one, has come into being, and spread the infection of communal suspicion to the educated members of both communities. Until self-government came into sight, Muhammadans had nothing to fear from the political pre-dominance of Hindus, but now they recognize the necessity of fighting for their full share of representation'.⁹⁴ Such reports missed the fact that Bengali Muslim writers of the MSS, perhaps amongst the most educated and publicly visible of the Bengali Muslim communities of Dacca, were far from afflicted with the 'infection of communal jealousy', but were rather working towards both interrogating Islam and working alongside Hindus.

Views from *Mufassil* Margins

These writers were not confined to Dacca University, the MSS, *Protiva*, *Sikha*, or *Saogat*. From locations like Chittagong, along with a centre of Bengali Muslim culture alternative to Calcutta or Dacca, texts emerged like Abul Hasem Khan's *Siksha Khsetre Bangiya Musalmandiger Durabastha O Tahar Pratikar Upay*, which can be translated as 'The Horrid Situation of Education among Bengali Muslims and its Solution', in 1930. Published by the Chittagong Muhammadan Society, but circulated in Calcutta, the author dedicates the book to improving the 'miserable condition of the Bengali Muslims'.

The association, rather than being an organization to simply profess or propagate Islam (though from its name and outward markers from the text one would assume that it was only about Islam), the goals included promoting general education, the arts, crafts, commerce, physical education, and the promotion of harmless recreations. It encouraged the creation of a Muslim Institute, as others had been set up in Sylhet and Mymensingh, and a library. In addition to a library, it encouraged community members to translate works from Arabic, Farsi, and Urdu into Bengali, and since Bengali Muslims are the majority of Bengalis (though it did not offer any official statistics to back up this claim), the government should realize that their representation in government, teaching, law, and medicine does not match their numbers in society. The Bengali Muslims felt that, 'so considered by population, this land of Bengal mainly belongs to us and our right and lordship on all auspicious events and consumer goods of this land, as a group, should be more not less by any means'.⁹⁵

Residents of Chittagong would have been receiving a steady stream of information from both Dacca and Calcutta, as this and many other smaller organizations around Bengal were being started by wealthy urban, Dacca and Calcutta-based Muslims. Chittagong was the centre of both long-standing Muslim settlements, from the early fourteenth century rule by Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah, who ordered the construction of mosques and other Islamic institutions from c. 1340 CE. Through this and subsequent polities, such as the Mughal state from 1666 to the early eighteenth century, Chittagong acquired a character unlike Dacca and Calcutta as both a port city linked to Southeast Asian polities and economies, such as the Arakanese, as well as a centre for Islamic culture.

From the mid-eighteenth century, however, with the rise of the East India Company and subsequently the British imperial state, Chittagong's economic centrality was sidelined due to the rise of Calcutta. In the first partition of Bengal during 1905 to 1911, Chittagong regained prominence through its establishment as a main port in the newly established East Bengal province. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, Chittagong started to develop its own newspapers and periodicals from 1921 and by the end of the 1920s held several daily and monthly publications. The rise of Chittagong as a provincial centre outside of Calcutta or Dacca derived partially from the creation of Dacca University in the early 1921. By the end of the 1920s, many Dacca University graduates would staff various Muslim societies in places like Chittagong, such as this Muhammadan Society or the Chittagong Islamia Society, another organization that promoted community upliftment and economic development by and for Muslims. The stream of information about education, representation, and provincial politics likely came from individuals like Muhammed Ansur Ali, a Dacca University graduate active in the politics of community improvement, who produce pamphlets about self-help and economic upliftment for urban residents who wished to invest their efforts in village-level economic improvements.

Central to the Chittagong Muhammadan Society's goals was the promotion of physical work, fitness, thrift, and economic self-sufficiency, as all of these were 'the external identity of *iman*'⁹⁶ or faith. Attention to economic and social progress was seen therefore in Islamic terms. Rather than promote a distinction in terms of identity, but keeping in mind the strictures of legislators and intellectuals (like the emphasis on the Bengali language and representation in government jobs), Hasem Khan instead

promoted work and upliftment as an integral part of Islam. Work and profit should not be for the sake of greed or personal pleasure, but towards righteous living, so 'whatever is good in this world we shall collect and enjoy and distribute with two hands, thus being worthy of Allah's blessing'.⁹⁷ Lest there be any confusion, the author states unequivocally that 'the goal of our life shall be the manifestation of the Islamic ideal. Come brother Muslims, let us come and jump in the field of action emulating his example, Allah, will lead us to victory'.⁹⁸ This pattern of work would be a practical path towards upliftment as the author encouraged others to build more samitis in villages dedicated to education and practical training, setting up English schools, scholarships for Muslim students, and especially, training for Muslim teachers, as very few Muslim teacher-role models existed.⁹⁹

Mochlem Samaj Samskar, by Maulvi Ahmadulla Saheb, also from Chittagong and published in 1926, castigated the power that village mullahs had over rural society. A critique of 'mad mullahs', this maulvi declares that mullahs have little learning, care little about making sure people understand their actual preaching, and really just promote their self-worth over the community's development. Rather than depend on such quacks, he urges Muslims to focus on their own individual self-improvement without worrying about mullahs. Comparable to the MSS writers, but simply in a different framework, he suggested that 'today what is needed is vocational training and enthusiasm for a new world'. To make a new world happen, he appealed to the educated youth, like those who would have been educated in Western-styled institutions, to form more associations and promote more improvement and self-reliance.

Hafez Ashrafuddin Ahmad's 1926 *Muslim Bani* or Statements of the Muslims, declared that the most pressing need in society was 'to educate the "backward" Muslim from the *mufasssil*'. From Tripura, a nearby region of East Bengal, Ashrafuddin Ahmad described the sad plight of the Bengal peasant, as such a person who rarely has money, and is always in debt, and cultivates throughout the year without making any profits. His real audience is the Muslim peasant community, as he contrasts Muslim peasants with the Hindu community at large. In the Hindu community one can find people 'doing so well, working, having no idle time, intelligent... They have covered the three great aspects of modern culture: work, education, and money-making through trade'.¹⁰⁰

In 1927, two texts emerged with the phrase *muktir path*, or path towards freedom, in the title. Khalilur Rahman's *Bartaman Muktir Path Ki*¹⁰¹ (What is the present path towards freedom today?), includes the parable of a play concerning three women talking about their husbands. The author puts the voice of social uplift and self-improvement into one of the characters, Kanakbala. She talks of how *byabsha* or business, is the way towards freedom and uplift. Muslims of Bengal used to be so dominant in culture, the arts, in business, but now, *jamidars* spend lavish sums on festivals and domestic pleasures. Meanwhile, the majority of Muslims are desperate peasants who cling to prohibitions on taking interest and so never enter into *byabsha* or business. In no uncertain terms, *byabsha* is the way towards freedom, as peasants are crushed by debt burdens. Also for Muslims, *fakirs* and *maulvis* poison their followers with all sorts of misinformation, as they 'don't even know the *kalima*, they are not to be trusted...[there are] more beggars in Muslims society because of ignorance and the dominance of cheating *fakirs*'.¹⁰² Though the text is a propaganda piece urging Muslims to take to the nationalist movement at the end, the author creates an entire character whose role in the play seems to be to demystify the poverty of Muslims and suggest paths for improvement.

Mohammed Abduswafi Mollah's *Muktipath*, from Bogra, also focused on succeeding in business and saving money for investment and progress in the future, but within a more 'Islamic' framework, as the path towards freedom included establishing an Islamic samiti in every village in Bengal, to monitor and ensure 'religious living'. But in the section titled 'How to Live a Good Religious Life', the author states that the *muktipath* is really a *karmapath* (path of work) and living a good religious life was about creating a strong rural community through education and saving money. The cause of living irreligiously, of going astray, actually had worldly causes like poverty, lack of education, and a lack of social organization and discipline.

As some were discussing language politics in the context of Urdu and Bengali, which itself had been a theme of both rural and urban writers since 1922, an extraordinary text from Bogra, published by the Bogra Musalman Sahitya Samiti, expounds a national identity for Bengali Muslims in ways that Dacca-ites hadn't even considered. This text, *Muslim Jati Tattva* (Facts of the Muslim Nation), written by Golam Jilani Nurul Hosen Kasimpuri in 1926, derived from one of those predominantly

Muslim regions that had been recognized in the 1871 census as a source of mystery. The fact of a Muslim majority population in an area somehow deemed Hindu, and far from old centres of Muslim political power, was the mystery the census revealed. The mid-1920s was also when Muslim samitis and institutes devoted to Muslim culture had been developing in Bogra, in Sylhet, and in Mymensingh.¹⁰³

This book is a national manifesto for Bengali Muslims. It establishes pride in the Islamic history of Bogra, claiming that instead of the common belief that Mohammed Bakhtyar Khilji was the first Muslim to come to Bengal in the thirteenth century, Gazi Choltan Balkhi was the first. He was allegedly sent by the Caliph of Baghdad to preach in East Bengal and died in Hijri 545, which is approximately 1150 CE. This fact is not mentioned in any of the histories about Bengali Muslims, according to the author, not even Khondokar Fazli Rubbee's famous *Origin of Bengal Muslims* (originally published in 1891). Wadud himself took issue with Rubbee, in his 1950 *Creative Bengal*, because Rubbee claimed that Bengali Muslims were actually descendants of aristocrats from central and west Asia, not converts of low-caste Hindus. But Kasimpuri stated that since there is no accurate history of Bengali Muslims, a new one that can make Bengali Muslims proud, should be constructed. He proposed a new history to take into account the lower orders, something that Rubbee did not do. As a corrective to the 'first Muslim in Bengal' debate, he discusses the life of Gazi Choltan Balkhi, a relatively unknown figure in Bengali Muslim circles at the time. He also claimed that since the tomb of Balkhi, along with others from his time, is buried in Mymensingh, Balkhi must have been the first. The foreword by an unknown writer claimed that since the book 'contains an account of all categories such as ashraf-atrap and no effort has been spared to include impartial criticism, it is like a national mirror for Bengali Muslims'.¹⁰⁴

On the other side of Bengal, in 1927, a similar text, by Khondokar Golam Ahmed appeared in Bardhaman, in West Bengal. In this text, *Muslim Jatir Itihas* or the History of the Muslim Jati, we find a similar urge, though the emphasis was on the history and pride of Islam. Maulvi Golam Ahmed aimed to instil that pride into Bengali Muslims in an abstract way, not through an examination of Bengal's past or present. The text contains a foreword by a Hindu, Sri Srirashamoi Mitra, who quoted Cicero in his shining respect towards history. Since Muslims had been in India for 800 years, Mitra strongly encourages Muslims to write

their own histories. But this history was on the level of Islamic history, not Bengali history. As Mitra's student, Ahmed wrote a ten chapter treatise on the history of Islam from its emergence through its spread across the world into western and central Asia, India, and Southeast Asia. He included a long section on the Mughal Empire, but no substantive analysis of Bengal's Muslims. Rather, he simply showed how Islam was a force for good. In order to instil pride in Muslims, as they rise in European and English education, they need to understand their past as Muslims, not as Bengali Muslims.

The idea of being Muslim, though marked by a growing sense of culture and Bengali-ness, belonged to the province of social change and uplift. A concurrent explosion of writing about Bengali Muslim literary identity, past, present, and future was taking place. Indeed, speaking and writing Bengali, starting local libraries, abolishing the prohibition on interest, and working towards ameliorating the problems of Bengali peasants, were all part of multi-faceted efforts at defining the boundaries of Bengali Muslimness in the 1920s.

* * *

The next chapter shall investigate how these conceptions of Bengali Muslim culture, language, and Islam transformed in the 1930s. As the political centres of change moved from the urban locations of Calcutta and Dacca to the hinterland in the 1930s, accompanied by the extension of the franchise in rural locations and the rise of middling and rich peasants, the Bengal social and intellectual landscape changed for Bengali Muslims. By the late 1930s, Bengali Muslim literary critics and writers were not only continually interrogating Islam, but were also interrogating the meaning and markers of Bengali, in creative and open-ended ways.

Notes

1. Second year Presidential Address, Muslim Sahitya Samaj/Muslim Literary Society, Dacca University, cited in Habib Rahman (ed.), *Muslim Sahitya Samaj-er Barshik Adhibeshan* (The Muslim Literary Society's Yearly Addresses) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2002), p. 128.

2. See Nazia Hussain, "The City of Dacca, 1921–1947" in Kenneth Ballhatchet and John Harrison (eds), *The City in South Asia: Pre-Modern and Modern* (London: Center for South Asian Studies, School for Oriental and African Studies, 1980), pp. 198–213.

3. See M.K.U. Molla, *The New Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1905–1911* (Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 1981), passim.

4. See Mumtassir Mamoon (ed.), *Unish Satake Bangladesher Sangbad-Samayikpatra* (Newspapers and Periodicals of Nineteenth Century Bengal), vol. II, nos 1–2 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987).

5. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatre* (Journals of Muslim Bengal), 1831–1930 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969), passim.

6. Regarding these landmark riots, see Government of Bengal Home Political File, No. 187, 1926 and the Bengal Fortnightly Reports, No. 112, IV and V, 1926. For a concise summary, see Kenneth McPherson, *Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918–1935* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974), pp. 90–4.

7. There exists ample documentation of these inflammatory leaflets. These two, which come from the first round of riots in April 1926, are found in MSS Eur F160, Papers of Lytton, 'Reports of 1926 Calcutta Riots'.

8. Quoted in Sibnarayan Ray, 'The Sikha (1927–32) Movement—I: A Note on the Bengali Muslim Intelligentsia in Search of Modernity', *Radical Humanist* (December, 1977), p. 10.

9. Shahadat Khan, *The Freedom of Intellect Movement (Buddhir Mukti Andolon) in Bengali Muslim Thought, 1926–1938* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), p. 53.

10. Khan, 'Freedom of Intellect Movement', pp. 63–5.

11. Kazi Abdul Wadud, 'Bangali Mussalmaner Sahitya Samasya', *Sikha*, vol. 1 (1927): p. 30.

12. Kazi Motahar Hussein, 'Tritiya Barsher Karjya Bibarani', *Sikha*, vol. II (1928): p. 22.

13. See Nazia Khanum, 'Dacca University, 1921–1947: Context, Controversy, Impact', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Humanities* 49, 2 (December 2004) 283–334, for an overview of Dacca University's history.

14. Nazia Khanum, 'Dacca University, 1921–47', pp. 286–7.

15. Ibid, p. 296.

16. Ibid, p. 301.

17. Ibid, pp. 317–20.

18. Dacca University Annual Report, 1926–27, p. 12. The report also commented on how few Muslim lecturers existed in an institution that was intended for the upliftment of the backward Muslim community. See also Khanum, 'Dacca University, 1921–47', p. 320, for a table listing the number of students enrolled, by religion, from 1924–45.

19. Mahmud Hassan, 'Dacca University and the Pakistan Movement' quoted in Wakil Ahmed, 'Muslim Organizations of Dacca, 1874–1947' in Sharifuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Dacca: Past, Present, and Future* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1991), p. 126.

20. Hasan 'Dacca University and the Pakistan Movement'.

21. For details on the composition of the group and its audiences, see Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Bengali Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1959), p. 28 and Soumitra Sinha, *The Quest for Modernity and the Bengal Muslims, 1921–47* (Kolkata: Minerva, 1995), pp. 109–11.

22. See Shahadat Khan, 'Freedom of the Intellect Movement', chapter 4.

23. Anwaril Kadir, 'Bangali Mussalmaner Samajik Galad', *Sikha*, Vol. 1 (1927): p. 60.

24. Ibid, p. 60.

25. Abul Hussein, 'Adesher Nigraha', *Sikha*, vol. 1 (1927), reprinted in Abdul Quadir (ed.), *Abul Hussainer Rachanavali*, (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1968) pp. 60–74. This was also published in the Hindu journal *Shanti* in 1929. Another similar article by Hussein is 'Nishedher Biramvana' (Dilemmas of Prohibition), *Abhijan*, vol. 1 (1926): pp. 20–6.

26. Abul Hussein, 'Adesher Nigraha', p. 60.

27. These ideas echo earlier nineteenth-century contributions by Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Moulvi Chirag Ali in the 1880s and 1890s. Aziz Ahmad in *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) terms Chirag Ali's work, written largely under the influence of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 'speculative modernism', see pp. 57–64. See also Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), chapter 4.

28. Abul Hussein, 'Adesher Nigraha', p. 63.

29. See Kazi Motahar Hussein, 'Dwitya Barsha Pratham Adhibeshan', quoted in Shahadat Khan, 'Freedom of the Intellect Movement', p. 217.

30. Mohammed Abdur Rashid, 'Muktir Agraha Banam Adesher Nigraha', *Sikha*, vol. V, no. 10 (1927): pp. 791–2.

31. Kazi Motahar Hussein, 'Dharma O Samaj', *Sikha*, vol. III (1929): p. 113.

32. Kazi Abdul Wadud, 'Sanmohita Mussalman', first read on July 8, 1927, in the MSS, and published in Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Naba Parjay* (New Directions), p. 71.

33. Kazi Abdul Wadud, 'Sanhomita Musalman', p. 73.

34. Khan's response to Wadud was published in the *Masik Mohammadi*, vol. 1, no. 5 (1927): pp. 272–6. Hussein's defence of Wadud and response to Khan was published in *Jagaran*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1928): pp. 37–40.

35. This book was first published in 1925 in Calcutta by Mohammed Khairul Anam Khan, his eldest son, who published many of his books and managed most of his journalistic activities.

36. This type of debate about Islam, in the *bahas* (public debates) is discussed in Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for*

Identity (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981). These were a part of Bengali society since the 1860s and certainly also a part of the broader South Asian Muslim social environment.

37. This tradition of arguing for the humanity of the Prophet has a long history within Islamic philosophy, also stretching back at least since the Mu'tazilites of the ninth century CE.

38. Abul Hussein, 'Sab-janta', *Jagaran*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1928): p. 39.

39. This again echoes the Mu'tazilite position. Given Hussein's background it is likely that he would have been familiar with early Islamic history. Though he does not explicitly mention Mu'tazilite philosophy, their influence is undeniably clear in this point of view.

40. Abul Hussein, 'Sab-janta', *Jagaran*, vol. 1 (1928): p. 82.

41. Abul Hussein, 'Sab-janta', *Jagaran*, vol. 1 (1928): p. 83.

42. These apologies are reprinted in Khondokar Sirajul Huq, *Muslim Sahitya Samaj: Samaj Chinta Sahitya Karma*, pp. 123–4.

43. Abul Hussein, 'Bangali Mussalmaner Bhabishyar', read in the MSS, January 15, 1928, published in *Jagaran* vol. 1, no. 2 (1929): pp. 44–7.

44. Abul Hussein, 'Bangali Mussalman Sikha Samasya', I and II read in the MSS in 1927 and 1928 respectively, published as a book with the same title (Dacca: Modern Library, 1928).

45. Abul Hussein, 'Bangali Mussalman Sikha Samasya II', passim and Shahadat Khan, 'Freedom of Intellect Movement', pp. 236–42.

46. Bengal Provincial Committee Report, 'Problems in Muslim Education: Bengali Muslims Entitled to Reparations', 1928, p. 3.

47. Bengal Provincial Committee Report, p. 3.

48. 'Bangali Musalmaner Arthik Samasya', vol. 1 (1927).

49. Abdur Rahman Khan, 'Europe Sikha Adarsher Chromobikash', *Sikha*, vol. 3, (1929): p. 41.

50. Mamtazuddin Ahmad, 'Sikha Samasya', *Sikha*, vol. 3 (1929): p. 29.

51. Cited in Habib Rahman (ed.), *Muslim Sahitya Samājer Barshik Adhiveshan* (Yearly Addresses of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2002), p. 20.

52. *Ibid*, p. 28.

53. S. Wajed Ali, 'Sabhapatir Abhibhasan' (Address by the President), published by the Bengali Muslim Literary Society as a book in 1925 in Calcutta.

54. S. Wajed Ali, 'Sabhapatir Abhibhasan' (Address by the President), 1925.

55. Majumdar, a Dacca-based Bengali Hindu writer and intellectual became famous for a controversy surrounding the fame of Nazrul's poem 'Bidrohi' (Rebel) as Majumdar claimed Nazrul plagiarized from Majumdar's works. In 1929, Majumdar read a paper 'Muslim Sahitya Samaj' (Muslim

Literature Society) in which he acknowledges the contribution Muslims made to Bengali civilization in the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries and how Bengali culture was inseparable from the history of Muslim settlement in the region. Majumdar was perhaps the only Dacca-based writer active in the MSS who, unlike Wadud and Hussein, whose models were Rammahun, Rabindranath, and various traditions from modern Europe, saw the internal Muslim tradition in Bengal as a role model for contemporary politics, that is, the movement to create a specifically Bengali Muslim literature.

56. See Rajat Sanyal, 'Protiva and Sikha: Two Faces of Literary Culture of Early 20th Century Dacca' in Sharifuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Dacca: Past, Present, and Future*, pp. 258–74, for a description of Dacca's literary culture in the early twentieth century.

57. Mujibur Rahman, 'An Address to Muslim Students', *Peace*, vol. VI (April 1930): pp. 63–4.

58. A.T.M. Abdul Hai, 'The Prophet as a Social Reformer', *Peace*, vol. VI, no. 8 (August 1930): 150.

59. A.K. Ahmad Khan, 'Socialism in Islam', *Peace*, vol. 5 (May 1929): p. 74.

60. Ibid, p. 75.

61. 'Humor', *Peace*, vol. VI, no. 7 (July 1930): p. 140.

62. See Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000), for discussions of how religion as faith and religion as social identity have been erroneously conflated in South Asian historiography.

63. Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1925–26, p. xxiv.

64. Ibid.

65. See Abul Kalam Shamsuddin's chapter titled *Saogat* in his autobiography, *Atit Diner Smriti* (Memories of Old Days) (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1994), pp. 293–6.

66. Khan's writings about Islam in the Bangla language actually started to appear in 1905, with his Bengali translation of the Qur'an. This was not the first Bengali translation of the Qur'an, however, as the Brahmo leader Girish Chandra Sen, translated the first Qur'an into Bengali in 1886. Khan was quite close to Sen and often looked to him as a mentor. A prolific writer, Khan wrote fourteen books on Islam in Bengali, including several works of tafsir and many essays in the newspapers *Mohammadi* and *Azad*. See A.T.M. Atiqur Rahman, *Banglar Rajnitite Maulana Akram Khan* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1995), Chapter 5, 'Maulana Akram Khan-er Sangabadikata O Sahityakarma' (Maulana Akram Khan's Journalistic and Literary Life), pp. 97–114.

67. Bengal Council Legislative Proceedings, 1913, p. 580.

68. Report on Indian Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal, 1922–23, Saturday July 1922, pp. 571–2.

69. Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1925–26, p. xxiii.

70. *Bengalee*, 1 January 1926, p. 4.

71. *Bengalee*, 13 March 1926, p. 2.

72. Bedar Bakht, Memorandum on Behalf of the Muslim Graduates Association, Calcutta, to the Royal Statutory Commission, 1928, Mss EUR E221/52(a) Philip Hartog Papers, Notes on Muslim Education submitted to the Education Committee, 1926–1929.

73. Ibid.

74. These colonial accounts include the reports of Sir Philip Hartog and Arthur Dash's many reports on Muslim education.

75. See Nurul Huq Choudhuri, *Notes on Muslim Education submitted to the Education Committee, 1926–1929*. This detailed report responded to the conclusions presented by Arthur Dash, as Education Secretary, in his 'Muhammadan Education in Bengal', November 11, 1928 and Sir Philip Hartog's December 11, 1928 letter on the same theme. He does not give precise numbers, but his rationale for calling caste Hindus a 'small minority' stemmed from interpreting lower caste and outcast Hindus as forming a completely separate community apart from caste Hindus.

76. Bedar Bakht, Memorandum, 1928.

77. Statement Issued to the Press from Mr Mahmood Suhrawardy, Member of the Council of State, West Bengal, January 8, 1929, Mss EUR E221/52(a) Philip Hartog Papers, 'Notes on Muslim Education submitted to the Education Committee, 1926–1929'.

78. Sir Abdel Ghuznavi, editorial, January 8, 1929, *Forward*, duplicated in Mss EUR E221/52(a) Philip Hartog Papers, 'Notes on Muslim Education submitted to the Education Committee, 1926–1929'.

79. S. Wajed Ali, 'Aligarh Memories', *Muslim Review* 26, 2 (October–November 1926): 39.

80. Ibid.

81. See Amber Abbas, 'Isolation and Solidarity: Aligarh Students and The Demand for Pakistan', unpublished paper delivered at the Margins and Centers in South Asian Islam Workshop, University of North Texas, Denton, TX., March 11, 2011.

82. Ibid, p. 88.

83. Report on Administration of Bengal, 1925–26, p. xviii.

84. Report on Administration of Bengal, 1927–28, p. 27.

85. Ibid, p. 486.

86. Ibid, p. 617.

87. Opinions on the Bengal Primary Education Bill, Calcutta, 1927, p. 4.

88. Ibid, p. 34.

89. Ibid, p. 37.

90. Mss EUR G119 Addresses of Welcome to Anderson, Governor of Bengal, 1933. Partha Chatterjee, 'Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal, 1926–35' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), reflects on the growing division between Muslim and Hindu legislators in the late 1920s, particularly around these bills of tenancy and educational reform. He complicates one strand of historiography that links continual demands for Muslim representation in the public sphere with 'communalism'. He claims the existence of 'structures of political authority and ideology quite autonomous from the straightforward representation of the political structure', p. 11. However, Chatterjee avoids any discussion of the many attempts by Muslim intellectuals outside of the legislative sphere to create a culturally distinct and socially viable 'Muslim' identity through literature and social critique.

91. Report on Administration of Bengal, 1931–32, p. 61.

92. Ibid.

93. Report on Administration of Bengal, 1930–31, p. xv.

94. Report on Administration of Bengal, 1929–30, p. xxiv.

95. Abul Hasem Khan, *Sikha Kshetre Bangiya Musalmandiger Durabastha O Kahar Pratikar Upay* (Calcutta, 1930), p. 10.

96. Ibid., p. 8.

97. Ibid., p. 40.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid., pp. 41–2.

100. *Muslim Bani*, 1926.

101. This text was produced in Comilla in East Bengal.

102. *Bartaman Muktir PathKi?*, p. 43.

103. Sylhet, in north Bengal, started its Muslim Samiti in 1926, and Mymensingh in the east also started in 1926. All of these regions are rural and were inhabited mostly by Muslims who were quite distinct from the Muslims of cities like Calcutta or Dacca who were familiar with Urdu and Persian. Writers of census and anthropological literature of the 1870s and 1880s focused on regions like these and their mysteriously high populations of Muslims.

104. *Muslim Jati-Tattva*, p. 10.

4. *Regional Confidence and the Rise of Folklore*

As much as the Congress leaders put on a Hindu face, I put on more of a 'Muslim' face. This Muslimness of course was not about actual religion nor was it about opposing another religion. I felt only a sense of autonomy, independence, and self-respect.

—Abul Mansur Ahmed, 1938¹

One of the most celebrated Bengali Muslim intellectuals of the late colonial period, Abul Mansur Ahmed would often experience ridicule in Calcutta because of his Muslim social identity. His name would be scrutinized, his background and educational credentials would be questioned. In short, he would find that a Muslim social identity, being labelled a Muslim in public (regardless of the actual faith of Islam, something quite distant from his social identity), was a point of contention in the Hindu-dominated world of Bengali literature, publishing, and intellectual labour in the 1920s and 1930s. By the late 1930s, as a writer working in both Calcutta and his East Bengali home town of Mymensingh, he came to identify with 'religion' not in the sense of ritual,

faith, or belief, but as a political strategy in the service of fighting social inequities.² This did not begin as an abstract critique, but as a response to, and reflection about, personal discrimination.

This chapter discusses how such a strategy acquired meaning and purpose in the 1930s by examining conversations within Bengali Muslim circles about language and cultural identity between 1933 and 1939. Such conversations sharpened notions of Bengali Muslim selfhood in the literary and journalistic world. In this chapter I focus primarily on the writings and horizons of one such example of journalistic and literary development in the form of *Bulbul* (Nightingale),³ a magazine active between 1933 and 1938. Published in Calcutta, this magazine was a touchstone of Bengali Muslim intellectual life, much like the Muslim Sahitya Samaj of the late 1920s or like the writings of Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmad of the early 1920s. *Bulbul's* writers detailed a growing sense of Bengali Muslim culture by constructing the boundaries of a specifically Bengali Muslim language, literature, and culture that would draw from both Hindu and Muslim elements. This distinctiveness was not fashioned as religiously Muslim by either the Muslims at the forefront of such construction or by the many Hindus who were also actively involved in this process. As a marker of the particular nature of the development of discourses of 'culture' in Bengal, from the early 1920s, Hindus had been a part of literary endeavour started by Bengali Muslims, including the magazines of *Dhumketu*, *Langol*, and *Samyabadi* of early 1920s Calcutta or the Muslim Sahitya Samaj of Dacca in the late 1920s. *Bulbul* is no exception and included Hindu writers in nearly every issue (Figure 4.1). Though the thematic content of many of the journals' included Islam, of course, it did not close off the possibility of Hindu voices.

Central to Bengali Muslim culture was the growing excavation of 'folk' culture that comprised the foundation of a literary past. This excavation was undertaken by poets like Jasimuddin and linguists like Muhammazd Shahidullah. Both were trained in folklore studies by Dinesh Chandra Sen, the Calcutta University Bengal studies scholar who had initiated such explorations since the early 1920s. Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad, another folklorist and committed collector of Bengali punthi manuscripts, also made headlines during the 1930s with a focus on the Bengali Muslim medieval literary past. These authors and their works delineated the precise boundaries of a Bengali Muslim culture. This chapter includes



Figure 4.1 Cover of *Bulbul* (Nightingale), 1933

Source: From Nasreen Shums (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul* (Selected Articles from *Bulbul*) (Dhaka: Bulbul Publishing House, 2005).

a detailed discussion of the politics of folklore as well as how these individuals rose to prominence in late colonial Bengal.

Right after the wide-ranging 1935 Government of India Act, the election season of 1936–37 marked a critical phase in the development of

Bengali Muslim politics of the decade. As prominent activists of the era have noted,⁴ electoral politics began to focus increasingly on the masses of Bengali Muslim peasants from this year onwards. Bengali peasants had certainly been organizing politically before, at least since the 1929 formation of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti (All-Bengal Peasant Conference), but from the mid-1930s onwards they entered centre stage in Bengali politics.

In an all-India sense also, the 1935 Act signalled an increase in the size of the electorate throughout colonial India. Both demography and peasant consciousness were manipulated by members of the Muslim League (ML) and the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) by the end of the decade. Central to the consciousness of Bengali Muslims were concurrent changes of an electoral presence alongside a development of literary identity. A rising awareness of demography, increased emphasis on peasant demands, and the eventual overlap between the KPP and the ML by the end of the decade, therefore, forms the concluding portion of this chapter and a foundation for analysis of the 1940s. The confluence of these three discursive forces—the power of demographic awareness, peasant politics, and the overlap between the KPP and the ML—was only reflected in the writings by Bengali Muslim critics and literary activists, but was actively promoted by them.

Fashioning a distinctive Muslim social and literary identity in the 1930s included a thoughtful relationship with Urdu literary and cultural dominance as well as an appreciation of the role of Urdu and prominent all-India Muslim keywords and benchmarks, like the writings of Muhammed Iqbal. Bengali Muslim writers, evidenced most directly in *Bulbul*, were quite conversant with Iqbal, Hali, and other writers working in the Urdu and Persian language traditions. Rather than simply giving a knee-jerk opposition to Urdu dominance, Bengali Muslims shaped their own appreciation of Urdu, but focused on constructing a recognizably Bengali Muslim form of literature. As for Hindus, the other group who appeared to dominate the production of literature and philosophy from the perspective of many Bengali Muslims, their output too was critically understood and included in their overall literary consciousness. Far from being 'communal', Bengali Muslim identity as seen from the literary and *Bulbul*-centred perspective and writings in other journals like *Mohammadi* and *Saogat*, was linked to both material culture in general, and to creative appropriations of various Urdu-centred or Bengali Hindu-centered

expressions of culture in particular. Always inclusive of Hindu voices to some degree, Bengali Muslim journalism of the 1930s strove to transcend the Hindu–Muslim divide and construct a literature that spoke to both communities. This literary criticism that developed in the 1930s grew to become a distinctive social practice, comparable to other instances in European and American history, where debating the form and content of literature assumed a practice in and of itself that marked new formations of community.⁵

Economic transformations in the agrarian social structure and social relations in the countryside dictated, to a great degree, how the identities of Bengali Muslims would be articulated. Since the Sanyassi and Fakir agitations of the 1770s, the Faraizi agitations of the mid-nineteenth century, and in the articulations of Muslim community improvement and peasant cultivation in the 1900s and 1910s, Muslims in Bengal had often seen their political identities intertwined with peasant politics. But with the emergence of modern credit in the East Bengali countryside, an unequal but necessary symbiosis between the mostly Hindu *talukdars* and *mahajans* and the predominantly Muslim and mostly undifferentiated cultivator groups in East Bengal had usually prevailed.⁶ This symbiosis outlasted conflicts as peasant small-holding families, crucial for the East Bengali economy, had to depend on credit for their own reproduction. But in the 1930s, with the onset of the Great Depression, and the disappearance of credit, the Hindu mahajans lost their role in reproducing the East Bengali social structure, and Muslim rural elites began to assume greater roles of power in maintaining social relations and articulating communitarian grievances based on material concerns.

As opposed to jotedar-dominated north Bengal, or west Bengal's small-holding-demesne labour complex, East Bengal was defined by a peasant-smallholding system filled mostly with Muslim and Namasudra cultivators. In the east, most cultivators held some titles to land and often controlled the labour of others. As opposed to rent or powerful local jotedars, fluctuations in the world market began to cause serious changes in the agrarian social relations of rural East Bengal. For the first time in the history of East Bengal, rural Muslim elites, though not new in and of themselves, began to acquire more of a voice and vision in local and provincial politics, aided by the general rise of the electorate in the middle of the decade. It is in this context that the writers of *Bulbul* and other literary and cultural critics must be analyzed.

Bulbul

As MSS output started to decline in quantitative and qualitative terms in the early 1930s, *Bulbul*, a Calcutta journal of arts, culture, and critique assumed the task of 'emancipating the intellect'.⁷ Beginning in 1933, just as Kazi Abdul Wadud and Abul Hussain were being further attacked by Muhammed Akram Khan and his ilk, this journal continued pushing the boundaries of intellectual work by and for Bengali Muslims.

Habibullah Bahar, the founder and original editor of *Bulbul*, was a writer, editor, and sportsman. Close to Nazrul, the great poet visited him in his Chittagong home in 1926, after massive rioting had engulfed the city. At Bahar's home, the poet wrote two books, *Sindhu-Hindol* and *Chakrabak*. He carried forth the spirit of the 1920s movements for rationalism and skepticism amongst the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia. He also made a name for himself as a master footballer in the Mohammadan Sporting Club. During his reign as captain of this football team, the football team won several awards and began to bolster pride in Muslim identity amongst the Muslim youth of Bengal.⁸

According to a scholar of Bengali literature,⁹ *Bulbul* was the most advanced and enlightened journal of the age, more so than even *Saogat* and *Mohammadi*, the other two leading Bengali Muslim journals of the time.¹⁰ Two thematic avenues organize its contributions to history. The writings of the journal maintain an enthusiasm for writing in the Bengali language, as well as an investment in the Bengali Muslim literary past, coupled with a progressive intellectual freedom. This investment in Bengali Muslim culture was now supported by the rising importance of demography, foreshadowed by debates about the rise of the Muslim population in Bengal that had begun in the 1870s. The highly local politics of Bengali Muslims were shaped partially by developments at the all-India level and the broader regional level, so that the awareness of demography and issues of relevance to the all-India Muslim community were always on the conceptual map of Bengali Muslims.

In addition to language and cultural distinctiveness, Bengali Muslim writers continually examined their relationship to Islam. In *Bulbul*, writers participated in an all-India discourse of Muslim culture, evidenced by the many critical articles about Islam, and translations of various essays and poems from Urdu into Bengali. The point of these translations was not merely to ingest Urdu-based literature and culture into the Bengali

orbit, but to appreciate the pan-Indian 'Muslim landscape represented by Iqbal, Hali, and Urdu literature and philosophy. Simultaneously, *Bulbul* writers encouraged a multivalent Bengali Muslim cultural and intellectual *ecumene*, avoiding a simple choice on one side of the divide between a 'Bengali' (and presumably Hindu) and 'Muslim' (presumably Urdu) literature. Alongside discussions of Iqbal, Hali, and Sayyid Ahmed existed critical but respectful assessments of famous Bengali Hindu writers like Rabindranath, Bankim Chandra, and Sarat Chandra.¹¹

This critique engaged with the fact that Bengali Hindus, such as Bankim Chandra, and Rammohun Roy, were seen as constructing and shaping Bengali literary and intellectual culture. This critique, led mostly by Kazi Abdul Wadud, signalled a new phase in the sophistication of Bengali Muslim cultural identity politics by focusing on the relationship with Bengali Hindus in the field of literature. Finally, Jasimuddin, Shahidullah, and Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad, rising Muslim stars in the new discipline of folklore studies contributed by writing articles and by giving excerpts of short poems about early Bengali literary history.

Within the magazine's first year, many essays continued with a focus on rationalism and approaches to Muslim identity. In 1933, M. Wajed Ali's opening essay, 'The Feeling of the Age', urged readers to take up the current innovations of science and modern thought. Ali was disappointed at how even though science and rationalism was bandied about people were not living scientifically. He urged his readers to approach science through an Islamic framework, asserting that science and quest for knowledge about nature were cited in Muslim religious texts. It was not religion that was holding Muslims back from science, it was sheer superstition and aversion to change that proved to be obstacles of progress.¹²

In the same issue, Abul Hussein, the MSS leader, placed the urge towards rationalism directly into an Islamic context, arguing that Islamic tradition dictates rationalism and change. His essay titled 'Muslim Culture and its Philosophical Foundations' compares the historical rise of rationalism and science in Europe with Islam's history. He claimed that Islam's entire existence and foundation is based on rational moves away from idol worship and tribalism towards a universal brotherhood and the use of the intellect. Hussein engaged in an extended critique of Ernest Renan's infamous diatribe which stated that 'Islam will perish without striking a blow by the sheer influence of European science'.¹³ For Renan, young Muslims in Turkey and Egypt of the 1930s were inclining towards

European science and rationalism, thereby threatening the existence of Islam. Hussein agreed with Muslims embracing science, but unlike Renan, stated that the avoidance of change would actually be non-Islamic. From the Qur'anic injunctions regarding *ijtihad* (reason) and its internally logical programme to distribute wealth, the foundations of Muslim culture were actually in line with the prevailing tendency in Europe towards some form of socio-economic justice and rational governance. Hussein condemned the Muslims around him for 'not living up to the Islam defined by yearning for change, knowledge, and experimentation',¹⁴ as these elements defined modern Europe for Hussein.

Arguments about literature began to take the form of nuanced critiques. Motahar Hussein Choudhury initiated this trend with a lengthy disquisition entitled 'Sahitya Sombondhe Nana Katha' (A Few Words about Literature). In this essay the author critiques the two poles of literature common in the Western world at the time, realism and idealism. Seeking to strike a balance between the two, Choudhury invited Bengali writers to try to steer a middle path, in a way that would be most appropriate for Bengali Muslims. The author wanted more emotion, feeling, and spirit to enter into literature, so that Bengali Muslims would feel free to introduce common subject matter into their writing.

Abul Kalam Shamsuddin went further and inserted Bengali literature into a long line of literary and philosophical criticism, citing Europeans like Croce and Russell extensively. He also noted the range of Indian thinkers over time, such as Akbar, Kabir, Nanak, and Rammohun Roy, who all have reformed and added to Indian society, but not actually revolutionized the literary representations of society. Shamsuddin stopped short of advocating a particular approach for Bengali Muslims, but critiqued the existing frameworks as having either too extreme a position on realism or idealism. Both a critique of the West as a literary frame and an emphasis on Indian history and culture merged in these opinions. For Choudhury, the impending 1936–37 election season was key, as he mentioned it as an important part of the 'real' world that writers should include in their literature, something never done before.¹⁵ The election process itself did not necessarily need inclusion, but the fact that Bengali Muslims were fast increasing their numbers in public politics should be a part of the literary universe of Bengali Muslims.

Criticism in the first editions of *Bulbul* was not confined only to abstract questions of form but also directly attacked Bengali literature of

the day. Wadud contributed a long critique of Bankim Chandra's realism and talents in the second edition in 1933. In this essay, he actually detailed how Bengali literature is to be assessed. In his review of Bankim Chandra's novels and talents, he condemned the prevailing Bengali literary adulation of Bankim as unfounded, not because of his lack of talent with language, but because his realism and character formation would not hold up to standards used to assess European literature. Tolstoy emerges for Wadud as a prime example of high standard European literature. Tolstoy's characters, though provincial and often drawn from specific environments, are also drawn with detailed efforts to make them universally understood. But Bankim's Kamalakanta, Chandrasekhar, Matibibi, Jebunessa, Sitaram, popular Hindu heroes and Muslim villains, were too provincial to be appreciated outside of their own contexts. They 'come from ideas, not from reality, and are taken from many places...with an odd sense of the *desh*'.¹⁶ This sense of *desh* or nation, was not only critiqued for its devaluation of Muslims and elevation of Hindus, as in earlier periods of Bengali Muslim literary criticism,¹⁷ but was seen as a defect in literature for all Bengalis which has to be collectively overcome. Wadud ended his essay by declaring love and respect for Bankim's talents, but encouraging historical and sophisticated engagement with literary production. Without this it would be impossible to measure the worth, value, and future of modern Bengali literature. A temporal aspect, an interest in the possible future, not the past in which Bankim is mired, coloured Wadud's critiques.

A critical voice productive of Bengali Muslim consciousness developed in general discussions of literature from the second issue onwards. Motahar Hussein Choudhury, Nazrul, and Humayun Kabir's essays about the usage and values of literature in the second and third issues produced in 1934 evince this consciousness. All of these authors discuss what literature, beyond the issue of Bengali Muslims expressing themselves in their mother tongue, can and may do for a nation.

Nazrul's literary review 'Today's World Literature' discussed the way two tracks of literature in the world, one represented by Shelley's 'Skylark' and Milton's 'Birds of Paradise', which sees and celebrates heaven, and the other represented by those who celebrate the real world, people like Shaw and Gorky. He then praised writers like Dostoyevsky, Gorky, Pushkin, Knut Hamsun, and Johan Bojar. All of these writers shared the intent of 'making the unholy holy' through depictions of peasant life and modern turmoil and frustration. Nazrul then inserted Indian metaphors and ideas

into his assessment of world literature. In his critique of Knut Hamsun's novel *Growth of the Soil* and Bojar's *The Great Hunger and the Swan*, Nazrul claimed that Indian readers will feel the pain and joy of the Upanishads and Vedas, in both of their emphasis on man's helplessness. Freud and Shaw's ideas of disappointment from desire actually mesh with Vedantic and Buddhist ideas relating to desire for Nazrul. He ended his essay by looking forward to a new world where Indians may write literature celebrating problems of peasants. In this new world, both the forces of literary and philosophical change in Europe, and an investment in Indian culture and conditions would lead to a new literary situation. He ended it encapsulating the motto of the journal *Bulbul*, 'this bird will not die!'¹⁸

Though he did not advocate a specific programme for Bengali Muslims, he was searching for ways to ameliorate their current situation in ways that crossed the then-known boundaries of literary expression. This solution included self-consciously following the trends of European literary and intellectual production, but carefully preserving Indian as well as specifically Bengali Muslim conditions of peasant and rural life.

Motahar Hussein Choudhury's essay in the second issue of *Bulbul* pushed the issue even further with a second part to his 'A Few Words about Literature'. As in Nazrul's piece on world literature, Choudhury's lament concerned the state of cynicism in literature. He cited Thomas Hardy as an influence from Europe that infected Bengali writers like Buddhadev Basu and Premendra Mitra. Rather than take a purely cynical view, or a purely idealized view like Rabindranath, according to Choudhury, Bengali Muslim writers must find another path towards literary representation. He uses the example of Nazrul and a few of his lines from an untitled poem where he mixes both religious and worldly images of sexual desire and bodily lust as one and the same part of being human. This humanity¹⁹ need not be either moral or immoral, but should appreciate all aspects of the human condition. When confronted with the question of the minds of political activists about religious literature for Bengali Muslims, as was the case in earlier periods of the 1920s, Choudhury encouraged readers to conceive of all literature that asks universal questions about God, the soul, and about life and death. All of these types of literature are 'religious', and hence Rabindranath's literature, Vaishnava literature, and sufi literature, in addition to traditional commentary on the Qur'an or *Hadith* are all religious. This kind of attitude towards literature should be cultivated by Bengali Muslims as

it would then reveal the actual nature of Bengali Muslim life. This life would create questions that would appeal to all readers. So just like the questions that motivated Milton, or Walt Whitman, two examples he used repeatedly, questions and answers about Bengali Muslim life should appear in the words of Bengali Muslim writers.²⁰

Humayun Kabir also advocated a variety of styles, including humour and satire, for freeing the intellect and mind. Because the Bengali literary mindset, again seen through examples like Bankim Chandra's novels, did not appreciate realism and empirically sound depictions of life, but rather indulged in escapism, enjoyment, and laughter, it will never progress to the point where literature can instigate social change or development. This type of social-realist literature, as advocated by almost all the critics of the magazine, would provide a way forward, for all Bengali writers and readers, in addition to the Bengali Muslim readership which had suffered for so long with erroneous and hurtful depictions of Muslims in what was considered 'high' Bengali literature. This literature would provide the basis for a continual 'emancipation of the intellect', as first enunciated in a Bengali Muslim context by the MSS' *Sikha* magazine seven years earlier.

Like the MSS, and also like the BMSP of the late 1910s and early 1920s, *Bulbul* also published occasional addresses from the BMSS to complement its critical and abstract essays about literature. From the first issue's publication of Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad's 1933 Chittagong Literature Conference speech, the Bengali Muslim literary past was excavated to create the foundation for a modern and contemporary Bengali Muslim literature. In this address, Sahityabisharad encouraged research on Bengali Muslim literary history, as opposed to Arabic or Persian literary or religious inspiration, for an investment in the specifically Bengali Muslim past.

Titled 'The Peculiarities and Evolution of Ancient Muslim Literature', this speech opened with the assertion that modern Bengali Muslim writers can hardly discount the history and influence of ancient²¹ Bengali Muslim writing from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century CE. Writers and texts from these periods of Muslim sultans predating Mughal rule, must be understood both to clearly grasp Bengali Muslim history, but also to shape a literature of the future. He called the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the 'Golden Era' of ancient Bengali Muslim literature, an era of Daulat Kazi, Alaol, Muhammad Khan, Sayyid Sultan,

Nasrullah Khan along with others. Works from these authors include both folk stories from the Muslim tradition, like *Laila-Majnu*, as well as religious tracts about Islam, such as Sayyid Sultan's *Nabi-Vangsa*, a text placing the Prophet Muhammad last in a long line of avatars, one of them being Krishna.

Karim dedicates quite some space to describe Alaol, the famous poet and writer whom he called the Rabindranath of the seventeenth century. He mentioned how in the eighteenth century, Muslims lost both the political power and cultural prestige. But just like Hindus, who by this time had developed a literature of renown, Bengali Muslims have a long-standing literary foundation in the Bengali language which can then create a modern literature. He ended the address by urging the youth of Bengali Muslim society to look to their past influences, like Alaol, in order to solidify their current literature.

Karim's address differed slightly from Sayyid Emdad Ali's 1932 address printed at the end of the first issue, which summarized the various areas of progress the Bengali Muslim Literature Society wished to press upon its constituents in literature, history, science, and philosophy. In the section on literature, Ali listed the reasons as to why Bengali Muslim literature was so lifeless: the weaknesses in Bengali Muslim politics, influences of Wahabism and rigid followers of orthodoxy, and the lack of great leaders in Bengali Muslim society. He encouraged one to follow the example of Hindus in literature and fearlessly letting go of any inhibition about following Hindus, as they have built the foundations of modern Bengali literature.²²

The ubiquitous issue of Urdu versus Bengali continued to have a forum, albeit lessened in impact by the presence of varied points of view about literature and language. A critical essay by Anwar-ul Kadir in the second issue echoed the same arguments made by urban and rural authors advocating the use of Bengali over Urdu. The arguments were much the same as those made by the BMSS critics as well as mufassil authors two decades earlier. In this argument, Urdu-wallahs²³ in villages were ignorant of the fact that Bengali was the mother tongue of the villagers and that for any social and political progress to be enjoyed, Bengali must be cultivated by the youth in order to obtain jobs in government or business. Here in the 1930s, the critique implicates Urdu-agitation as responsible for the backward state of Muslim literary achievement in Bengal. The author asks his Bengali audience if any Urdu-wallahs roaming the villages of Bengal

have produced a Rabindranath, Hemchandra, Bankim, or Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, all prominent Hindu Bengali authors.²⁴

Though Bengali Muslim critics in earlier periods would castigate some of these writers for their depictions of Muslims, critics now would embrace Bengali literature as a totality that encompasses both the Muslims and Hindus. The author condemned how upper-class Muslims, who have the money and time to study Urdu, condescendingly advocate Urdu, while the masses of village Muslims who have no such option are like 'homeless, boatless men, floating around with no country and no language to support them'.²⁵ They are denied the chance to properly learn Bengali as their local mullahs are strongly opposed to Bengali literary and language instruction, since Bengali for these mullahs was a language of idols. But since these mullahs had little access to any proper training in Urdu, they themselves held scant knowledge of the language. Unfortunately, English and Urdu-educated upper-classes in Bengali Muslim society may aspire to potential jobs in government or in services, but the millions of peasant Muslims are stuck without any clear linguistic education, and consequently, without a future.

In addition to a growing appreciation of medieval heroes like Alaol, Bengali Muslims now had contemporary influences like Mozammel Huq, who was praised in a biography by Abdul Kadir entitled 'Mozammel Huq's Devotion to Literature', published in the third issue. Huq was a poet, publisher, and literary magnate of the early twentieth century, who started the Bengali Muslim magazine *Muslim Bharat*, a platform to encourage the talents of individuals like Nazrul and Kaikobad. Kadir placed him in the same class as Rabindranath on the Bengali Hindu side and European literary greats like Shakespeare and Milton. Huq, much in the same way as medieval Bengali Muslims like Alaol, did write on folk Islamic themes like the Hatem Tai and Laila-Majnu, but also wrote modern poems and emphasized both the Bengali and Muslim parts of literature. By the mid-1930s, there was not only a Bengali Muslim distant past, but a living tradition out of which a national culture could be constructed.

Though literature was being discussed in broad and local terms, the concept of a Bengali political future was also being discussed. Two sides of the debate on Bengal appear in the journal in the second and third issues respectively. In the second issue, Abul Hussein, a leader of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj in the 1920s, in his 'Future of the Bengal State',

discussed how the main political issue of the day in 1934 included the future division of power between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. From Hussein's perspective, Hindus seemingly wanted to assert as much power as possible over a weak and politically inarticulate Muslim minority. Hussein contended that Hindu politicians like P.C. Chatterjee and Sir N. Sarkar wasted no opportunity to vilify Muslims in public. If a Hindu majority were to rule Bengal, the majority would most definitely be a communal majoritarian force according to Hussein. The reason this communalism has taken such horrible shape was that Hindus had started to actually consider the idea of a Muslim majority government. The majority of Bengalis by this time, according to the census, were clearly Muslim. But Hindus were determined not to let Muslims rule via a democratic majority due to a deep-rooted hatred that the Hindus had harboured towards Muslims. Hindus had been by and large concealing this hatred until now, but when the prospect of a Muslim majority government arose, the main leaders of the Hindu community were up in arms, all because of Hindu communalism.²⁶

Another issue taken up by the author was the much publicized topic of 'fallen' Hindu women—widows and allegedly kidnapped women who were then accepted into the Muslim community.²⁷ The veracity of much of this has yet to be determined, but during the mid-1930s the issue of fallen Hindu women and alleged Muslim abductors certainly dominated Bengali headlines. Hussein saw this as a ploy by Hindus to distract the public from the real problems within Hindu society of widowhood and gendered discrimination. He also castigated terrorists and violent revolutionaries, most of whom happened to be Hindu, for not putting forth constructive programme for the good of the nation. As *Bulbul* strove to objectivity, the editors included two footnotes to the essay, one stating that simplistic oppositional terms like 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' interests and politics were inadequate for constructive critique of the politics of the day. The editors also claimed that simply apportioning blame would produce no progress, for self-criticism actually led toward betterment.

Abul Mansur Ahmed opposed Hussein in a response published in the following issue. He castigated Hussein for not seeing the reality of wealthy Muslims in Bengal, whose allegiance was not to suffering Muslim peasants, but to their own money and status. Abul Mansur Ahmed claimed that the leaders of the Muslim community in Bengal have paid little attention to economic injustices and the socio-economic well-being

of peasants. Rather than talk about saving and protecting Muslims from Hindu communalism, Ahmed proposed that the public find ways to save Muslim peasants from malaria, kala-azar,²⁸ and cholera as well as from their back-breaking work which reduced them to little more than slaves. He also mentioned how many Muslims supported various nationalist movements, like the Swadeshi movement, Non-cooperation, as well as the pioneering work of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das.²⁹ Given the shared Hindu-Muslim nationalist struggle, pitting Hindus and Muslims against each other opposed the facts of political history.

Regarding Hussein's biggest charge of Hindu communalism, Ahmed clarified that it was not at all communal to recognize that, factually, more illiterate, unemployed, and criminal elements came from the Muslim community. It would be communal to state that Hindus have been terrorists and revolutionaries and Swadeshi activists as opposed to Muslims. Many Muslims and many Hindus jointly participated in all sorts of politics. The task of the politicians should not be to appropriate blame to one particular community, but to find a political solution to the problems of the day. As Abul Mansur Ahmed's main concern was the economic grievances of peasants, he stated clearly that Hindus have come forth with solutions to these problems. A solution to an economic problem could hardly be termed communal just because it came from a particular community. Whatever ideal state Bengal would take in the future was hardly determined in 1934, but Abul Mansur Ahmed emphasized repeatedly how the future state had to include a joint programme that certainly recognized that Muslims were a majority. But political solutions would have to accommodate the entire population, not just the imagined grievances of spokesmen.

In the early issues of *Bulbul*, Ahmed pointed to a larger and important strand of engagement by the Bengali Muslim political and intellectual establishment. Identity was interlaced with material concerns that had to accommodate the particular economic predicament of Muslims in colonial Bengal. A recognition of and debate about material and economic concerns, much more than any hazily defined 'Muslimness' were at the forefront of Bengali Muslim conversations about present and future solutions to political problems.

From 1934 to 1938, the periodical evinced a strong engagement with an all-India discourse of Muslim literary and cultural identity through translations of Urdu poems and texts alongside essays about

Mohammed Iqbal, the pre-eminent Punjabi Urdu and Persian poet of the 1930s. During this half of the 1930s, *Bulbul* began to publish the poetry and short stories of Bengali Muslims who would later rise to local fame. Of these writers, many would develop into literary spokesmen for the Pakistan movement in the 1940s, including Farrukh Ahmed and Shahadat Hossein.³⁰ As in almost every other portion of this magazine, Muslim and Hindu Bengali writers were showcased side by side. In addition to these and other established writers such as Kazi Abdul Wadud and Jasimuddin, Hindus like Sri Manindra Datta, Sri Surendranath Maitra, and Sri Nishikanta Roychoudhury found a forum for their poetry in *Bulbul* during the latter half of the 1930s.

Apart from Muslims writing literary criticism alongside poetic and short fiction works in Bengali, *Bulbul* in its later years published many works of translation from Urdu into Bengali. This showed an increasing self-confident engagement with the all-India Muslim literary and intellectual traditions of the era. The strongest evidence of Urdu and all-India Muslim literary discourse was a range of poems by Iqbal and Hali. Humayun Kabir contributed a translation of ninety verses of Hali's 'Musaddas' into Bengali. Muhammad Shahidullah composed a translation from Urdu of 'Iqbal's Petition' which rendered a portion of Iqbal's 1930 declaration of Indian Muslim patriotism into Bengali. Also, Iqbal's poem 'Ak Arju' or 'Aakangkha' (Desire) in Bengali was translated by Mohiuddin. Iqbal's 'Tarana-i-Hind' also received an anonymous Bengali translation.

In addition to these translations, the magazine published five lengthy analytical essays about Iqbal's philosophical, literary, and political salience for the Bengali Muslim community immediately after Iqbal's death in 1938. Befitting the nature of the journal as a platform for Bengali Muslim literary journalism, authors included M. Wajed Ali, S. Wajed Ali, Golam Maksud Hilali, Sri Jaminikanta Sen, and Abul Mansur Ahmed. All the authors had various perspectives on Iqbal, but the unifying theme of the analysis was the central role that Iqbal played in carving out an Indian Muslim consciousness.

Though this consciousness was of course the context, none of the Bengali Muslim authors attempted to literally connect Iqbal to Bengal. Rather than focus on the identity politics of Muslims, all of these Bengalis discussed how Iqbal's work as a philosopher took precedence over his work as a poet.³¹ Abul Mansur Ahmed and S. Wajed Ali both

examined Iqbal's philosophical writings and maturation as a thinker of global significance.

In addition to philosophy, all of the writers praised Iqbal's unique and creative nationalism which simultaneously drew from European philosophical sources and combined it with Indian culture.³² His rejection of the overly materialist culture of the West as well as his investment in Indian cultural forms led Sri Jaminikanta Sen, a Hindu, to write about how the inclusion of Arabic and Islamic high culture in Iqbal's crafting of an Indian patriotic sensibility was a point of pride for all regardless of their religion.³³ S. Wajed Ali also commented on how Iqbal's genius in emphasizing Islam's relationship to societal change and progress, was a unique Indian Muslim and Indian national perception to be emulated by others.³⁴ None, though, mentioned the long-standing alienation from Urdu literary culture that permeated much of *Bulbul's* and indeed, Bengali Muslim literary discourse of the era. This demonstrated a move away from Urdu-Bengali conflict and an increasingly self-confident focus on examining what it meant to be Bengali Muslim inclusive of a critical appreciation of Urdu.

***Bulbul* and Increasing Self-Confidence: Hindus and Local Politics**

As a part of this self-confident vision of Bengali Muslim-ness, local politics appeared throughout this journal. When in 1936 the Mohammadan Sporting Club won the IFA shield, self-consciously as a 'Muslim' named team, the specifically Bengali Muslim sense of pride in cultural identity took on a new and unexpected turn. Sport, another area where Muslims had not made a striking mark in Bengal, was beginning to open up to Muslims. Great footballers on the team, like Jumma Khan and Salim took place alongside literary greats like Nazrul and Golam Mostafa on the pages of *Saogat* and *Mohammadi*.³⁵

Bulbul also showcased how the meaning of Bengali Muslim literary selfhood involved the relationships Bengali Muslims had with Bengali Hindus. In a long debate about a polemic by the famous Hindu writer Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Bengali Muslims responded vigorously to a challenge he had put to his Muslim brethren in 'Undesirable Distance', an essay about the lamentable distance between Hindus and Muslims that could be remedied through more literary endeavours by Muslims.

Though Muslims had been writing in Bengali since the seventeenth century (and readers of *Bulbul* were certainly aware of this), Chatterjee focused on the relative lack of prose literature by Bengali Muslims. Novels like Kazi Emdadul Huq's *Abdullah*, a portrait of rural Bengali Muslim life, and Kazi Abdul Wadud's *Mir-Paribar*, also about the same topic, had been available for some time. But the lack of prose literature stood out in Chatterjee's piece.

Responses corrected Sarat Chandra's ignorance about the many Bengali Muslim authors who had been enjoying a platform by the 1930s. These included Nazrul, Kaikobad, Shiraji, Kazi Emdadul Huq, and Mozammel Huq, in addition to pre-modern literary giants like Alaol. Also, just because Muslims had protested their representations in books like Nabin Chandra Sen's *Palashir Juddhya*, or Bankim Chandra's *Rajsingha* or *Sitaram*, it did not necessarily mean that Muslims were narrowly only looking out for themselves, which was one of Sarat Chandra's charges. Perhaps the point of view, as Kadir Nawaj argued in one response, on the part of both Hindus and Muslims, had to be enlarged to correct this distance. Another response discussed how Muslims have been alienated from literature because of heavy-handed discrimination from Hindus. This anonymous writer suggests that 'to cure the disease, one cannot just treat the symptoms'. And another discussed how there are quite a few Muslim writers out there anyway. Regardless of the varied positions of the responses, nearly all respondents appreciate how talented and deeply committed people like Sarat Chandra were to Bengali literature.³⁶

By now Bengali Muslims were developing their own standards of evaluation that did not owe directly to Hindu critics. Wadud, for example, assessed the value of pieces like *Abdullah* and Mir Musharraf Hussein's nineteenth century *Bishad-Sindhu*, an epic poem about the battle at Karbala. This poem was noted by Wadud as the first piece of Bengali Muslim literature in *sadhu* or chaste Bangla. Like *Abdullah*, *Bishad-Sindhu*, would stand out as one of the classics in Bengali Muslim literature, marking the entry of modern Bengali Muslim literature, so far back in the 1880s. The mere fact that a 'classic' for Bengali Muslims could be conceived of was a novelty to this period. Rather than simply encouraging Muslims to write in Bengali, Bengali Muslims were now finding a forum to critique and shape their own literature and define their own literary identity. Not just literature, but the history of Muslims in Bengal, such as the work of

Muhammad Mohsin and Sayyid Amir Ali, and other Muslims in India, such as Sayyid Ahmed Khan, received glorious biographical praise.

Throughout the journal's five year history, each issue was sprinkled with advertisements for various biographies of prominent Indian Muslims, like Sayyid Ahmed, Sayyid Ameer Ali, Rokeya Sakhwat Hussein and other Muslim Indian women, Jasimuddin, Rabindranath, and assorted heroes of Bengali and Bengali Muslim literary and cultural life. The magazine also included many essays and poems by Hindus, not just as a show of inter-communitarian harmony, but as a perspective on topics germane to Bengali Muslim society. For example, several issues featured the writing of Pramatha Choudhury, a famous Bengali Hindu literary critic and editor of the journal *Sabuj-patra*. Choudhury contributed many articles on the Urdu-Bengali question, including pieces advocating the literary usage of spoken Bengali forms that include Arabic and Persian words. Capturing the actual usage of Bengali would, in his perspective, only strengthen Bengali literature. He therefore encouraged, against the current of the opinion of the educated Bengali Hindus on the issue and supported the insertion of spoken forms in Bengali that derived from Arabic, Persian, or Urdu into literary usage. This showed how the Urdu-Bengali controversy was not merely a question of one's social identity, but concerned actual literary debates regardless of the identity of the critic in question.

Given the range of form (poetry, essay, song) and content (debates about politics, language, and literature), this journal did more than simply advance an 'emancipated intellect' in 1930s Bengal. By the third issue, though, the journal did receive high praise on this score from established Calcutta newspapers. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta's premier English language newspaper, mentioned its 'refreshing spirit of modernism' and how the magazine will 'liberate the minds of young men from the thralldom of old rusty ideas and ideals and show them the way to a life resonant with a voice that can speak only in terms of entire humanity'.³⁷ Likewise, the *Advance* remarked how the magazine 'represented the best literary and cultural thoughts among the younger generation of Muslims' and how such individuals represent a community 'bold enough to climb a height, where man's vision remains unblurred by the encompassing mists of passion and prejudice'. In addition to interpreting *Bulbul* as a 'universal' and thereby, 'non-communal' paper aimed only at Muslims, it also stated that the journal 'will prove to be of invaluable help in strengthening the forces in operation for the creation of a united Bengal',³⁸ implying that

a united Bengal depends on a type of Bengali literary environment in which Muslims must address an audience beyond their own religious community.

Folklore and Bengali Muslim Constructions of Past and Future

This era also saw the rise of an interest in folklore and social scientific examinations of Bengali language and literary history. Through the collection of folk tales from the Bengal countryside and an appreciation of this rural Bengali setting in the writings of Bengali Muslims, folklore began to take concrete shape in the 1930s. Such idealization was not altogether new, as Kazi Abdul Wadud in 1919 wrote *Mir-Paribar*, a novel about peasant life in Muslim Bengal. Also, Kazi Emdadul Huq's *Abdullah*, serialized in the late 1910s and published in the 1930s, chronicled life in Bengali Muslim villages. However, these two prose works were isolated pieces of writing with no larger academic or literary force backing them up. Hence, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's 1937 polemic about the absence of prose literature amongst Bengali Muslims failed to specifically mention these works.

But by the late 1930s, in tandem with Calcutta University scholars like Dinesh Chandra Sen, and with the aid of *Bulbul*, the interest in 'folk' and village literature became concretely linked to the idea of a specifically Bengali Muslim literary culture. Both Shahidullah and Jasimuddin, two major exponents of Bengali Muslim folklore, studied under Dinesh Chandra Sen, the leader of Bengal studies at Calcutta University, in the early 1920s. Another, Abdul Karim, later to be titled 'Sahityabisharad', an honorific title meant to convey prominence in literature, had already been collecting manuscripts of old folk tales and pun this, since the 1890s. In the 1930s, all three would formally establish themselves as leaders in the field of 'Bengal studies'. The point of digging out old manuscripts and understanding Bengali as a tradition, unbroken from Alaol to the twentieth century, was to construct a workable Bengali Muslim identity.

Folklore studies in Bengal began in the nineteenth century with the investigations of W. W. Hunter, James Wise, and Indians themselves, like Abdul Wali Khan, a noted novice collector and amateur anthropologist. From the 1870s, journals displaying ethnographic and folklore data appeared in Calcutta, London, Boston, and Baltimore. During the data

collection for the first all-India census in 1872, colonial officials like Lewin in Chittagong and Dalton in Chota Nagpur began to write ethnological surveys of Bengalis. Grierson began the systematic study of folk songs in Bengal as he collected many songs from 1873 to 1877. In 1891, after years of research, Herbert Risley published a multi-volume encyclopedia of knowledge about the folkways of Bengal titled, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. From the 1890s to the 1910s, many European officials and anthropologists, like the district collector Bradley-Birt and the missionary Carey, collected and published Bengali folk tales and proverbs.

From the early twentieth century, Rabindranath Tagore started to include village tales and Baul songs in his writings.³⁹ Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize in 1913, was hooked on Bauls from the 1910s. He opened his famous novel *Gora* with lines from a Baul song and often wrote about how they influenced his thought processes and literary work.⁴⁰ In addition to Rabindranath, Dinesh Chandra Sen, a language and literature specialist at Calcutta University's Bengali department began to take interest in parts of Bengal where 'folk' culture was vibrant. In the early 1920s, Sen began the task of compiling ballads from Mymensingh in eastern Bengal.

Sen worked with Bengali Muslims familiar with rural Bengali culture, such as Jasimuddin, to collect such ballads. Jasimuddin, as a Dinesh Chandra Sen protégé, found his voice in the 1930s. Born in 1903 in East Bengal's Faridpur district, Jasimuddin was amongst the first Bengali Muslims to include images of rural East Bengali Muslim life into literature that was consumed by Hindus. From the end of the decade, his work was translated into European languages. He wrote poems that started to attract attention in the 1920s, like 'Kabar' (Graves). Since the early 1930s, he attracted the attention of Rabindranath Tagore, who by then was quite interested in 'folk' literature. Jasimuddin's long dramatic poem 'Shojon Badiar Ghat', detailing the lives of lovers unable to consummate their love because of Hindu-Muslim rivalries, appeared in 1929. This impressed Dinesh Chandra Sen so much that he encouraged the young writer to publish the poem as a book. When the cover art was decided, it was discovered that nobody had any precedent for constructing visual representations of rural East Bengal. Though the cover art was not satisfactory to Jasimuddin, from this point onwards a consciousness about how to represent and interpret Bengali rural culture began. In the late 1939, his long poem 'Nakshi Kanthar Math' or 'The Field of

the Embroidered Quilt', also about Hindu–Muslim love, won so much acclaim that an Englishwoman, Mary Milford, translated and published it from Oxford.⁴¹

In 1938, the trajectory of folklore studies underwent a significant change with the work of Muhammed Shahidullah. He convened a conference dedicated to folklore in Kishoreganj, Mymensingh, and started the Eastern Bengal Folklore Collection Society. Shahidullah was then chairman of the Dacca University's department of Bengali and added courses in folklore to the syllabus.⁴² Shahidullah was an individual who represented a change in Bengali Muslim approaches towards folklore and literature. His entry into Bengali language and literature was more academic than Jasimuddin, as he rose to prominence as a student in school and college in languages and linguistics. He was teaching both Bengali and Sanskrit at Dacca University in the early 1920s and studied numerous languages, such as Pali, Arabic, Urdu, and Pushto, in addition to the languages he studied since his undergraduate education, such as Bengali and Sanskrit. From a young age he maintained close relationships with Dinesh Chandra Sen and Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya, a famous Bengali Hindu linguist. He also presented papers in both the BSP and the BMSS.

Another individual, not directly a part of the Calcutta literary elite, but yet recognized by them, was Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad, who made headlines in the 1930s as a recognized expert in ancient Bangla texts and manuscript collections. As a dogged collector of punthi manuscripts⁴³ for much of his life, he embodied the search for a Bengali Muslim literary identity through a Muslim literary past. Active in Bengali Muslim literary conferences and meetings since their inception in the 1910s, during the 1920s and 1930s his punthi collection efforts grew to staggering proportions. As evidenced by his numerous contributions to *Bulbul* on the theme of ancient Bengali Muslim literature, his presence came to mark a new era in Bengali Muslim culture, that of the 'folk' construction of a nationalist past.

From the 1890s to the 1950s, Karim wrote over four hundred essays in Bengali journals about Bengali literary history and Bengali Muslim writers of the early modern eras. He often wrote about the text from his home of Chittagong. He published eleven editions of various punthis during his lifetime.⁴⁴ As a unique and probably the sole member of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (Bengali Literature Assembly)⁴⁵ who did not complete a formal education, his most well-known edited compilation

was the two-volume *Prachin Bangla Punthir Bibaran* (A Description of Ancient Bengali Punthis). This book, published first in 1913, set the standard for punthi collection and awareness in Calcutta intellectual circles. Though he was not the only punthi collector active in the early twentieth century, the collection he amassed over the course of his life far surpassed anyone else's. He was committed to punthi collection regardless of their religious communitarian character, and so he collected texts on 'Hindu' themes, as his edited collection of punthis on Satyanarayan testify, as well as his extensive research on Muslim Bengali writers like Alaol.

Punthis or manuscripts, varied in size and content, from small pamphlets of ten–twenty pages to 300 page tomes. Rhyming couplets, local vocabularies, metaphors, and idioms drawn from local religious practices, as well as romantic tales filled the pages of these manuscripts.⁴⁶ Though Abdul Karim was focused on punthis in their broadest manifestation, a few Muslim authors recurred time and again in his speeches at various literary societies and articles in journals like *Bulbul*. The collection and preservation of particular authors like Alaol (1607–80) occupied a great deal of his time, as he collected hundreds of the author's writings. Born in Faridpur in East Bengal, but a resident of Chittagong for most of his life, Alaol worked often for Arakan courts in Chittagong of the middle and late seventeenth century. Alaol was primarily a translator who created free renderings of original works that were travelling throughout northeastern and broader South Asian Islamic literary environments. *Padmabati*, Malik Muhammad Jaisi's Hindi poem about an imaginary love affair between the Khilji emperor Alauddin and Padmini Devi, the queen of Chitor, was the subject of this Alaol's signature work that became famous in late seventeenth century Bengal. To be excavated by Sahityabisharad in the early twentieth century, this poem, like many of his other works,⁴⁷ described romance and love and did not follow rigidly defined 'Muslim' lines. Sahityabisharad consistently cited Alaol's work to show how vibrant early modern Bengali Muslims writers were and how they were not solely fascinated with Islam or its themes. As the introduction of one of the editions of *Padmati* in his collection states, Alaol was an emotional 'poet who always strongly guarded love' in his writings.⁴⁸

Both Daulat Kazi and Alaol were well-versed in Sanskrit, Bengali, Persian, and Arabic and were literary innovators of their age. For Sahityabisharad, they showed to a largely Bengali Hindu literary audience

(in the course of his twentieth-century research) how prominent Muslims were in the creation of Bengali literature in their urbanity, political prominence, and wide-ranging knowledge of various literary languages. He also emphasized how many themes of these writers' world-views and choices of subject matter were not shaped by rigidly conceived monoliths of Islam, but involved human love and the transgressing of social boundaries in the name of love. This point was emphasized mainly in the context of 1920s and 1930s literary criticism in which Bengali Muslims were formulating their own conceptions of a Bengali Muslim literature that would fit into ideas of world literature.

This is not to say that Sahityabisharad's punthi obsession avoided Islamic topics. On the contrary, he also collected hundreds of folk tales and other narrative poems that both glorified Islamic history and also placed Islam into a localized Bengali social framework by authors like Sayyid Sultan, Razzaq Nandan, Abdul Hakim, Muhammed Khan, Jainuddin, and many others. Texts written by these writers, like the late fourteenth-century Jainuddin's *Rasul-bijay* (Victory of the Prophet), became important as objects of literature that centralized the role of Islam in defining Bengali literary activity. They also provided a useful point in opposition to those who sometimes claimed that Islam was foreign to the Bengali intellectual and cultural landscape. By the 1920s and 1930s when Sahityabisharad had been able to reflect upon the nature of these texts, it was undeniable to him that any discussion of a 'Bengali identity' had to take into account the long-standing history of Muslims writing about Islam in Bengali, centuries before modern issues of representation and colonial politics arose.

One such text was Sayyid Sultan's *Nabi-Vangsa*, a late sixteenth-century,⁴⁹ two-part biographical poem narrating the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Bengali works about the Prophet Muhammad were not in and of itself remarkable at this time. But this particular author's work included in the first part, sub-titled 'Nabi-Vangsa', lengthy descriptions of all those that came before the Prophet, such as Hindu deities like Rama, Krishna, and Brahma. The second part, subtitled 'Rasul Charita', narrated the history of Islam from creation through the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Representative of a particular genre of Bengali literature that evinced an engagement with localized cultural difference by placing the *Niranjan* (formless) God of Islam as an equivalent of the *Nirakar* (shapeless God) described in the Vedas. This type of Bengali

literature was interpreted as evidence of the Muslim talent and skill in the construction of Bengali literature. It also definitively placed Islam into any workable definition of Bengaliness.

It is impossible to assess the full impact of Abdul Karim's writings, as his work found a home in the BSP journal, Hindu periodicals like *Purnima* and *Aalo*, and Muslim periodicals like the *BMSF*, *Saogat*, *Bulbul*, and *Mohammadi*, and *al-Islam*. For the 1930s, his work in *Bulbul* reflected a growing sense of folklore consciousness, alongside his contemporaries Jasimuddin and Shahidullah, whose writings were also cementing a consciousness about Bengali Muslim literary pasts. As a contemporary historian has written, Abdul Karim represented a particularly poignant part of the Bengali Muslim construction of a unique identity, as he was the product of various historical forces in folklore studies, Bengali studies, and rising Muslim politics.⁵⁰ This work was a product of the German folklore studies tradition, but rather than only pursue the subject with characteristic scientific precision, he took the task upon himself to link language and specific historic literatures with the emotional container of belonging in a specifically Bengali Muslim collectivity. These texts were living entities to him, so unlike the Germanic drive for collection, preservation, and analysis (though he mentions his debt to this tradition in his writings), punthis were a link to his sense of spatial and cultural reference points. Chittagong, as a place dear to Sahityabisharad's heart, became represented by the numerous versions of *Padmabati*. Before Karim, punthi collection and preservation remained in the domain of science and folklore as a list of manuscripts with chronologies, but he emotionalized them and situated them at the centre of Bengali Muslim identity.

The other element of Abdul Karim that warrants attention in this context was his personal attitude towards punthi collection. He saw his work as both devotion and pleasure, but without a professional or scientific anchor. He constantly remarked about this condition throughout his life. Unlike nearly all of his contemporaries—Haraprasad Sastri, Nagendranth Basu, and Rajendralal Mitra—he existed as a liminal outsider to the world of professional scholarship. Partly out of personal choice he decided to spend whatever limited funds and time he had on punthi collection, but also he made an ethical stand as a punthi collector not out of a commitment to science, unlike his European and Bengali Hindu contemporaries. Rather, his commitment wavered between the modern convictions of Hindu fellow collectors and his position as a beleaguered

minority within two minorities: a minority within the Bengali literati that was dominated by Hindus, and a minority amongst the Muslims who speak and write Urdu, who hardly cared about this sort of literature. His minoritized stance led him on numerous occasions to stress that literature was meant for all of humanity. Digging out the work of Alaol and others was meant for universalist, and not particularist, communitarian purposes. From the early days of the Bengali Muslim Literary Society in the 1910s, he made numerous speeches to this effect, and concurrently, impressed upon his audiences that Bengali was the mother tongue of Bengali Muslims. His Hindu colleagues were not interpellated in this way and never had to address the question of a 'mother tongue'.

What united all of these individuals was an intense love for the Bengali language and a pointed interest in the non-standard, village-level, rural type of language encapsulated by folk songs and ballads. About his 'Nakshi Kanthar Math' (Field of the Embroidered Quilt), Dinesh Chandra Sen wrote that Jasimuddin 'invested the poem with life-like presentation of the moral and cultural traits of Bengalis.... It is difficult to find a faithful picture of Bengal in any of the modern novels or tales.... The true Bengali whom we meet in our villages is now difficult to meet in literature'.⁵¹ This presentation of Bengal was dependent on the language and the rhythm of rural life Jasimuddin had captured in the language of his upbringing.⁵²

By the mid-1930s, such a language had impressed other guardians of Bengali, like Sen, who hired him to work at Calcutta University in 1933 as a lecturer of Bengali. Indeed, students in Bengali courses would have to read his poem 'Kabar' (Graves) as a required part of the syllabus, the first piece of literature by a Bengali Muslim to be assigned to the Calcutta University syllabus. An emotional poem about a farmer at a graveyard lamenting the loss of his loved ones and asking God for mercy, this poem inputted religion into the rural landscape:

How lovingly the tree-boughs bend above
The fire-fly maidens of evening light lamps,
And the crickets make music with small bells tinkling
Fold your hands, grandson and pray: O come, eternal God,
Let Paradise descend now for father and mother.

For decades, writers had espoused Bengali literature by and for Muslims in varying degrees, but never had the 'folk' portion of Bengali Muslims

ever been appreciated in a manner that directly cemented a contemporary political identity. Also, it was remarkable for such an appreciation to occur at Calcutta University, an institution often deemed a 'citadel of communalism' by Bengali Muslim periodicals like the *Masik Mohammadi*.

One facet connected all of these individuals: the experience of Hindu bigotry in the name of Bengali culture. As a young student, Shahidullah experienced intense bigotry from his Hindu teacher of Sanskrit. The teacher reluctantly gave him high marks, much to the disaffection of fellow Hindu students. He had to endure insults from his Hindu teachers—who would mockingly call him 'Siraj-ud-daula'—along with attacks from his Hindu peers, who would complain that giving a Muslim student high marks in Sanskrit was an injustice. He did so well in his B.A. studies that he gained entrance into an M.A. course in Sanskrit in Calcutta University, but Hindu teachers refused to teach him on grounds that he was a Muslim. During his B.A. days, he found refuge in a Brahmo college in Jessore, where he excelled. After his entrance into Calcutta University, Sanskrit professors refused to teach him, but kind teachers who did recognize his talents accepted him as a student of comparative linguistics, in lieu of Sanskrit. His youth and student life in rural Bengal and Calcutta, given his talent for the languages, Bengali and Sanskrit, was filled with a consciousness of Hindu vs. Muslim discrimination.

Jasimuddin also faced his share of bigotry and discrimination. In his youth, he grew up in rural Faridpur watching Durga Puja festivals and mixing with *sanyassis*, an experience he counts as an important influence in his writing. Though he writes that *sanyassis* and local Hindus certainly liked him, when he got close to Hindu friends, their parents, notably the mother of one of his childhood friends, refused to touch him or allow him to eat from the same utensils. The *sanyassis* that he so loved so much would similarly not eat with him.

As he grew into a literary celebrity and moved to Calcutta during the Non-cooperation movement, he found that some of his Hindu activist friends were close to recruiters looking for new members of the movement. One such recruiter liked him, but once he found out that he was Muslim, gave up on recruiting him on the sole pretext that Muslims were not welcome in the movement. Later, at Santiniketan, a group of Hindu Mahasabhis came to give lectures about Hindu widows and Muslim goondas, clearly to rouse communal antipathy. As the lone Muslim at Santiniketan in 1930, he records that all of the Hindu faculty were cold

and distant towards him, expecting him to categorically denounce Muslim goondas. He records that his feelings as a minority and as a Muslim was not taken into consideration even once.

Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad also encountered many instances of Hindu bigotry in the service of punthi collection. He would spend much of his life going from village to village collecting punthis from anyone who would offer them. As he found that many Hindus housed punthis, when he tried to persuade Hindus to at least let him read the punthis in their collections, most Hindus did not let him touch the punthis. Some did not let him even discuss punthis, for fear of caste rules being defiled. But he did manage to access them, since by the end of his life he had collected over four hundred punthis that detailed Hindu themes which were presumably collected from Hindu homes. Most Hindus he encountered would rather discuss the punthis and allowed him to take notes on them. Towards the end of his life, in the immediate aftermath of the 1947 partition, he found himself with a large collection of Muslim and Hindu-themed punthis. His large collection of nearly two hundred Muslim punthis was given to Dacca University in the early 1950s. As for the Hindu punthis, he was unsure as to what to do with them. Given the then-dilapidated nature of Rajshahi University and their famed Barendra Research Museum, he originally wanted to gift his collection to Viswa-Bharati University in West Bengal, then a part of newly founded India. But Viswa-Bharati never responded, and he ended up donating his collection to the Barendra Research Museum in Rajshahi.⁵³

While Bengali Muslims were actively seeking out knowledge and scholarship about Bengali, as these three representatives were doing, they experienced heavy-handed resistance. The resistance helped to cement a sense of solidarity in individuals such as these, which in turn helped construct a Bengali Muslim culture out of Bengali raw materials which could have only been done by and for Muslims. Even with the rampant bigotry and discrimination faced by these people, several like Sahityabisharad himself, commented that these instances were simply prejudice and bias remaining from older generations, and that Muslims also certainly held such bias.⁵⁴ But as language and literary history came to define the shape of Bengali Muslim identity, access to these two sites now took the utmost importance. Access to literature was shaped by the social relations of bigotry and prejudice as well as the actual content of Bengali Muslim literary history. These two forces of fighting social prejudice as

well as researching Bengali Muslim literary history became intertwined in the 1930s.

Beyond *Bulbul*: Bengali Muslim Literary Culture

Besides *Bulbul* and the developments in folklore, other individuals and journals carried forth a spirit of the 1920s, such as the work of S. Wajed Ali. Published in *Bulbul* and in other journals like *Mohammadi* and *Saogat*, S. Wajed Ali was a public intellectual who travelled to England in the 1910s and 20s and acquired a name as a prominent writer in both English and Bengali. His essay, 'Bharatbarsha', made such headlines that it started to appear in Indian school curricula after 1947. He started the *Bulletin of the Rationalist Society* in 1919 in Calcutta, claiming it to be the first such periodical on 'rationalism' in India and describing it as a 'non-political, non-sectarian journal where Hindus, Christians, Muslims, may freely mix with each other'.⁵⁵ Determined to put rationalism and science at the forefront, he stated that the progress of the nation depends on the encouragement of rationalism and the search for truth. He extolled rationalism to the point of extremism, where he declared that that which is irrational is not divine, and quoted Hafiz in support of this point.⁵⁶

S. Wajed Ali rose to literary prominence in the 1930s as a speaker at many Bengali Muslim literary conferences at various locations in Bengal. He embodied the spirit of progressivism by starting his own journal, *Gulistan* in 1932 from his Calcutta home. This journal, based on writings derived from gatherings of intellectuals at his home brought to mind the *conversaciones* of Nawab Abdul Latif in the late nineteenth century. The difference was that unlike Latif's meetings, Ali's were all conducted in Bengali and resulted in Bengali language publications. As an institution of Calcutta intellectual life in the 1930s, his gatherings attracted Hindu writers like Buddhadev Basu and Tarasankar Bandhopadhyaya in addition to the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia of the period.

As the presence of *Gulistan* shows, progressive Bengali Muslim journalism was not confined to *Bulbul*, though the spirit of the age certainly found expression on its pages. The amount and quality of writing, from the point of view of the government, began to grow in the 1930s during the emergence of *Bulbul*. In 1925, one year after Abul Hussein's critique of Bolshevism, 'Banglar Bolshi' appeared in the *BMSP*, the government reported that 'as usual, the contribution of the Muhammadan writers

is small'.⁵⁷ In 1927, the government reported that 'the number of Muslim writers is steadily increasing and some are fairly on their way to making their mark in literature'.⁵⁸ By 1933, Bengal's authorities remarked that the Muslim press was working 'toward the economic and political awakening of the masses' and that they 'attempted to understand and judge government with fairness'.⁵⁹

Bengali Muslim journalism of the *Bulbul* variant transcended the mere inclusion of Bengali Muslims in the Bengali literary world, but also strove to integrate Muslims and Hindus in creating readerships that would speak to both communities. Unlike the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, where the creation of periodicals aimed for the inclusion of a singularly Muslim politics,⁶⁰ the age of *Bulbul* signaled the arrival of a middle-class readership receptive to liberalism, rationalism, and discussions of Bengali culture as a whole. This is not to suggest that liberalism and rationalism were outside the scope of 'Muslim' politics, but rather that these issues now spilled out into broader reading communities. These readers also would not be addressed only as Muslims, as *Bulbul* and *Gulistan* had large numbers of Hindu consumers. Besides *Bulbul*, the two main platforms of the period were *Saogat* and *Mohammadi*.

From 1918, *Saogat* also represented Bengali Muslim literary cultural distinctiveness. Edited by Mohammed Nasiruddin, it showcased the talents of literary personalities, as well as the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia. Nasiruddin started the journal at the same time as *BMSP*, intending to create a non-partisan forum for Bengali Muslim literature. In the 1930s, the decade that saw the provincializing of politics and rising Muslim identity, it contributed a range of essays about Hindu-Muslim relations. The very same writers featured in *Bulbul*, including Morahar Hussein Choudhury, and Hindus like Dinesh Chandra Sen, wrote for *Saogat*.

The *Masik Muhammadi* was yet another venue for Bengali Muslim journalism. Started in 1903 as a weekly, it grew into a monthly publication in 1927 under the aegis of Mohammed Akram Khan. It started out the decade with a fierce editorial dismissing the age-old question (which in the minds of the editorial staff should not be a question) of whether a Bengali Muslim is a Bengali first or a Muslim first, comparing the question to whether a mango is a fruit or a mango first! It concluded that like mangoes being both fruits and mangoes at the same time, Bengali Muslims are both Bengali and Muslim, and neither can be given predominance over the other.⁶¹

Its frequent editorials expressed the pulse of Bengali Muslim thought in the 1930s alongside *Bulbul*. One editorial praised Rabindranath's defense of Islam from expressions of bigotry in the early 1930s.⁶² Rabindranath, praised in *Bulbul*, was often castigated for his unconscious communalism, as in a powerful critique by Abdul Karim Sahityaratna.⁶³ In a 1936 article entitled 'Rabindranath and Communalism', Sahityaratna expressed wonder at how such a great and liberal-minded poet could be so stingy when it came to righting historic wrongs of discrimination in government jobs and educational appointments.⁶⁴

In defence of both English and Bengali education, in 1931 Muhammad Akram Khan boldly declared that both languages are absolutely necessary for Muslim children in Bengal. The paper also evinced support for the rising tide of separate electoral politics, as embodied in the debates about the 1932 Communal Award⁶⁵ and the 1935 election. Regarding literature, just like *Bulbul*, the *Mohammadi* published nearly all of the reports from literary conferences, and published a list of the top fifty books written by Bengali Muslim authors in 1935. It announced the list as an instructive guide for Bengali Hindu writers and readers, who, in their estimation, probably would not have encountered these books in their studies. The list included books like Mir Musharraf Hussein's *Bishad-Sindhu*, the epic work of verse published in the nineteenth century, almost all of Nazrul's poetry and prose, and works on religion and history by Maulana Akram Khan and Pandit Reazuddin Mashadi. Without any clear justification, which could perhaps be because of its perception as a 'pre-modern' literary form, the *Mohammadi* unabashedly declared that it did not include punthis or works in 'Mussalmani Bangla' on the list.⁶⁶

While periodicals like *Bulbul*, *Saogat*, and *Mohammadi* flourished in Calcutta, Dacca University continued to produce high-standard works. The *Dacca University Studies Journal* from 1933 to 1936 records articles on modern theatre, European theatre like Maeterlink, ancient, medieval, Mughal, modern India, Persia, Java, Persian and Sanskrit literature, making it a journal that would compare with the publications brought out by similar universities in Calcutta or Delhi. These advances took place as Sir Philip Hartog, the first vice-Chancellor of Dacca University, stated that 'the number of students in residence had fallen in 1931-32 due to the economic blizzard from which not only Bengal, but the whole world is suffering, [but] it still was a center of intellectual culture and inter-communal peace'.⁶⁷

Led by *Bulbul*, *Saogat*, and *Mohammadi*, the world of Bengali Muslim journalism and public culture began to take on a new shape in the 1930s, turning into a venue for middle-class Bengali Muslim life. Such a middle-class was now a part of Bengali public culture, in ways that had not existed in earlier periods. *Mohammadi*'s circulation topped seven thousand in the thirties, whereas the earlier efforts in the *BMSP* and in *Samyabadi* reached only hundreds of people. Furthermore, these journals became a substantive forum for debates within Bengali Muslim society. The entire concept of 'Bengali Muslim society' came to take on a new meaning accompanied by an extension of the franchise in Bengal, the rise of a 'Bengali Muslim' peasant interest in politics, and the rise of professional politicians espousing much of the same ideas as we find in Bengali Muslim journals.

A New Age: Representation and Demography of Bengali Muslims

In the mid-1930s, a new cadre of intellectuals began to transform the thought and politics of older generations of rationalists and radicals from the 1920s. Led by Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, both of whom published in *Bulbul*, these intellectuals began to emphasize elements of a distinctiveness which included a highly particular focus on a Muslim social identity as a constituent part of Bengali Muslim identity, and therefore, greater Bengali identity.

The earlier phases of Bengali Muslim journalism and intellectual life were recognized by Ahmed and Shamsuddin, but their approach to Bengali Muslim life contained no discussion of how Islam was practiced and they didn't have critical approaches towards understanding Islamic philosophy. They rather emphasized a social Muslim political identity which stemmed from changes in electoral politics, the rise of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and its eventual capitulation to the forces of the ML.

Changes in electoral politics stemmed primarily from the 1932 Communal Award that crystallized the role that the politics of electoral representation played in the political fortunes of Bengal. This law framed official discussions about Hindus and Muslims in Bengali public life for much of the decade. It entrenched a separate electoral system based on religious community, so that electorates would be drawn from communities and weighted based on numerical representation. Designed to protect minorities from the tyranny of majorities, 'separate electorate' political

practice stretched back to earlier periods in colonial India. This practice began with the 1909 Indian Councils Act, also known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, which introduced elected, as opposed to only appointed, Indians to Legislative Councils. It also stipulated, due to demands by Indian Muslim politicians, a reserved number of seats for Muslims in Municipal and District Boards. The devolution of power on the lines of 'community' was further instantiated with the 1919 Government of India Act, which increased the powers of central and provincial legislative councils. By the 1932 Communal Award, increasing measures to instil representative self-government, organized by the banner of separate electorates, had been practiced for decades in colonial India.

As Jalal has shown, separate electorates in colonial India 'were effectively a class concession advanced in the name of a religious community'.⁶⁸ Since 1909, separate electorates had continually flattened out the differentiation inherent in the Muslim communities of India and provided a set of representatives to an all-India audience that meshes uneasily with the actual politics of Muslims on the ground.⁶⁹ In Bengal, this concept of representation based on religious community was a threat to Hindu majoritarian power, as Hindus were slowly becoming a minority in the province. Muslims argued for the award because a joint electorate could never account for the majority of potential Muslim voters given the educational, property and tax requirement for joining the electorate.

The issue of separate electorates, though, was different from the issue of the percentages of representation of various groups in the Bengal population. According to the 1931 census, with 27.8 million people, Muslims formed 54 per cent of the population of Bengal and with 22.2 million, Hindus formed 43 per cent of the population. Given the steep decline in representation of Hindus relative to their demographic numbers, the Communal Award stirred Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* sentiment to the point of protest. Many prominent Hindus of the era, such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Prafulla Chandra Roy, Shyama Prasad Mookherjee, and Subhas Chandra Bose, created a protest petition, which upheld their superiority based on higher education, attainment, and wealth.

In Bengal, with the Muslims outnumbering Hindus by having a population of approximately five million, Muslims formed a provincial majority. But, given the tax and property requirements for suffrage, more Hindus than Muslims would be qualified voters, even though the absolute numbers of Muslims was much higher than the numbers

of Hindus. Debates about the proposed award raged for a few years before its implementation and reflected broader pan-Indian Muslim concerns about minority fears in a majoritarian Hindu political set-up. Azizul Huq in his 1931 *Plea for Separate Electorates in Bengal*, says that because of the restricted franchise, Muslims would consist of roughly only 500,000 voters (2 per cent of the Muslim population) from a population of 25 million, the majority in Bengal, compared to nearly 591,000 Hindu voters, who formed about 2.5 per cent of their overall population. This slight edge of the Hindus was due to both including the schedule caste communities in the Hindu electorate and the pre-existing advantages of having more members meet the property and tax requirements. After years of debate, the actual award was announced in 1932, with Muslims receiving 119 out of 250 seats, which constitutes 48 per cent of the total. Hindus received 80 out of 250, with 32 per cent of the total seats in the Assembly. These 80 seats included a reservation of 10 seats for marginalized classes. Other noteworthy allocations included 10 seats to 'Europeans' and 14 to members of 'European commerce'⁷⁰

As the government noted, the communal award was 'universally condemned by Hindus as placing their community in a relatively inferior position which is not justified by their superior wealth, level of education, or past political record'.⁷¹ This served the function of uniting Hindus from various regions of Bengal. Clarifying often that their protest was not against Muslims, but against the government, Hindus maintained that because of their superior educational qualifications, their representation in government should exceed their population. This award also had the effect of alienating increasing numbers of former Congress supporters into alternate political organizations. As the *Star of India* reported:

It has given rude shock to the Bengal Muslims to discover that Congress organs of Bengal are busy today trying to scrap the Communal Award. It appears that Congress organs are so much perturbed over the allocation of seats to the Muslims that they have lost their balance of mind... The so-called nationalists [Congressmen] are not much concerned with the allocation of seats to the Europeans who have their quota abnormally out of proportion, but in season and out of season, they would cry out that some seats must be taken from Muslims. Is this nationalism?⁷²

In the wake of the Communal Award, many Muslims turned to peasant politics, and eventually, the KPP.

Peasant Politics and the Bengali Muslim Community

As peasant politics were being foregrounded in the midst of the Depression, religion, as a source of social identity, provided for the Muslim peasantry of East Bengal a newly meaningful sense of community grounded in the specific material demands of the 1930s. In the period before the Great Depression, primarily economic conflicts had sometimes assumed 'communal' colours. whenever the economy returned 'to an even keel, the symbiosis in social relations ensured a phase of relative political quiescence in the East Bengal countryside'.⁷³ Even though the Khilafat movement of the late 1910s and early 1920s had roused a sentiment of Muslim solidarity in rural Bengal, the substance of the Khilafat movement was mostly economic, and peaceful relations between Hindus and Muslims in the countryside began to reappear by the late 1920s. In the mid to late 1930s, a qualitative change took place in the agrarian social structure and the social relations between the various groups in the East Bengali countryside. As credit dried up and the Hindu mahajans lost their role in ordering social relations, 'the old deference on the part of the peasants toward mahajans disappeared'⁷⁴ Unlike earlier periods when conflict assumed communitarian colours, this time the old unequal symbiosis did not reappear after conflicts subsided because of such a large destruction of the pre-existing credit-based economy. In the mid-1930s, in the absence of any meaningful bonds between Hindu moneylender or *talukdar* and Muslim peasants, religion as a social marker began to assume greater significance. As Sugata Bose has shown, 'religious communitarian identity under these circumstances imparted the social bases of solidarity to articulate class-based political demands'.⁷⁵ The rupture in credit relations that had occurred in the early 1930s played itself out socially and politically once war-time inflation began to expose the fragile livelihoods of the peasantry in East Bengal. The war-time economic and political scenario, which led to the devastating famine of 1943, was exacerbated in East Bengal because of the impact of the rupture of credit relations. The very specific conditions in which global capitalism was transforming East Bengal's political economy enabled the rise of a politically 'peasant' identity grounded in material concerns to take shape within the bounds of an outwardly 'religious' contour.

Peasant organization in general terms began in 1929 with the creation of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti (All Bengal Peasant Society).

From the early 1930s, East Bengali Muslim peasants started setting up *krishak samitis* (peasant organizations) which aimed to collectively represent peasants in struggles against moneylenders who charged exorbitant rates of interest. Concomitantly, these samitis would target landlords who would often charge bizarre and expensive taxes for Hindu festivals. These organizations would sometimes advocate non-payment of taxes, rent, and interest, and attempt to ameliorate the debt problem.

The government was at times afraid that any meetings of *prajas*, like the 1932 Bengal-Assam Praja Conference in Siranjanj, would be a violent affront against moneylenders and landlords.⁷⁶ Local samitis in 1933 and 1934 were growing in power throughout Bengal, in Dacca, Mymensingh, Pabna, and Bogra, Bakerganj, Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Murshidabad. The government in the early 1930s was constantly worried about the alleged 'tendency of the movement to develop along communal lines, and this is largely due to the fact that the great majority of villagers in east and north Bengal are Muhammadans, whereas the bulk of the landlords and *mahajans* are Hindus'.⁷⁷ However the extent of the 'communal' nature of the villagers listed in the government's reports included leaders urging withholding of rent, and at times, looting of Hindu traders, as in Noakhali and Mymensingh.⁷⁸ Antagonism solely on the basis of religious identity was never cited during these years, only the potential for economic conflicts to assume communal colours was hinted at.

However, most activists in this movement were Muslims. Members of the movement noted how in the early 1930s, 'the *praja samitis* were the only type of organization truly open for Bengali Muslims'.⁷⁹ Growing rapidly in the early 1930s, a turning point in the *krishak* movement's expansion into an all-Bengal entity was a pivotal 1935 meeting in Mymensingh, the location of the first Bengal peasant conference in 1914. The meeting elected a new president and set of leaders. At this juncture, Bengal's Muslim political leadership began to take on different dimensions. Up until this moment, Bengal's Muslim representatives in council were composed mostly of Calcutta-based businessmen and landowners. The youth of the *krishaksamiti*, however, had been urging new leaders from East Bengal, like Fazlul Huq, to assume leadership. A split then developed between elder Calcutta-based individuals, like Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin and East Bengalis like Fazlul Huq. Members like Abul Mansur Ahmed pushed for Huq's candidacy as president. Against the

wishes of the elders, Huq was made the president. From 1935 onwards, Huq assumed the public leadership of the samiti.

The organization was growing in tandem with increasing articulations of Bengali Muslim culture, as heroes of rural Bengali Muslim cultural life like Nazrul, Jasimuddin, and the singer Abbassudin, all attended *krishak samitis* gatherings. At the 1935 Mymensingh meeting, artists, singers, and local writers were invited. As a politician of the 1930s remarked, 'it was the first time in the twentieth century social history of the Bengali Muslims that a comprehensive, well-organized attempt was made by a political body to mobilize the Muslim rural masses through their own folklore'.⁸⁰

In 1935 and 1936, the collection of samitis around Bengal became consolidated into an all-Bengal Krishak Praja Party (KPP). Though it was mostly comprised of Muslims, Hindus also participated in publicizing the message and gathering supporters as the initial impetus for the movement was based on peasant concerns that transcended communitarian divides. So Muslim politicians like Fazlul Huq, Shamsuddin Ahmed, and Tamizuddin Khan, youth like Abul Mansur Ahmed, and Hindus like Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, all helped push Bengal to 'ride the wave of peasant politics'.⁸¹ The idea of a Bengali Muslim culture focused on peasant life was not imagined to wholly exclude Hindus, but rather only to foreground the hitherto neglected dimension of Islam and Bengali Muslim folklore. Through the efforts of the KPP, the newly constructed Milon Press published *Chashi*, a weekly paper from Mymensingh. Local and district boards found KPP workers canvassing vigorously. For the first time, Bengali Muslim agriculturists were given a voice as the main constituent of a political party and they created a list of fourteen demands in April 1936.

Of its many demands in this and in other manifestoes of the party, an emphasis on both 'peasant' and 'Muslim' concerns became evident. For peasants, the organization urged the abolition of the zamindari system without compensation, and pressed for the reduction of rates of rent, remission of old debts, free and compulsory education, and a host of other measures constructed for the benefit of peasants. On the 'Muslim' side, it included in its aims the wish to 'protect and advance the political and religious rights and interests of the Indian Musalmans', to 'protect and promote the Urdu language and script, but with proper safeguards for the development of the vernacular', and 'to take steps for the adequate representation of Muslims and the scheduled castes in the services with a

view to ensuring justice to all communities'.⁸² This connection, however, did not arise without producing divisions within the Bengali Muslim community, as the Calcutta-based Muslim politicians who previously had been supportive of the *krishak* demands, like Akram Khan and Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin, had by 1936 split from the group and formed their rival United Muslim Party.

In the meantime, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, having been out of political action for several years, returned to India in 1934 and started to revamp the all-India Muslim League. Jinnah visited Bengal in 1935 and was stunned to find out that the Bengali Provincial Muslim League (BPML) was actually in the hands of *praja* leaders like Maulvi Mujibur Rahman, Abdus Sobhan, and Abul Mansur Ahmed, the president of the Mymensingh branch. All of these activists were busy organizing peasants, not busy advertising Muslim unity. But they still were members of the Muslim League.⁸³

Through his lieutenant and Calcutta business leader Mirza Abul Isphahani, Jinnah organized meetings with KPP representatives in Calcutta. Initially, few disagreed with Jinnah's emphasis on protecting Muslim interests and consolidating Muslim unity. But Jinnah's goal of organizing all of Muslim India on a single platform began to cause dissension. He wanted all other Muslim groups to join the ML to promote a united Muslim front. At a meeting at Albert Hall in Calcutta in 1935, he said in a strikingly powerful voice 'let the cream of the Hindu society be organized under the banner of the Congress and the cream of the Muslim society organized under the banner of the Muslim League. Then let us put up a united demand for the independence of the motherland. Our demand will be irresistible'.⁸⁴ Regardless of the attention this raised, the younger activists like Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, were wary of Jinnah's intentions.

As discussions between Jinnah's camp and the KPP became more heated, Bengal's *praja* leaders lost the energy for a compromise about electoral arrangements. Jinnah demanded that KPP candidates stand on ML tickets and that they remove their anti-zamindar legislation. As he aimed for a single, united Muslim India, the alienation of zamindars would anger a powerful part of the ML. The KPP tried to compromise, but Jinnah wanted full ML control. Some observers noticed that he convincingly argued that since the KPP and BPML are virtually comprised of the same people, they ought to run on a ML ticket.

After a series of intrigues between Jinnah, his aides, Huq, and various KPP leaders, and rumours about what compromises the KPP had made, both Abul Mansur Ahmed and Humayun Kabir decided to all KPP-ML negotiations. Jinnah personally urged Abul Mansur Ahmed to 'go to every home and carry the message of Muslim unity to each and every Muslim', and he told them, 'That will serve the peasants more than your *praja* party'.⁸⁵ By late 1936, given the hesitance of Jinnah and his associates to focus on peasant demands and the KPP's resolute emphasis on them, the KPP and ML had formally parted ways before the upcoming elections. Due to seemingly interminable differences between Jinnah and KPP leaders like Abul Mansur Ahmed, the KPP decided to end their formal association with the ML for the elections. While before the elections the BPML and the KPP were virtually synonymous, during the elections both parties would directly compete with each other.

During the 1936–37 election, the ML had advantages, like Akram Khan's new newspaper *Azad*, which publicized the ML's party platforms with formal endorsements. In contrast to the ML, the KPP had fewer resources and not nearly as much money. But the KPP did have Fazlul Huq, who was perceived as a 'man of the people', as someone who opposed zamindar oppression and who was directly connected with peasants.⁸⁶ The ML had no such advantage in rural East Bengal. Additionally, young Muslim students, intellectuals, and writers who contributed to journals like *Bulbul* and *Saogat* supported the KPP cause.⁸⁷

One particular factor impacted the results of the 1936–37 elections, namely the 1935 Government of India Act's changes to Bengal politics. Two features especially shaped the increasing mixture of peasant concerns with formal politics. First, the act overtly focused on rural constituencies, so out of 117 Muslim seats, 111 were set in rural areas. This propelled rural areas of East Bengal to gain centre-stage in the election process. Also, the franchise was extended from 3 per cent in 1919 to about 14 per cent in 1935. Though in overall terms, the extension was not terribly high, this boosted more and more Muslims into positions of importance in the political process, and significantly shifted the terrain of Bengal politics onto the countryside.⁸⁸

In the 1936–37 election, the ML commanded a slight margin of victory over the KPP. The Congress, however, refused to create a coalition with the ML. They did briefly try to produce a coalition ministry with the KPP. The Congress rigidly maintained their need to release political

prisoners and the KPP could not agree to this demand. Due to this and other communication breakdowns, the Hindu-majoritarian Congress party backed out from negotiations and refused to form a coalition.

This exit of the Congress left the KPP and ML to form a coalition. From the very formation of the first ministry, the KPP's emphasis on peasant rights began to decline in official circles. Through various machinations of both Fazlul Huq along with ML and Congress leaders, Shamsuddin Ahmed, a long-time praja supporter, was denied entry into the ministry. His place was given to a wealthy land-owning *nawab*. Fazlul Huq had tacitly approved of this action and he explained his support by citing the cause of Muslim solidarity. By the time the new cabinet was formed, eight out of eleven ministers were wealthy landlords, and the radical reforms the KPP pushed for like the abolition of zamindari and free primary education were reserved until further review. It is not clear from available evidence as to why exactly the proponents of all-India Muslim solidarity, from the ML vantage point, were so wary of the class-based politics of the KPP. But Jinnah and many ML members during the 1936–37 elections claimed to speak for the Muslim community above and beyond class divides and assured their constituencies that once communitarian goals were met, class-based issues would come to the fore.

Abul Mansur Ahmed and other KPP members did create an advisory board to ensure that peasant demands were met. By this time, debt settlement boards had already been created, but the KPP pushed for the abolition of the zamindar system entirely, the curtailment of mahajan powers, and the reduction of ministerial salaries. The credit crisis of the 1930s determined, to a great extent, the nature of the political goals of the KPP, as the major demands of the peasant organization related to curtailing the effects of indebtedness and ameliorating the economic health of both debtors and creditors in the midst of the far-reaching liquidity crisis of the Great Depression.⁸⁹ Though the aims of the KPP were economic, many members would feel the brunt of a rising provincial turn in Bengali Hindu politics. Abul Mansur Ahmed wrote how Hindu nationalists suddenly changed their previous focus on the 'Bengali nation' in the 1930s when it was clear that the majority of Bengalis were Muslim and that these Muslim Bengalis most likely would run the government. Instead, they started to declare support for the 'Indian' nation and left Bengal behind. The reason Abul Mansur Ahmed cited for this was the entry of Fazlul Huq into a position of power, who 'had put the economics

of Bengal at the forefront of Bengal politics, realizing that the masses of Bengali peasants, who happen to be Muslims, demand representation in government'.⁹⁰ Huq was merely one man, but he represented a variety of forces—the rising Bengali Muslim middle-class, Bengali Muslim land-owning interests, and a politics that focused on economics and distribution of wealth and resources.

When Ahmed would be confronted by Hindu nationalists, he would often show a list of Bengal's socio-economic stratification to his Hindu peers:

Hindu	Muslim
Zamindar	Peasant Mahajan
Debtor Lawyer	Client Doctor
Patient Magistrate	Accused Players
Audience Jailer	Captive ⁹¹

The symbolic and emotional, poignancy of this dichotomy in rural Bengal society, rather than its empirical certitude, gripped Bengal politics of the mid-1930s. Cultural pride and distinctiveness, though written about by intellectuals in Calcutta or Dacca, was beginning to seep into KPP workers and their constituents in the countryside. This led Ahmed to call the *praja* movement 'the only movement within rural Bengali Muslim society', with distant precursors in the Faraizi, Titu Mir, and Fakir/Sanyassi movements of earlier generations. It was neither simply a political movement aimed at representation in the liberal system of politics nor was it a movement by and for Muslim self-respect. It was a movement that combined the two, as it was a 'movement for the self-respect of Muslims', or 'Musalmaner marjader dabi'.⁹² This type of self-respect was now sought after generations of social discrimination, of Hindu zamindars openly disrespecting Muslim peasants twice their age, and of those same zamindars denying their *prajas* seats in *kutcheris*. After the rise of the KPP, Bengal's social relations were no longer between zamindar and peasant, but between Hindu and Muslim. This was not, of course, an instantiation of religious difference, but a strategized construction of difference rooted in the material culture of Bengal.

In the first two years of the new KPP-ML ministry, Huq did preside over a range of progressive legislation. But he told Abul Mansur Ahmed in 1938 that 'Bengal's movement for *prajas* and Bengal's movement for

Muslims are one and the same. Just like the Muslim League does for all of India's Muslims, the KPP does for Bengal's Muslims'.⁹³ By 1939, KPP members did see the power of this line of thought. From the mid-1930s, the government had taken measures to ameliorate the economic problems of Bengali peasants. In 1936, the Bengal Agricultural Debtors Act created debt settlement boards to help indebted peasants. In 1938, *shalishi* or dispute boards based on local law were created. Also, in 1940, the Bengal Moneylenders Act of 1940 registered moneylenders and reduced interest rates. In 1938, the government established the Flood Commission to examine problems of land administration and particularly, the issue of a potential abolition of the zamindar system. Though in 1940, the commission recommended the abolition of the zamindar system, it could not be implemented due to political instability and the Great Famine of 1943.⁹⁴

Even though zamindari abolition did not happen, other peasant demands were being negotiated and so Muslim solidarity grew in the form of a movement to establish self-respect in the eyes of Hindu society. Gradually, many members of the KPP drifted towards the ML, and as many believed the 'the peasant movement was, in essence, a Muslim movement', there was little reason for KPP men not to ally with the ML. As many of the praja demands were met, except for the abolition of zamindars, many in the KPP were able to accept the idea of Muslim *swatantrata* or difference, as it had been part and parcel of a larger economic programme anyway. In February 1939, after only a few years of formal acceptance, following a grand meeting in Bhengula, the KPP all but formally withered away, as the majority of members began from then on to affiliate with the ML.

KPP and Bengali Muslim 'Culture'

The KPP provided the link between the intellectuals writing books for urbane audiences and contributing to middle-class journals like *Bulbul* and the world of peasant politics. The party provided a basis for the interplay between peasant politics and ideas of distinctive Bengali Muslim culture. These two strands of politics merged as a result of the rise of a Bengali Muslim middle-class derived from rural regions of East Bengal. By the mid-1930s, a small but growing middle-class of Bengali Muslims emerged as a result of the expanding numbers of qualified Muslim graduates from Calcutta and Dacca Universities vying for jobs

and government posts. Also the rising recognition of the *mufasssil*, as encapsulated in the Government of India Act of 1935 and the 1936–37 elections, propelled those intellectuals and leaders from these regions into positions of provincial prominence.

The leaders of the Krishak Praja Party, such as Tamizuddin Khan, Syed Nausher Ali, and A.K. Fazlul Huq, came from a social class that was neither from the earlier generation of Urdu or Persian speaking elites unconnected to Bengali language or culture, nor directly from peasant-cultivator groups. Rather they hailed from relatively prosperous rural peasant families with capital, and had connections to both Bengali and Muslim cultural stature, and property. Many, like Shamsuddin Ahmed, Syed Nausher Ali, Abul Mansur Ahmed, and Humayun Kabir, were educated in Western institutions and fluent in colonial-era political practice. Others were madrasa-educated like Maniruzzaman Islamabadi or Abdullah Baqui. But a majority of them were members of middle-class professions, as 'lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, *jotedars*—were at the apex of KPP leadership'.⁹⁵

This new breed included individuals like Tamizuddin Khan, who completed his higher education through great economic hardship. Tamizuddin Khan became the first Muslim honours graduate from Faridpur, the region that produced Nawab Abdul Latif and Jasimuddin. Upon entry into the Bengal Legislative Assembly and through his work in the KPP, he worked within the strictures of the colonial language of electorates, and within the rural, populist, and agrarian world that spoke a language (in Bengali, and that Bengali of various dialectal versions which included Urdu, Persian, and Arabic words) of local Islam, development, and self-definition. When he entered politics, he was inspired by the 'ideal of service to my kith and kin, to the poor, to my country and to mankind in general, which all combined is regarded according to the Islamic conception as service to God, if rendered in the proper spirit'.⁹⁶

The rise of Fazlul Huq also represented this development. From Barisal in southern Bengal, Huq rose to academic brilliance, debating in English, but also fluent in Urdu and his native Bengali. With an illustrious career in various legislative assemblies, he assumed the leadership of the KPP in the 1930s, but also affiliated with the Muslim League. He was the first Muslim politician to tour locations in East Bengal and actually speak dialects understandable to Muslim peasants.⁹⁷ He also commingled with politicians of all communities. His rise to power within the KPP and in

Bengal at large signified a greater change in Bengali social history—the rise of an identifiable Muslim middle-class with a stake in the professions, land, and government that was simultaneously linked to rural Bengali culture.

Abul Mansur Ahmed, a young public intellectual and peasant activist from Mymensingh, also showcased this change. He was active in Bengali Muslim journalism since the early 1920s and was a constant contributor to *Bulbul*. He also hailed from a region where memories of rural Hindu zamindar bigotry were not at all in the distant past. Even though he vaguely compared the KPP to earlier movements in the Bengal countryside, like the Faraizi and Titu Mir movements, the difference the 1930s brought forward was the inclusion of individuals like Ahmed into a liberal system of representation, along with a literary-religio-cultural sense of community boundaries for Bengali Muslims.

These leaders were closer to the majority of Bengali Muslims in the East Bengal countryside and appeared with much more legitimacy than non-Bengali, non-Bengali-speaking Muslim notables from Calcutta. By the late 1930s, Bengali Muslim leaders from the mufassil emerged as part and parcel of the political process and not simply as a footnote to urban politicians or spokesmen.⁹⁸ In the late 1930s, these leaders promoted and advertised a specifically East Bengali language and culture. Journals such as *Saogat* and *Mohammadi*, addressed this rising community of Bengali Muslim middle-class individuals who sought representation in the system from their rural Eastern Bengali vantage points. Whereas politics in earlier periods had been focused on Calcutta and urban concerns, because of the 1935 Government of India Act and the concurrent peasant politics, the Bengali Muslim middle-class came to shape both the direction of cultural activities and political organization. Community boundaries in the rural interior gained shape not just from the KPP, but also from notions of Islam, Muslim identity, and self-improvement emanating from various texts in the mufassil regions. In addition to politicians capitalizing on their mufassil location, ideas and texts about Islam also grew during this time period.

Peasant Politics and Bengali Muslim Culture in the Mufassil

The 1930s marked the culmination of self-improvement politics following the political developments of the 1910s, and especially the first

partition of Bengal. By the end of the decade, they diminished in number and significance. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, texts from various rural regions, but not always published in Calcutta, often affirmed three main points of contention. First, Islam should be a vehicle for economic development. Implicit in this point would be the ideal of Islam's focus on thrift, savings, and hard work, thereby curbing frivolous expenditure on festivals or unreliable *pirs*. Third, Bengali Muslims had an identifiable history and should continue to develop a sense of identity based on language. These texts were written in a unique form of Bengali as they inherit some factors of the *Mussalmani Bangla* active in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a form of verse that used a number of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu words. These texts were not quite punthis, but not quite prose as well, since they included various genres to get their mission across. These genres included poems and short stories as well as pedagogical prose.

In the 1930s, a newly recognized sense of a modern Bengali Muslim past and potential future, in tune with a changing liberal political atmosphere, appears in various texts from mufassil regions. The 1936 pamphlet *Mussalmander Arthasankat O Tabar Pratikar* (The Economic Crisis of Muslims and Its Solution), published from Mymensingh in East Bengal, critiqued the traditional prohibition of interest in the Islamic tradition. The text mentions Dilawar Hussein Ahmad, implying a readership familiar with the nineteenth century intellectual's pioneering critiques of the Muslim prohibition of interest.⁹⁹ The author mentioned the growing numbers of *krishak samitis* and discussed how *krishak* groups were always crushed. The author also hoped for a better future in the new context of the depression, in which jute prices had fallen, peasants were further impoverished with the loss of credit, and had fallen further into poverty. This led him to declare:

What we need is not *swaraj* but financial well-being...as Muslims would be in no position to welcome *swaraj* at a time when they would be reduced into coolie-laborers after losing their property to pay debt. If the property and tax qualification is not taken away from the vote, who is going to carry the message of peasants to the people?¹⁰⁰

The idea of a Bengali Muslim literary and cultural history written by and for Bengali Muslims appeared in Sheikh Habibur Rahman's *Sahityaratna Karmmavir Munshi Meherullah*,¹⁰¹ a narration of the revered age of reform and its most prominent activist, Munshi Meherullah, who was active in

the 1890s and 1900s. Meherullah started an era of continued defence of Islam in the Bengal countryside from Christian missionaries. Meherullah also wrote in a Bengali comprehensible to upper-crust Sanskritized Bengali Hindus. He therefore reached a broad audience as he was a part of the landmark newspaper *Mihir O Sudhakar* which published writings primarily in this type of Bengali. The memorialization points to the fallen nature of Muslims after Meherullah had passed, signifying an internal chronology and history to rural Bengali Muslims. The author stated, 'I have a feeling that had an orator like Meherullah not appeared among us at that time, I would not have found the Muslims of Bengal even as much advanced in the field of education as they are now.... He has removed the blindness of Muslims to higher education'.¹⁰² This text showed a history to the Bengali Muslim struggle that contained messages of self-help and community uplift by eulogizing a Bengali Muslim who wrote his exhortations for self-improvement in chaste, standard Bengali. This stood alongside the 1930 text *Siksha Kshetre Bangiya Musalmandiger Durabastha O Tahar Pratikar Upay* (Bengali Muslim's Miserable Plight with respect to Education and Solutions to the Problem)¹⁰³ which consolidated a Bengali Muslim historical narrative within Islamic history, whereas this text shows a unique and particular Bengali Muslim history.

Elites and Official Discourse at the End of the 1930s

Not confined to the context of rural self-improvement, Muslims in vaunted positions of public accord also contributed meaningful dialogues about Islam, its past, and its potential futures in the late 1930s. Maulvi Abdul Karim, a Muslim *alim* and polyglot, wrote *Islam: A Universal Religion of Peace and Progress* in 1938 from Calcutta. In this text, the author connected both the universalist message of Islam with the highly localized and immediately important topic of liberalism and representation of Muslims. Continuing a trend begun in the mid-1920s amongst Bengali Muslims, this text evinced a continual need on the part of Bengali Muslims to examine their religious traditions and texts in ways suitable to the political needs of the moment. Like Wadud and Hussein's advances of the late 1920s, and Akram Khan's focus on Islam as a locus of change, Karim also argued that local politics and temporal emphases on amelioration of problems was not at all un-Islamic. In fact, it was the very definition of being a Muslim.

In 1939, Sir Azizul Huq, a Bengali Muslim politician who had published numerous pamphlets and policy booklets in his career about Muslim education and separate electorates, published a book, *The Man Behind the Plough*. Huq had by this time donated much of his time and energy to the cause of Muslims, as he took over the provincial education department in 1934, and had been a prominent part of Bengal's government since the rise of the KPP.¹⁰⁴ In this nearly three hundred page English book, the author delineates the miserable condition of Bengal peasants, particularly around the questions of *abwab* and illegal extractions. Like Fazlul Huq, he believed that the cause of the peasants was the most important issue for Bengal. He claimed that little had changed for the peasants since the 1870s and the world of Faraizi agitation. Between the 1870s and the late 1930s, many laws were passed. But what did change in the intervening years was a strident and growing call for a cultural autonomy that would begin to recognize both a literary and communitarian sense of belonging, as well as economic relations and justice.

The sense of belonging was solidified in the 1938 Bengali Muslim Literature Conference in Calcutta's Muslim Hall. Abdul Karim Sahitya-bisharad spoke in this conference of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' ideals in literature, building on decades of debate within Bengali Muslim circles about this issue. He concluded, as a life-long advocate of Bengali literature, that Bengali indeed was a language that was dominated by Hindus, but only in recent times. So it would stand to reason that Hindus would use Hindu imagery and words. But, by now, there shall be nothing stopping Muslims from claiming the language as their own as they have both an ancient past represented those authors whose works he had so tirelessly collected like Alaol and Daulat Qazi. Furthermore, they now held a modern, contemporary *oeuvre*.

Mohammadi, which had published a list of the top fifty books written by Bengali Muslims a few years back, published this manifesto in 1939, as the last in a long line of literary manifestos. This conference marked an important turning point in the history of literary identity politics, as from this conference onwards, 'culture', along with 'folk' literature gained currency as a separate unit in the Bengali Muslim conferences. It was also the last conference that had an exclusively literary and intellectual audience. From 1940 onwards, literary gatherings ceased to be simply an esoteric affair that was populated with specialized intellectuals, but had started to attract masses of people who may have had little knowledge or

specialization in literature. They simply came to enjoy Bengali Muslim 'culture'.¹⁰⁵

Culture embodied by literary self-confidence was asserting itself through a variety of venues: literary conferences, journals like *Bulbul* and new texts, like Ezharul Huq's play 'Aurangzeb', which portrayed the Mughal leader in a positive light, perhaps the first modern play written in Bengali by a Bengali Muslim. As Bengali theatre was a site where Muslims had been frequently insulted, the beginning of theatre written by and for Bengali Muslims was a part of the larger movement towards recasting regional identity.

Communal relations, discussed by nearly all of the authors surveyed thus far, deteriorated sharply by the beginning of World War II in September 1939. A.D. Gordon, Inspector General of Police, discussed how 'Hindus [were] getting more and more worried and bitter: the Hindus have had it their own way for so many years.... One cannot wonder at the Mohammadans wanting to get some of their own back'.¹⁰⁶ The *Krishak Praja* newspaper carried an article by Mozammel Huq which said that Muslims are ready and are waiting for revenge after generations of mistreatment and discrimination.¹⁰⁷ Tension, therefore, was paramount in the Bengal of late 1930s. Even texts by Punjabi Muslims, like Fazli Hussain's *Plans of Hindu Raj*, circulating in Calcutta since 1932, reinforced the rising tide of Muslim distinctiveness.¹⁰⁸ Hussein cited all the elements of Bengali Muslim investment in their own recent history, celebrating the emancipatory aspect of Islam's rise in Bengal. He claims that 'in the eyes of these people who were poor fishermen, hunters, robbers, low-caste farmers, Islam was the incarnation of a blessing from Heaven for their salvation. Muslims brought the welcome news of unity and equality of all men to the people regarded as low and mean by their co-religionists'.¹⁰⁹

Memories of those like Tapan Raychaudhuri, a contemporary Bengali historian, confirm this sensibility but claimed a distance from the growing public sense of communal awareness. In his childhood home of Barisal, the home of Fazlul Huq, he noticed little communalism in his interactions with friends at school. But when he went to Calcutta as a student in the late 1930s and early 1940s, he found the atmosphere to be stifling.¹¹⁰ However, he recalled Fazlul Huq being treated with such adoration in Barisal that his family and neighbours never found leaders like Huq to be 'communal', even though the Calcutta press often painted him to be.¹¹¹

The 1930s ended with a thoughtful set of essays by Motahar Hussein Choudhury, 'Freedom, Nationalism, Communalism' in *Mohammadi*, and by Humayun Kabir, 'Freedom, Peace, Progress' in *Bulbul*. On the eve of the World War, these two authors cautioned against extremism and unrestrained identity politics, which they saw as unleashed by the electoral politics of the day. Choudhury wrote more cautiously about the problems that the expectations of freedom bring out. He pondered over the nature of freedom and what it is meant for, and wondered if the communal violence that Bengalis are witnessing has anything to do with that freedom. Kabir similarly warned his readers of the unfolding of freedom's hitherto unknown meanings, and how violence, a tempting path, will not be a path to anybody's freedom. Bengali Muslim intellectuals, by this moment, had arrived on the all-Bengal stage.

The decade's developments accelerated the connection between a regional identity, linguistic confidence in Bengali, and an increased focus on socio-economic relations and ways towards ameliorating the woes of peasants. Rather than simply find affirmation in a literary, political, or activist context, these three forces converged by the end of the decade in varying strands of social life.

Notes

1. 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar' (Fifty Years of Politics as I Saw It) in Rafiqul Islam (ed.), *Abul Mansur Ahmed Rachanabali Tritiya Khanda* (Complete Works of Abul Mansur Ahmed, Vol. 3) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy 2001), p. 116.

2. For the distinction between the faith of Muslims and the usage of Muslim social identities as modern strategies to fight inequities, see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

3. *Bulbul* started in 1933, the same year that *Poedjangga Boare*/The New Writer, a literary journal started in the Dutch East Indies. A creative regionalism and cultural regeneration in the form of literary criticism began to develop in what later would become Indonesia at exactly the same time as in Bengali Muslim society.

4. Abul Mansur Ahmed writes in his memoirs that the 1936–37 elections were 'a groundbreaking, historic event' that changed Muslim politics forever as peasants would begin to have a say in formal Bengal politics, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 75. He also remarks that as Bengal saw the rise of

the Krishak Praja Party—a party whose constituency included mostly Bengali Muslim peasants—he witnessed the beginning of a new era in the political history of India and the political history of Bengal, *ibid.*, p. 93. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Ahmed's collaborator, friend, and at times, roommate, writes in his *Atit Diner Smriti* (Memories of Old Times), that in the mid-1930s when the Krishak Praja Party rose in stature, Muslims developed 'a sense that Muslims are not just different from Hindus in religion, but in ancestry, rituals, culture and in all the meaning-making markers of life', p. 330. Mohammed Waliullah, a prominent Muslim journalist of the era wrote that 'never before have the people of this country seen the prospect of being represented by a government directly elected by them. As a student of history, I felt this was no less significant than Balmiki's composing of the Ramayana, Asoka's conquest of Kalinga.... Sher Shah's building of the Grand Trunk Road, Akbar's propagation of Din-e-Ilahi or even Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal!' *Yug-Bichitra* (Dhaka: Molla Brothers, 1967), p. 343.

5. Comparable examples include the Frankfurt School's notion of critical practice or the American New York intellectuals of the 1930s such as Delmore Schwartz, Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, and many others. Most of these writers were Jewish and felt alienated from mainstream political and literary discourse. Lionel Trilling's politics of literature as espoused in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1950) provides a useful window into literary criticism as sort of critical practice.

6. Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal Since 1770*, p. 163.

7. 'Emancipating the intellect' is the English translation of *buddhirmukti*. Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Where the Mind Is Without Fear' from *Gitanjali* served as an inspiration for the use of this phrase.

8. In an account by Tapan Raychaudhuri, young Muslim students in Calcutta would energetically support the Mohammadan Sporting Club in the early 1940s in ways that he never encountered before. This support of the football team was an 'undoubtedly strong part of the surge of Muslim identity in Bengal', p. 40, 'Bangalnama' (Story of East Bengal), *Desh*, 12 April 2006.

9. Anisuzzaman, 'Introduction', Nasreen Shums (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul* (Selected Articles from *Bulbul*) (Dhaka: Publishing House, 2005), n.p.

10. It launched the careers of a generation of writers like Farrukh Ahmed, Abu Rushd, Saukhar Osman, Abul Hossein, Ahsan Habib, and Golam Quddus. The circulation and visibility of these authors grew within a new orbit of Bengali Muslim journalism.

11. Many of Bulbul's Muslim contributors, like Kazi Abdul Wadud, would publish articles in the Calcutta-based *Kallol* (The Wave).

12. M. Wajed Ali, 'Juger Man/The Feeling of the Age', Baisakh/Sraban, 1340 BS/1933 in Shums (ed.) *Nirbachita Bulbul*, pp. 10–12.

13. Ibid., p. 43. Jamaluddin al-Afghani had responded to a lecture Renan had given at the Sorbonne in which the French author stated that Arabs were incapable of science and philosophy. In this letter, published in the *Journal des Debats* in 1883, al-Afghani offers a host of examples that demonstrate how Muslims from the beginning of Islam had been thinking scientifically and philosophically. See Nikkie Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Jamaluddin al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 183. Though Hussein referenced al-Afghani's historical speeches in Calcutta in other works, he never mentioned this specific exchange between al-Afghani and Renan in the late nineteenth century.

14. Abul Hussein, 'Muslim Kalchar O Uhar Darshanik Bhatti/Muslim Culture and Its Philosophical Foundations', Baisakh/Sarban 1339 BS/1993 in Shums, (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul*, Vol. 1, p. 43.

15. See Motahar Hussein Choudhury, 'Sahitya Sombondhe Nana Katha/A Few Words about Literature', in Shums (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul/Selected Articles from Bulbul*, Vol. 2, 47–51, and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, 'Samanbai O Shristi/Synthesis and Creation', in Shums (ed.) *Nirbachita Bulbul*, pp. 56–9.

16. Kazi Abdul Wadud, 'Bankim Chandra', in Shums (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul*, pp. 82–3.

17. See chapter 1 for a review of this earlier history.

18. Kazi Nazrul Islam, 'Bartaman Bishwya-Sahitya/Today's World Literature', Poush/Chaitra 1340 BS/1934 in Shums (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul*, Vol. 3, pp. 181–5.

19. He constantly refers to Oscar Wilde when discussing talking morality and immorality.

20. Motahar Hussein Choudhury, 'Sahitya Sommondhe Nana Katha/A Few Words about Literature', Bhadra/Agrahan 1340 BS/1934 in Shams (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul*, Vol. 2, pp. 84–9.

21. What he terms 'ancient' would correspond to medieval in contemporary historical language.

22. Sayyid Emdad Ali, 'Bangali Mussalman Sahitya Sammelan/Bengali Muslim Literary Conference', Baisakh/Sraban 1340 BS/1933 in Shums (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul*, Vol. 1, pp. 67–73.

23. 'Wallah' is an indigenously Indian suffix appended to any group, type of work, or language signifying advocacy of that particular form. Urdu-wallahs were those who claimed an attachment to and advocacy for Urdu.

24. This argument was identical to the one put forth by Sir Abdel Ghuznavi in early 1929.

25. Anwar-ul Kadir, 'Urdu Bangla Torkoaur Bangali Musalman' (The Arguments between Urdu and Bangla and the Bengali Muslim) in Shums (ed.), *Nirbachita Bulbul*, Vol. 2, p. 98.

26. The 'provincializing' of Bengal politics in the 1930s and the stridently 'Hindu' identity that grew out of this time period, coloured by the impending changes in electoral politics and restructuring of seats in the Bengal assembly informs Hussein's comments. This entire process has been studied, on the Hindu side, by Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, chapter 3. Chatterji argues that because the prospect of a Muslim majority government arose, prominent Hindus protested vehemently, citing spurious and communalist arguments about how Muslims were unfit for majority rule. Hussein's protestations appear to confirm this perception by Bengali Muslims of the 1930s.

27. See P.K. Datta, *Carving Blocs* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapter 4, for a discussion of this issue in the press and public sphere in 1920s Bengal.

28. Literally 'black fever' in Hindustani, this disease claimed the lives of many Bengali peasants in the early twentieth century. Often fatal and caused by parasites that attack internal organs, the parasites in question are now named as Leishmania, named after the Scottish pathologist William Boog Leishman (1865–1926) who discovered the original protozoan in 1903 as a result of his work in colonial India.

29. Chittaranjan Das (1870–1925) was a Bengali Hindu lawyer and nationalist who advocated the cause of communal harmony in various formats. One of his most famous efforts was the Bengal Pact, an agreement between him and Bengali Muslim politicians settled in late 1923, guaranteeing 55 per cent Muslim representation in government appointments after the establishment of self-government in Bengal. Though many Bengali Hindu Congress members opposed this pact, he was well respected by many on both the Muslim and Hindu sides, thus earning him the honorific Deshbandhu, meaning Friend of the Nation. Ahmed cites him as an example of how Hindus and Muslims worked together in the recent past.

30. Ahmed's 'Janma-Dainya' (Wretchedness at Birth) was published in 1937 or 1938 and Hossein's 'Amar Jauban' (My Youth) was published in 1934.

31. As Iqbal's *Reconstructions of Religious Thought in Islam* was published in 1930 it is likely this was a factor in the Bengali intellectuals latching on to his philosophy over his poetry.

32. Particularly S. Wajed Ali's 'Iqbal' and Sri Jaminikanta Sen's 'Great Poet Sir Muhammad Iqbal'.

33. 'Great Poet Sir Muhammad Iqbal'.

34. S. Wajed Ali, 'Iqbal'.

35. The team's victories inspired a poem by Golam Mostafa, 'League Bijoya, Dig Bijoya', and Nazrul's 'Mobarakbad', which would often be sold in small leaflets during matches. See Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti*, p. 321.

36. In addition to Bulbul, *Mohammadi* echoed the very same issue with a series of articles about Sarat Chandra in the late 1930s.

37. *Nirbachita Bulbul*, 1st Year, 3rd issue, n.p.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Bauls are a group of mendicant mystics who are known for their heterodox beliefs and practices that combine elements of Sufism, *bhakti* Vaishnavism, as well as tantric sexual practices. Marked by their clothing and *ektara*, a one-stringed musical instrument, these traveling mystics came to represent 'folk' Bengali culture via the importance Rabindranath placed on them. Sukumar Sen in *Bangalir SahityaItihasa* (History of Bengali Literature), (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1960) claims that Rabindranath 'discovered' Bauls, p. 396. See Jeanne Openshaw, *Seeking Bauls of Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Edward C. Dimock, 'Rabindranath Tagore: The Greatest of the Bauls of Bengal' *Journal of Asian Studies* 19, 1 (November 1959): 33–51; Carol Salomon, 'The Bauls', in Donald Lopez (ed.), *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 187–208, for overviews.

40. A line from a Baul song, 'The unknown bird flies in and out of the cage/ If I could catch it, I would place/ the chains of my mind on its feet', opens the novel *Gora* (Kolkata, 1910), p. 1. In 1931, he wrote, 'I have expressed my love for the Bauls in many of my writings ... the tune as well as the message of the Bauls had at one time absorbed my mind as if they were its very element', *Religion of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 110.

41. See Jahirul Hasan, *Jasimuddin: Jiban-grantha* (Jasimuddin: A Biography), (Dhaka: Palasa Prakashani, 1964) pp. 41–91 for descriptions of his literary development and relationship to Dinesh Chandra Sen. His own autobiography *Jiban Katha* (Life Story) (Dhaka: Palasa Prakashani, 1964) also discusses his rise from his Faridpur origins to a celebrity in Bengali literary circles by the 1930s.

42. From 1947, regional folklore societies sprouted in Rajshahi, Sylhet, Rangpur, Mymensingh and folklore studies gained recognition in the new Asiatic Society of Pakistan. During 1948–52, the impending work towards the language movement helped folklore, from 1954, the Bangla Academy was formed and started to collect folklore formally

43. The literal English definition of punthi is manuscript, derived as it is from the Sanskrit word *pustak* for book. However, in the Bengali cultural

context readers must recall a set of criteria specific to the Bengali cultural context. First, though popularly associated with Muslims of Bengal, these works refer to all middle period Bengali works regardless of the authorship. Though no scientific definition has emerged from linguistics or Bengali area studies, the majority of texts called punthis use a composite vocabulary drawing from Bengali, Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit. However, many writers like Alaol, a seventeenth century writer who produced many punthis did not use such mixed language. Finally, the subject matter of punthis, though commonly thought of as 'Muslim', often concerned history, romance, mysticism, and folk tales. Stories about Muslims and about Islamic themes, however, do abound in punthi texts. Sayyid Sultan's late sixteenth-century *Navi-Vamsa*, an adaptation of the Persian *Kasasul Ambiya* narrates the work and life of all religious prophets through the Prophet Mohammed. Sahityabisharad turned this mass of literary history into a set of data that could be recognizably called 'Bengali Muslim literary history', done so specifically to negate the inferiority complex many Muslims felt about Bengali. See Syed Sajjad Hussain, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection*, xiv-xvii, for a discussion of the meaning of the term.

44. For a complete list with full citations, see Manjula Bera, *Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad, 1871-1953* (Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 2005), pp. 28-30 and Syed Sajjad Hussain (ed.), *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960), p. xiii.

45. Hereafter BSP.

46. See Ghosh, *Power in Print*, chapter 7, as well as Tony K. Stewart, *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) for discussions of manuscript literature in medieval Bengal.

47. Others in this genre include his *Saifulmuluk-Badiujjamal*, another love story, this one taken from the *Arabian Nights*. The story narrates how Sifuan, the king of Egypt, falls in love with Badiujjamal, princess of Iran. This was written after *Padmabati*, under the patronage of Syed Musa in the late 1660s.

48. See Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad, *Padmabati* (Chittagong: Chittagong University, 1977), p. 29 and descriptions of the Alaol and *Padmabati* in Syed Sajjad Hussain, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection*, pp. 286-97.

49. The entire work was probably completed around 1586 or 1587.

50. Gautam Bhadra, 'Jatiya Bader Punthi Path: Abdul Karim Sahitya-Bisharad', Abdul Karim Sahitya Visharad Memorial Lecture. 27 September 2003, reprinted in *Baromaas*, pp. 20-35

51. *The Field of the Embroidered Quilt* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. viii.

52. In his autobiography, he writes that his real influences were the people he knew growing up in Faridpur, boatman, sanyassis, and fakirs with names like Jadab, Parikshit, Ismail, Hari Patani, or Hari Acharya, *Jiban Katha*, 122.

53. See Gautam Bhadra, 'Jatiyabader Punthi Path: Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad' and Manjula Bera, *Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad (1871–1953)* (Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 2005).

54. Manjula Bera, *Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad* (Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad), p. 21.

55. *Bulletin of the Rationalist Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, n.p.

56. *Ibid*, vol. 1, no. 7, 'The Conflict of Cultures', p. 199.

57. V/25/960/18, Report on Administration of Bengal, 1924–25, p. 14.

58. V/10/81, Report on Administration of Bengal, 1926–27, p. 248.

59. V/10/82, Report on Administration of Bengal, 1932–33, pp. 174–5.

60. Many newspapers and periodical catering specifically to a Bengali Muslim audience were in circulation from the 1830s. From 1831 to 1930, approximately 130 periodicals catering to a Bengali Muslim audience, such as *al-Eslam*, *Islam Darshan*, and *Naba Nur*, were in circulation. In the early half of the nineteenth century, of over 900 total Bangla language periodicals, 240 were from east Bengal. See Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra* (Journals of Muslim Bengal), 1831–1930, Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion*, and Muhammed Rahman, *Banglaye Muslim Madhyabitta Srenir Bikash* (Development of the Bengali Muslim Middle Class).

61. *Masik Mohammadi*, 'Agre Bangali Ki Musalman?' 5th Year, 1st Issue, 1338 BS/1931. This comparison brings to a mind a comment mentioned to me during my research by Badruddin Omar, the son of Abul Hashim, the 1940s populist Muslim leader of the Bengali Provincial Muslim League. Omar said that asking whether a person is Bengali or Muslim is like asking someone if they are Muslim or vegetarian. They need not cancel each other out. On the surface they may appear to be antithetical categories but in reality, they have no reason to oppose each other. This is taken from an interview, 10 November 2005.

62. Editorial, 5th Year, 9th Issue, 1339 BS/1932.

63. Abdul Karim Sahityaratna is not to be confused with Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad, though the former also collected lots of folklore and contributed to *Mohammadi* and *Saogat*.

64. 9th Year, 11th issue, 1343 BS/1936, cited in Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Samayikpatre Jiban O Janamat* (Life and Public Opinions in Periodicals, Vol. II) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2005), p. 143.

65. See my discussion later in this chapter about the Communal Award.

66. '50 of the Best Books', Editorial, 9th Year, 3rd Issue, 1935, cited in Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Samayikpatre Jiban O Janamat*, pp. 358–60.

67. *Dacca University Journal*, 1936.

68. Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam*, p. 160.

69. See *ibid.*, pp. 160–3, in which the author discusses how separate electorates were seen by Indian Muslims as a protective safeguard from the power of majorities.

70. See N.N. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. 2 (July–December 1932), p. 236 for a tabulation of seats by community. For the effects of the Communal Award in Bengal, see John Gallagher, 'Congress in Decline: Bengal, 1930–39' *Modern Asian Studies* 7, 3 (1973): 589–645, Harun Ur Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–47*, pp. 40–3, Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947*, chapter 2, 'Bengal Politics and the Communal Award', pp. 18–55, and Bidyut Chakrabarty, 'The Communal Award of 1932 and its Implications in Bengal' *Modern Asian Studies* 23, 3 (1989): 493–523. For an overview of how separate electorates functioned within Muslim political thought and practice in the early twentieth century, see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam*, pp. 160–3.

71. Home Political File No. 18/12/1932, p. 2.

72. *Star of India*, 22 November 1933, quoted in Harun Ur Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1905–47*, p. 40.

73. Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, p. 163.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

76. Home Political File No. 18/15/1932.

77. V/10/82, Report on Administration of Bengal, 1934–35, p. xxx.

78. In 1930 in Kishoreganj, Mymensingh, Muslim peasants looted Hindu shops and burnt documents relating to debt, and in Noakhali in 1933, preventative action was taken against KPP members urging no-rent campaigns. V/10/82, p. xxxi. For analysis of the 1930 Kishoreganj riots, see Sugata Bose, 'The Roots of "Communal" Violence in Rural Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies* 16, 3 (1982): 463–91.

79. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar' in Rafiqul Islam (ed.), *Abul Mansur Ahmed Rachanabali*, p. 56.

80. Syed Muhammed Hossain, *Banglar Katha* (About Bengal) (Dhaka: Muktaadhara, 1986), p. 98.

81. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 72.

82. See Srilata Chatterjee, *Congress Politics in Bengal, 1919–1939*, pp. 179–81 and Mohammed Mannan Siraj, *Muslim Political Parties in Bengal, 1936–47: A Study of their Activities and Struggle for Freedom* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1987), appendix C, pp. 138–40. Though Bengali Muslim literateurs had for years been extolling Bengali, the KPP mention of Urdu by no means detracts from the Bengali focus of the group. Rather, like the writers of *Bulbul* or *Mohammadi*, the leaders of the KPP saw Urdu as an important trans-regional language and source of inspiration.

83. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 69.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., p. 74.

86. Ibid., p. 75.

87. Some of these writers include Abul Mansur Ahmed, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, and Abdul Gafr Siddiqi. All of them, also, wrote frequently for Bengali Muslim journals aimed at literary audiences. See Jatindranath De, 'History of the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal, 1929–47: A Study of Changes in Class and Inter-community Relations in the Agrarian Sector of Bengal', PhD diss., Delhi University, 1977.

88. For details, see Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of the Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937* (Dhaka: Sunny House, 1972).

89. See Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 162–5.

90. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 96.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid., p. 98.

93. Ibid., p. 108.

94. See Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure, and Politics, 1919–1947*, chapter 4.

95. Harun Ur Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, 61. This is not to suggest that the *krishak* movement was undifferentiated and unitary. There were internal splits between the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS), led by Communists and Congress leftists, and others factions like those led by Ashrafuddin and Abdul Malek. See Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure, and Politics, 1919–1947*, p. 203.

96. Tamizuddin Khan, *Test of Time* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985), p. 72.

97. Interviews with living descendants of Fazlul Huq's family have confirmed this sentiment; personal interview, Amit De, 20 November 2006.

98. For discussions of this process, see Tajul Hashmi, *Pakistan as Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in Bengal, 1920–47* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), chapter 5, 'Rebellion to Conciliation: The Capitulation of the Krishak and the Ascendancy of the Praja, 1929–36', Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure, and Politics, 1919–47* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chapter 6, 'Agrarian Class Conflict, Nationalism, and Communalism in East Bengal', and Harun Ur Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 59–62.

99. Muhammad Abdur Rashid, *Mussalmander Arthasankat O Tahar Pratikar* (The Economic Crisis of Muslims and its Solution) (Calcutta: Mohammadi Press, 1936), n.p. This book was published in Calcutta from Mohammed Khairul Anam Khan's Mohammadi Press, a long-time printer of Bengali Muslim books like Mohammed Akram Khan's *Mostafa Charit*. It, however, was originally published by a press in Mymensingh where the author resided too.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

101. Sheikh Habibur Rahman, *Sahityaratna Karmavir Munshi Meherullah* (The Jewel of Literature and Hero, Munshi Meherullah) (Kolkata: Mohammadi Press, 1934).

102. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

103. See chapter 3 for a discussion of this text.

104. Home Political File No. 18/5/34.

105. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti*, p. 350.

106. Quoted in John Tyson's memoirs of 1939 in the Tyson Papers, MSS Eur E 341/31, p. 3.

107. Quoted in the All India Congress Committee papers of Amulya Prasad, Secretary of the Munshiganj Division, Dacca, of the Congress, 1937.

108. This Fazli Hussain was not the famous Punjabi politician, alive from 1877–1936, who was instrumental in the creation of the Punjabi Unionist party.

109. Malik Fazli-i-Hussein, *Plans of Hindu Raj* (Kolkata, 1932), p. 29.

110. From the 'Bangal-Nama', or 'Story of East Bengal', a serialized piece of writing that appeared in *Desh*, a literary magazine in Calcutta in 2006; this experience was recounted in the 12 April 2006, *Desh* edition. The writings have been included in the book-length edition, *Bangal-Nama* (Kolkata: Ananda, 2007).

111. Raychaudhuri, Tapan. *Bangal-nama* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2007).

5. *Ideas of Pakistan and the End of Empire*

In order to make a viable concept of Pakistan, we have to give it an intellectual contour—with geography, history, political science—to make it practical. We must also make sure that call of religion is not the only basis of Pakistan, as then the whole idea would be vulnerable to appropriation from *mullahs*, and therefore, the most important issue of peasant freedom may be at risk.

—Abul Mansur Ahmed, 1943¹

Though 'Pakistan' was not mentioned in the 1940 Lahore Resolution, soon after this historic moment, Muslim leaders from Bengal and other regions in colonial India began to articulate vague ideas of a 'Pakistan' as a potential solution to the problems of late colonial India. Initially, Abul Mansur Ahmed was unconvinced of the concept's political utility. It was too vague to address the crucial problems confronting the broader Indian Muslim Community in general, and the Bengali Muslim community in particular. The Muslim community was confronted with the problems of severe underemployment, the economic

oppression of peasants in the *zamindari* system, along with the biased and discriminatory facets of the colonial government. Though he certainly believed in the value of solidarity along the lines of religious community for Muslims, he saw such solidarity as a strategy to ameliorate currently existing social inequities, not as an actual basis for an anti-colonial political programme for a new conception of sovereignty.

But by 1943, Abul Mansur Ahmed did come to believe in the concept of Pakistan, defined as it was by leaders like Jinnah in the early 1940s as a secular challenge to the centralizing tendencies of the Indian National Congress. As 'religion' was not the driving force behind the conception of Pakistan in the other regions of South Asia, the Bengali experience comprised an important manifestation of the all-India Muslim encounter with ideas of decolonization that emphasized Muslim social identities within a broader anti-colonial political movement.²

Rather than religion, Ahmed foregrounds the economic problems of peasants for Bengal's Muslim population during the last days of the British Raj. Religion as the marker for a social identity, however, had grown to occupy an important space in the public discourse concerning anti-colonial politics. But, for Ahmed and his associates in the KPP of the 1930s, religion was always linked to the very specific experiences of Bengali Muslim peasants and their particular material and social world. As his activism in previous decades proved, identities of 'Muslim' and 'peasant' gradually came to occupy the same categorical field in Bengal politics by the end of the 1930s.

Publishing both Nazrul's poem 'Krishak-er Eid' ('The Eid for Peasants') and M. Wajed Ali's essay of the same name, the 1940 Eid edition of *Krishak* showcased the clear connection between a peasant and a Muslim identity in Bengal. From 1940 to 1944, in literary and high political circles, this connection transformed from a political interest articulated by political party leaders into an issue seized upon by literary and activist minds behind the articulation of Bengali Muslim cultural distinctiveness. In the literary and intellectual sphere, many associations and writers would attain stature within the growing world of Bengali Muslim readership by confronting their alienated and marginalized position within Bengali letters. The result of this continued alienation and growing sense of identity in official politics merged with a mass movement for Pakistan.

A variety of elements came to find expression within the term 'Pakistan'. This Pakistan would be a place free from Hindu domination

and colonial mismanagement, as opposed to a particular territory, though such deliberations on territory did take place.³ This revolutionary construction of space was meshed with decade-long debates regarding the ideal culture of Bengali Muslims. In this idealized world, a Pakistani Bengali Muslim would inhabit a newly defined Pak-Bangla culture, as opposed to a Bengali Muslim, forever imprisoned in the unforgiving Hindu-controlled world of Bengali culture. Within the political horizons of the 1940s, such a Hindu-oriented culture was also imprisoned inside an uncompromising vision of 'Akhand Bharat', or Indivisible India. From the point of view of the Pakistan theorists of Bengal, 'Akhand Bharat' was a continuation of imperialist thinking. Pakistan, on the other hand, for 'Bengali Pakistan-ists', would be a revolutionary change in politics aimed at liberating minorities from imperialist governance. Influenced in part by the Communist position on minority rights and self-determination, Bengali Pakistan theorists of the early 1940s maintained a commitment to self-determination through an elaboration of their own unique culture. Through an examination of regional politics, literary culture, and the merging of religious ideals of social justice within these two spheres, this chapter discusses how this conception of Pakistan arose in Bengal from 1940 to 1944.

The Rise and Fall of Fazlul Huq

Within official politics, individuals like Fazlul Huq would define the limits of Bengali Muslim political aspirations in negotiations between the All-India Muslim League (AIML), Congress, and the British colonial state. An ardent spokesman for Bengali Muslim peasants who was active at the helm of the KPP in the late 1930s, Huq developed a personality as a politician who spoke languages of religion, region, and social justice.⁴ The conflicts between Jinnah and the all-India Muslim League High Command, Fazlul Huq, and his various ministries,⁵ and other rival Bengali Muslim politicians like Suhrawardy and Akram Khan, and the British official administration during the early 1940s constitute a well-documented archive of Bengal politics near the era of decolonization.⁶ The rise and fall of Fazlul Huq as an index of official debates about Bengali Muslim cultural autonomy displays how the struggles between region and centre in official politics were replicated by a curious appropriation of the Pakistan demand under new banners of the newly structured BPML

by the mid-1940s. Though not an innovation of the 1940s, the interplay between regionalized and centralized visions of Muslim interests became central to how Pakistan as an idea emerged in the Bengali cultural space.

A unique 'regional' Bengali Muslim political interest⁷ through the downfall of Huq, was not replaced by a state-centred nationalism, but by Bengali Muslim cultural nationalism that had been brewing for nearly three decades. Huq himself at times recognized that the 'Muslims of Bengal are neither a minority community nor a majority community'⁸ and their problems are in many respects not shared by Muslims of other regions of India and also not shared by fellow Bengalis who happen to be Hindu. Huq's language included power-sharing, equity, justice, and representation in the colonial public sphere. His successors' language in the mid-1940s included Pak-Bangla, *samajikmarjada* (respect in society), and cultural autonomy.

In the late 1930s, Bengali Muslim interests manifested in two distinct arenas. On one hand, the Muslim peasant interest, long expressed in various formats since the 1910s, found articulation in mainstream journals attached to political parties, like *Krishak*. This short-lived journal published the very same intellectuals and writers who were active since the days of *Samyabadi* in the 1920s, like Nazrul, Humayun Kabir, and many others. In 1938, just after the rise of the KPP, Nazrul published his 'Krishaker Gan' (Song of the Peasant) and Humayun Kabir published 'Krishaker Eid' (The Eid for the Peasant).⁹

In addition to the journalistic arena that was attached to political parties, the debates within the Legislative Assembly and various attempts to highlight injustices, real or imagined, against Muslims, were drawing more attention as the decade ended. These injustices included Muslim feelings being injured by Hindu nationalist plays and the perceived communalism of songs like 'Bande Mataram' and books like *Anandamath*. Other points of contention included the symbols of lotus flowers in Calcutta University, seen as injurious to Muslim feelings. Finally, the perceived injustices to the Muslim community through bills on higher education and the allocation of Calcutta government jobs were also discussed in the legislative assembly.

Fazlul Huq supported and was supported by both of these trends in Bengali society in the late 1930s. Though some of his actions and alleged intrigues against peasant leaders during the beginning of the combined KPP-ML ministry roused opposition and defection in the KPP camp,

his popularity, power, and solidarity with the Muslim community of India, and of Bengal, was hardly questioned in the late 1930s. Part of his stature as a 'Muslim' politician included his behaviour after leading the KPP to victory in the 1937 elections. After being unable to manage any negotiations with the Congress, he constructed a coalition ministry with Jinnah's ML upon assuming power. After becoming Chief Minister of the Government of Bengal in April of 1937, he formed an agreement with Jinnah to publicly join the ML propaganda drive later in the year. By 1938, he was actively encouraging Muslim political unity underneath the ML banner. His work with the ML in the late 1930s demonstrated a strand of the Indian Muslim political attempts to resolve constitutional problems of power-sharing in a potentially independent India. Though always committed to his regional Bengali Muslim interests, he also saw both the local and broader trans-regional Indian Muslim interest as his own.¹⁰

When in February 1940, he convened a meeting with both Congress and Hindu Mahasabha, as well as with BPML leaders to discuss the possibility of a provincial solution to the problems of Bengal, his popularity as a Bengali Muslim, and particularly as an Indian Muslim politician certainly did not begin to wane yet. One month later, he joined Muslim League officials in Lahore to discuss various issues of the day. At this historic meeting, he moved the Lahore Resolution, one of the landmark decisions of the Muslim League of the 1940s that would prove instrumental in Muslim politics of the decade.

The Lahore Resolution signaled the beginning of debates about territorial claims about Muslim sovereignty.¹¹ Huq's introduction of the resolution was met with unanimous approval by the AIML. The resolution flowed from years of Muslim League's efforts to protect the rights of Muslims as it reiterated sentiments taken from earlier resolutions in 1938 and 1939. On one level, the Lahore Resolution was bound by the minority status of Muslims, but it also aimed to attack the constitutional edifice of colonial India. The resolution begins by declaring the Government of India Act of 1935 'totally unsuited to, and unworkable in the peculiar conditions of this country, and is altogether unacceptable to Muslim India'.¹² The resolution established not only the communitarian nature of 'Muslim India' as a solid bloc, but also that 'Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the whole constitutional plan is reconsidered *de novo* and that no revised plan would be acceptable to the Muslims unless it

is framed with their approval and consent'.¹³ A requirement for consent would be a revised concept of sovereignty such that 'the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India, should be grouped to constitute Independent States'¹⁴ in which the constituent units are sovereign', meaning that Muslim India constituted a sovereign nation, as opposed to a minority within a broader nation. Rather than be simply for or about Muslims, the resolution emphasized the general condition of all minorities, as not only did it stipulate that Muslims should enjoy 'adequate, effective, and mandatory safeguards', but that all minorities should enjoy 'protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative, and other rights and interests'.¹⁵ It therefore expressed disaffection at how minorities in general were treated under the political arrangements of the late colonial era, as opposed to affirming only Muslim Indian nationalism or political distinctiveness.

In addition to Huq himself moving the resolution, his enthusiastic declaration of the Muslims of India as an indivisible community (from the point of view of power-sharing arrangements in government) left no scope to doubt his allegiance to Muslims. He essentially combined the majority-region (Punjab and Bengal) and minority-region Muslims of the rest of India into a broader category, as he stated that even though Punjabi and Bengali Muslims were the majorities of their regions, Muslims as a community were not an effective majority, since in any all-India context they would always be a minority.¹⁶ AIML leaders, and in particular Jinnah, were so impressed with Huq's powerful speech that he received a standing ovation.¹⁷ Allegedly shouts of 'Fazlul Huq Zindabad' and 'Shere-e-Bangla' were heard.¹⁸ Nearly all of the Bengali Muslim papers showered Huq with praise and lauded the resolution as 'a landmark in the history of Indian Muslims'. Not only was the creative solution to Indian minority problems unprecedented, the editors of *Masik Mohammadi* concluded that it was the only solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem in colonial India.¹⁹ Some, like the editorial staff at *Saogat*, saw the resolution as a truly revolutionary event that allowed the AIML to transform from a party of rich landowners into a party of truly popular representatives who came up with positive solutions to problems, not simply negative backbiting tactics against the Congress. Given the resolution's focus on 'religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative, and other rights'²⁰ for all minority groups, including

Muslims, it signalled a path towards freedom as it guaranteed protection for all communities.²¹

Many Muslims contended that Hindus simply did not understand the proposals that Muslim politicians offered for the resolution of communal problems. The Lahore Resolution was no different, and in a telling anecdote, Subhas Chandra Bose, a leading member of the Congress, found the resolution to be grounded in theocratic and inflexible ideals. Abul Mansur Ahmed, a long-time friend and supporter of Bose, had to disabuse him of this notion. Bose admitted that he, like many of his Congress colleagues, had not bothered to read the resolution but formed his opinions from the news. After Bose read the resolution in its entirety, he began to find value in the AIML's emphasis on minorities. Much of the discourse of the early 1940s was centred on how minorities would be treated in any post-colonial settlement. However, Bose's transformation was rare as the resolution only produced a rash of anti-Muslim and aggressive 'Akhand Bharat' posturing in the Hindu press, which bolstered Huq's position amongst the Muslims of Bengal.²²

Abdul Gafr Siddiqi, a Bengali Muslim secondary school student during the 1940s, and an ardent supporter of the Muslim League, which was behind the movement for Pakistan, reminisced about the power of Huq and the emotional effects of his speech on the Muslim youth of Bengal. He interpreted Huq as articulating a culmination of 'hundreds of years of a struggle for freedom since Plassey'²³ during the historic meeting. The culmination for Siddiqi came at the end of a long line of Muslim Bengali activists like Haji Shariatallah, Dudu Miyan, and Titu Mir, all of whom fought to establish the rights of Muslims in Bengal. Huq was the favourite leader of Bengali Muslim youth of the late 1930s, as he was 'looking out for the political, cultural, and economic rights of Muslims in a free India[.]...even though Congress Hindus interpreted it as separatism.'²⁴

No matter how much support he derived from that speech and resolution, Huq's hold on Bengali Muslim political power dwindled soon afterwards. On the organizational level, the centralized power within the All-India Muslim League was spelled out in the League's resolution, as it stipulated that no provincial leader could oppose or challenge the wishes of the President and the all-India command. This laid the foundation for the early 1940s struggle between Huq and Jinnah which resulted in Huq's ousting from the Muslim League. Given that regional and central visions would necessarily have to be in conversation due to the structures of late

colonial India, eventually Huq was ousted from a position of influence in Bengal politics by 1943.

In the summer of 1940 and in early 1941, Huq attempted to join Punjabi officials in talks with Congress leaders to discuss provincial policy ideas. This infuriated Jinnah, who raged at Huq and the Punjabi Premier Sikander Hayat Khan's disobedience towards the rules of central command, especially in the light of their understanding at Lucknow in 1937. Early in 1941, Huq was invited to join a defence council regarding World War II and considered the option without consulting Jinnah. Out of line with AIML central policy, Huq did not categorically oppose the war effort, and this continued to cause problems with the central leadership. Huq began to voice his opposition to central control through various letters to Liaquat Ali Khan and through letters to the public, which were published in the *Statesman*. Due to these and a few other independently construed decisions, he was expelled from the Working Committee of the ML in late 1941. In December of that year, he started a new Progressive Coalition Ministry.

The years 1942 and early 1943 witnessed an all-out attack on Huq from various fronts alongside a rise of popularity of Jinnah and the AIML in Bengal. It is most probable that Huq's construction of this new multi-party ministry ended his popularity with Muslims in Bengal. The main reason for this was his inclusion in the ministry of the popular enemy of the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha president, S.P. Mukherjee. Sarat Bose, a major proponent of coalition politics, was imprisoned once the new Progressive Coalition Ministry was formed in 1941. Consequently, S.P. Mukherjee, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, became a prominent Hindu voice in Bengal politics and a well-known member of the ministry. The ministry was then dubbed the 'Shyama-Huq' ministry, mainly by the Bengali Muslim press, though Mukherjee was the only Mahasabha member. Other members included KPP stalwarts like Shamsuddin Ahmed and Upendra Nath Barman of the Scheduled Caste party. British government officials commented on how diverse and far-reaching the composition of the ministry really was.²⁵

Unfortunately for Huq's position amongst the AIML community, the ministry had no real unifying thread, as it was formed only in opposition to mainstream parties and it was 'completely an Assembly party whose sole purpose was to combine various groups'.²⁶ Also unfortunate for Huq was that even though Mukherjee was the only Mahasabhite in

the group, he had previously opposedⁱ nearly all measures intended to help the Muslim community. Mukherjee's 'Hindu communal' politics included his opposition of the Communal Award of 1932 as well as continual opposition to bills that advanced Muslim interests in government service and education. In 1937, Mukherjee presided over Calcutta University as vice-chancellor when Muslim students organized protests over the singing of *Bande Mataram* and the mandatory salutes to the *sri* and lotus flower symbols in convocations. Therefore, he was seen as the most '*pukka* communalist' by many Muslims in Bengal. This cultural angle to the Muslim opposition to 'Hindu' politics that had already been in place in literary circles began to infiltrate the political sphere.

Bengali Muslim papers such as *Azad*, *Star of India*, and the newly created English language *Morning News* vilified Huq throughout 1942. AIML directives in 1942 show orders to tour the mufassil regions of East Bengal where Huq held popular sway and vigorously discredit Huq's abilities to lead the Muslims of Bengal.²⁷ Suhrawardy, previously an ally of Huq, also supported the anti-Huq brigade. Black-flag demonstrations were held throughout mufassil towns accompanied by shouts of 'ghaddar murdabad' (death to the traitor). Throughout East Bengali rural KPP strongholds where Huq used to command power, such as Noakhali, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, and Dacca, politicians, students, and journalists alike preached against Huq's allegedly traitorous behaviour of including a Mahasabhte in his ministry. AIML and Pakistan conferences were held and only seven months after the start of the so-called Shyama-Huq ministry, by June 1942, over 500 ML meetings occurred in Bengal. June 1942 saw a special drive to enroll as many Bengali Muslims in the BPML as possible and spread the message of Pakistan. By that time, Jinnah had also replaced Huq in the Bengali Muslim political sphere as the leader of repute by 1942. In 1936, a visit by Jinnah to Calcutta was received only by the 'three lonely hosts' in the form of the Ispahani brothers. However, in February 1942, Jinnah was happily received by thousands of vocal supporters in Calcutta and rural Sirajganj. His name, along with some version of the Pakistan demand (however vague it was in 1942) was 'a familiar element in every Muslim household in the province'.²⁸ By the end of that year, anti-Huq hysteria had degenerated to the point where 'people hurled rotten eggs and tomatoes at the once uncrowned monarch of Bengal and welcomed him with black flags wherever he went'.²⁹ Calcutta-based ML activists like Raghbir Ahsan led the charge against Huq in 1941 and

1942, writing that Huq and his kind were 'Muslim quislings who have surrendered Muslim Bengal to the Mahasabha just as Mir Jaffer surrendered Bengal to Clive'.³⁰ The *Star of India* in 1942 urged its readers to 'take a vow not to rest until the betrayal of the community (Huq's inclusion of a Mahasabhite in the Ministry) is avenged by the overthrow of the present Ministry'.³¹ Only five years before, in 1937, the Muslim League in Bengal was perceived as an organization in name more than anything else. By 1942, it had infiltrated the masses of Bengali Muslims.

Dacca University had become a site of intense Hindu-Muslim conflict soon after the Lahore Resolution in early 1940, as well as the propagator of the idea of Pakistan. The concept of Pakistan had manifested in various student societies and a fortnightly journal titled *Pakistan*. This paper was managed completely by students and appeared from 1942 to 1944.³² Tensions rose between Hindu and Muslims students in the early years of the decade, and in early 1943, the staging of Hindu festivals and the singing of *Bande Mataram* by Hindu students antagonized the growing number of Pakistanbadis on campus. In February, Nazir Ahmed, the manager of the *Pakistan* journal, was stabbed to death in a fracas over the singing of *Bande Mataram*. Huq, previously welcomed with loving arms on the campus, was vilified in student demonstrations. The environment was so frightening that the university was closed until March of 1943.³³

In the midst of these tensions in 1943, Huq's image in official British circles continued to fall. The Governor of Bengal, John Herbert, displayed a sharp antipathy to Huq's politics and his opposition to the central Muslim League. Herbert quite preferred the unambiguous politics of AIML leaders like Nazimuddin. Huq and Herbert also clashed on British India's role in World War II; Herbert wished for a more obedient and loyal minister. After Mukherjee resigned, Herbert dismissed Huq on the grounds that he allegedly posed a threat to the formation of a stable, inter-communal ministry. In March of 1943, Herbert handed Huq a resignation letter.³⁴

Soon before his resignation, he published a long-letter in the *Statesman*, expressing his views on Pakistan and Muslim self-determination. Responding to criticisms levied at him from old hands like Akram Khan and Suhrawardy, who charged him with opposing the idea of Pakistan, he strongly defended his own support of Pakistan. He claimed that he stayed true to the tradition initiated by him and other long-standing Bengali Muslim politicians. He clarified that he absolutely supported

the concept of Pakistan that he adumbrated. In this letter, he said, '[I] challenge anyone to quote a single word, either in any of my speeches or statements, which may be interpreted as my opposition to the Pakistan idea as such.'³⁵ Rather than oppose Pakistan, he actually kept alive the spirit of the Lahore Resolution's precise programme of allowing independent states in Muslim majority areas. He simply wanted India to know that 'there is no use hoodwinking the Muslim of Bengal that the formula which may hold good in the Punjab will also hold good in Bengal', as the regional situation of eastern India would put Muslims in a precarious position given the Hindu majorities around eastern Bengal. Rather than declare the Pakistan plan obsolete, he only requested Jinnah 'to modify the Pakistan idea so as to enable the Muslims of Bengal also to assert their self-determination along with the Muslims of other provinces'.³⁶

Huq was, therefore, committed to a Bengali and Muslim identity, as well as a Pakistan that would encompass this combination. His downfall exemplified how this type of politics became overridden by other forces within Bengali Muslim society that tended not towards 'separatism', but towards an autonomy that valued a distinctive Bengali Muslim culture in thought, practice, and literature. Such autonomy was not simply a 'Bengali exceptionalism' to all-India Muslim politics, but rather a result of the interplay between all-India Muslim and provincial Bengali imperatives. As opposed to the rise of a sudden all-India Urdu-based, trans-regional Muslim consciousness amongst the Muslim students and politically active youth of Bengal in the 1940s,³⁷ the energies and goals behind 'Bengali Pakistanism'—a consolidation of literary, cultural, and religious identity politics—were growing beyond Huq's capacities as an organizer, administrator, and politician. As has been noted by historians of Huq,³⁸ before his demise in the Muslim political sphere in the early 1940s, nobody ever questioned Huq's abilities as an orator. Nobody also ever questioned his commitment to the well-being of Bengali people, Muslim and Hindu. But his political programme of power-sharing failed to energize the masses recently imbued with a literary-cultural spirit of Pakistan. Such energies would rest with the writers and activists of 'Pakistanism', students and youth who found the Muslim League and the slogans of Pakistan to encapsulate their hopes and dreams. Huq's push for Pakistan, though substantively in the same arena as the literary-cultural version, spoke the language of accommodation from an earlier generation.

The demise of Huq and the rise of AIML popularity contributed to a theoretical sense of 'Pakistan' only at a vague, political-placard level confined to membership numbers, catchy news headlines, and the establishment of offices. The ideological work of developing the contours of the meanings of Pakistan was left to the literary and religious leaders of the Pakistan movement, which began to manifest just as Huq's stature began to sink into the pages of recent history.

The Creation of Pak-Bangla

Calcutta's Muslim literary community of the late 1930s and early 1940s was literally and figuratively centred in the offices of *Azad*, *Mohammadi*, and *Saogat*. *Azad*, begun in 1936 by Muhammed Akram Khan and his son Khairul Anam Khan, occupied a well-known office in Entally Road in Calcutta. Akram Khan and his family were also behind *Mohammadi*, both the *dainik* (daily) and *masik* (monthly) editions. In the early 1940s, Akram Khan fell seriously ill and the management and editorship of his publications were handed over to young rising stars of Bengali Muslim journalism like Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Mujibur Rahman Khan, and Abul Mansur Ahmed. These individuals also went on to promote Bengali Muslim literature, enunciate Purba (east) Pakistani autonomy, and articulate a literary-cultural movement of renaissance in the Bengali Muslim community in the mid-1940s.

Mujibur Rahman Khan and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, in their journalistic and literary-critical endeavours, started the ideological drive towards articulating an undivided Bengal within a proposed Purba Pakistan, as workers for the *Azad* daily newspaper. By the early 1940s, both had long careers in journalism from the 1920s, with articles published in *Bulbul*, *Saogat*, and the English-language *The Mussalman* and *Mohammadi*.³⁹ Both Mujibur Rahman Khan and Shamsuddin were a part of many literary societies, including the BMSS, which met infrequently throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but also their own *Naoroze Samiti*, which included writers like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Giasuddin Pathan, and Nurul Amin. They also participated in S. Wajed Ali's Gulistan group, among others. Most meetings of these societies, if not at individuals' homes, would take place in or around the *Azad* office, which, much like the BMSS of the 1910s, or *Saogat* of the late 1920s, would become a centre for the meeting space of journalists, writers, and critics of Bengali Muslim society.

In 1940, when Akram Khan became severely ill, it was decided by Khairul Anam Khan that Shamsuddin would become the editor of *Azad* with Mujibur Rahman Khan as joint co-editor. Right around this time, Shamsuddin and Mujibur Rahman Khan started yet another literary society, the Sahitya-Sangsad, which would meet weekly at the *Azad* office. This group included some older writers, like Moinuddin and Habibullah Bahar of *Bulbul*, but also some younger writers barely in their 20s. These young upstarts included Farrukh Ahmed and Benazir Ahmed, two writers who would publish poetry about the idea of Purba Pakistan later in the decade. They would meet each week in 1940 and 1941 to discuss and present original works of prose, poetry, drama, essay, and political polemic in the *Azad* and nearby offices. One young writer of the group, Mustafizur Rahman, wrote a biography of Atatürk in Bengali. Some began to test out stories and poems in the group, like Shawkat Osman and Abu Rushd, who would later upon Shamsuddin's encouragement write for *Mohammadi* and become famous figures in East Pakistan after 1947.⁴⁰

Earlier societies and journalistic platforms still maintained a presence in the early 1940s, as the BMSS held its final meeting in 1941 at Calcutta's Islamia Hall. At this meeting, Nazrul made his last public appearance before falling ill. He eventually became completely invalid until his death in 1976. Also, Fazlul Huq created a journal, *Navajug*, with the same name and anti-colonial spirit as the journal he started twenty-one years earlier. Like its earlier incarnation, it soon withered away due to lack of funds and management. Debates about literary criticism continued on the pages of *Mohammadi*, *Azad*, and *Saogat*, but now in the early 1940s they reflected a stage of memorialization and historicity. Bengali Muslim writers, though certainly aiming to create a literature of the future, had by now a literature they could refer to and critique as their own, as opposed to only working towards inclusion into a Hindu-dominated space.

After the 1941 BMSS meeting, Shamsuddin proclaimed Nazrul the only true literary ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity in Bengali literature. Unlike Hindu greats like Bankim and Rabindranath, according to Shamsuddin only Nazrul actually included Hindu and Muslim characters, symbols, and concepts with equal respect and interest. Hindu writers like Bankim, though his talent was undeniable, did not address a Muslim audience. When Hindu writers did include Muslims as characters, they did so only in negative ways. This, of course, was by now an old issue.

But Nazrul, given his attention to both Hindu and Muslim cultures, truly spoke to the Hindu and Muslim population of Bengal in a singular way.⁴¹ Rabindranath, however, was not at all construed as a 'Hindu' enemy to Muslims. After his death in 1941, *Mohammadi* published several elegiac essays and poems mourning the passing of the great writer. All of them recognized his great contributions to the world and to Bengali literature.

In August of 1942, with Mujibur Rahman Khan and Shamsuddin at the helm of *Azad*, and just two months after the most aggressive membership drive of the AIML in Bengal to date, the two writers along with nine colleagues started yet another literary society. This time, however, the society was expressly dedicated to 'creating a literature of the future.' In the minds of the founders, the society emerged as a natural culmination of years of literary-cultural development in Bengali Muslim letters that merged with the concept of Pakistan. Shamsuddin declared that 'we understood the call to Pakistan to be not just a political one, but one inspired by and based on literary and cultural strength.'⁴² In the *Azad* office on Lower Circular Road in Calcutta, Shamsuddin, Mujibur Rahman Khan, Habibullah Bahar, and eight others founded the East Pakistan Renaissance Society (EPRS).⁴³

The East Pakistan Renaissance Society

Meeting throughout August, the group issued a formal declaration of four principles to the press in September of 1942. Nearly all of the objectives and public speeches were published in *Masik Mohammadi* from 1942 to 1945, the years when the society was most active. As one of the most vocal leaders of the organization Shamsuddin articulated a broad plan for literary identity within the concept of Pakistan. Not exactly a challenge to the so-called Two-Nation Theory that alleged the existence of a Hindu Hindustan and a Muslim Pakistan, this plan revised that concept to include a full-fledged Bengali branch that had its own unique, and internally understood elements of culture. These elements had not only to be protected, but developed in the new state of Pakistan.

Shamsuddin interpreted Pakistan as referring to a 'struggle for freedom not just for one *desh*, but for many *deshes*, many *jatis*, as India is a large federation of *jatis*.'⁴⁴ From this foundation, Shamsuddin declared the overall mission of the renaissance society to be the promotion of

swatantrata, or difference, in literature and culture. Shamsuddin himself recognized during these initial meetings, that such efforts had been happening for many decades now and did not merely begin with their organization. But the concept of Pakistan, and specifically of eastern Pakistani renaissance, would crystallize this effort into a revolutionary consciousness amongst Indian Muslims. According to Shamsuddin, earlier literary-critical efforts, even ones he was a part of, 'were not conscious of the struggle of freedom, but now [with the Pakistan concept in play] we were grasping the freedom to create our own literature'.⁴⁵ The usage of 'Buddhir Mukti' (freedom of the intellect), was of course an implicit nod to the MSS only a few years before. Later in Dacca in 1943, Syed Emdad Ali would directly link the group to it, but in Shamsuddin's original manifesto in 1942, the concept remained at the level of abstraction. For the true freedom of Pakistan, and for a renaissance to take place that would enable such freedom, the literary capacities of Bengali Muslims had to be free from any non-Bengali Muslim influences.

Freedom here was to be contrasted with the nominal freedom guaranteed by politicians, as the freedom of the Renaissance Society was concerned with cultural, literary, economic, and educational freedom, the creation of a total cultural programme. This definition of culture was not the type of narrowly bounded 'high life' as understood in the humanist tradition, but an anthropologically-informed, Tylor-ian culture understood via a Gramscian notion of culture as a site of resistance to prevailing markers of common sense.⁴⁶ After a long bout of imitation from Plassey onwards, Muslims in this formulation of renaissance had been simply imitating various models, be they English or Hindu. In order to fully realize their capacities, they could neither follow Urdu, English, nor Bengali Hindu Bengali, but a Bengali Muslim Bengali whose cultural foundations of a total programme would be the only path towards actual autonomy. Shamsuddin seized on a foundation in the past, and so he lamented how Bengali Muslims have forgotten their punthis, forgotten their glorious past history, their thriving and important folk culture, and their democratic nature, all due to the prevalence of imitation. Renaissance would take the best from the past and use it for the construction of a just future.

The goals of the movement included the encouragement of research, debate, and publication about Pakistan. This would entail the compilation of data and the management of seminars and *baithakkhanas* to promote Pakistan in an academic and scientific way. Of course, literature was the

main point of the organization; not just literature by Bengali Muslims, but literature that embodied specifically Bengali Muslim culture. This literature was envisioned as a strand of world literature to be compared to other great literatures, not only an internally Indian, Bengali, or South Asian literature. In their discussions of internationalism, during the initial meetings of the society in 1942 and 1943, the fight against fascism was central to the existence of the society.⁴⁷

In this vein, the renaissance society attracted many communists, radical Hindus, and leftists of various anti-fascist stripes. M.N. Roy, the radical communist, indicated his interest in the society and gave a speech on 'Pakistan and Democracy', and upheld its commitment to self-determination, and recounted the long history of Muslim identity politics and intellectual efforts at breaking out of traditional molds, such as the 1920s MSS writers. Other Hindu Communists like Gopal Halder, Bankim Mukherji, Somnath Lahiri, and Anil Kanjilal supported the society and occasionally attended meetings. Halder gave a paper entitled 'Pakistan and Hindustan Samasya' (The Problems of Pakistan and Hindustan) in which the revolutionary concept of Pakistan, as a plan for self-determination and minority protection, was supported. The EPRS was a space where intellectuals and activists of various lineages expressed a willingness to engage with visions of the future that veered from mainstream Congress nationalism.

In 1942 and 1943, meetings were held every week, usually at the *Azad* office, or at times in individuals' homes. At that time, Dacca also saw the creation of its own society, the East Pakistan Literary Society. After a few years, smaller societies imbued with the same spirit appeared in other East Bengali locations, like Chittagong and Rajshahi. The renaissance society idea spread quickly with the concept of Pakistan as a large part of its popularity, but taking in main the literary-critical ideas of self-sufficiency and pride that had been voiced since the 1910s.

Though Mujibur Rahman Khan and Shamsuddin's organization grew in popularity in late 1942 and early 1943, their long-time friend, and Shamsuddin's roommate in Calcutta, Abul Mansur Ahmed was not initially supportive of the ideas behind Pakistan and not at all supportive of the AIML as it was then constituted. Abul Mansur Ahmed found the AIML to be nothing more than a communal organization, manned by well-positioned elites redolent of special interests. Managers of these interests would never take account of the masses of Bengali Muslim

peasants who suffered from exploitation in rural Bengal. When confronted with this, Shamsuddin in a heated discussion declared that Abul Mansur Ahmed's characterization of the AIML was rather a Congress, Hindu-centric type of misunderstanding of the Pakistan demand. Shamsuddin referred him to the actual text of the Lahore Resolution and how Congress mistakenly promoted the false idea that India was one unified *desh*, when in reality, it was a collection of various groups and communities. Abul Mansur Ahmed responded affirmatively, agreeing with the widely held perception of Jinnah as a modern secularist, not a Muslim communitarian, but a fighter for minority rights. To give him more food for thought, Shamsuddin lent his friend Mujibur Rahman Khan's recently published book *Pakistan*, replete with philosophical, anthropological, and politico-spatial ruminations about why Pakistan was the answer to the problems of 1940s India.

Pakistan was published in 1942 by the Mohammadi Press on Lower Circular Road, the site of so many *addas*, literary society meetings, the *Azad* newspaper, and from mid-1942 onwards, the East Pakistan Renaissance Society. It, therefore, emerged directly from this environment of Bengali Muslim literary and intellectual engagement, which stretched back several decades. This book was the first published attempt in Bengali to intellectually outline the Pakistan idea in Bengal. With Shamsuddin's foreword emphasizing how Pakistan is a solution to the problems of colonial India not just for Indian Muslims, but for all of India, the book appeared firmly in the tradition of the 1940 Lahore Resolution.

Mujibur Rahman Khan placed the idea of Pakistan, or the two portions of Pakistan, into the world of nations, compared to areas like Europe, India, and nations like Great Britain, Italy, England, France, and Belgium. He also used anthropological imagery of different groups in India. He included a territorial map of West and East Pakistan, clearly providing for two separate portions of a multinational state (see the reproduction of this map in Figure 5.1).

Besides the obvious reflection of the discourse of new nations and self-determination that was enveloping much of the Asian and African colonial world of the 1940s, two factors squarely planted Mujibur Rahman Khan's conception of Pakistan into a revolutionary and inspirational framework. First, Pakistan's entire existence as a new nation would base itself, for Purba Pakistan at least, on language and literature. He cited a galaxy of models, like the writers of France and Russia, whose literature

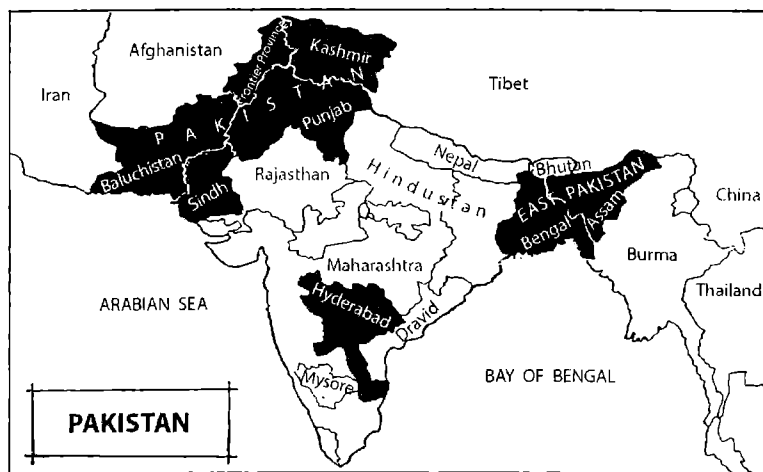


Figure 5.1 Map of Proposed Pakistan in Mujibur Rahman Khan's *Pakistan*, 1942

Source: From Habibullah Bahar, *Pakistan* (Calcutta, 1968).

provided the basis for their respective nationalist sources of selfhood. In India, Bengali Hindus have a long list of comparable authors, like Bankim and Rabindranath, and Indian Muslims have Iqbal. Though Iqbal did not originally mention Bengal in his early ruminations about Indian Muslim culture, Mujibur Rahman Khan merely continued a Bengali tradition of appreciating Iqbal's philosophical and inspirational power for Indian Muslims.⁴⁸ As Iqbal was the first to articulate Indian Muslim cultural distinctiveness,⁴⁹ all the political manoeuvres of 'Pakistanism' in his name should enable, the book argues, Bengali Muslims to find their own Pakistan in their own language.

In addition to language, the book argued that minorities in a centralized colonial set-up, whether from the British imperial, or the Hindu-led Akhand Bharat-styled Congress (as the Congress was merely following the British imperial method of governance in their assumption of an indivisible India), would always be disempowered in relation to the majority. With the inspiration coming from the distinctive Bengali Muslim experience, the idea of Pakistan actually aimed to universalize the minority problem. It would provide the means for all groups, possibly including Dravidians into a 'Dravidistan' or Sikhs into a 'Sikhistan', to fully realize their self-determined existence. Though the practical dimensions of such

possible self-determination were not outlined, the idea was seen as an inspiration for all minority groups in India.

After reading this book, Abul Mansur Ahmed came to one of the EPRS meetings in Calcutta. Without the knowledge of Shamsuddin and Mujibur Rahman Khan, he had prepared a comprehensive note of praise for the book and conveyed this praise in the form of a paper at the meeting. He had become an ardent admirer of the goals outlined in the book. In the book's second edition, Abul Mansur Ahmed contributed a foreword describing his conversion into a Pakistanibadi. Initially, he felt skeptical of how a movement that invoked religion so vaguely might be vulnerable to a takeover by mullahs and religious leaders, even though his version of the Pakistan idea meshed with Jinnah's secularist visions. In order to protect the idea from such appropriation, he began to promote how it was not merely a narrow demand for one community's development, but rather a universalist and revolutionary attack on unjust majoritarian governance.

Abul Mansur Ahmed then attended every EPRS meeting in Calcutta in 1943 and 1944. In 1943, both the Calcutta and Dacca societies held large-scale meetings promoting their cause. Both of these meetings' proceedings were published in the *Mohammadi* and received wide-spread circulation in the non-Muslim publications of the time as well. The Calcutta meeting was held at the Islamia Hall, long a site for meetings by and about Muslim groups. It was a lavish, three-day event, headed by Shamsuddin who inaugurated the meeting with a speech that set the tone of the renaissance's revolutionary potential. In this speech he declared that the society aimed to 'promote the emancipation of the intellect, as without that, no political freedom is possible. Renaissance is the name for a revolutionary change in consciousness. Not to look to the past as a crutch, but to establish a foundation for the future, so punthi and folk literature had to be a part of this endeavor'.⁵⁰ In this meeting, Kaikobad, in a much publicized speech on literature, also seconded the need to make sure that distinctive Bengali Muslim literature would define the contours of East Pakistan.

The most important essay to appear in 1943 from the event was Abul Mansur Ahmed's 'Purba Pakistaner Jaban' (Purba Pakistan's National Language), which outlined his vision of the renaissance society. Building upon Shamsuddin's earlier statements in 1942 about how Purba Pakistan aimed to emancipate intellects and instil freedom, he focused on the highly particular place of Bengali Muslims, their state, society, their

economics, their arts, their own specific intellects and talents that have lain dormant due to imitation and diffidence.⁵¹ This emphasis, strewn throughout his and indeed all of the Purba Pakistan literature, pointed to the particularizing drive of these intellectuals, the effort to construct a 'Bengali Muslim' nation to take its place in the roster of nations like any other nation. Abul Mansur Ahmed said as much in this essay as he claimed that with self-sufficient intellectual and cultural development, Bengali Muslims as a *jati* would take their rightful place not only in India, but in the entire Muslim world as well. This was to be realized through a fidelity to the actual demands laid out by the AIML and Jinnah in 1940, as he stated that it is 'because of Jinnah's leadership and modernist ideas that a different sense of East and West Pakistan could exist'.⁵² The language and format within which Purba Pakistan renaissance could take place derived then from the all-India Muslim experience of being a minority in any all-India potential political set-up, not just from the specific experience of Bengali Muslims.⁵³

The existence of both a trans-regional and particularly local sense of Muslim identity that enabled Purba Pakistan to come into being was solidified in a 1942 EPRS speech, to be reprinted as the essay 'Pakistaner Biplabi Bhumika' (The Revolutionary Face of Pakistan). In this essay, Ahmed analyzed the idea of Pakistan with a philosophically wide-ranging discussion of its meanings and theoretical relevance. To establish the revolutionary nature of the Pakistan idea, he begins his essay by stating that Pakistan, though it may be interpreted in various ways, was not defined by religion, but yet was inspired by Islam. Bengali Pakistan was highly specific to the local environment, as it was allied to agriculture and cultivation (*krishiti*), language (*bhasa*), and civilization (*sabhyata*). His conception of Pakistan based itself on a concept of culture as a totality of life, with religion simply being inside of that totality. He willingly admitted that this may be misunderstood, but this conception would work out in time dialectically, as history provides a long list of examples where the truth of ideas had to be worked out via syntheses and reformulations. The truth of this conception would naturally emerge out of social and historical circumstances.⁵⁴

These circumstances may be harsh and uninviting in the short-term, as he acknowledges an inventory of reasons why Muslims may oppose Hindus or why Hindus oppose Muslims. However, he stated that there was no reason to oppose Hindus, from the perspective of Muslim'

solidarity or vice versa. Indeed, his own biography bears a long history of discrimination and ill-treatment at the hands of *bhadralok* Hindus from his childhood. But the *bhadralok* Hindus were not to blame, for they were merely caught in a system not completely of their own making. Rather, the question for an activist would be whether a political programme was tending towards social revolution. The prevailing trend of social change, aimed at the imperialist edifice, was simply not revolutionary and only replicated the structures of imperialism in theory and practice. It simply replaced the colonial state with 'Akhand Bharat', and did nothing to revolutionize social relations or political thought. The idea of the '*desh*' as an indivisible political and/or cultural unit was simply a falsehood, perpetuated by the Congress, to maintain an imperialist manner of governance. Abul Mansur Ahmed was certainly not lacking in sympathy towards anti-colonial rebels, many of whom were Congress members. He simply felt that the only unifying factor in colonial India was dissatisfaction with imperial rule. But the methods of Congress party officials and their line of thinking was simply not revolutionary.

Ahmed's Pakistan was a revolutionary agenda aiming at absolute social and political change. Whereas the 'Akhand Bharat' formation took from other imperial ideas (he lists not just the British Empire, but Greater Germany and the empires of earlier periods in Europe), Pakistan would actually respect all groups, no matter how large, small, or inconsequential, as there was value in all social and cultural formations. So, 'Akhand Bharat' would easily swallow up all of the smaller and marginal cultures and groups in places like Burma and Tibet, just like any other imperialist formation. In the time of World War when the imperialist designs of European powers like Britain were fading, and Europeans were fighting amongst themselves, the elite classes of India were also fighting amongst themselves. There would be no way, in an imperialist formation, to look after everyone's cultural and social rights.⁵⁵

Because all groups would be respected in this new political formation, Pakistan for Ahmed was a revolutionary concept. By stabbing at the heart of nationalism's assumption that it represented all communities, Ahmed saw revolution in how Pakistan was based not on the idea of a nation that represented all groups, but on the preservation of self-determination for all groups. This plan, in the midst of an imperialism that was struggling to maintain power, was the way out of a potentially fascist state. He does not expound in much detail as to how exactly,

minority and majority groups would relate to one another. But as in all the Purba Pakistan literature, respect for and recognition of minorities became a principle of just governance. Allowing the full flowering of all groups' potential acquired revolutionary character in the Pakistan idea. At the end of his essay, he summarizes the whole agenda of the society to provide for total and absolute freedom:

Pakistan is not just for the ten crores of Muslims and their 'community' — it is a claim for the thirty crores of minorities in India and their full religious, agricultural, and geographic and territorial rights. 'Pakistan' has provided inspiration and hope for the common people of India to voice their own identities and aspirations, has given them courage to assume self-confidence, and in the world of impending independence and change, ['Pakistan'] has given a language of freedom for all *jatis*. In a world of revolution, this is Pakistan. It is not just a revolution in the creation of a state, it is a revolution in thought.⁵⁶

This revolution would, he hoped, usher in a new world in which after Akhand Bharat has been severed into its real constituent parts, equality (*samya*) would prevail in a world where all *jatis* would have the opportunity to achieve complete self-determination. The intellectual efforts of Abul Mansur Ahmed and Shamsuddin in 1942 and 1943 transformed the Lahore Resolution into a tangible reality based on notions of a specifically Bengali Muslim variant of new-nation-statehood.

Dacca also hosted a large *sammelan* in 1943, soon after the Calcutta meeting. Led by Shamsuddin again, the Dacca meeting was organized by a younger crowd of university students barely out of their teens, like Syed Sajjad Hussein, Syed Ali Ahsan, and Syed Ali Ashraf, all of whom would later go on to reach great heights within East Pakistani and Bangladeshi literary and political environments. Taking place at Salimullah Hall at Dacca University, a site of intensified communal conflict in 1943, but also the setting of the MSS less than twenty years back, the festival included not only Shamsuddin and Calcutta colleagues, but many Dacca stars like Ashiya Khatun, an MA graduate from Dacca University and the elder literary giant Kaikobad. Sayyid Emdad Ali in his main address explicitly linked the goals of these societies back to the MSS of less than twenty years before, taking place right at the same venue.

EPRS was not a direct continuation of the MSS, since MSS stalwarts like Wadud stayed aloof from the movement. Abul Hussein, another

leader of the MSS, had tragically died a few years earlier. However, the MSS was the first such organization in Bengali Muslim history to put forth the 'emancipation of the intellect' as a goal. So the 1940s renaissance societies used this spirit in their mission in both a substantive way and as a way to historicize their own work, mentioning a line of historical development tending towards Purba Pakistan. Also fully printed in the *Mohammadi*, the entire session's proceedings were preserved in a volume in 1968 after the production of the Bangla Academy by Sardar Fazlul Karim.

After these two festivals, the EPRS set out to plan a large, interdisciplinary *anusthan* with sub-groups like Economics, Cultural Programmes, and Publications. Organized on the model of previous BMSS events, but larger and inclusive of more groups, the EPRS held this programme in July of 1944, again at Calcutta's Islamia Hall. The organizers planned an inclusive set of cultural programmes, like *jarigan*, *marfati gan*, *bhati-yali*, *lok-giti*, and *punthi-path*. To accomplish this, the managers of the organization set out in search of local masters of these forms, in the interiors of East Bengal, such as Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Faridpur, Comilla, and Chittagong. Collecting folklore and preserving it scientifically had been in process for decades informally, but now it had an overtly national purpose.⁵⁷

The festival was covered by the *Mohammadi* and all the main speeches were reprinted soon after the event. In addition to the *Mohammadi* coverage, two editions of 'Renaissance-Sammelan' books were published after the festival and circulated throughout Calcutta, Dacca, and mufassil towns as well. Abul Mansur Ahmed was the main convener and mastermind of the event, but the list of directors for each sub-group displayed diversity in terms of age and religion. Syed Sajjad Hussein, a young university student was in charge of literature whereas Hindus like Professor Sushobhan Sarkar and Monoranjan Bhattacharya were in charge of political science and folk literature. Long-time Bengali Muslim literary advocate Habibullah Bahar, founder and editor of *Bulbul*, was in charge of education, and Mujibur Rahman Khan, author of *Pakistan*, was in charge of the culture section.

Nearly all of the major figures of Bengali Muslim politics attended this three-day festival. Even those not necessarily aligned with a Bengali cultural orientation, like Nazimuddin and the Suhrawardy attended each day's events. Elder Bengali Muslim peasant populists, like Fazlul Huq

and Tamizuddin Khan attended alongside Hindu writers and activists like Nripendrkrishna Chattopadhyaya, Bankim Mukherji, and Gopal Halder. The younger generation of writers that began to link with the EPRS enlarged as individuals like Abu Jafr Shamsuddin, Talebur Rahman, and Farrukh Ahmed joined more seasoned litterateurs like S. Wajed Ali and Golam Mostafa. The festival was therefore the epicentre of Bengali Muslim literary, intellectual, and political engagement.

The event began with a reading from the Koran and then a song, 'Pakistan, Pakistan, Amader Ei Pak Bhumi' (Pakistan, Pakistan, Our Pak Homeland) by Mohammed Khusrou, which was also incanted by the crowd. After the opening, the main event began with back to back speeches by Shamsuddin and Abul Mansur Ahmed. Shamsuddin reiterated points made in earlier meetings of the society to the broad audience which included students and political leaders who were anxious to hear more about the idea of Purba Pakistan, as opposed to only intellectuals and literary personalities. Both Shamsuddin and Abul Mansur Ahmed after him, emphasized how political freedom was not total freedom, or *purna azadi*, which would be the work of the EPRS. Whereas the politicians would work towards the detailed adjustments of protecting a territorial space for Purba Pakistan, such a space would be meaningless without freedom on every level, such as the economic, social, educational, and cultural levels. In this address, Shamsuddin went a step further than previous efforts and states that freedom of this type is the birthright of all individuals and all groups.⁵⁸ This freedom is dormant and is waiting to be found. This freedom was something that must be actively created and sought after. Only in the literary and intellectual realm can such freedom be created.

This revolution, though outlined earlier in Abul Mansur Ahmed's 'Purba Pakistaner Jaban', received a full disquisition in the main address of the event. This speech set the tone for the Pakistan movement of Bengal, but also contributed a creative element to the intellectual history of Bengali Muslim cultural autonomy. It is during this speech that he overtly began to use the term 'cultural autonomy' alongside other terms like *sanskritik swaraj* and *tamaddunik azadi*, all phrases that referred to self-determination.

In this speech Abul Mansur Ahmed clarified the goals of the society and his conceptualization of ideas like culture, religion, and renaissance for the EPRS. At the heart of the Purba Pakistan definition was a particular conception of cultural difference. Any notion of cultural difference

had to base itself, of course, on an idea of culture. The culture idea had to be clarified in response to those who saw Pakistan as simply a 'religious' movement for Muslims in an 'Islamic' state. A religious state was far from the goal, as the culture of Pakistan did include religion, but in a very specific way. Religion (Islam) was the 'seed', but culture was the 'flower' (Bengali Muslim culture) of a 'tree' of a particular place (Bengal).⁵⁹ Here he compared the Indian situation with the large Christian and Islamic worlds. He asserted that the nations of Europe like France, Germany, and England certainly were not united on the grounds of religion, and neither were Afghanistan, Iran, Arabia, or all the regions within the Islamic world.⁶⁰

In Ahmed's terms, religion was trans-regional even if all the nations that professed the same religion were not politically or culturally united. The Muslims of India and Muslims all over the world did share a universalist, trans-regional sensibility. This was a part of religion's strength and beauty. For Bengali Muslims, the religion of Islam did provide a basis for Bengali Muslim culture. In the outline of this religiously informed culture, Ahmed cited the most liberal parts of the Qur'an as the basis of Pakistan.⁶¹

But culture, or as he began to call it, *tamaddun*,⁶² did not possess trans-regional powers and only existed within a particular territorial, linguistic, and sub-linguistic (Bengali Muslim as opposed to general Bengali) region. The insertion of *tamaddun* provokes inquiry, as the usage of it in Urdu carries a particular and significant intellectual history. The usage of the word 'tamaddun' to denote culture in the context of civilizational uplift has been traced to the 1890s, from Syed Ali Bilgiramī in his 1896 *Tamaddun-i-Arab* (Culture of the Arabs), a translation of Gustav Le Bon's *La Civilization des Arabes* (The Civilization of the Arabs). In this formulation, the word culture in Urdu began to assume the characteristics of politically and socially dominant groups inputting their own imprint on locality. Abdul Halim Sharar's early twentieth century *Hindustan Men Mashriqi Tamaddun Ka Akhiri Namuna* (The Last Example of Eastern Culture in Hindustan) then contained the first usage of *tamaddun* to describe the history of Lucknow, as a place with distinctive elements such as architecture, defined as a part of *tamaddun*. In the Bengal context, writers such as Abul Mansur Ahmed were disconnected from these Urdu conversations as they were not participants, but rather distant spectators utilizing these intellectual developments for wholly different purposes.

The concept of *tamaddun* does retain its evolutionary sensibility, as in Le Bon and Zaidan, but is deployed to describe specifically Bengali Muslim elements about the Bengali language and landscape, stated within the context of elaborating a plan for self-determination.⁶³ Abul Mansur Ahmed produced such a culture concept in opposition to *sanskriti*, a term for culture that for him denoted Hindu culture. This context, obviously absent in discussions of culture in other portions of Muslim India in the 1940s, places the Bengali Muslim culture concept into a thoroughly unique intellectual predicament.⁶⁴ For full freedom, self-determination, and therefore progress,⁶⁵ to occur, these self-contained, territorially bound cultures must develop to their full potential.

Abul Mansur Ahmed was certainly aware of the many critiques of narrow-minded, inward-looking self-containment in India. Many of them came from Congress-minded Hindus, who found the idea of Pakistan that was 'only for Muslims' to be narrow-minded. When confronted with the prospect of politics that was not Hindu-centric Congress politics, but of a universal humanism, he put forth a critique defending the distinctiveness of culture. Such humanism, seen by Ahmed as emanating from the Western world, would flatten out difference and render the distinctiveness of each culture, however religiously informed, as Bengali Muslim culture certainly was, obsolete. This was not only unnatural, but also a form of fascism, uniformity, and suppression. As opposed to this type of allegedly universal humanism, Ahmed signalled the need for a different sort of humanism that accommodated difference.⁶⁶

Ahmed's Pakistan referred to the actual liberation of groups and individuals from both centralizing, imperialistic tendencies inherent in the Congress and their tutors, the British Raj, as well as liberation from the difference-denying impulses in secular humanism.⁶⁷ The idea of *Purba Pakistan* was not *rastra-darshan* (state philosophy), but a *jiban-darshan* (philosophy of life). He emphasized the universalizing tendencies that other propagators before him voiced, so that 'Pakistan is not just for the lives of Muslims, not just for the lives of Hindus and Muslims of India, but for the future well-being of the whole world'.⁶⁸ Pakistan was a solution to modern political life, given the complexities of the culture and trans-regional elements of identity.

Having established the differences between religion and culture, but creatively integrating the two for Bengali Muslims, he also clarified the use of the term *renaissance*, as opposed to other possible terms like *revolution*,

revival, or reformation. Revolution was for states and politicians but the true revolution in people's minds and thoughts would happen through literature, writing, and debates. Real change would also not imply revival, as that presupposed an uncritical usage of the past. Also, revolution would not be a reformation, as Islam was suited for change and adaptation within its inherent logic. In the European Renaissance, leaders took the best of the past as a foundation and used it to construct a new future. So Bengali Muslims would have to carefully consider their past, like their folk literature, and also how to move forward, without imitation.

The way forward would not be an imitative model, as Rabindranath himself, hailed as a great world poet by Abul Mansur Ahmed, did not reach such heights by imitating Shakespeare, Wordsworth, or Milton. Citing the Irish case, no Irish writer ever attained stature in London, but had to find a distinctive Celtic voice in Irish soil to truly capture the Irish experience. To that end, Ahmed strongly advocated the awareness of punthis and non-Bengali Hindu forms of Bengali writing as a part of the Bengali Muslim ecumene. He did not urge people to start writing punthis along the lines of Daulat Qazi or Alaol⁶⁹ (though some did start doing this, like Abdul Gafr Siddiqi), but to use them as an inspiration for a model of literature that was independent from any outside influence, like Bengali Hindu or Western models. Finally, he advocated the conscious usage of words and phrases like *aju-ghosal*, *khana*, *pani*, *haj*, *zakat*, *allah*, *khoda*, *roza*, *namaj*, words that he claimed were 'always seen as foreign non-Bengali words in the halls of Bengali departments at universities'.⁷⁰ This issue had been alive since the late 1910s, but now, it took shape in the form of a national movement. By 1944, Abul Mansur Ahmed had experienced a wealth of bigotry at the hands of Hindus who hegemonically controlled Bengali literary publication. At this meeting, the personal, political, and philosophical became one and the same.

When considering Bengali as a language, Abul Mansur Ahmed had to contend with Hindu literature and Hindu writers as they built the modern literature in the language that he so admired. He had no problem with this per se, but painstakingly details how Hindu literature and Hindu writers were different in spirit, character, and form. Hindus embraced other-worldly asceticism and womanly love and devotion, whereas Muslims promoted truth, justice, martyrdom, and this-worldly action. Though he respected the talents of Hindu writers, they never included Muslim characters, feelings, or themes. Their Ram–Lakshman, Bhisma–Arjun,

Sita–Savitri, and Radha–Krishna are simply different from Shah Jahan–Alamgir, Ali–Hamza, Sohrab–Rustom, or Hajera–Rahima. The first Muslim writer, as Shamsuddin mentioned a few years before, to actually put all this into a literary programme was Nazrul, as he included Muslim themes in Bengali literature. Though he did not mention it directly, but implicitly, a whole generation of writers, including Ahmed himself, had been following Nazrul's lead.⁷¹

The broader sentiment of a cultural nationalism that included religion but distinguished itself from Hindu co-culturists and non-Bengali co-religionists had been variously expressed in different formats, but without any unified political programme. With the introduction of the concept of Pakistan, such an autonomous space now made ideological sense. It, however, was tied to a highly temporal conjunction of a variety of commitments that were sensibly fused into a larger programme, of the trans-regional 'seed' of religion, the regional 'tree' of Bengal, and a broader embrace of decolonization against centralizing, and imperialist tendencies in the Congress. As a scholar of the movement has written, 'it was the key strategic juncture of centralism and regionalism, of Muslim nationhood [represented by the AIML] and peasant politics [represented by Purba Pakistan and the history of the KPP] that culture was occupying in Ahmad's thought in 1944'.⁷² Cultural nationalism had a history for Bengali Muslims, but it had transformed into Purba Pakistan due to the highly contingent and temporally specific politics of late colonial India.⁷³

The meeting was a grand success and attracted praise from nearly all in attendance, from Hindus like Bankim Mukherji and Narendra Deb, and drew throngs of young Muslim students. In addition to generating energy and excitement as well as outline the theoretical concept of Purba Pakistan, the meetings also clarified territorial boundaries of the potential limits of East Pakistan by displaying several maps, particularly in the 1944 grand meeting in Calcutta. In September 1944, in the midst of long-awaited talks between Jinnah and Gandhi, Mujibur Rahman Khan published a booklet, titled *Eastern Pakistan: Its Population, Delimitation, and Economics*, that clarified the political, economic, and territorial goals of the society. The maps in the booklet were the same maps of the 1942 book and included all of eastern Bengal, Assam, Sylhet, excluded Burdwan and a small part of Murshidabad, but significantly, included Calcutta. The author claimed that if the non-Bengali Hindu migratory aliens were excluded, Muslims would then be in a slight majority in Calcutta, and so

it should be included in East Pakistan. There was no discussion, however, of the non-Bengali Muslim migratory aliens who also formed a large part of the Muslim population.⁷⁴

In the accounts of boundary disputes and economic development, as detailed in the booklet, the discourse follows from both the basic Lahore Resolution principles and also from its Purba Pakistan variant, as self-sufficiency, in developing natural resources, modernized agriculture, and port city development are all examined at length. The style of government would be a federation that would include the small 'native states' such as Cooch Behar or Manipur, they would in a true Pakistan spirit, be incorporated into a federation. But he delved into wholly different territory in a chapter about the human resources of East Pakistan. Employing a nineteenth century view of martial races and ethnic difference, the author's chapter on the alleged martial race quality of Bengalis leads him to construct a working defense of the 'martial' character of the Muslims of Bengal. The author accepts the long-standing allegation that 'the name Bengalee is reserved for the Hindus of Bengal and Musalmans of Bengal are simply known as Musalmans. The Muslims of Bengal cannot be styled a non-martial people by any stretch of imagination'.⁷⁵

Mujibur Rahman Khan supported this assertion by citing the valour and courage of the many Muslims who fought in Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bareilly's jihads in Punjab in the late 1820s,⁷⁶ noticed by people like William Hunter and James O'Kineally. The importance of recognizing the 'martial' nature of these Muslims of Bengal was that this inherent fighting quality would prepare them to create a viable state, as 'the formation of an eastern Pakistan state where Islam and Muslim culture will have a free scope to develop, will supply the necessary stimulus to the Muslims of Bengal, to make them one of the best specimens of the fighting men of the world. Hence the military quality of the peoples of eastern Pakistan may be safely assumed to be good enough to make it a strong state'.⁷⁷ Hunter's observations about Muslims of Bengal in the nineteenth century, that 'they were the superior race, and superior not only in stoutness of heart and strength in arms, but in power of political organization and in the science of political government'⁷⁸ led the author to conclude, hopefully, that if Muslims of Bengal were so superior only a century earlier, there would be no reason not to attain such superiority now.

Mujibur Rahman Khan's 1944 booklet's reliance on separating the Bengali Hindu from the 'Musalman' of Bengal created an impression

that Muslims of Bengal were never 'Bengalis' but rather always 'Muslims of Bengal'. In this formulation, however, there was no recognition of the shared culture from which Muslims have definitively taken after. In Mujibur Rahman Khan's presentation, the Muslims of Bengal had not yet become Bengali Muslims, even though the entire point of the society was to press upon colonial India and their existence! In the midst of a 'Pakistan demand', the details of these potential problems were not engaged or questioned. The booklet reinforced the idea of East Pakistan as a bounded territory, not only a cultural place for freedom, but a real, tangible place inhabited by an ecological unity. This moment in the intellectual history of the Pakistan concept shows that elements of its emergence immediately assumed the qualities of a nationalist movement aimed at bounded, territorial, and hegemonic power, yet its formative moments in earlier decades originated in a far more fluid context.

Bengali Pakistan Outside of the EPRS

The Purba Pakistan concept was outlined in other texts, such as Habibullah Bahar's series of essays on the Pakistan demand, published in 1941 and 1942, which followed closely the global Soviet commentary on the self-determination of nations.⁷⁹ Bahar was the editor of *Bulbul* in the 1930s, a public supporter of the EPRS, and a close friend of Mujibur Rahman Khan. In Bahar's 1942 essay, he appends Khan's maps used in the book *Pakistan*.⁸⁰ Framed by the claim that Pakistan was a concept conceived through a political science framework that was attentive to various facts, which were completely misinterpreted by nationalists promoting an Akhand Bharat stance, Bahar's entire thesis was grounded in a sense of self-determination embellished both by Soviet commentators like Stalin and by historical references to Lenin and Wilson, both of whom were staunch (at least rhetorically) supporters of self-determination. Wilson, unlike Lenin, categorically did not support the emancipation of the colonies, but Bahar cited him anyway.

Like Mujibur Rahman Khan, Bahar claimed that there was no organic 'nation' in India. Whereas India as a unitary nation was an illusion fronted by Akhand Bharat propagandists, India was rather a collection of various jatis and communities. Quoting M.N. Roy on self-determination, Bahar also relied on Hunter's perspective on Muslim history in India, citing the famous line that Muslims 'have been aloof from our system'. With this

in mind, he stated how the Congress was using outdated, parliamentary centralized models of governance that will go only in a modern European direction. So he listed the principles of the AIML: (a) Akhand Bharat was a myth, (b) British centralized parliamentary government did not suit India, and (c) every group deserved self-determination. In order to flesh out the claim that Akhand Bharat was a myth, he listed and described the great racial, cultural, economic, and linguistic diversity of India. In one section, like Mujibur Rahman Khan, he listed the seven races of Hindus the census has counted and uses this as a basis to argue that even within the Hindu 'jati' there is racial diversity. About language, Bahar claimed that nearly 25,000 punthis in musalmani *Bangla* exist, but Hindus do not want to claim this as Bengali.⁸¹

To press the point that the Pakistan demand was not simply about Muslim identity, he argued, that the only political unity of India was an administratively imposed political unity in the British period. Therefore, to Bahar only British imperialism was the form of governance that politically unified India. The two main groups opposed to the concept of Akhand Bharat—Muslims and Dravidians (south Indians)—were both pushing for self-determination. He listed 'Dravidistan' as merely a natural outcome of Indian politics itself.⁸² There must be, just as in the Russian model, a system that recognizes self-determination of groups, where they have the freedom to choose their allegiance without necessarily seceding. He endorses this Russian system's power-sharing confederacy. This notion of self-determination and not the unitary concept of 'nation' should inform the notion of decolonization. He quoted Rabindranath in the late 1890s, as an example of how 'nations' as a form of governance simply did not fit the Indian case, at least insofar as they come from a European context. Finally, he cited Lenin and Wilson as providing a long-standing tradition of respecting self-determination, in rhetoric, if not in practice.

The model espoused by Bahar clearly merged with the Indian Communist Party's understanding of the Pakistan demand. Dr Gangadhar Adhikari, in a report given to the central committee, elaborated on the party line as it related to Bengal. In general, it stood for a free and voluntary association of nationalities, a federation in which 'provinces where Muslims form the overwhelming majority of the population could form autonomous units and even have the right to secede'.⁸³

But when discussing the idea of Pakistan, Adhikari clarified the distinction between 'a just quest for autonomy and a separatist two-nation

theory⁸⁴ as the Communist Party (CP) supported the former. Regarding the rising power of Muslim identity, he claimed that the CP did not see communalism in the Pakistan demand, but 'the rise of anti-imperialist nationalist consciousness among the Muslim masses'.⁸⁵ Echoing the sentiments of Bahar, the report said that the denial of self-determination for one group would deny it for all.

East Bengal presented a unique case unlike any other portion of Muslim India, as the Muslim peasantry of Bengal has its own distinct cultural and geographic complex. It was, in their terms, a 'transitional form' and their unique elements of culture and socio-economic values should be recognized. Sushobhan Sarkar, another communist who supported the EPRS, suggested that the very existence of a Purba, as opposed to a united, Pakistan, meant that India consisted of many nationalities.

Adhikari's *Pakistan and National Unity* was directly cited in support of the arguments of the geographer Nafis Ahmed, in his *The Basis of Pakistan*, which appeared in 1947. The principles of self-determination, as well as citations of the international world of decolonization and how borders are man-made British inventions that may be changed for the better, appears in the book. Pakistan, for Adhikari, was an ideological attack on unitary all-India nationalism, and emphatically *not* a principle of Muslim political distinctiveness. As Bahar also argued, Ahmed claimed that Akhand Bharat-ists 'ignore the socio-religious realities and the atmosphere of seclusion and different historico-religious conceptions of the two peoples'.⁸⁶

Another aspect of the Pakistan demand explicitly mentioned in Ahmed, and in scattered citations throughout the EPRS, was the role of World War II and the formulation of a policy of decolonization. Ahmed claims that during the war years, the creation of subsidiary war factories and massive profiteering and corruption led to large unemployment, and this decadent economy was further exacerbated by famine, extreme poverty. Pakistan would help lift Bengal out of this situation through attention to the economic and social capacities of the East Bengali region, allowing it to develop its own industries and 'limited proletariat'. Echoing quasi-socialist interpretations of Jinnah, and certain BPML leaders like Abul Hashim, Ahmed claimed that Pakistan would be an equitable and socially just state where citizens would live without fear of economic exploitation. The duty of Muslims of Bengal and of India as a whole was to 'visualize a people's Pakistan, as the concept of Pakistan is political and

not religious'.⁸⁷ Citing nineteenth century writers like Sayyid Ameer Ali and Jinnah in the same vein, the inspiration for Pakistan arose because of 'charity, brotherhood, social justice, and equal opportunity', guaranteed under Islam.⁸⁸

It is not as if no Bengali Muslim opposed the Pakistan idea. Rezaul Karim, a life-long Congressman, wrote detailed refutations of the Pakistan idea. He matched Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin with a discussion of religion and culture, but claimed great exception to culture being used to denote difference or power, and voiced that it marked sameness for Karim. Published in Calcutta in 1941 just before the EPRS was coming into being, his *Pakistan Examined* was a polemical response to the demand for Pakistan.⁸⁹

The conception of the Pakistan demand Karim cited was most probably the type of discourse Abul Mansur Ahmed responded to in his 1944 address. Like Ahmed, Karim did explicitly differentiate religion from culture, but the concept of 'culture is vague, ambiguous, and full of numerous interpretations...the word is generally used to exploit the ignorance of the masses'.⁹⁰ He did admit the existence of cultural identity, but refused to believe that a Muslim, as a member of a religion, automatically followed a 'Muslim' culture, as 'many Muslims adopt a culture which is neither Islamic nor Hindu, so also the Hindus'.⁹¹ For Karim, culture was an organic expression of place and environment, so it 'assimilates, adapts, and amalgamates all the surrounding conditions of the age', and therefore, Hindus and Muslims hold a common culture brought out by their environment. It is not, then, as the EPRS held, a reflection of hegemonic power relations.

In addition to seeing 'culture' as a natural, rather than malleable and politically purposeful, site of social change, Karim also interpreted the influence of British imperialism in complete opposition to the EPRS line. Whereas Bahar and the EPRS clearly saw the Congress' 'Akhand Bharat' and unified stance it has come to represent as a reflection of imperialist thinking, Karim believed that the Pakistan demand may be a 'clever hint of the imperialistic power to keep alive the dying embers of communalism'.⁹² Karim also mentions how it was imperialist to think of division, whereas Bahar and the EPRS saw it the other way around. Other intellectuals prominent in Bengali Muslim public life, like S. Wajed Ali, Kazi Abdul Wadud, and Humayun Kabir were not supportive of the idea of Pakistan. Regardless of detractors, the Pakistan movement⁹³ did find

expression in more than just theory. Many EPRS members practiced what they preached in the form of Purba-Pak literature.

Literary Pakistan in Practice

The literary-critical emphasis on constructing a Purba Pakistan outlined academic plans, but individual writers themselves produced a deluge of poetry, song, and sentimental literature about 'Bengali Pakistanism' from 1942, the beginning of the EPRS, to 1947.⁹⁴ A generation of writers, some from earlier eras like Golam Mostafa, and younger poets like Farrukh Ahmed and Benazir Ahmed, waxed philosophical and cultural about Pakistan. The implementation of the Purba Pakistan ideal into poetic practice was not a uniform occurrence, but it articulated the Pakistan demand in poetry, outside of traditional domains of political theory. This poetry of Pakistan blended a variety of images and points of view into an aesthetic that productively combined the Bengali and Muslim components of identity and culture as a continuation of pre-existing forms into a new idiom celebrating Pakistan.

On an aesthetic level, the poetry regarding Pakistan in Bengali inherited the long tradition begun by Nazrul of using Persian and Arabic words and imagery, as well as characters and themes from Islamic history in a modern framework.⁹⁵ Rather than being merely a statement of 'difference', poems about Pakistan *avant la lettre* combined a sense of being Muslim, being Bengali, and being free as constituent parts of a new, utopian type of political governance. Particularism and universalism were brought together in this new idealization of a political future.

Abul Mansur Ahmed's exhortations about creating a national Bengali Muslim literary culture did manifest, to some degree, in the varied poetic writings supporting the idea of Pakistan. Ever since it was initiated in the late 1910s, this by itself was not a new phenomenon, but Islamic ideals that already had a presence in Bengali Muslim literature—equality, justice, brotherhood, deliverance from oppression—acquired a new level of consciousness with the introduction of the concept of Pakistan. It also reciprocally produced more images of Bengali language, culture, and social life within a trans-regional frame.

Golam Mostafa evoked trans-regional Islamic themes in his literary descriptions of Pakistan. As a peer of Nazrul's, his long career as a published writer, which began back in the BMSS days of the late 1910s,

culminated in songs and poems about Pakistan. He wrote profusely in Bengali, including 'Tarana-e-Pakistan' (The Song of Pakistan), a song which depicts Jinnah as 'the Aladdin of the New Age'. Among his Pakistan songs, his most popular included both 'Pakistani Jatiya Sangit' (Pakistan's National Song) and 'Pakistan-er Bhatiyali Sangit' (Pakistan's Bhatiyali Music),⁹⁶ both published in 1945 in *Mohammadi*.

Both clearly heralded the coming of a new age when 'new soldiers would come forth to fight for Pakistan, bringing forth a new Eid' and when the *azan* would be called by a new Bilal.⁹⁷ In 'Pakistan-er Bhatiyali Sangit', Mostafa connected pre-existing Bengali poetic imagery, that of boatmen, rivers, and salvation to the Pakistan context, as he exhorted his readers to 'take him on a boat to the new kingdom of Pakistan' for salvation where everything, including the water, the air, and the prayer would be all the sweeter.⁹⁸

Another BMSS man of the Nazrul generation, Shahadat Hossein, wrote 'Awban' (Call) also in 1945. Also printed in the *Mohammadi*, this poem concerns salvation and freedom, without clear references to Bengal, but with constant references to victory and pride, embodied by the new flag of Pakistan. In addition to not referencing Bengal directly, Islam and Muslims were also not explicitly mentioned. This poem is about the coming into being of a new form of political governance, a new state, and a new world in which all people, including Dravidians would hold their heads up high.

Talim Hossein's 'Gan' (Song) evoked much of the same, but translated abstract ideals of justice into a trans-regional Islamic poetic language. In this poem, published in *Mohammadi* in 1947, a 'pak-Islami sultanate' or a pure, Islamic government would reign in the new land of Pakistan, bringing light to the land that is enveloped by darkness, ignorance (*julum*) as well as oppression (*majlum*). Pakistan emerges as a Muslim response to this oppression, as 'azad habe go' (freedom will happen) in a land where Islam will reign free, marked by the flag of a new moon ('jagibe nishane natun chand').⁹⁹

This sort of Islamic universalism in no way excluded a consciousness of India inside this Bengali poetic expression. Mufakharul Islam's 1944 'Tarana-i-Pakistan' discusses how India is a land where people, those oppressed (*majlum*), cry out for a savior (*tran*), though the actual content of oppression and dissatisfaction is not exactly spelled out. India's actual fate, though, was dependent on the *azadir furman* (the order of freedom)

in which all mysteries will be exposed. Pakistan was envisioned as the end result, the manifestation of this order, in which individuals will be delivered from their state of darkness. Pakistan was freedom's last step, the last stage in the progress of India. Though prayer is mentioned, Islam as a separate religion or particular force bringing about freedom is not discussed. Rather, Pakistan, regardless of its relationship to any religion, was the method of deliverance and salvation. The order of freedom is the real subject of the poem and the author's vision of Pakistan. Though it is particularized for Indian Muslims' salvation, Pakistan remained a pan-Indian solution to the problems of India's politics.¹⁰⁰

Mufakharul Islam contributed a similar poem only two years earlier in 1942. In his 'Ruje Pakistan' he combined both ideals of justice and freedom with explicit links to the Islamic world and Islam as the catalyst for deliverance from subjugation. Here we find an extraordinary example of the link between a politics of Muslim identity and a conception of social justice emanating from Islam. The poem begins with a narration of how Islam itself came upon people nearing death and those submerged in ignorance and darkness. Similarly, Muslims of India were in a situation of danger, but with the 'sweetness of tauhid', Muslim India had the tools to break out of their hopeless situation. Finally, Muslims had to confront who they really are, qua Muslims. As such, he included several lines beginning with the proclamation of 'I am Muslim' in various contexts, in terms of political power, in terms of peace, in terms of prayer practices, and beliefs. But the poem ends with the author declaring to God that he is a Muslim born and raised in India, and that the meaning of Islam is to eradicate injustice, to develop mankind, and to cleanse all impurities from humanity.¹⁰¹ Mufakharul Islam's poetry that emerged between 1942 and 1944 could be interpreted as nationalist, but then, the entire concept of a unified 'nation' had only come into being a few years earlier. Clearly, the push towards merging ideals of Islam with a broader collectivity had roots in earlier literary developments.

Whereas Mufakharul Islam and Talim Hossein's poetry remained either abstract or directly referenced Muslims and Islam, other poets, like Roushan Ijdani, interpreted *jalim* and *majlum* as affecting all Indians, Hindu and Muslim. In his 'Jagibe Abar Mahabharat' (Great India will Rise Again), published in 1947, he lists both Hindu and Muslim reference points like Yudhisthir, Janaki-Ram, Arjun, Mortaza Ali, Haidari, and a galaxy of historical Hindus and Muslims, including a call to

Shiraj-ud-daula, as those who will rise, to answer the call to freedom for Indians enduring the common source of oppression, the British Raj. Pakistan as the new state, in Ijdani's poem 'Raigir', written in 1947 but published later in 1949, would be a land where 'milon-maitri-samyer-hukumat', or the authority of equality, friendship, and harmony, would rule.¹⁰²

These were ideas put into all-India and trans-regional Islamic, terms. But Bengal as a region was also referred to in multiple ways. Firstly, themes common to pre-Pakistan, and pre-Nazrul poetry, including the images of boatmen and salvation, appear in the Pakistan poems. Farrukh Ahmed, particularly, carried through Nazrul's aesthetic mingling of the Bengal ethnoscape with a trans-regional Islamic sensibility, by imagining how Pakistan will be a saviour delivering freedom to the land of *ausdh dhan*, or the land of paddy fields, in Bengal.

Published in 1944 in *Mohammadi* as well as in his book *Sat Saghorer Majhi* (The Boatmen of the Seven Seas), the poem serves as a key example of how both Nazrul's inheritance and the emotive force of the East Pakistan idea manifested in Bengali Muslim literature. The poem narrates in Islamic fashion, a downtrodden time for India, when faith, action, and life itself were on the wane. Through the rise of the Prophet Muhammad, and exemplary heroes, like Umar and Ali, the world had seen the triumph of peace, but the poet continually asks for a sign, for any deliverance from this plundered world, and from a world of tyrants and oppression. Continually throughout the poem, Farrukh Ahmed asks if the great flag of Islam, of liberalism, of peace, and justice will flow again in this 'ausdh dhaner desh', or the land of paddies, referring to Bengal. Just like Nazrul in his path-breaking poetry of the early 1920s, Farrukh Ahmed ends his 'Nishan' with a merging of spatial and cultural references, as he hopes that the 'wonderful weight of Mecca' will shine on this 'ausdh dhaner desh'. As opposed to a statement directly about Pakistan, this poem rather signals the search for Islamic legitimacy in a Bengali framework.

The direct influence of Nazrul also appeared in the writing of Sufi Julkifdar Haidar.¹⁰³ The course of his life also followed a similar trajectory. Hailing from a family of Persian scholars and writers, Haidar was proficient in Persian, Arabic, and also, punthis from a young age. He also fought in World War I in Iraq and returned at the close of the war in 1919. During the inter-war period, he followed literary developments

closely as a member of the BMSS, but in 1942, retired from his office job and began to write poetry full-time, mostly about the Pakistan movement.

His first book of poetry, *Bhanga Talwar* (Broken Sword), appeared in 1945. Though many poems in the book contained nothing about politics or Islam, the political poems in the book fit with the prevailing tenor of trans-regional Muslim sentiment and anti-colonial critique. In 'Kofiyat' (Explanation), he asked how long the 'inhuman oppression' of India will last in the present age. In another poem of the book, titled 'Islam', he directly equated Islam with equality, stating that 'Islam samyabadir dharma/Sakaler tare sakale amra/Tomra Sobai Jano bhai bahi' (Islam is a religion of equality/Everyone is ours/We are all brothers).¹⁰⁴ These sentiments were stated in almost this exact fashion twenty years before in Nazrul's 'Samyabadi' poems in *Langol*.¹⁰⁵ Haidar also equated Pakistan as the harbinger of freedom in 'Takbir', also in the same book. In this poem, he writes that 'Pakistaner naya rahadhare muktir pathe chale' (Let us take the new road, the path to freedom in Pakistan) and that 'jeta majlum nirbhoi-aar/haq-hishyarha bedabidar' (fearlessly, oppression will be taken away by justice).¹⁰⁶ His work also put the striving for Pakistan in *jihadist* terms. Taking from a long tradition of jihadist discourse in South Asia,¹⁰⁷ his 'Hushiar Ho Sabdhan' (Helmsman, Be Careful!) sees Jinnah as the leader of crores of jihadist Muslims seeking freedom. Jihad did not point to a specific political or spiritual event, but was used as a symbol of a struggle for freedom.¹⁰⁸

In these poems, one can detect a deep continuity between earlier traditions of incorporating Muslim themes self-consciously into Bengali literature as an act of politics. This sort of manoeuvre, signals a modern form of community, aided by efforts in multiple areas—politics, geography, and history—that lifts Bengali Muslim Bengali out of the hazy tracts of 'Mussalmani Bangla', a name given to the forms of Bengali inclusive of numerous Persian and Arabic words generated in the late eighteenth century into a modern form, authored by modern Muslim Bengalis themselves.

The ideological effects of poetry written by and for the Pakistan demand were as varied in style, content, and generational affect as the writers themselves—some had vague communist backgrounds, like Farrukh Ahmed, and some had staunchly opposed communism, like Golam Mostafa and Syed Ali Ahsan. A few wrote convincingly on how Islam and communism actually matched, such as Benazir Ahmed.

Some adhered to a total rejection of all that was not strictly Bengali Muslim (meaning a rejection of all that was Hindu, e.g., Syed Ali Ahsan), whereas some did accept a notion of an all-Bengali culture informing their sense of autonomy, such as Aminul Islam Chaudhuri. But all emphasized the poetic expression that Pakistan would equal a deliverance out of a negative state of ignorance, tyranny, and oppression (in some cases, this oppression was specifically due to the British Raj, and in some cases, to the Akhand Bharat idea), into a new, just state.

In a manner that confirmed Abul Mansur Ahmed's dictum about the construction of a 'national' Bengali Muslim literature, nearly all of the poets whose writings extolled Pakistan in the 1940s like Farrukh Ahmed, Julfikar Haidar, Chadruddin, Roushan Ijdani, Talim Hossein, Mufakkharul Islam, and Syed Ali Ahsan, had deep exposure to punthi-path, Bengali 'folk' literature, and Persian, Urdu, and at times, Arabic in their childhoods. Some like Ijdani began to write punthis after 1947, including the 1965 *Pak-Jang-Nama*, during the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Early in his career, Ijdani was praised by Kazi Motahar Hussein for being comparable in his skills in folk literature to Jasimuddin.

These writers, therefore, already had the tools to implement the Pak-Bangla manifestoes that the EPRS articulated in 1944. With their attachment to Islam as a social identity, critical awareness of Bangla as a language, and engagement and exposure to Bengali folk forms, these poets produced a discursive face for Bengali Muslim politics that would mark the 1940–4 period as an era of hopeful utopist visions for a new form of governance. Ideologically, the presence of organized communist or radical and/or revolutionary ideals appears as a backdrop and as emotive sentiments, not as an ideologically coherent portion of Pak-Bangla. But the general attraction towards ideologies of social justice was never far from the Pakistan demand, however ideologically diverse the demand's references were. Consistent with demands for Pakistan in other regions of colonial India, the notion of justice (*adl*) was central to the various Pakistan ideas symbolized in the 1940s. It was not only that justice was the central issue for 'Pakistanists', but that the contestation of the meanings of justice, emblematic of the age of decolonization, assumed primary significance in the Pakistan decade.

Two particular writers who came of age in the 1940s—Farrukh Ahmed and Syed Ali Ahsan—illustrate the literary and intellectual life of poetic Pakistan-badis of the 1940s. Farrukh Ahmed heard punthis from

his grandmother since his childhood and then attempted to enter the Calcutta literary society in the 1920s. There he met Abu Rushd, another young writer, and spent most of his time at the Dilkhusa Library. As a vociferous reader, he read and recited Rabindranath, Shelley, and many others, alongside Rushd. In the 1930s, he started to follow M.N. Roy and his radical humanism. By the late 1930s, he was a noted compatriot of other radicals like Tarasankar Bandopadhyaya, Manik Bandopadhyaya, and Golam Quddus. But by the 1940s, he emerged with a distinctive allegiance to Muslim political interest. In 1944, his first major book of poems (*Sat Sagorer Majhi*, The Boatmen of Seven Seas) drew attention from major figures in literary circles. *Azad Koro Pakistan!* (Make us Free, Pakistan!), another book of poems, mostly about Pakistan, appeared in 1945.

An Iqbal devotee, he dedicated his 1945 book, *Sat Sagorer Majhi*, to the great Punjabi poet. By the mid-1940s, his radical sense of self had turned in another direction as he completely opposed communism and the role of communists in Bengal politics. The images he constructed for Pakistan, though, like many of the other images and sentiments brought forth by his peers in the literary scene of the 1940s, did however include a consciousness of economic equality and social change. It is not clear how comparable Farrukh Ahmed's trajectory of radical politics is to Muzaffar Ahmed's, who began with Muslim politics but stayed with communism, as opposed to Farrukh Ahmed, who began with radicalism and turned to Muslim identity. His conception of Pakistan in a literary and literary-critical sense drew from a tradition of social protest that framed itself inside Islamic idioms and Bengali reference points.

Syed Ali Ahsan comprises a similar, Dacca-based counterpoint to Farrukh Ahmed's politics and literary leanings. As a youngster in Jessore, he was exposed to Urdu and Persian from his family of *sufi* dervishes whose ancestry stretched back to Iraq. Growing up in East Bengal, he had little contact with Calcutta until 1940, the year of the famous Lahore Resolution, and the year of his entry into Dacca University as an undergraduate student of English. From this point onwards, Ahsan was intimately involved with Dacca University literary organizations such as the student journal *Pakistan*, and began a dual Calcutta-Dacca existence. In 1944, he started teaching in Calcutta but remained active in Dacca literary associations, including the EPLS, from 1943. In 1945, he satirized communists in 'Kapital O Anti-During' and 'Lal Bandhuder Gan' (Song for our Communist Friends) in *Mohammadi*. Both Farrukh Ahmed

and Syed Ali Ahsan symbolized the generation of Bengali Muslim youth growing up in inter-war South Asia, imbued with the spirit of Bengali Muslim cultural distinctiveness.

It is not as if the BPML workers and Muslim religious leaders were aloof from EPRS meetings and literary and poetic movements. On the contrary, the all major religious leaders of the era attended EPRS meetings, particularly the most important and famous meeting of 1944. East Pak Renaissance was a meeting point for the diverse elements of Bengali Muslim intellectual life that were all coming together, including religious leaders, literary critics, and BPML workers.

* * *

The area which received the least attention in the discourse of Pakistan was religion in practice. Ostensibly essential for Pakistan, the role of religion was not coherently mapped out by the movement's protagonists. Religion as an identity and marker of difference, as well as how it proved to be a highly determining factor in Bengali Muslim's re-empowerment was certainly highlighted. Exactly how the religious practice in the Muslim tradition would have anything to do with a proposed just future did not appear in renaissance literature.

The following chapter details how the role of religion transformed the politics of Bengali Muslims active in the public sphere, as Abul Hashim and Hamid Bhasani, two veteran activists who also happened to be *maulvis*, began to command large-scale attention within Bengal politics of the last days of the Raj. The following chapter discusses the emergence of a public 'religious' politician, the inheritances and boundaries of such politicians, and the meanings and ideological contours of such politics, particularly, its relation to social justice, from 1944–47. Additionally, the following chapter discusses how wide-ranging politics that entailed in the debates about Bengali Muslim cultural autonomy, including religion and literary culture, developed in the world of a post-colonial nation-state of Pakistan from 1947 to 1952.

Notes

1. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar' (50 Years of Politics as I Have Seen It), in Rafiqul Islam (ed.), *Abul Mansur Ahmed*

Rachanabali, Tiritiya Khanda (Collected Works of Abul Mansur Ahmed, Third Volume)(Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2001), p. 144.

2. Recent research on decolonization and politics of the 1940s has demonstrated how the push for partition and the creation of Pakistan did not stem from 'religion', but were rather contingent decisions at the all-India political centre. See Ayesha Jalal, 'Nation, Region and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33, 32 (August 8–14, 1998): 2183–90, Sugata Bose, 'Nation, Reason and Religion: India's Independence in International Perspective', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (August 1–7, 1998), and Haimanti Roy, 'A Partition of Contingency? Public Discourse in Bengal, 1946–47', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43, 6 (November 2009): 1355–84.

3. See David Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57, 4 (November 1998): 1068–95, for a distinction between territory and place within conceptions of Pakistan.

4. See my description of Huq's political biography and role in the KPP in Chapter 4.

5. Fazlul Huq led the KPP–ML coalition ministry of 1937–41 and the Progressive Coalition Ministry with ministers from many different parties including the ML, Congress, KPP, and Scheduled Caste Party, from 1941–3. Huq included S.P. Mukherjee of the Hindu Mahasabha in the latter ministry to the sharp rebuke of the AIML and legions of Bengali Muslims who perceived such an inclusion to be a 'communal' stab at Muslim identity.

6. See for example, Harunur Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1905–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987), especially chapters 3 and 4. Explicit in the title is an unexamined link between the politics of the 1940s and the emergence of Bangladesh in institutional and infrastructural policy, leaving the content and limits of Bengali Muslim cultural history of the pre-1947 period unexamined. Both, Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937–47* (New Delhi: Impex, 1977), and Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal, 1920–47: The Land Question* (Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi, 1984), also arrive at the usual conclusions that the downfall of Huq equalled the rise of a trans-regional, all-India Muslim identity in the Bengali Muslim political arena. Sana Aiyar, 'Fazlul Huq: Region and Religion in Bengal: The Forgotten Alternative of 1940–43', *Modern Asian Studies*, 42, 6 (November 2008): 1213–49, Semanti Ghosh, 'Nationalism and the Problem of Difference, Bengal, 1905–47', PhD diss., Tufts University, 1999, and Haimanti Roy, 'Citizenship and National Identity in Post-Partition Bengal, 1947–1965', PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2006, all explain Huq's downfall as an example

of the positive 'regional' face of Bengali Muslim politics being thwarted by the unyieldingly centralized 'communalism' of Hindu and Muslim variants.

7. This 'regional interest' was in itself a presumption of some distinctive Bengali Muslim cultural and political space. In this chapter, I demonstrate how such a regional conception of Bengali Muslim selfhood was a constructed identity made of various contingent components, and not simply one part of a broader 'Bengali' nation or region.

8. Letter to Abdul Hamid Khan, MLA, Chairman, All India Muslim League, Madras, 30 March 1941, quoted in Harunur-Rashid, *Huq-Jinnah Correspondence* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2003), p. 95.

9. Poems and essays about krishaks (peasants) and Eid increased in number in the late 1930s and 1940s Bengali Muslim literary and journalistic sphere. Humayun Kabir's 1938 'Krishaker Eid' has to be distinguished from Nazrul's 1940 poem of the same name.

10. For the all-India Muslim political scenario of the late 1930s and early 1940s see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000). For analyses of Fazlul Huq, see Amalendu De, 'Fazlul Huq and his Reaction to the Two-Nation Theory', *Bengal Past and Present* 72 (175), 1974, Shyamali Ghosh, 'Fazlul Huq and Muslim Politics', *International Politics* 13, 3 (July–September 1974), and Amalendu De, *Pakistan Prostab O Fazlul Huq* (Fazlul Huq and the Pakistan Proposal) (Kolkata: Ratna Prakashan, 1972).

11. The text of the resolution is printed in many locations including Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents*, Vol. 2. (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1963), pp. 340–1 and as appendix B of Harunur-Rashid, *Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*.

12. Pirzada, p. 341.

13. Ibid.

14. In 1946, during the Delhi Resolution, the word 'states' was changed to 'state', implying one unified state of Pakistan. From 1940 to 1946, Bengali Muslim politicians and the majority of the Bengali Muslim public believed Pakistan to mean a separate Bengali Pakistan state, as opposed to one large Pakistan. Abul Hashim, the secretary of the BPML, vigorously protested this change in the 1946 Delhi meeting.

15. Pirzada, p. 341.

16. In a statement to Congress about the resolution, *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. 1, p. 312.

17. Abdur Rab, A.K. *Fazlul Huq: Life and Achievements* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1967), p. 120.

18. 'Nikhil Bharat Muslim League', Editorial, *Saogat*, 21st Year, 5th Number, Chaitra 1346 BS/1940, cited in Mustafa Nurul Islam (ed.), *Samayikpatra: Jiban O Janamat* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2005), p. 234.

19. 'Muslim League's Lahore Resolution', Editorial, *Masik Mohammadi*, 13th year, 7th Number, Baisakh 1347 BS/1940, in *ibid.*, p. 235.

20. Pirzada, p. 341.

21. 'Lahore-Muslim League', Editorial, *Saogat*, 22nd Year, 6th Number, Baisakh 1347 BS/1940, *ibid.*, p. 236.

22. See Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', in Rafiqul Islam (ed.), *Abul Mansur Ahmed Rachanabali*, pp. 118–20. In 1940, though, Subhas Bose did seal the Bose-League Pact, which stipulated that a Muslim mayor would be chosen, along with two ML aldermen and three aldermen from the Bose group. This was designed as an effort to improve relations between the two communities.

23. Abdul Gafr Siddiqi, *Amar Kaler Katha* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Book Society, 2002), pp. 47–8.

24. *Ibid.*

25. See Sana Aiyar, 'Fazlul Huq, Region, and Religion in Bengal', pp. 1232–4.

26. Harun Ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 132.

27. Ispahani, in a letter to Jinnah, said that 'students will tour the province, delivering speeches and telling the Muslims how Fazlul Huq has let them down and how the combination between Huq and Shyama Prasad will affect them', in Z.H. Zaidi (ed.), *Jinnah-Ispahani Correspondence* (Karachi: Forward Publications, 1976), p. 228.

28. Harun Ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 147.

29. Mohammed H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987), pp. 17–18.

30. Raghib Ahsan to Jinnah, 27 March 1942, Harun Ur-Rashid, *Inside Bengal Politics, 1936–47: Unpublished Correspondence of Partition Leaders* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2003), p. 136.

31. *Star of India*, 26 January 1942.

32. In 1944, the journal re-printed an old essay written by Rabindranath, first published in 1911, about Hindu–Muslim relations in Bengal. From Rabindranath's point of view in 1911, whenever Hindus called Muslims to join their 'nationalist' struggles, they did so for certain political ends, not as brothers or members of the same family. It is this feeling that fed Muslim distinctiveness and alienation, and Rabindranath urged his fellow Bengali Hindus to consider this fact seriously.

33. See Nazia Khanum, 'Dacca University, 1921–1947: Context, Controversy, Impact', *Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Humanities* 49, 2 (December 2004): p. 330.

34. See Aiyar, 'Fazlul Huq, Region, Religion and Bengal', pp. 1233–5.

35. *Statesman*, 3 February 1943.

36. *Ibid.*

37. This is implied in Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937–47*, chapter 7.

38. Harun Ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 145–6.

39. See Chapter three and four for descriptions of different facets of literary and political journalism within the Bengali Muslim community during the 1920s and 1930s and journals like *Saogat*, *Mohammadi*, and *Bulbul*.

40. See Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), pp. 358–62.

41. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, 'Sahitya Samiti O Nazrul Islam' (Literature Conference and Nazrul Islam), *Mohammadi*, 14th Year, 7th Edition, Baisakh, BS 1348/1941.

42. Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti*, pp. 359–60.

43. For a complete list of the founders, see *ibid.*, p. 360.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 362.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

46. See Andrew Sartori's 'The Resonance of "Culture": Framing a Problem in Global Concept-History', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47, 4 (October 2005): 676–99, 'Abul Mansur Ahmad and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism', in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (eds), *From Colonial to the Post-Colonial: India and Pakistan in Transition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), and Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) for an analysis of the emergence of culture as a political concept in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I merely point to how the culture concept for Bengali Muslims in 1942–45 in its Purba Pakistan manifestation appropriated the 'great tradition of Hindu nationalism in Bengal', (Sartori, 'Abul Mansur Ahmad and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism', p. 127). It also revised the term *tamaddun* for use in the broader Indian Muslim landscape. Furthermore, culture was not just understood to be a 'total way of life', but a site of resistance to common sense markers that had previously defined culture, as those definitions were explicitly exclusive of Muslims in thought and practice.

47. The main points the society listed in their early meetings, including the opposition to fascism worldwide, are reproduced in Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti*, pp. 367–8.

48. See my section on the many essays on Iqbal by Bengali Muslim authors in *Bulbul* described in Chapter four.

49. This point may be moot at this juncture even though he was the first to formulate a Muslim conception of nationality.

50. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti*, pp. 367–8.

51. The ideas of the 1940s East Pakistan Renaissance Society intellectuals certainly resonate with classical nationalist discourse. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

52. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Purba Pakistaner Jaban', *Mohammadi*, 16th Year, 1st Edition, Kartik BS 1350/1943, cited in Dilawar Hossein (ed.), *Mohammadi Patrikai Muslim Samaj* (Muslim Society as seen through the Mohammadi Magazine) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), p. 100.

53. For an analysis of the relationship between the politics of Muslim minorities in the all-India centre and the politics of regionalism in late colonial India, see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, especially chapter 7, 'Between Region and Nation: The Missing Centre', pp. 320–85.

54. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Pakistaner Biplabi Bhumika', *Mohammadi*, 16th Year, 1st Edition, Falgun 1349 BS/1942, cited in Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.), *Pakistan Andolon O Muslim Sahitya* (The Pakistan Movement and Muslim Literature) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), p. 71. It is not clear to what degree Abul Mansur Ahmed was familiar with nationalist struggles around the world, but his work in these essays clearly reflects traditional nationalist discourse, as outlined in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* and Thongchai Winachakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of the Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

55. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Pakistaner Biplabi Bhumika', *ibid.*, pp. 72–3.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

57. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of how and when folklore came to acquire a political purpose for Bengali Muslims.

58. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, 'Abhartana Samiti Sabhapatir Abhibashan' (Welcoming Committee's Address), in Sardar Fazlul Karim, *Pakistan Andolon O Muslim Sahitya* (The Pakistan Movement and Muslim Literature) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), p. 100.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

60. The concept of cultural difference elaborated here, though phrased in relation to the specifics of Bengal, was quite compatible with simultaneous versions of cultural difference put forth in the Punjab and the U.P. See Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, especially chapter 2, 'Forging a Muslim Community', regarding the various articulations of cultural difference by Muslims from the late nineteenth century.

61. Ahmed's example is the surah, *al-Qafirun* 109: 06, which states 'to you your religion and to me, mine'. Ahmed translates this in Bengali as 'Tomar dharma tomar, amar dharma amar' (your religion is yours, my religion mine) and further states that 'Qur'anic e udarbani Pakistaner gorar katha' (This liberalism is the foundation of Pakistan), *Ibid.*, p. 139.

62. Ironically, this staunch advocate of Bengali used an Urdu word, *tamaddun*, to signify Bengali Muslim 'culture'.

63. See C.M. Naim, 'Interrogating "The East", "Culture", and "Loss", in Abdul Halim Sharar's *Guzashta Luckna'u* (Lucknow of the Past)', in Alka Patel and Karen Leonard (eds), *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 189–204, for a discussion of Zaidan, Le Bon, and the gradual shift towards the usage of the word *tamaddun* to denote culture in Urdu.

64. See Andrew Sartori, 'Abul Mansur Ahmed and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism', pp. 123–8.

65. He explicitly critiqued those who saw Pakistan as not being progressive and being backward looking.

66. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Mul Sabhapatir Abhibhasan', in Sardar Fazlul Karim, *Pakistan Andolon O Muslim Sahitya*, p. 140.

67. Like Habibullah Bahar, another Bengali Pakistan theorist, Ahmed followed the Communist International support of minority self-determination. Communists who were supportive of the Pakistan idea on this basis, like M.N. Roy, supported the EPRS' broader movement of constructing a viable Bengali Muslim 'culture'.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

69. See my Chapter 4 for a discussion of punthis and their excavation by Bengali Muslim intellectuals in the early twentieth century.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

71. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Nazrul's political and aesthetic emergence.

72. Sartori, 'Abul Mansur Ahmed and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism', p. 132.

73. Jinnah, in particular, stands as a politician whose political thought was certainly embraced by EPRS leaders like Abul Mansur Ahmed, their various differences notwithstanding. Abul Mansur Ahmed saw his politics of Bengali Muslim culture, as did many of his associates, as simply the proper regional unfolding of the AIML policy of constructing a solution to the problems of power-sharing in a potentially independent India.

74. There were a variety of proposed territorial schemes offered by different branches of the AIML. Raghbir Ahsan, in his Confederacy of East Pakistan and Adibasistan, created a confederation between Eastern Pakistan, composed of Bengal and Assam, and also an Adibasistan for tribals of eastern India.

This included all of Bengal and Assam, whereas another view, supported by Nazimuddin and Akram Khan, in *The Construction of the State of Eastern Pakistan*, advocate a Pakistan completely shorn of any the Western Hindu majority portions.

75. *The Construction of the State of Eastern Pakistan*, p. 17.

76. See Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

79. Abul Mansur Ahmed, though not formally a Communist, was also sympathetic to the Soviet position.

80. See my appendix for this map, which showed the various regions that were proposed in Mujibur Rahman Khan's Pakistan idea.

81. See Habibullah Bahar, *Pakistan* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), a collected edition of essays on the topic.

82. This of course meshed with Jinnah's thoughts on the unitary centre created by the British in India. See the discussion of this point in Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*.

83. *Communist*, 2, 9 (1940), p. 9. Another politician of the era, B.R. Ambedkar, the outspoken advocate of the 'Untouchable communities', voiced a reasoned sympathy for the Pakistan proposals, though his main concern was that a rushed departure of the British Empire would exacerbate, rather than solve, the minority problems of India. See his *Pakistan or Partition of India* (Bombay: Thacker, 1945).

84. G. Adhikari, *Pakistan and National Unity* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1943), p. 15.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–9.

86. Nafis Ahmed, *The Basis of Pakistan* (Kolkata: Thacker, 1947), p. 161.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

89. Rezaul Karim, *Pakistan Examined with the Partition Scheme of Dr. Latif, etc.* (Kolkata: Book Company, 1941). Karim wrote books on Hazrat Mohammed, Maulana Azad, and significantly, writings in defence of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, including 'Bankimchandrér Nikat Musalmaner Reen' (The Debt of Muslims to Bankim Chandra) in 1938 and his 1944 book *Bankimchandra O Muslim Samaj*.

90. Rezaul Karim, *Pakistan Examined*, p. 9.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

93. See S. Wajed Ali in 'Bharatbarsha', in Syed Akram Hossein (ed.), *S. Wajed Ali Rachanabali*, Vol I. (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985) for another example of Bengali Muslim visions of community that did not accept the Pakistan idea.

94. As Nitai Das has written, the bulk of literature espousing EPRS ideals appeared from 1942 to 1947. Not exactly 'new', Pakistan-badi literature in Bengali was, according to Das, an attempt to integrate the Islamic sensibility into a formalized programme of literary production, though it had been happening for decades, 'Pakistan' gave a name to something already in motion. See Nitai Das, 'Pakistan Andoloner Rajnoitik, Samajik, O Sanskritik Patbhum' (The Political, Social, and Cultural Foundation of Pakistan), in Nitai Das (ed.), *Pakistan Andolon O Bangla Kobita* (The Pakistan Movement and Bengali Poetry) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993), p. 45.

95. As mentioned in Chapter two, Nazrul was certainly not the first Bengali Muslim to implement Islamic images and words of Perso-Arabic origin into Bengali literature, but merely the first to construct a modern version of such aesthetic practice noticed by Bengali Hindu writers and critics.

96. Bhatiyali is a particularly Bengali musical form found in East Bengal.

97. 'Pakistani Jatiya Sangit' in Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.), *Pakistan Andolon O Muslim Sahitya*, p. 161.

98. Ibid, pp. 162–3.

99. 'Gan' in Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.), *Pakistan Andolon O Muslim Sahitya*, p. 185.

100. 'Tarani-i-Pakistan', in *ibid.*, p. 171.

101. 'Ruje Pakistan', in *ibid.*, pp. 177–80.

102. 'Raigir,' in Roushan Ijdani, *Raigir* (Dacca, 1949), pp. 31–2.

103. Kazi Motahar Hossein, the celebrated critic and philosopher, wrote that Haider was the first Bengali Muslim writer since Nazrul to combine highly developed poetic skill with a politics that condemned oppression and tyranny. See Nitai Das, *Pakistan Andolon O Bangla Kobita*, p. 87.

104. Though the first edition of *Bhanga Talwar* was published in 1945 in Calcutta, the extant version of it was published in Dacca by the Islamic Academy in 1959, see Nitai Das, *Pakistan Andolon O Bangla Kobita*, pp. 87–8.

105. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of these poems.

106. Ibid., p. 88.

107. Though certainly different than the main actors in Ayesha Jalal's *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, the basic thrust of Haider's critique meshes the long-standing tradition of appropriating the concept of jihad for temporal and this-worldly purposes.

108. One verse displays the jihadist urge: 'Koti koti mora mukti pran ei bharate jihadi Musalman/Jatirmukti tare dite paria kata re janmal korban/mora chai Pakistan/Moder Shadher Azad Pakistan' (We are crores and crores of jihadi Indian Muslims seeking freedom/For the freedom of our jati we would unflinchingly sacrifice our lives/We want Pakistan/We want that Pakistan which we long for), see Nitai Das, *Pakistan Andolon O Bangali Kobita*, p. 89.

6. *Language and Religion in the Post-colonial State*

The Muslim League was an organization of the Muslims, but it stood for the safeguarding of the rights and privileges of all irrespective of caste, creed, and political opinion. I urged upon Muslims to build the fundamentals of Islam and build up your thrones in the heart of every man and woman by your service to humanity and your devotion to truth, and sacrifice all you have in the way of God.

—Abul Hashim, 1943¹

When Abul Hashim, the Islamic philosopher, BPML leader, and political activist, began to organize and politicize Bengali Muslims around the idea of Pakistan, he would not have imagined that the Pakistani state he worked so hard to establish would jail him only five years after its emergence. He was imprisoned in 1952 for participating in the language movement, which was a collective effort to force the central government of Pakistan to recognize Bengali as one of the

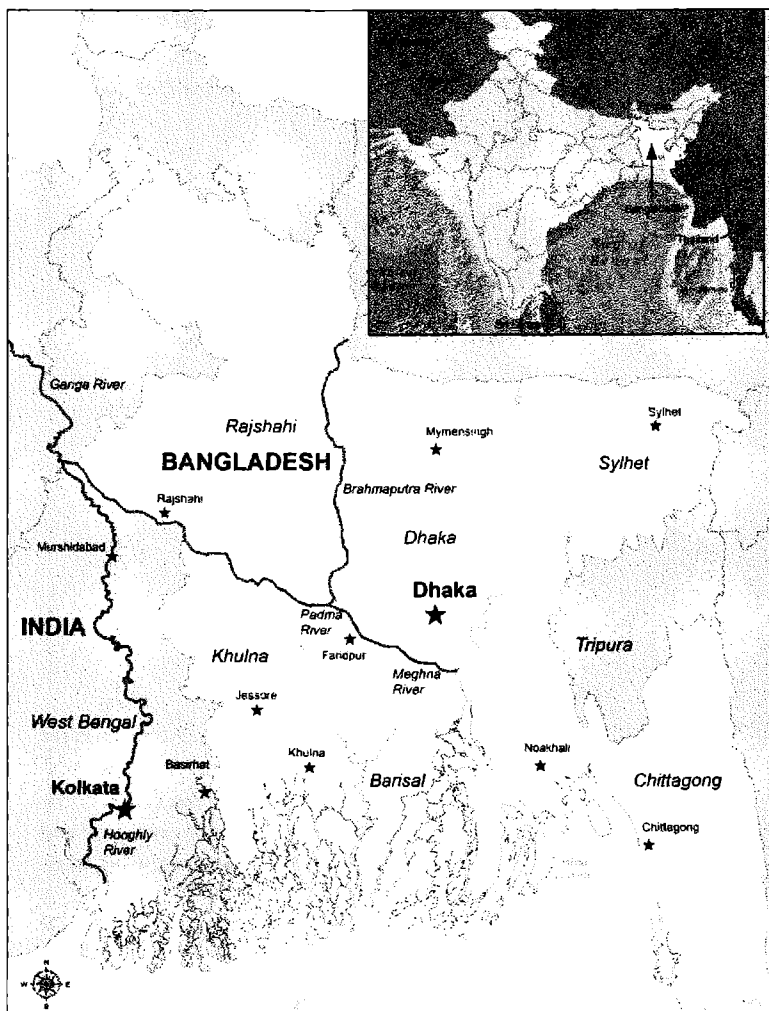


Figure 6.1 Map of Bangladesh, 2014

Source: Based on Esri, GEBCO, NOAA, National Geographic, DeLorme, NAVTEO Geonames.org, Survey of India, and others.

Note: Map not to scale and does not represent authentic international boundaries.

state languages of Pakistan.² As he and so many of his compatriots found out, governance in the early days of Pakistan did not match at all with the ideals of a proposed Pakistan as enunciated in the early 1940s by him and his colleagues. Akin to the experiences of many Muslim politicians and activists in the other regions of India that would become part of Pakistan, Hashim and his associates continued to articulate a mix of Islamic universalism, along with an emphasis on the resolutely local Bengali Muslim literary culture that had been developing since the 1910s. Rather than challenge the corruption and the disjuncture between ideals and reality by opposing the Pakistani state structure, Bengali Muslims in the early years of the new Pakistani state aimed to preserve the original Pakistan idea embodied by their interpretation of the 1940 Lahore Resolution. The Bengali Muslim Pakistan idea, as examined in Chapter 5, confidently fitted Bengali Muslim culture into a trans-regional Muslim frame.

This chapter discusses how ideals associated with Pakistan by Bengali Muslims developed during the latter days of the British Raj from 1945 to 1947, as well as the first five years of East Pakistan. After the transfer of power and the arrival of nation-states in 1947, I examine the effects this monumental change in political geography and sovereignty had on Bengali Muslim intellectuals. Part of this monumental change included the dislocations, and at times chaotic adaptations, of East Bengalis to the new East Pakistan in its first five years of existence from 1947 to 1952. Religion, as an emotive and philosophical force, represented by *rabbaniyat*, or an investment in the Islamic Kalima as a revolutionary creed, emerged as a powerful agent in the world of ideas about Bengali Muslim politics from 1945 to 1952. Such ideas were hardly new to South Asian Muslim intellectuals, but they were new to the public politics of Bengali Muslims during the late colonial and early post-colonial era. Rather than conflict with the highly particular identity politics of Bengali Muslims, these ideas emerged within the long-standing focus on literary and cultural particularity amongst Bengali Muslim activists who were simultaneously advocating and materializing East Pakistan.

Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, who in his youth read and wrote impassioned editorials promoting the inclusion of Muslims into Bengali literary culture, had come to embody 'cultural difference' during the last days of the British Raj. This difference was defined quite specifically in terms of an all-inclusive sense of culture, as he was a stalwart of the EPRS and was a central figure in the construction of an Eastern Pakistani cultural

renaissance only a few years earlier. Both Shamsuddin and Hashim represent the two complementary strands of thought and practice in the Bengali Muslim ecumene: Islamic universalism and Bengali Muslim particularity. Both of these elements of Bengali Muslim politics—developed and sustained throughout the early twentieth century—manifested throughout the turbulent early years of the new post-colonial nation-state. Rather than bursting into a wholly oppositional ‘Bengali culturalism’, Bengali Muslims actually proceeded along the continuous lines of living up to the goal of a Purba or Eastern Pakistan.

Far from being merely instrumental in order to simply assert or obtain political power, religion had a strong influence in the Bengali Muslim drive for Pakistan, as represented by two of the Pakistan movement’s most celebrated leaders, Abul Hashim and Maulana Hamid Khan Bhasani from 1945 to 1947. The precise role of religion in the formation of Pakistan was not coherently mapped out by the movement’s protagonists. Religion functioned as a deeply important agent in the construction of Bengali Muslim cultural empowerment and social identity, and as a marker of difference. Exactly how either philosophy or practice from the Muslim tradition would have anything to do with a proposed just future did not appear in the East Pakistan Renaissance Literature of the early 1940s.

Religion in Hashim’s Thought and Praxis

Religion was not directly approached by a Bengali Muslim *maulvi* until the rise of Abul Hashim, both an *alim* and a rising star of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Hashim was the son of Abul Kasem, the Bengal Congress leader, and the grandson of Abdul Jabbar, a deputy magistrate and classmate of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in the nineteenth century. Both his father and grandfather were steeped in English education and public politics in the colonial state as well as traditional Islamic education. As a young boy, Hashim learnt Arabic and Persian from noted tutors like Giasuddin Ahmed from Deoband. In this sense, Hashim was a product of an elite section of Bengali Muslim society that would have access to English, Urdu, Arabic, and Persian, along with Bengali. Growing up in rural Burdwan in West Bengal, agriculture was a part of Hashim’s life from a young age and this was innately reflected in his worldview. Like most rural Bengali Muslims, the agricultural work he learned and

observed was mostly from maulvis and village mullahs in the 1910s and early 1920s.

In the early 1920s, when a student at Calcutta University, he fell in love with what were known as 'Western' subjects like sociology, law, politics, history, and philosophy. This led to a life-long interest in the comparison between Islam and communism, which would appear in his political and religious behaviour and writing in the 1940s, and culminate in his book *The Creed of Islam or the Revolutionary Aspect of the Kalima*, published in 1950. In the 1930s, as a rising lawyer and politician in the Muslim League, he organized flood relief campaigns and anti-*pardah* groups. In 1937, he was elected to the Bengal legislature from Burdwan, and had been well known to the public, particularly to Jinnah, who by now called him 'Maulana Sahib'. The 1940 Lahore Resolution touched him deeply, as he 'saw in the Lahore Resolution my complete independence as a Muslim and as a Bengali'.³

In 1943, Hashim began to develop a politico-philosophical programme for the reconstruction of Muslim politics in Bengal that would yield significant repercussions for the trajectory of Bengal politics. As one of his young devotees would later record, nobody in Bengal knew much about Hashim until he began to construct a religio-philosophical programme for the re-generation of the Muslim League.⁴ Approached by Maulana Azad Soubhani to lead the Muslim League 'via the preaching of the pragmatic values of Islam',⁵ Hashim emerged as the lone BPML politician to hold training in Islamic studies, Western philosophy, and communism. Through this foundation, he began to theorize and revolutionize the Muslim League's approach in Bengal. At first, Hashim was reluctant to lead such a charge, but in time he would lead meetings with a variety of Muslim League stalwarts like Raghīb Ahsan, Maulana Abdul Jabr Waheedi, and others to 'discuss the necessity of reconstructing Islamic thought in the context of accumulated knowledge of man in various spheres of man's being and becoming'.⁶ During these meetings over the course of 1943, the group would probe the meanings of *rabbaniyat*, or the 'physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual development of man according to divine way of creation, sustenance, and evolution of the Prophet Muhammad'.⁷ *Rab*, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, would be the inspiration to the politics of re-defining political organization, and also enable resistance to dominant power structures. An Islamic state, which is defined as a state that 'implements *rabbinyat*

in [the] individual and collective life of its citizens', would be the goal of this new programme.⁸ Through Hashim's leadership, the group decided to instil such a programme into the campaign of the BPML.

Later that year, Hashim was easily elected the General Secretary of the BPML. He stated that from then on he would 'organize the ML as a broad-based democratic and progressive political party in Bengal'.⁹ The first step the BPML would take in this direction would be to fight three vested interests: the Ahsan Manzil, the Ispahanis, and his rival Akram Khan's newspaper *Azad*.¹⁰ Additionally, he immediately started changing the public face of the BPML. Only a few weeks after his election, he declared that even though 'the ML was an organization of the Muslims...it stood for the safeguarding of the rights and privileges of all irrespective of caste, creed, and political opinion'.¹¹ At this same meeting, he addressed the all BPML members and said: 'run about in cities, towns, and villages, and organize your brothers and sisters and build up your thrones in the heart of every man and women by your service to humanity and your devotion to truth, and sacrifice all you have in the way of God'.¹² Whereas Islam had been recognized by EPRS leaders as a part of the overall Bengali Muslim cultural portfolio, it had not been explicitly included, philosophically or practically, in any programme of cultural renaissance. With Hashim, religion became an indispensable factor of the BPML directive.

From late 1943, he started modernizing the ML business in Bengal by starting a new office in Calcutta, and by opening a bank account and an organized system of audits and annual reports. He also led the drive towards instituting local offices and libraries, particularly in eastern and northern districts where Muslim peasants were numerous. Before Hashim's rise as the General Secretary, the BPML had no official representation in the districts of eastern and northern Bengal. In 1944, he managed a massive recruitment drive and campaign to build representation in the trenches of rural Bengal for the BPML. By April 1944 a permanent Dacca office had been established, overseeing seven district branches.

This work, though certainly tied to the temporal goals of the Muslim League as outlined in the Lahore Resolution, was for Hashim also a venue for the proper dissemination of religious teachings. He portrayed the BPML as a fighter for progressive interests, but he also saw himself 'as a zealous missionary of Islam... [as he] also preached from the ML platform social, political, economic and cultural fundamentals of Islam and how they were implemented in individual and collective life under the

leadership of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the caliphate of Islam'.¹³ When the Lahore Resolution was passed in 1940, the BPML was an organization comprising of elite, often, non-Bengali professional politicians. By 1944, the provincial party had infiltrated rural Bengal through efficient organization and the formal inclusion of Islam into its public face. By the end of the year, nearly one million members had enrolled in district centres all over Bengal.

From 1944 onwards, Hashim created a cadre of full-time workers who toured continuously through 1946 in cities and in the mufassil regions. These cadres were mostly young, educated middle-class youths, who would have responded to the EPRS cries for self-determination.¹⁴ In 1944, Hashim moved into the Calcutta BPML house on Ripon Street and resided there till 1946. There he trained party workers, gave classes on Islam, ideology, communism, and the grammar of political warfare. Though not a Communist, he was sympathetic to the premises advanced by Marx about the human condition. He encouraged his followers to widely read Marxist philosophy and Islamic philosophy and to find ways to spiritually and politically organize their approach to politics. It is not clear from available evidence whether he took from these two traditions of thought to create a coherent or synthetic revolution in the realm of ideas. Antecedents to his work appeared in earlier movements in the form of Bengali Muslim innovators like Nazrul, but Hashim galvanized pre-existing energies in such a way that it combined into a comprehensible programme for the mobilization of the BPML. Hashim also embarked on philosophical investigations of the role of Islam in society and its application to a socially just order. As recounted by one of young BPML workers of the period, being one of the few with an extensive 'knowledge of both Islam and Marxism, he could inspire the younger generation, [who were] disappointed with the reactionary leadership during World War II and the Great Famine of 1943'.¹⁵ Mufassil workers often visited Calcutta and stayed at this house during these years. Some of these youth included Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, later to become the first prime minister of Bangladesh. The Dacca counterpoint, in its Moghultuly Road Party House had committed workers of the KPP like Shamsuddin Ahmed and Kamruddin Ahmed in their ranks.

Abdul Gafr Siddiqi remembered these meetings as 'intellectual training camps' of the 1940s and as a counterpoint to the physical training camps of the Muslim League National Guards, which were growing in

visibility in the mid-1940s.¹⁶ Siddiqi, a young college student like his poet counterparts Farrukh Ahmed and Syed Ali Ahsan, attended meetings with great interest, and learned about Islam, modern history, philosophy, and principles of social justice. Although celebrating Islam as a marker of identity was part of the agenda, Islam's revolutionary and liberating potential was one of the major reasons as to why it was emphasized, and this is exemplified in the line: 'the revolutionary parts of Islam were for our freedom, for our liberation'.¹⁷ As recorded by Siddiqi, Hashim maintained a towering public presence in packed meetings in Faridpur, Gaffargaon, and throughout rural eastern Bengal during this time. Due to Hashim's innovations in political mobilization and his attention to the revolutionary and emancipatory aspects of Islam, a variety of groups and individuals were drawn to the Pakistan movement. Benazir Ahmed, one of the Bengali poets to extol Pakistan only a few years earlier, was continuously present on Abul Hashim's tours and drew many other poets into the movement.¹⁸

By 1944, the BPML was the vanguard political movement of rural Muslim Bengali society. Conferences were held in every mufassil town, and people with a variety of political interests—religious leaders, peasant leaders, poets—were all incorporated into a loosely connected joint movement.¹⁹ From the placards and slogans of the mufassil Pakistan movement, it was clear that Pakistan was an indispensable conception of social change. Election campaign slogans and posters sent to the mufassil from the BPML office read: 'Land Belongs to the Plough', 'Abolish Zamindari without Compensation', 'Pakistan for Peasants and Laborers' symbolized a potential link back to the Faraizi movement for some of the movement's supporters.²⁰

In 1944, Hashim constructed a manifesto that explicated the Pakistan demand. This ten-point manifesto highlighted all the ideals of both Islam and social justice: sovereignty, universal adult franchise, equality before law, guarantee of civil liberties, guarantee of employment, free and compulsory education, free hospitals for the poor, nationalization of the key industries, minimum living wages, and equality of opportunity for employment.²¹ Hashim also continually articulated his message of Pakistan as a form of liberation for all groups, including lower and outcast Hindus.²² On September 9, 1945, Hashim released a statement to the press, titled 'Let Us Go to War', a pamphlet clarifying the BPML's position as 'real democracy, freedom, equity, and justice...and opposed to imperial

domination and economic exploitation, which is the basis of the favorite Akhand Bharat of the Congress'.²³ Here he echoed the early 1940s EPRS position that Pakistan was a challenge to the centralized, quasi-imperialist Congress which aimed to simply replace British Raj with a Congress Raj. Hashim mixed his religious commitments with a reflection of the politics of self-determination by claiming that 'liberated India must necessarily be, as God has made it, a subcontinent having complete independence for every nation inhabiting it'.²⁴ Hashim transcended his EPRS predecessors by briefly mentioning how the Pakistan ideal, though rooted in Islam, was not by and for Muslims only:

The Congress ought to realize that when we Muslims talk of freedom and independence, we seriously mean it and Muslims of India are opposed to every kind of domination and exploitation—British or Indian. In Pakistan there will be just and equitable distribution of the rights and privileges of the state among all its citizens, irrespective of caste, color, or creed. And it is not in the contemplation of the Muslims to reserve any advantage for themselves except their right to govern their own society according to the laws of the Shariat. It is untrue and mischievous to say that Pakistan means the domination of the Muslims and to say that Pakistan means opportunity for the Muslims to dominate and exploit others.²⁵

This universalist message of liberation found a space in the public politics of the Muslim League during the election campaigns of 1946. Elections were held for the Bengal Legislative Assembly in March 1946, preceded by a vigorous campaign by the BPML to push for 121 of the 250 'Muslim' seats in the House. In late 1945, Hashim started his own newspaper, *Millat*, which became an outlet for his programme within the BPML. Hashim's activism and his new newspaper were both treated with caution by the central League High Command. Non-Bengali aristocrats, like Nazimuddin, or the Bengali Akram Khan aligned themselves more with the AIML during the campaigning of the 1945–46 election. Jinnah frequently clashed with Hashim, but he realized the emotive power and popular support Hashim's mobilization commanded for the broader Muslim League cause.

During the elections, the main issue animating the battles between the two main parties, the ML and the Congress, was the issue of Pakistan. For Muslim voters, choosing the ML meant choosing Pakistan. In the words of a prominent scholar, the 'elections were virtually a referendum

on the issue of Pakistan'.²⁶ The BPML, through Hashim's leadership, drew in more members. Significantly, the majority of the KPP membership, including Abul Mansur Ahmed, whole-heartedly joined the Muslim League by 1946.²⁷ Even Shamsuddin Ahmed, a long-time KPP activist, joined the BPML in late 1945. Though there existed a trace of an oppositional force in Bengali Muslim politics that opposed the BPML—for instance, groups like the KPP headed by Fazlul Huq, the Jamiat-ul-Hind Bengal, or the Emarat Party—none of these groups offered any challenge to the BPML's success in popular mobilization or electoral power.

Abul Mansur Ahmed, who had been quite skeptical of the Pakistan idea when it first emerged, and who was quite wary of the ML's intentions in the early 1940s, declared that the BPML had become the 'revolutionary people's organization, the vanguard of the old Krishak Praja Party'.²⁸ From late 1945 to mid-1946, Bengali Muslims of many different social classes—from peasants to labourers, students, writers, and middle-class workers—began to join and support the BPML in support of the Pakistan idea.²⁹ Hashim and Suhrawardy began to ruthlessly organize the BPML's base of operations by setting up offices in every territorial constituency. They also presided over a massive propaganda programme throughout each city and mufassil location in Bengal. In the March 1946 elections, the BPML easily won the majority of 'Muslim' seats, bagging 114 out of a total of 250 seats and polling 84 per cent of the Muslim votes. Fazlul Huq's KPP could only secure 4 seats while two other parties won the remaining seats. Because of Hashim's popularity and his emphasis on Islam, particularly social justice, equality, and revolution, the BPML and the idea of Pakistan captured the political imagination of thousands of Bengali Muslims.³⁰

From this point onwards, Pakistan was understood by the EPRS and Pakistan-badi poets in not only through symbolic, emotive terms, but also through the BPML in Islamic-philosophical terms. Pakistan was a sub-junctive condition, a possibility, a state of things that might materialize. It was to be a just state imbued with the ideals of Islam. On both literal and figurative planes, the literary, religious, and political arenas of Bengali Muslim politics converged in the 1946 elections.

Bengali Muslims and the End of the Raj

Language, literature, and Islam formed the core of the establishment of a Bengali Muslim selfhood from the 1910s until the 1940 Lahore

Resolution. From 1940 onwards, these three aspects of identity were all joined in a totalizing conception of freedom within the utopian vision of Pakistan. Given the focus on a variety of issues not directly related to Muslim identity Bengali Muslim conceptions of Pakistan were not exactly a refutation of the two-nation theory. They rather modified the theory, stipulating that the concept of distinctiveness based on religion was further delimited by culture, which was represented in great part by language and literature.

On the purely logistical and instrumental level, the all-encompassing term of Pakistan conveniently allowed thinkers of varied commitments to share a platform, so that Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Akram Khan, Abul Hashim, and then, Suhrawardy, Fazlul Huq, and the tens of thousands of Muslim students, peasants, and BPML recruits in the mid-1940s, and many others believed in some form of Pakistan. This, then, may be understood as a strength resulting from elasticity of the demand for Pakistan, since the drive towards cultural distinctiveness in literature had a long-standing history, as did the grievances of Muslim peasants at the hands of Hindu landlords. The concept itself was able to provide the ideological support for a wide array of actors, all of whom shared the core belief in social change. In 1945, the spirit of hope and anticipation informed a society disempowered by World War, and it anticipated broad changes in governance. As the BPML was preparing for their 1946 election season, S. Wajed Ali, still based in Calcutta, wrote *Bengalees of Tomorrow*, a short book on the problems of Hindu-Muslim tension and the future of these communities.

He wished for the existence of a Bengali nation composed of both Hindu and Muslim factions. And he argued that Bengali-speaking Hindus and Muslims never rioted against each other or had 'communal' problems with each other. Ali's 1945 statement about a Bengali nation appears all the more important when seen in relation to the growing sense of cultural autonomy all around him in the literary associations that he frequented, namely, his *Gulistan* meetings, and the workings of the renaissance society which he attended. He was one of the few Bengali Muslims who wrote promoting the larger movement of a poetic and justice-based religio-social Pakistan.

This idealized sense of Pakistan was shaken by the reality of late colonial politics from mid-1946 to the end of the Raj in 1947. In August 1946 riots during and after the so-called 'Direct Action Day' shook the

entire populace of Bengal. Intellectuals like Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin described it as the pivotal event of the decade. After it occurred, the region slid into a frenzy of violence and retroactive attacks and counter-attacks. Though Bengali Hindu Marxists would call Direct Action Day as 'really an attack on Hindu and Muslim masses',³¹ by the end of the calendar year, panic and fear had seeped into the hearts of many of Calcutta's Muslim residents, who are now quite anxious for Pakistan. Abul Mansur Ahmed wrote about the waning days of British colonialism as he saw many Hindu activists patrolling the streets of Calcutta, intimidating people from late 1946 onwards. Feelings of fear and bewilderment, rather than reasoned deliberations on Islam's potential to organize a socially just society, dominated thought and practice in these last two years of colonial rule.

Direct Action Day was planned because the all-India Muslim League was excluded from the negotiations to form an interim government at the centre, even though it had accepted the long-term proposals of the British cabinet mission.³² The day was originally planned to be simply a rally for the general support of anti-colonial activity. Many Hindus, though, were fearful of Muslim reprisals and attacks. The Muslim League government, which had recently taken over the administration of Bengal, declared that 16 August would be a holiday, partially out of fear. The spokesman of the ML-led West Bengal government, Nazimuddin spoke of the 'betrayal of Muslims and the need for Pakistan' which would be established by 'breaking the walls of Fort William'.³³ Ironically, the embrace of a non-centralized version of governance embodied by the comprehensive literary and intellectual articulations of the Pakistan demand now became dormant in the midst of rising centralism. Pakistan as an idea carved out by Bengali Muslim intellectuals had been tied to a locally honed cultural identity that was informed by religion. But in 1946, the idea of an 'ML' government became linked to a rigid centralism, not a culturally-informed Bengali Muslim-ness.

On the morning of 16 August, ML volunteers began to force Hindu shopkeepers to close their shops. Hindus retaliated with violence, as many had been prepared for this confrontation by stockpiling arms with the aid of local goondas. Thousands died in the aftermath of this upheaval, later to be termed the 'Great Calcutta Killing', in which looting, murders, and sporadic bouts of violence lasted for four days until 19 August. A complete breakdown of law and order was accompanied by fiercely militarized

violence (which was evidently pre-planned and well-organized) between Hindus and Muslims at the end of summer 1946. Though numbers varied according to different accounts, between 5,000 and 10,000 people died, and nearly 15,000 were injured.

The episodes of murders and lootings betrayed long-standing organization and planning by a variety of groups. Acid bombs were being made in Hindu-owned factories, and other sorts of weapons were being produced by Hindu blacksmiths well before the actual disturbances began. American soldiers reportedly sold many weapons to Marwari merchants who would use them during the riots. The ML government also allegedly planned various strategies to divert food rations for ML activists and also shield ML volunteers from the police. The goonda (criminal) underworld also had a significant hand in this, as the vast majority of perpetrators of violent crimes were clearly from criminal elements of society. Goonda violence also showed prior planning and organization, as attacks were often undertaken against specific groups, and rarely against wealthy members of either community. Calcutta, traditionally known as a quiet, peaceful city was reduced to a blood-ridden city that witnessed horrific violence in the last days of August 1946. The government, led by Suhrawardy of the ML, was unable to stop the violence until the military was introduced to quell the conflicts.³⁴

After the Calcutta riots and murders, Noakhali, situated near the eastern part of the Bay of Bengal, was engulfed in the flames of Hindu–Muslim violence in October 1946. Begun after the Eid celebrations in late September, highly organized gangs of Muslims began to terrorize Hindu communities and individuals as retributions for attacks in Calcutta two months earlier. What marked this episode of violence was a new element in Hindu–Muslim relations in Bengal: complete communalization of violence which used religion as a legitimizing force. As a leading scholar of the subject has written, Noakhali ‘completed the shift from the relatively unorganized and often class based communal violence to organized rioting with direct involvement of the organized political world’.³⁵ For the first time, forcible conversion of Hindus by Muslims occurred, since violence persisted through the end of the year, until Gandhi arrived on a peace mission to end the violence in Noakhali.

Like Direct Action Day, many conflicting reports of numbers of murders, accounts of forcible conversions, lootings, and other acts of violence appeared, making it difficult to ascertain precise casualties and behaviours. Suhrawardy, the chief minister, reported a figure of

approximately 9,800 cases of forcible conversions in Noakhali, whereas government reports cited 22,000 cases, a number that far exceeded the chief minister's report.³⁶ Though the veracity of the various government and eye-witness accounts must be carefully scrutinized for accuracy, the mere presence of so many reports testify to a preponderance of violent conversions, destruction of Hindu idols, forcible wearing of Pakistan clothes (*lungis* for men, along with caps adorned with phrases like 'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Larke Lenge Pakistan'), and violence against women in the last few months of 1946 in Noakhali. Only a few months after the mobilization of Muslim peasants along lines of Muslim politico-philosophical reconstruction in the name of Pakistan, the idea and potential of Pakistan had taken a totally different turn in the rural regions of southeastern Bengal.

In April of 1946, Suhrawardy moved the historic Delhi Resolution, in which the phrase 'independent sovereign states' was changed from its original incantation in the 1940 Lahore Resolution into 'independent sovereign state' implying one unified pan-Indian Muslim state of Punjab, Sind, NWFP, and Baluchistan in the west, and Bengal in the east, with a sovereign India in between the two halves. This infuriated the Bengali ML members who had done so much to rally support for the Pakistan idea. Abul Hashim protested vigorously to no avail. He even pointed out the error to the Quaid-i-Azam who said that the first term 'states' must have been a mistake.³⁷

During the passage of the Delhi Resolution, Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim clearly occupied oppositional ends of the Muslim League spectrum. But about a year later, along with Sarat Bose, both BPML leaders, along with Jinnah, supported the United Bengal Plan, which was a short-lived plan to construct a unified Bengal state. This quick and ill-fated attempt made no real effect on the hearts and minds of those who had for years conceptualized a space for Bengali Muslims in their distinctive literature, language, culture, and religion. The United Bengal Plan matched with Abul Hashim's vision of a reconstructed Islamic society. Like many of his BPML colleagues, Hashim opposed the partition of Bengal, as a United Bengal would serve Hashim's interests in reconstructing Bengali society for the future. The United Bengal Plan was approved by Jinnah on behalf of the AIML and quashed by the Congress High Command. However, as some sort of change in political structure appeared like a possibility in 1947, the ML newspaper *Dawn* ironically vilified Hashim's

eagerness for a united Bengal, even though it did not contradict Jinnah's own stated positions.³⁸

From late 1946, given the environment of fear, violence, and uncertainty, many literary-cultural Bengali Pakistan activists, such as Abul Mansur Ahmed, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Talim Hossein, and Golam Mostafa were only waiting for Pakistan to materialize and to move from Calcutta to Dacca. From September 1946 onwards, many Muslim residents of Dacca and Calcutta felt that 'Pakistan was the only solution to the constitutional problem' of late colonial India.³⁹ In early 1947, the organization for the Muslim League, and especially the Muslim League National Guards proliferated throughout rural East Bengal, with hundreds stationed in places like Malda, Bogra, and Noakhali, and over one thousand in Chittagong.⁴⁰ Chittagong, in particular, was a rising centre of Muslim League activism, with increasing numbers of incidents of violence instigated by the National Guards, and allegations of talk of a religious war in early 1947.⁴¹

But a feeling of inevitability—of some kind of monumental political change—arose from this era of collective violence and heightened tensions between religious groups, especially from August 1946 onwards. In this context, the leading Bengali Muslim literary men, Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, were working for the *Azad*, the long-standing institution for Bengali Muslim journalism in Calcutta. Under frequent attack in 1946 and 1947, *Azad* had to briefly close down for fear of continual attacks by Mahasabha goondas in Calcutta. As Shamsuddin notes in his autobiography, he and the *Azad* staff were often living in fear of their lives in August and September 1947.⁴²

After much consternation, the editors decided to move *Azad* to Dacca, and set the date for October 1948. In the first few years of the formation of Pakistan, *Azad* was marked by an economic crisis that reflected the economic condition of the whole of Bengal. There were no stocks for paper, and consequently they had to borrow heavily to make the ends meet. Additionally, there were precious little funds to pay workers. Still, the move was taking place in 1947 and 1948, at nearly lightning pace. Like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Shamsuddin and the *Azad* group left Calcutta with high spirits, but with nasty memories of the end of colonial rule: 'for about eighteen years we [writers of *Azad*] enjoyed Calcutta so much, but this last year was such a traumatic experience, that we left with good wishes and thoughts for the future'.⁴³ Abul Mansur Ahmed also

left with positive memories of his long-standing Hindu friends and compatriots, but felt that it was time to leave for the new world of Pakistan, a new state that in 1947 and 1948 held hope for a better, new future.⁴⁴

This hope for Pakistan was not simply rooted in a conception of 'Muslim identity', but as a part of a multi-layered set of identities that was neither simply Bengali Muslim in a syncretic sense,⁴⁵ nor in a regionally patriotic sense,⁴⁶ but in a way that would specifically *not* be Bengali Hindu regarding their language, culture, and religion. It was not a shared regional culture misunderstood by 'Muslim separatists', but understood by the right-thinking 'Bengalis'. It was rather a construction of Bengali regional culture that positively valorized the Muslim portion of that culture, a valorization which itself was an innovation in the realm of ideas and activism. Most Bengali Hindus had never considered this valorization as a part of 'Bengali culture', and indeed, the established definition of 'Bengali culture' had always depended on exclusion of Muslims from it.⁴⁷

Though 'religiously informed cultural identities embroidered with an array of religious symbols and empowered by religion as faith'⁴⁸ certainly existed in Bengal of the 1940s, the substance of the very particular Bengali Muslim identities and religious symbols in this decade were not proceeding from a shared regional culture in which Hindu and Muslim were both understood to be equal parts of a larger unit. As understood by the East Pakistan renaissance units and the BPML, Bengali Muslim-ness was not to be carved out of the equivalent substance of Hindu Bengali-ness of the province. However, Bengali Muslim-ness was certainly not antagonistic to the obviously Hindu portions of the broader Bengali sensibility. At every step along the way, Bengali Hindus were involved, in some fashion or another, in a project of reshaping identity, so that Muslims would simply hold their rightful place in a larger Bengali cultural ecumene. Distinctiveness within this broader Bengali, and also broader South Asian Muslim, ecumene gave the new nation of East Pakistan its actual reason for existence, as evidenced by the confluence of political and literary-cultural activism that blended a conception of being and becoming Bengali Muslim in one totalizing programme.⁴⁹

Eternal Eid and a New State

Though the decision process was quite hasty and hardly befitting any procedures of democratic governance, in June 1947 the last viceroy,

Mountbatten, decreed that the partition of Bengal and Punjab, and the concurrent creation of the multi-regional state of Pakistan, separated by India in between its two halves, would occur. Regardless of the political negotiations and debates at the centre of late colonial India, the majority of Bengali Muslims (who had little direct knowledge of either the negotiations at the centre or the precise structure of the future Pakistan state) welcomed Pakistan with open arms. The literary-cultural and religiously-informed activists who had been working to promote the idea of Pakistan for the last few years also found that some semblance of justice had been done for Bengali Muslims.

For a short time in the late summer of 1947, the streets of Dacca were filled with jubilant people celebrating the birth of a new state in mid-August. Ahmed Kamal has described the euphoria of this time as characterized by the phrase, 'A Land of Eternal Eid.' Talim Hossein wrote a poem linking Pakistan and Eternal Eid at the same time.⁵⁰ A variety of social groups, like Communists, left-leaning Hindus, and tribals also celebrated in August 1947. The Pakistan poetry of individuals like Talim Hossein, Roushan Ijdani, Farrukh Ahmed, and Sufi Julfikar Haidar continued apace with the realization of the dream enunciated only a few years earlier in journals like *Azad* and *Mohammadi*. The relationship between the partition of Bengal and Pakistan (in theory and practice) generated multiple results, as many Muslims were quite jubilant about Pakistan, but had mixed feelings about the partition of Bengal.⁵¹

One disjunction between proposal and result, between theory and practice, was the role of Calcutta in the emergent Pakistani imagination. In 1945 and 1946, the Pakistan idea included Calcutta without any reservation. Without the historic city, the new nation-state would be a 'truncated, moth-eaten Pakistan', leaving the under-developed eastern half without industry, jute mills, or large-scale capital. A legal and constitutional demand put forth by Suhrawardy and his colleagues since 1946 had also been brewing about the inclusion of Calcutta in a new Pakistan. EPRS ideologues since 1944 had been offering numerous arguments for the retention of Calcutta in Pakistan. Suddenly, Calcutta was let go by the Nazimuddins and elites of the Bengali Muslim League, as they argued that a focus on Dacca, an old 'Muslim' city, not Calcutta, a city with dubious 'Muslim' credentials, would better serve the interests of Pakistan.⁵²

The new state began with a few old faces like Maulana Akram Khan, a staunch supporter of the idea who took over the new Pakistani ML,

stalwart activists like Kamruddin Ahmed and Ataur Rahman who based themselves in Dacca immediately and tried to manoeuvre old antagonisms between the populist Muslim League and the Ahsan Manzil. Abul Hashim went straight to his ancestral home of Burdwan, Abul Mansur Ahmed stayed in Calcutta working with *Azad's* transition to Dacca, and wrote for other magazines along with Abul Kalam Shamsuddin. Wadud stayed in Calcutta aloof from these developments. Fazlul Huq, long alienated from the ML, initially stayed in Calcutta well before heading to Pakistan in the early 1950s.

However, quickly, the discombobulated reality of post-colonial life in East Pakistan set in within all levels of the government and politics.⁵³ Observers present during the transition noted that 'the new province of East Bengal started from nothing. No pens, no ink, no office furniture, no office buildings, no official cadres. Just droves of officers and clerks who opted for Pakistan from many parts of India, for whom there was no housing'.⁵⁴ There were hardly any resources, not to mention housing, for the thousands of civil servants who surged into Dacca in 1947 and 1948.⁵⁵

The economic capacities of the state were severely undermined in 1947 and 1948, as East Bengal stopped drawing imports from Calcutta and had to depend on Chittagong, a port not used to handling such heavy traffic. In September 1949, because of disputes over currency valuations between India and Pakistan, trade between the two countries essentially stopped and East Bengal lost the biggest market for its raw jute and had also to import most of its essentials, like coal and manufactured goods, from various other countries at high prices. Added to this economic dislocation in the early years was that the state and educational systems, being heavily staffed by Hindus in the colonial period, lost well over the majority of their teachers, with Dacca University in a serious state of flux in the second half of 1947 and early 1948. Regardless of all of these hardships, the mere idea of Pakistan seemed to hold fast onto to the Bengali Muslim imagination, particularly the many Muslims who now rose to positions of power in the government. Arthur Dash, a civil servant, observed such a condition in the transitional years:

It is not easy to describe the exhilaration felt by Yakub Ali and most other newcomers to Dacca. Not only were they free from fear of massacre by Hindus but they were in an area where there could be no kind of Hindu domination in public or private. And when required, Hindus could be

given a taste of their own medicine. Pakistan Zindabad was a slogan which aroused a surge of exaltation in this new liberty. And it helped Muslims to endure the frustrations and discomforts which now pervaded everything.⁵⁶

Regardless of these emotions that sustained the idea of an eternal Eid, by all accounts the immediate post-colonial period of 1947 to 1950 was an era of extreme hardship in nearly all forms of social and political life for East Bengal in and outside the domain of the state. The region was caught in the throes of famine, severe economic crisis, and sporadic acts of violence. Also, confusion regarding who was to be posted where and how the civil service and other government posts were to be handled persisted in the early years of the new state. Violence against all kinds of social groupings, such as Communists, who were suspected of all sorts of treason and were alleged to be active in terrorist acts against the state, was perpetrated by the new state. Communists were quickly banned and often attacked. Tribals, Buddhists, and Chakma groups were also in a state of panic. In this environment, Bengali Muslim literary critics and writers inhabited new conditions, but retained the same vision of the pre-1947 period.

Pak-Bangla Culture in the New Nation-State

In the midst of all this, however, two weeks after the creation of the new state, on 2 September 1947, a group of students and professors at Dacca University created the Tamaddun Majlis, or the Assembly of Culture. This organization aimed to promote Bengali language and culture through activism and worked towards the recognition of Bengali as the language of the courts, schools, and state in East Pakistan. Led by Abul Kashem, a professor of physics, the veteran activist Abul Mansur Ahmed, and the writer and literary critic Kazi Motahar Hussein, the group published a pamphlet on 15 September 1947, called 'Pakistaner Rastrabhasa Bangla Na Urdu?' (Will the State Language of Pakistan Be Bangla or Urdu?). In a continuation of language activism that harkened back to the days of BMSS debates thirty years earlier,⁵⁷ this organization maintained the same arguments as Maulana Akram Khan and Shiraji in the 1910s, but now adapted to the newly formed world of nation-states and state language policy, an issue that never had been contemplated in this way before. Though the manifesto urged the official maintenance of

Bengali in the schools, courts, and government offices of East Pakistan, it proposed that the Central Government use both Bengali and Urdu. It also urged the usage of English in scientific departments of universities and the states, as well as forming an 'international' language that East Pakistani diplomats should cultivate.

Far from being at odds with the Pakistan concept or the Pakistani state, the Tamaddun Majlis sought to cultivate Bengali literary culture within the boundaries of, not at the expense of, Pakistan. As the founders were all solid supporters of the Pakistan ideal, there was no reason why Bengali language and culture would not be included in this ideal. Indeed, Bengali-ness was at the heart of the Pakistan demand for them.⁵⁸ The very term, Tamaddun Majlis, is not derived from the Sanskritic origins of Bengali, but from the Perso-Arabic lineage within Urdu, and the founders self-consciously chose this term in line with Abul Mansur Ahmed's dictum in the EPRS meetings of 1944 regarding the construction of new parameters for the future regeneration of culture in Bengali Pakistani life.⁵⁹ Using Tamaddun to signify culture was not designed to 'Islamicize' at the expense of Bengali-ness. It was included as a concept in the thought-worlds of Bengalis, given the hundreds of foreign loan words that existed in contemporary Bengali. According to Abdul Gafur, one of the founding members, the Tamaddun Majlis was formed in order to maintain a modern and progressive Muslim organization in East Pakistan.⁶⁰ The organization also issued a periodical, *Saptahik Sainik* (Weekly Soldier) throughout the late 1940s and 1950s.

Literary public culture continued just as it had in the pre-1947 era, as the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sammelan (PPSS) began to meet in late 1948, with the exact same goals as the colonial-era literary societies, but couched in the euphoric language of new nation-states. The first address from December 1948 began with recognition of God, but then proceeded to expound on the freedom of places like Dacca and Jahangir nagar, in the new, free 'Azad' East Pakistan. It extolled Islam, but recognized how Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims have historically made their homes in Bengal and salutes their contributions to Bengal. It also invested the term 'Bangaal'—often used as a stereotype to demean east Bengalis referring to their rural, and at times uneducated manners—with a dignity, as it cited early Charyapad texts that relate 'Bangaal' to be the name of historic East Bengal. In a manner that would be emulated by the official archivists of the early Pakistani state, Islam's coming into Bengal was narrated as a

'religion of equality' (*samyabadir dharma*), and fits into the broader scheme of Pakistani-ism. Later in the early 1950s, many writers present would form the Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad (Pakistani Literary Society), such as Hasan Hafizur Rahman, Kazi Musharraf Hussein, and Anisuzzaman, out of an explicit interest in forming a purely secular literary organization, as opposed to the Tamaddun Majlis, perceived to be 'religious' by many in the literary world of East Pakistan at the time.⁶¹

The various meetings of literary societies and cultural organizations continued unabated in the early years of East Pakistan and the very same themes, now only impressed upon a different national environment. Meetings in Chittagong in 1950 and 1951 displayed the same investment in East Pakistani Bengali culture, as well as the 1952 meeting in Comilla. Radio addresses on Radio Pakistan in 1949 and 1950 by Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad also continued. In Chittagong, the journal *Simanto* (border) began in 1947 and lasted until 1952. Featuring the work of Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad, by then nearing the end of his life, the journal continually published critical essays about the need not for a Bengali Muslim literature, but for a Pakistani literature in Bengali.⁶²

Regions of Pakistan that were often cited by Jinnah in his initial addresses, like Chittagong, noted for its port, and Sylhet, an area inserted into Pakistan via referendum, also were coloured by this sense of emancipation and therefore, Pakistani-ness, of these Bengali regions. The Sylhet and Chittagong gazetteers from the 1960s, reflecting back on these regions, both comment on how Muslim missionaries spread visions of equality throughout the land in the early days of Islamic expansion, e.g., the appearance of Shah Jalal, a saint who allegedly came with an army of 350 missionaries in the early fourteenth century to Sylhet, or Chittagong, which had been a long-time mix of Arab business forces, early modern Portuguese, Southeast Asian Arakanese, and travelling pirates, as a place where Islam flourished because of its ideologies of liberation.⁶³

In the December 1948 literary manifesto of the Tamaddun Majlis, the pamphlet recounts the long history of Islam, the ways in which language had developed, and the final present moment in which Pakistan can nurture the development of Bengali. Though couched throughout in Pakistani idioms, referring to the freedom of Pakistan, the founders of this society—including Muhammad Shahidullah—aimed to preserve the Bengali variant of Pakistan, not topple the entire edifice of Pakistan. In a manner representative of the age, the authors stressed the international

nature of language and state policy, citing examples like the USA, the UK, France, and Italy, where strong states engendered strong literatures and developments of culture. This interestingly was also repeatedly used by Jinnah in his 1948 speeches in Dacca, in which he consistently cited the international world and the need to rise to a high status in comparison to others via the sole state language of Urdu.

The politics of language continued to form the main issue in East Pakistan state of affairs. Language politics, as I have shown in Chapter one, was a major subject on the pages of *al-Eslam*, *Saogat*, *Mohammadi*, and *Azad* from the early twentieth century. However, Jinnah's first public speech in Dacca in the newly formed East Pakistan gave the impression of an undifferentiated liberal democratic state devoid of any regional particularities. In March of 1948, Jinnah travelled to Dacca to deliver three speeches to the masses of Bengali Muslim youth, many of whom had devoted considerable energy towards the mobilization of support for the creation of Pakistan. As in his opening August 11, 1947 speech to the new Pakistan Constituent Assembly, the focus of Jinnah's speeches was the preservation of minorities as was exemplified through his famous words: 'that in course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, as that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State'.⁶⁴ Not only would religion be privatized, but Pakistan was a modern nation-state waiting to be realized in practice, as he declared that unlike Roman Catholics and Protestants of earlier eras, 'we are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another'.⁶⁵ These ideals were a part of the overall, trans-regional sense of Pakistani-ness, regardless of local majority-minority practices or historic conflicts. Also, these ideals were enunciated from the mouth of a leader speaking the homogenizing languages of modern nation-states. Jinnah's rigid stance was insensitive to Bengali Muslim sensibilities, but it was a direct product of the insecurities facing the new state. Such insecurities neglected the long-standing politics of the regions that actually created Pakistan through their political organization and mobilization and ideological expressions in newspapers and other sites of public culture.

Bengal, arguably, was the region that had displayed the most powerful and organized expressions of support for Pakistan. Even Jinnah stated

in his first speech in Dacca on 21 March 1948, that 'East Bengal is the most important component of Pakistan, inhabited as it is by the largest single bloc of Muslims in the world'.⁶⁶ Jinnah kept emphasizing the ideals of justice informing the new state, though these ideals hardly manifested in the early post-colonial history of East Pakistan. Neither was the ideal of justice consistent with Jinnah's position on Urdu being the sole state language, far less the rampant corruption and obsession with bureaucracy by the Muslim League,⁶⁷ and the growing antipathy towards democratic governance as practiced by the Central Government of Pakistan from the years 1947 to 1952. But the Bengali-based movement to preserve the ideals of justice enunciated by Jinnah and by their own politics of self-determination continued to find expression in the early days of Pakistan. These expressions included the various attempts to preserve the Bengali language, as well as continuing to fight for issues central to the KPP of the late 1930s and the BPML of the mid-1940s.

In this first speech in East Pakistan, Jinnah laid down the foundations for Urdu-based hegemony over Bengali-speaking Pakistanis. Urdu and non-Bengali Muslim culture neatly took the place of the hegemonic high-caste Bengali Hindu and their Sanskritized Bengali, as Jinnah declared in only a few words how speaking and writing Bengali must only be a privatized, secret affair in homes, or the provincial language of East Bengal. But the language of the state unequivocally had to be Urdu. Support of any other language for state business would be tantamount to treason for Jinnah, as any non-Urdu supporter would be an 'enemy of Pakistan'. In this first speech, Jinnah continually harped on 'provincialism' as a pejorative term for Bengali linguistic consciousness, as the great gains of Pakistan, according to him, happened because of the transcendence of difference, as the 'vast territory [of Pakistan] does not belong to a Punjabi, Sindhi, Pathan, or Bengali',⁶⁸ but to Pakistanis. This approach, obviously, infuriated many Bengali Muslims, particularly those ML members who met with Jinnah only three months earlier, including Kamruddin Ahmad, a young follower of Abul Hashim's, and Muhammad Shahidullah.⁶⁹

These Bengali Muslims pleaded with Jinnah to implement two state languages, Bengali and Urdu, as Bengali was the first language of the majority of Pakistanis. Jinnah reportedly would not budge on this issue and oddly referred to this in his speech, by saying that 'there has also lately been a certain amount of excitement over the question whether Bengali

or Urdu shall be the state language of this province and of Pakistan', without in the least recognizing the decades of efforts, discourse, and politics that had developed around this issue for Bengalis. Not only did he neglect to note how he had discussed the issue with Bengali Muslims, but that Bengali had been a central part of the Bengali Muslim drive towards Pakistan, and this was never publicly acknowledged by Jinnah. The *Quaid-i-Azam* was limited by his attachment to a homogenizing focus on modern nationalisms and also the imperative of building a new state, which he saw must entail one common state language for the entire administration.

Before the speeches, the first central legislature meeting on 25 February 1948, recorded the move by Dhirendranath Datta to allow Bengali to be a language of the state, given its majority status in Pakistan. Many other Hindus, like Bhupendra Kumar Datta seconded this motion. Liaquat Ali Khan, the prime minister, responded with a position identical to Jinnah's, that Urdu would qualify as the only language that would unite the two zones of Pakistan, and in his and Jinnah's eyes, the most 'Islamic' language of India., Jinnah in his first March 1948 speech referred to the advocates of Bengali as 'foreign elements' who are continually bringing up the 'provincial' language question, all the while never considering that Bengali Pakistanis had long considered the cultivation of Bengali as central to what Pakistan should be.

Though Jinnah kept referring to Pakistan as a revolutionary change, he reiterated his and Liaquat Ali Khan's argument that Urdu was a 'language which, more than any other provincial language, embodies the best that is in Islamic culture and Muslim tradition and is nearest to the language used in other Islamic countries'. These statements led at times to sporadic student outbursts and protests.⁷⁰ As in all of his other speeches on the subject, Jinnah kept referring to those who supported Bengali as foreign conspiratorial elements, enemies of Pakistan (primarily referring to India) fixated on the new state's destruction. By this point in 1948, not only the Tamaddun Majlis, but the Sylhet-based journal *Nao Belal*, and even *Azad*, the journal presided over by the staunch conservative Akram Khan, were calling for the usage of Bengali as a central government language alongside Urdu, as well as the official language of East Pakistan. Such papers were as staunchly in support of Islam and Pakistan as they were of Bengali. This fact appeared nowhere in the speeches of Jinnah or his lieutenants like Liaquat Ali Khan.

In his speech on 24 March, Jinnah mentioned the continual threat that India posed to the new state and he said that it might, allegedly, plan conspiratorial attacks on the integrity of Pakistan. Bengali, as a language redolent of Hindus, represented this 'threat' from India. Jinnah's formulation was strikingly comparable to Abul Mansur Ahmed's view of Bengali, in which the Hindu part was respectfully declined for the actual uplift of the Bengali Muslim. Jinnah used the same premise (Bengali has Hindu overtones) to advocate Urdu. Ironically, as Ahmed and others noted, Jinnah did not speak Urdu fluently and made his speeches in English.

Bengali Muslim intellectuals such as Kamruddin Ahmed and Muhammad Shahidullah had been meeting with Jinnah since January of 1948 to draft a precise language policy. These talks, however, were thwarted by Jinnah's insistence on Urdu. This did not stop the main protagonist of language policy, Shahidullah, from formulating many proposals for language policy changes. In the 1949 *Amader Samasya* (Our Problems), he constructed a detailed, ten-chapter treatise on Bengali Muslim linguistic distinctiveness that appears almost to be taken right out of the debates he participated in over twenty years earlier. He even referred to the 1917 BMSP address about language problems and how Bengali Muslims, unlike any other group, appeared not to develop their mother tongue in a manner similar to that of other ethnic groups of India, and other Muslim groups like Persians, and Urdu-writers in India. And just like in the late 1910s, he advocated the creation of a religious literature in Bengali, and actually cited the pedagogical example of Urdu-speakers, who have contributed a range of literature like *tafsir* and *fiqh*, and many other Islamic texts in their language that was created and based in India. And he wondered why Bengali Muslims could not do the same. He did not mention the pioneering work of Naimuddin, the first *tafsir* writer of Bengali in the late nineteenth century,⁷¹ but he advocated the creation of a modern literature. Not just punthis (though he says they are worthy of pride), but only a thoroughly modern religious literature would lead East Pakistan into the future.

As a grammarian and linguist, and even with his history of discrimination at the hands of Hindus, Shahidullah advocated for the usage of *sadhu bhasa* in writing, the Sanskritized form of language that many Bengali Hindu grammararians would have advocated as the 'true' or 'proper' language. Sensitive to the communalist tendency of this

approach, he advocated a middle ground between Sanskritization and Islamicization, pointing to a truly Bengali Muslim language. The time was ripe as the new East Pakistani state, at least for him and his intellectual cohort, was created precisely for this reason. He also dismantled the old debates about origins of words debated in the BMSS offices about thirty years earlier. A trained linguist, he knew that the 'Bengali Muslim' words, such as *pani*, *nani*, *chacha*, *dada*, or *fufu*, are all derived from Hindi or Rajputani origins anyway. The origins of 'Islamic' words such as *khoda* or *paigambar* lay in Persian; so there would be no reason to exchange or stop the free development of using different words. He saw the Bengali Muslim language in a state of transition. As the modern age in the nineteenth century brought in *sadhu bhasa*, the era of the new nation-state in East Pakistan would bring forth a new language that would formally and self-consciously include words from many languages such as Arabic, Persian, Portuguese, and English. As he himself argued on the pages of *Bulbul* approximately ten years earlier, the literature that would sustain this language could not be communal. Like religion, language and literature must capture universal truth. To this end he cited Shakespeare and Sarat Chandra as Bengali models for this sort of literature. He also allied with Hindu linguists, like the famous Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, who argued against communalism in literature. Literature's beauty and purpose lay in its ability to transcend particularity, and so was it the case for a new Bengali Muslim literature.

The tension between the universal and the particular arose in Shahidullah's thought as a representation of the predicament of Bengali Muslim politics in the new age of Pakistan. There was a need for a particular literature for a universalist cause. This was similar to Hashim's and Bhasani's use of religion for a universalist approach to the problems of nationalism and post-colonialism. In his radio address, *Amader Sahitya* (Our Literature) to Radio Pakistan on January 18, 1949, Shahidullah again pushed this decades-old drive for creating a new Bengali Muslim literature, taking new forms, and citing global precedents like the Elizabethan age in England, and individuals like Pericles and St. Augustine. Though East Pakistan was a land of Muslims, he sadly remarked that one would not know it from reading East Pakistani prose in Bengali. The greatest Bengali prose writers, Rabindranath, Sarat Chandra, Bankim, though not exactly Muslim-haters, knew little of Islam and could not articulate its beauties in a universal idiom accessible to all Bengali readers. Just like he

had argued in the BMSS debates in the 1910s and in *Bulbul* in the 1930s, he urged listeners to replace the villains of Bankim's novels with independently constructed Muslim heroes in Bengali literature. He pushed for a non-communal universalist approach, as the great literature of the world is often coded by some particularity. For instance, Shakespeare or Milton, both from Christian traditions were not only appreciated by Christians, but by all readers. He also advocated a literature that would be for the consumption of all Bengali readers, Hindu and Muslim, in order to cultivate 'anti-communalism, equality, friendship, and freedom', as the ideals of Pakistan.

In 1949, disgruntled members of the Muslim League, led by Bhasani, joined by Abul Mansur Ahmed and Suhrawardy started the Awami Muslim League (AML), including *awam* (people) in a strategic, symbolic way to press upon the government the fact that the people were excluded from ML and from state governance more broadly. The Awami Muslim League focused on the very areas central to historic Bengali Muslim literary activism: Islam, a focus on abolishing zamindari, on establishing compulsory primary education, and on Bengali. The precursor to this sort of activism clearly derived from the KPP, the party led by rising middle-class Muslim jotedars like Fazlul Huq that had reached its height approximately ten years earlier, included nearly identical demands. Many AML members like Abul Mansur Ahmed were previous KPP activists. However, the AML's first 'aim and object', was to 'preserve the sovereignty, integrity, dignity, and stability of Pakistan'.⁷² Other points of importance included strengthening bonds between Muslims across the world and disseminating proper knowledge about Islam and its 'high moral and religious principles among the people' of East Pakistan.⁷³ The East Pakistan Awami League, which would transform into the Awami League in 1952, like most of the Bengali Muslim political organizations preceding it, saw itself in an Islamic idiom but included in its main points of grievance the economic and social problems of Bengali Muslims.⁷⁴

Though such critiques of the Urdu-fixation did occur throughout the early days of East Pakistan, the journal *Mahe-Nao* began in 1949. An unabashed supporter of the unity of Pakistan, this Bengali-medium monthly began with an image and quotation from Jinnah about the integrity of Pakistan. Nearly all of the writers active in the 1940s, like Muhammed Akram Khan, Muhammed Shahidullah, Farrukh Ahmed, et al., wrote for this journal.

Realities of Pakistan: Refugees and Violence

Besides the long-standing issues of linguistic-cultural cultivation and economic equality, a new concern entered into East Bengali society after the partition of 1947. An entirely new social dimension of Bengali life—the refugee—came into existence. These refugees would be East Bengali Hindus or West Bengali Muslims crossing borders into the new nation-states that were supposed to receive them. Both of these groups would feel unsafe, uncomfortable, and unwilling to risk life as a minority. Ironically, one of the ideas behind the creation of Pakistan in Bengal, as developed by the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, was the protection of minorities in a state dominated by a majority. Refugees began to stream in both directions across the border between east and west in the first three years of the new nation-states, but at a scale much lower in scope than the migrations taking place on the other end of India and Pakistan, the Punjab region. In the Punjab about 15 million refugees left their homes for the new state, India for Hindus and Sikhs, Pakistan for Muslims.

Bengal, however, showed much lower numbers, where the refugees from 1947–50 were approximately 1 million. From 1946–64, approximately 5 million Hindus left East Pakistan for India and in this same period, about 1.5 million Muslims left West Bengal for Pakistan. In the crucial initial years of the nation-state's formation, the total number of both Hindu and Muslim refugees remained below 1 million.⁷⁵ This began to change in 1949 and 1950, when a series of communal disturbances and incidents of violence led to an increase in migration. In 1950 alone, nearly 1 million people migrated across borders, with the majority being Hindus from East Bengal who were migrating into West Bengal. This violence bears a great resonance with other episodes of communal disturbances in the Bengali social space, such as the Calcutta riots of 1926, the Direct Action Day disturbances in August 1946, and the Noakhali tragedies in October 1946. In 1949, due to inflammatory speeches by Sardar Patel, riots and violence ensued in Calcutta, which led to a meeting between the chief secretaries of both East Bengal and West Bengal in February 1950. These meetings were accompanied by further violence in Dacca, such as the looting of Hindu shops and murders.

This led the prime ministers of both nation-states, Liaquat Ali Khan of Pakistan and Jawaharlal Nehru of India, to create the Delhi Pact in

April of 1950. This law guaranteed the rights of minorities. Though this temporarily created a sense of euphoria, this period of sporadic violence and political confusion was marked in October of 1950 by the resignation of Jogendranath Mandal, the Scheduled Caste minister. Initially active in the joyous celebrations over the creation of Pakistan, he published a long litany of charges against the vicious crimes against minorities perpetrated by various groups. Most pivotally for Mandal, Hindu minorities had been exposed to the tyranny of the majority. Protection of minorities had been argued by the All-India and Bengali Provincial Muslim Leagues throughout the Pakistan movement. This protection was unfortunately not applied after Pakistan actually came into existence.⁷⁶

Included in the interim government as a ML member before the partition of India, Mandal was a Scheduled Caste leader who held economic solidarity between Muslims and Scheduled Castes close to his heart. He supported the Pakistan movement and recounted grand praise for the new state as it came into being. He also cited how his willingness to work with the Muslim League stemmed from the realization that 'the economic interests of the Muslims in Bengal generally were identical with those of the Scheduled Castes'.⁷⁷ He found that the large numbers of cultivators and labourers in both communities and the 'backward' status of education in both provided for common ground between Muslims and Scheduled Castes. During the first Constituent Assembly, he praised Pakistan for its emphasis on minorities and just governance:

The free independent state of Pakistan will bring to one and all citizens, prosperity, happiness, and peace...through the leadership of Jinnah, all prosperity and happiness will come to the people of Pakistan...not only will the people of Pakistan and India, but the people of the whole world, look to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly and find for themselves that the Muslim community which determined to acquire their legitimate rights and privileges and determined to have a separate state of Pakistan, will never lack in the quality of doing not only justice and fairness but acts of generosity towards the peoples of minority communities.⁷⁸

But after four years of the new state, he had to retract these comments made in August 1947. The trouble began when, at the onset of the state in August 1947, he asked to include two Scheduled Caste members in the new central legislature ministry. This request was never addressed

by Liaquat Ali Khan or Nurul Amin. Subsequently, extreme acts of violence against Hindus, and often against Namasudras, were reportedly carried out. Often, the police and military collaborated to violently root out Communists as they were continually suspected of treason and terrorism. This, as Mandal would find, was really an excuse to commit acts of violence against Hindus, to rape Hindu women, and to expropriate Hindu property. Often local residents would start the mischief, only to be joined by the police. Many incidents occurred of this nature from 1947 to 1950. When in February 1950 Mandal brought this up in the central assembly, it was disallowed as a subject of debate. Then, a few days later in the Dacca riots of 1950, a mass-scale effort of looting, theft, and at times murder and rape, against the Hindu community commenced. By the end of 1950, over a million Hindus had left in fear.⁷⁹

The entire tone of the new Pakistani state directly contravened the assurances that Jinnah gave in his 11 August 1947 speech and his three March 1948 speeches to the Bengalis that minorities were safe and sound. Exactly the opposite occurred: the educational system underwent compulsory Islamicization, Hindu lawyers, doctors, traders, and store-owners were informally banned and alienated, and large numbers of Hindus found it increasingly challenging to live and work in peace in Pakistan. By the end of his resignation letter, while claiming an 'anxious and prolonged struggle' for its creation, Mandal decided that Pakistan 'was no place for Hindus to live in and their future is darkened by the ominous shadow of conversion or liquidation'.⁸⁰ In Mandal's eyes, no revolution for equality and emancipation from capitalism or imperialism had taken place. Abul Mansur Ahmed had mentioned that he thought of Pakistan as a liberal democracy and precisely not a Muslim state, with Hindus and Muslims enjoying equal rights in both.⁸¹ Mandal, however, declared that he could not 'with a clear conscience, create the false impression in the minds of the Hindus of Pakistan and peoples abroad that Hindus can live there with honor and with a sense of security in respect of their life, property, and religion'.⁸² Though theoretically designed as a concept to ensure minorities protection from tyrannous majorities, the reality of East Pakistan only oversaw the depressing levels of majoritarian power. While it is acknowledged that one particular group does not stand out as responsible for this development, increasingly dangerous ML goondas and the lack of interest in minority concerns on the part of the central government greatly exacerbated this volatile condition.

In short, the theory of Pakistan as outlined by the EPRS and BPML before 1947 bore no resemblance to the practice of Pakistan in its initial stages. The high-level leadership recognized these matters but was unable to conduct any substantive policy towards ameliorating the violence and conflicts of early 1950. In letters between Governor Bourne and Chief Minister Nurul Amin, it was noted by both that violence against minorities was increasingly horrid. The spectacle of thousands of Hindu refugees without homes and clothes was a common sight in East Bengal, as famine continued without any relief. Bourne noted how the government of East Bengal, in the midst of such crises, decided to lavishly host the Shah of Iran, an inexplicable decision by any measure.¹⁸³

The Continuity of Trans-regional Islam

The same year that Mandal delivered his resignation and indictment of the state, Abul Hashim published *The Creed of Islam*, or the *Revolutionary Aspect of the Kalima*, first printed in 1950 in English, then reprinted five times between 1950 and 1997, and translated into Urdu and Bengali. *The Creed of Islam*, therefore, arose during the era of decolonization in which ideas of religiosity and political change based on religion were now being located in a language of nation-states and nationalities. But the themes and contours of these ideas managed to remain continuous with the spirit of the late colonial Pakistan movement: the interpretation of Islam as a source for social justice.

Like many of his counterparts, Hashim stayed in Calcutta for three years after partition to serve in the newly organized legislature of West Bengal. In April of 1950, he left Calcutta for Dacca and soon after, published the *Creed of Islam*. A student of the renowned Maulana Azad Subhani and Maulana Aftabuddin Ahmed in his hometown of Burdwan, Hashim spent most of his life in the study of Islam. In this groundbreaking book, and in his later work *As I See It*, a compendium of previously published essays and speeches, he developed the philosophy of rabbaniyat, or the condition of mind focused on non-material and spiritual existence. Rabbaniyat also formed a large part of Maulana Bhasani's thought, and therefore forms a large part of the late colonial and early post-colonial itinerary of political Islam in Bengal.

As the title suggests, revolution encapsulates Hashim's entire approach to Islam. He prefaced the book by calling rabbaniyat a 'revolutionary

philosophy that alters the very basis of traditional philosophical thinking and the science of Religion'.⁸⁴ Refuting materialism, the basis of Marxism and Communism as he understood those ideologies, and refuting the idealism of Europe, Hashim's rabbaniyat was the philosophy of individual action grounded in the ideals of the Qur'an. Since revolution encapsulated the idea of Islam, he included a section on spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, political, economic, and cultural revolutions, all of which resonated with Islam. He began his book with a relatively common trend in Islamic thought, a revolt against the tendency to divorce religion from public, political, and social life, and relegate it to the private sphere, as it has occurred in the West. He claimed that this has only occurred within European and American modern life, but by contrast, it was part and parcel of Islamic history and contemporary society. The *kalima*, or the revolutionary call to action, had been perverted ever since the period of Islamic expansion from the Abbasid period onwards. From this time, given the ways Islamic rule expanded into various regions of Africa and Western Asia, Islam was perverted in practice through a split between the temporal and spiritual realms, as sultans began to rule the temporal world and the Ulema began to rule the spiritual world.⁸⁵

This, according to Hashim, is what destroyed Islam, a 'divinely ordained natural philosophy of creation, sustenance, and evolution of the Universe',⁸⁶ not a system that can be divisible, but a system that engulfs the entire individual in his private and public sense of being. His interpretation of religion was 'a guide to humanity, irrespective of caste, color, or territory', and in this vein he declared that the 'The right and sensible attitude would be to dismiss unceremoniously and with contempt the mullah, pandits, and priests, the self appointed guardians of religion and to entrust the responsibility of interpreting religion to the talents of the world.'⁸⁷ Islam, when interpreted properly, was a total system of both revolution and emancipation.⁸⁸

Hashim's formulation of revolution displayed an engagement with Marxist thought. Unlike other Muslim intellectuals who would castigate or critically distance themselves from Marxism, Hashim's positions were singular in the usage of Marxist terminologies and assumptions in service of a larger argument about Islamic universalism, as his concept of rabbaniyat conceived of Islam as a religion of work, action, and productivity, not mystical contemplation, prayer, or ritual. This facet of Islam was the revolutionary aspect that Hashim stressed—Islam ceased to be a religion

isolated from life's actual work. It was not a 'religion' in the secularized sense, relegated either to belief or ritual. These sorts of ideas were not at all uncommon in the broader South Asian Muslim intellectual discourses of the early and mid-twentieth century. Muslim thinkers of the late colonial and early post-colonial period, including Iqbal, would provide a conception of Islam as revolutionary to counter the attractions of communism for Muslim youths.

When discussing economic revolution, he asserted the truth of how ownership of the means of production and exploitation of the surplus value of individuals comprised the definitive problem facing modern society, but his version of 'economic universalism' transcended the alternative of capitalism and socialism, the models available in the Western world. He argued that as socialism implies collective ownership of property, which is unnatural, and capitalism implies individual ownership of property, which tends towards exploitation, both systems failed to adequately manage both social and individual needs. Economic universalism, ensured by the Islam he conceptualized, with its inherent balance between individual and society, 'completely abolishes man's ownership of the earth or any part thereof and gives to an individual, a society, or a community only the right of possession and use of social wealth for satisfaction of actual needs of its individuals consistently with the right of other individuals and societies to the satisfaction of their just needs'.⁸⁹ In this formulation, he accepted the Marxist explanation of capital, as continually reproducing itself via the exploitation of labour, as an explanation of modern society. But to change the world required not the dictatorship of the proletariat as that would entail merely a change in form. The content of materialism would stay as long as a materialist, and not arab inspired, Islamic universalist system was in place.⁹⁰ Because Islam forbade interest, Hashim contended that 'in the economy of the Holy Quran, capital is not recognized as an independent agent of production', and therefore destroys the foundations of capitalist society. The early days of Islam, defined by Hashim as a kalima-centred Islam, inspired a spontaneous socialist order, derived from what he termed 'man's natural instinct', and particularly not founded on a materialist understanding of the world.⁹¹ This type of Islam would produce a 'complete man', fully able to appreciate individual and social potential for creativity, balance, and justice.

Hashim's emphasis on the early caliphs and his denigration of the expansion of Islam and the changes in Islam practice they engendered,

were certainly not new to modern, or even early modern Islamic thought. His profound knowledge and admiration for European thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, or Voltaire, the latter extolled as a free-thinker, and had appreciated charismatic paradigm-breakers throughout world history such as Darwin, Newton, or Vasco de Gama, also was not an innovation. Hashim's text is worth considering because it provided a culmination to the various points of identity formation that had appealed to Bengali Muslims in the late 1940s. Though often oddly coded as 'communal' or overtly religious, these conceptions of identity were actually resolutions of modern conflicts that appeared through the trans-regional South Asian Muslim ecumene of the late colonial and early post-colonial era.

Discussions of this ecumene must begin with Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of northwestern India. Nearly twenty years earlier, he began to philosophically apprehend communism as simply the negative (*la*) part of the kalima, focusing on destruction of falsehoods, without any positive (*illa*) portions of affirmation or construction. Islam held both destruction and construction and thereby was fundamentally an affirmative ideology of emancipation for Iqbal. Though Iqbal wrote poems lamenting the plight of struggling peasants and more or less agreed with a Marxist interpretation of materialist exploitation, he found communism as a systemic revolutionary attack on capitalism inadequate, based as it was also on a materialist, and therefore ethically barren view of humanity:

The creed of this undiscerning prophet [Marx] based his religion on the equality of stomachs, the feeling of fraternity is born only out of a spiritual attitude, its roots are not found in the earth or in the bodies of man.... Imperialism is no better, its creed is nothing but greed. Communism proposes to feed everyone and feels no need to go beyond the physical self because, according to its philosophy, supra-sensible realities do not exist. Imperialism too believes in the body only and plans to fatten itself on the bodies of others, sucks the honey out of the flowers that bloom in others' gardens, a soul-sucker of humanity though apparently it leaves the bodies of the exploited miserably alive, both of them deceive humanity, one preaches revolt, the other demands tribute, between these two millstones, humanity grinds to dust.⁹²

Hashim argued strikingly similar points about the rabbiniyat lifestyle, distinguished from the mundane 'religious' world of priests and rituals.

Though Marxist ideas were quite powerful in their analysis of social ills of materialism, communism, and materialism both equally occluded the spirit in their understanding of human life. They were therefore bankrupt as ideologies of liberation. Communism established an equality of the stomach, but did not take consideration the mind or the spirit, which was preserved in Islam. Furthermore, the social aspect of life, or socially just governance, was also provided for in Islam, via traditions of *zakat*, or prohibition of interest, and procedures of inheritance that distribute wealth.

The critique and rejection of spiritless materialism runs through Hashim's, Iqbal's, and many other South Asian Muslims' critical engagements with communism. Materialism for Khalifa Abdul Hakim or Obeidullah Sindhi, other prominent South Asian Muslims who approached these subjects in the late colonial and early post-colonial eras, was logically untenable. This rejection of materialism stemmed from its inability to explain anything but the urges of the flesh, and man's quest for biological reproduction, food, and sex. It did not explain the arts, human thought, or moral impulses, or in other words, ethics.⁹³

The Bengali Muslim variant of nationalistic and collective self-realization was inclusive of Hashim's formulation, but it emerged out of a realization of the highly local relationships between Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims. It was a negative construction formed out of conflict. The target of this negativity changed in different historical moments, and the role of Islam as an inspirational force (for literary self-definition, economic self-improvement, for the creation of a new, socially just state) served as a foundation for a new post-colonial version of selfhood. The results of the 1940s, though symbolically inclusive of Hashim's vision, held a highly materialist, and socio-economic face, as opposed to a totalizing social revolution as he advocated.

As a thinker and politician, Hashim developed from his earlier phase as a BPML leader who held sophisticated views on how Islam and cultural autonomy would work together. Even though his vision was at a distance from the literary-cultural vision, it was a totalizing political conception, a complete programme for spiritual and political life. While this arose in the earlier 1940–4 period, it came to have a fundamentally different intellectual meaning in the *Creed of Islam*. He aimed to convince his interlocutors of the necessity of looking at Islamic thought for the present moment of reconstructing society in a

new nation-state, not simply construct a Bengali Muslim nation out of a complicated negotiation of difference and sameness. Hashim was not writing out of line with many ideologues of the Muslim League active before 1947. Raghīb Ahsan, the Calcutta-based, non-Bengali Muslim politician, whose *New State and Society in the Pakistan Commonwealth*, published in the summer of 1947, just before partition, argued exactly the same points as Hashim's by focusing on socially just governance and alternatives to 'Western' capitalism or socialism through Islam. Hashim became a member of the emergent language movement and was arrested on 25 February 1952, five days after the fateful shootings of the young boys on February 21st, 1952. He was released in 1953 and immediately started a new, but vibrant political party, the Khilafat-i-Rabbani party, as enshrined in his *Creed of Islam*.

Meanwhile, the political combination of religion and social justice, which had manifested in the 1930s as Krishak Praja, and in the 1940s, as Purba Pakistan, emerged within the Awami Muslim League. Continuous elements included the literal individuals like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Bhashani, and Hashim, along with the ideological goals of the party. But the political context and the energies towards decolonization were wholly different. Though the party's aims were quite similar to those of the KPP before it, they now pressed for recognition of Islam, social justice, and democratic governance in a new world of nation-states. It is this face of the Bengali Muslim political movement that lasted throughout, sustained by the literary-cultural elements of a growing selfhood and the emergence of Pakistan.

* * *

During the first five years of East Pakistan, the ideals of Abul Hashim were subverted in most areas of social life, regarding language policy, violence against minorities, and a complete lack of democratic governance. Despite the Indo-Pakistan Minorities Agreement and the Delhi Pact, extreme tension and violence between Hindus and Muslim ruled the social spheres of early post-colonial East Bengal. Within an environment of fear, violence, and tension, literary-cultural organizations like the Tamaddun Majlis and the EPSS or the political Awami Muslim League worked to preserve the ideals of Pakistan, as they had conceptualized them, rather than to subvert the notion of the Pakistani state.

These efforts reached a significant turning point on February 20, 1952, when the Muslim League government imposed Section 144, prohibiting a gathering of more than five people in public. The next day, during large-scale demonstrations organized by the Awami League in Dacca in defiance of this law, several young members of the rally were shot dead by the police.⁹⁴ In 1954, an alliance of opposition parties, including the Awami League, and the Krishak Sramik Party, decisively defeated the Muslim League in the elections for the East Bengal Legislative Assembly. Politicians active in the pre-1947 period, such as Fazlul Huq, Huseyn Shahid Suhrawardy, and Maulana Bhasani, led the United Front to an easy victory, as the United Front gained 223 out of 309 Muslim seats. This demonstrated a vitality to the formal continuation of regional-linguistic politics and recognition of the concerns of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia in East Bengali political decision-making. The intellectual and regionalist aspirations from 1952 until 1971 are the subject of a different study, but doubtlessly they were informed by the vibrant energies of the long-standing, emotive attachments to the concept of Pakistan that had been honed so vigorously by Bengali Muslims during the previous decade.

Notes

1. Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Cooperative Book Society, 1974), p. 51.

2. For overviews of the Bengali language movement and the political environment of the late 1940s and the early 1950s, see Badruddin Omar, *Language Movement in East Bengal* (Dhaka: Jatiya Grantha Prakashan, 2000), especially chapters 5 and 6. The same author's *Purba Banglar Bhasa Andolon O Tatkalin Rajniti* (The Language Movement of East Bengal and Politics of the Time), 2 Vols (Dhaka: Jatiya Grantha Prakashan, 1996) remains the authoritative study of the language movement.

3. Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, pp. 35–6. See chapter 5 for a discussion of the Lahore Resolution.

4. Kamruddin Ahmed, *A Social History of East Pakistan* (Dhaka: Pioneer Press, 1967), p. 58.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 44. Islam as a system of 'being and becoming' recurs throughout his writing on both Pakistan and Islam in the post-1947 period.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Though Muhammed Iqbal was not literally invoked in these meetings, the influence of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* was clear from an analysis of the content of Hashim's work.

9. Ahmed, *A Social History of East Pakistan*, p. 48.

10. Begun in 1937, this popular newspaper was a Muslim literary and social institution that had been controlling AIML publicity by the early 1940s. Though often espousing AIML dictates, Azad's Entally Road office was the home of many *addas* (leisurely conversations and intellectual discussions) and meetings by EPRS leaders in the early 1940s.

11. Ahmed, *A Social History of East Pakistan*, p. 50.

12. *Morning News*, 19 November 1943.

13. Ahmed, *A Social History of East Pakistan*, p. 56.

14. See *Ibid.*, *passim*. Ahmed was one of these workers who witnessed the rise of Hashim firsthand.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

16. The Muslim League National Guards were a quasi-military organization that provided physical training and military defense networks for the Muslim League from 1945–47. As a part of the militarized environment of the mid 1940s, by 1947, these national guardsmen were said to be nearly one thousand in number in Chittagong, and present throughout East Bengal. See Home Political File, #18/2/47, February 1947.

17. Abdul Gafr Siddiqi, *Amar Kaler Katha* (Stories of My Past) (Dhaka: Progressive Book Publishers, 2000), pp. 103–4.

18. Many of the poets who wrote of Pakistan in metaphoric terms using religious imagery, such as Sufi Julfikar Haidar, Farrukh Ahmed, Chadruddin, Roushan Ijdani, Talim Hossein, and Golam Mostafa, were ardent supporters of the Hashim faction of the BPML.

19. See Sardar Fazlul Karim, *Pakistan Andolon O Muslim Sahitya* (Muslim Literature and the Pakistan Movement) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968) and Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar' (50 Years of Politics as I Have Seen It), in Rafiqul Islam (ed.), *Abul Mansur Ahmed Rachanabali, Tritiya Khanda* (Collected Works of Abul Mansur Ahmed, Third Volume) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2001).

20. Abul Mansur Ahmed says as much in 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 253.

21. Many of these points were identical to the demands put forth by the Krishak Praja Party of the late 1930s; see my Chapter four for a discussion of the KPP. The manifesto was published in *Millat*, 11 October 1946.

22. See Abdul Gafr Siddiqi, *Amar Kaler Katha*, p. 233 and Ahmed, *The Social History of East Pakistan*, p. 58.

23. Included as an appendix to *In Retrospection*, p. 196.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 197.

26. Harun-ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987), p. 181.

27. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', pp. 245–6.

28. Ibid., p. 247. Also, see the same author's 'The Background and Nature of Bengal Muslim Politics', *Millat*, 23 November 1945.

29. There has been debate on whether or not the BPML in this election campaign stressed the claim to a distinctive Eastern Pakistan as an independent state, or whether Muslim unity in a vaguely defined Pakistan was the message. Evidence supports either side, but irrespective of the precise details of the messages of the BPML at this time, the Bengali Muslim masses were being politicized and organized in a manner that transcended elite intellectual discourse around the concept of Pakistan. For a summary of these debates, see Harun-ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 200–7.

30. See *Franchise: Elections in Bengal*, 1946 (Kolkata, 1946) and Harun-ur-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 215, for a breakdown of results.

31. Souymendranath Tagore, *Resurgence of Tribal Savagery in Calcutta* (Kolkata, Ganabani Publishing House 1946), p. 5.

32. The Cabinet Mission Plan was a proposal put forth by Lord Penthick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, and A.V. Alexander in the spring of 1946. It was the beginning of British discussions about the parameters of decolonization and the transfer of power. The initial cabinet mission proposal of May 1946 included a loosely federated political structure in which various groupings, including Muslim majority regions and Hindu majority regions as examples, would have parity in a Central Legislature. The Congress, however, could not agree to this arrangement as it advocated a strong central government and could not accept the devolution of power to regional groupings. The Muslim League initially accepted the cabinet mission's federated plan. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chapter 5.

33. Government of Bengal, Home Political File, No. 18/8/46.

34. See Claude Markovitz, 'Case Study: The Calcutta Riots of 1946', Working paper, November 2007; Debjani Sengupta, 'A City Feeding on Itself: Testimonies and Histories of Direct Action Day', *SARAI Reader: Turbulence* (2006): 288–95; Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905–1947*

(New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Francis Toker, *While Memory Serves* (London: Cassell, 1950). Historians have debated the role of Suhrawardy and the ML in fomenting violence, though recent scholarship has concluded that the great majority of casualties were Muslim and that Suhrawardy was more defensive than proactive in his behaviour during the riots. See Tazeen Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengali Muslim Discourses, 1871–1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Amalendu De, a historian of Bengal, recounted his memories of Direct Action Day as a young student from Faridpur, a village in East Bengal, visiting Calcutta as a teenager. His memories of the event confirm how militarized, and how prepared, violent factions on both sides were in the days leading up to the conflict. Interview, Amalendu De, 18 November 2006.

35. Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 201.

36. See Rakesh Bartyal, *Communalism in Bengal, 1943–47, From Famine to Noakhali* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), pp. 282–3.

37. Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, pp. 125–6. Hashim pointed out the original text to Jinnah who claimed that it must have been a printing mistake. Upon inspection Liaquat Ali Khan admitted that the original version, accepted by the Muslim League in 1940, did say ‘states’ and not ‘state’. Jinnah then approached Hashim with the idea of having one Constituent Assembly for the Muslims of India, not one state, though this distinction was lost in the chaotic conditions of post-1947 East Pakistan.

38. ‘Snakes in the Basket’, Editorial, *Dawn*, 10 June 1947. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, for a discussion of how Jinnah accommodated the United Bengal Plan into his programme.

39. Government of Bengal, Home Political File, No. 18/9/46.

40. Government of Bengal, Home Political File, No. 18/2/47.

41. Government of Bengal, Home Political File, No. 18/3/47.

42. Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti* (Memories of Old Days) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), p. 412.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 419.

44. Abul Mansur Ahmed, ‘Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar’, pp. 161–2.

45. See Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), for a classic statement of this position. For alternative viewpoints on ‘syncretic’ identities, see Akbar Ali Khan, *Discovery of Bangladesh: Explorations in the Hidden Dynamics of a Nation* (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1996), especially chapters 4 and 5. Another contemporary

classic critique is Tony K. Stewart, 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Hindu-Muslim Encounter Through Translation Theory', *History of Religions*, 40, 3 (February 2001): 260–87. Both challenge the syncretistic view, but remain in the pre-modern eras. Scholars of Bengali Muslim studies are notably silent on this issue in the twentieth century, though Asim Roy advocated a study of what he called 'cultural mediators', in 'Being and Becoming a Muslim: A Historiographic Perspective on the Search for Muslim Identity in Bengal', in Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay (ed.), *Bengal: Rethinking History, Essays in Historiography* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001).

46. See C.A. Bayly, *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Prachi Deshpande, *Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), chapter 5, for discussions of regionalism. Deshpande updates Bayly's insights from Western India by looking at a wide variety of regional/national overlaps in political consciousness for the Marathi context but still does not clearly elucidate the range, parameters, and internal power relations that enabled such a Marathi consciousness.

47. See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, especially chapters four and five for a discussion of how Bengali Hindus understood their selfhood in the 1930s and 40s. See also Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), especially chapter 6.

48. Sugata Bose, 'Between Monolith and Fragment: A Note on the Historiography of Nationalism in Bengal', in Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay (ed.), *Bengal, Rethinking History*, p. 288.

49. The phrase 'being and becoming' emanated often from Abul Hashim, who conceptualized Pakistan as a place, in his 1950 *Creed of Islam*, safe for the 'being and becoming of a Muslim' in all of its splendour.

50. See Ahmed Kamal, 'East Bengal at Independence', in Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh, 1704–1971, Vol. 1: Political History* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992), pp. 407–9.

51. Government of Bengal, Home Political File, No. 18/6/47

52. Abul Mansur Ahmed dedicates a section in his autobiography to the loss of Calcutta, see 'Amar Dekha Rajniti Panchas Bachar', pp. 158–60. He speculated that the elites of the western half of Pakistan, or wealthy Muslim residents in Bengal, given their capital and connections, wished to exploit Dacca, as a city ripe for development and investment, as opposed to being in Calcutta. Though since 1944 he and others energetically discussed the importance of Calcutta for economic reasons, Nazimuddin and his associates began to argue that Calcutta was a Hindu city, and therefore, not of importance to Pakistan.

53. Hardly unique to South Asia, decolonization in nearly all parts of Southeast Asia and Africa were met by considerable confusion, violence, and corruption. See John Darwin, 'Decolonization and the End of Empire', in Robin Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

54. MSS EurC188/3, Memoirs of Sir Arthur Dash, 1887–1974, Indian Civil Service, Bengal, 1910–1942, 'The Bengal Way of Life', n.p.

55. Ibid., 'Paradise Lost, or Pakistan as it was in the Beginning', p. 5.

56. MSS Eur C188/8, 'Pakistan, 1947–54', p. 2.

57. See Chapter one for a discussion of this old issue. Many essays from prominent Bengali Muslim journals like *Mohammadi*, *al-Islam*, and in the latter decades of the colonial period, *Saogat* and *Azad*, carried editorials with 'Banga Na Urdu' in the title.

58. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of how Pakistan and Bengali language and culture were a part of the same ideological programme.

59. See Chapter 5 also for a discussion of the historic speech in which Abul Mansur Ahmed outlines his ideas regarding the difference between Hindu *sanskriti* (culture) and Muslim *tamaddun* (also culture). See Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, chapter 6.

60. Interview with Abdul Gafur, 16 June 2011.

61. Interview with Anisuzzaman, 20 August 2009.

62. See Israil Khan (ed.), *Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad: Abhibhasan Samagra* (Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad: Collected Speeches) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2010) for speeches reproduced in *Simanto*. Also, see Mahbubul Alam Chowdhury, *Smritir Sandhaney* (In Search of Memories) (Dhaka: Palak Publishers, 2008) for discussions of *Simanto*.

63. See S.N.H. Rizvi (ed.), *East Pakistan District Gazeteers* (Dhaka: East Pakistan Government Press, 1971), both the Sylhet and Chittagong volumes.

64. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah's Inaugural Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 11 August 1947, cited in Badruddin Omar (ed.), *Bhasa Andoloner Prasanga: Katipaya Dalil* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1984), p. 42.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., p. 78.

67. The issue of bureaucracy-based fascism is analyzed in Ahmed Kamal, 'The Muslim League and the Bureaucracy: An Essay in the Failure of Democracy in East Pakistan, 1947–55', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh Humanities*, 33, 2 (December 1988): 197–215. See also Ahmed Kamal, *The State Against the Nation: The Decline of the Muslim League in Pre-Independence Bangladesh, 1947–54* (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 2009).

68. Omar (ed.), *Bhasa Andoloner Prasanga*, p. 82.

69. Abul Mansur Ahmed remarked how shocked he was upon hearing these words from a man who hardly knew Urdu and did not know Bengali, the language of the majority of Pakistanis! See Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 155.

70. Omar (ed.), *Bhasa Andoloner Prasanga*, p. 68.

71. See Sufia Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), especially chapter 3, for a discussion of Naimuddin.

72. Constitution and Rules of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, as cited in Omar (ed.), *Bhasa Andoloner Prasanga*, p. 16.

73. Ibid.

74. The 'Muslim' part of the Awami Muslim League was taken out in 1955.

75. Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–67* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 105–7; Richard Lambert, 'Factors in Bengali Regionalism in Pakistan', *Far Eastern Survey*, 38, 4 (April 1959): 49–58 and Richard Lambert, 'Religion, Economics, and Violence in Bengal: Background of the Minorities Agreement', *Middle East Journal*, 4, 3 (1950): 307–28.

76. In his three speeches at Dacca in March of 1948, Jinnah consistently repeated how East Bengal had successfully dealt with 'minority problems' and how the Hindus of East Bengal were safe and sound unlike their Punjabi counterparts. Jinnah did not live to see the highly communalized violence of 1950 and the total failure of the Pakistani state to successfully protect its minorities. Badruddin Omar, in his *Language Movement in East Bengal*, has written that Pakistan's minority problem was a natural inevitability as the founders of the centralized Pakistan, like Jinnah, had no theoretical conceptions of minorities beyond Muslim minorities in undivided colonial India, and so were quite ill-equipped to handle the tragedies East Bengal Hindus faced in the immediate post-colonial period of East Pakistan.

77. 'Jogendranather Oitihashik Padatyagpatra' (Jogendranath's Historical Resignation), p. 237.

78. Cited in *The India and Pakistan Yearbook and Who's Who*, 1950, Vol. XXXVI, *A Statistical and Historical Annual* (Bombay: Times of India Office, 1950), p. 552.

79. Mandal offers many first-hand accounts in his resignation letter, 'Jogendranather Oitihashik Padatyagpatra' (Jogendranath's Resignation Letter), pp. 247–9.

80. Ibid., p. 250.

81. Abul Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 182.

82. Ali Mansur Ahmed, 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar', p. 251.

83. MSS EUR 364/12, Papers of Bourne, Governor of Bengal, 1947–50.

84. Abul Hashim, *The Creed of Islam* (Dhaka: Umar Brothers, 1950), p. x.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

88. This account of the 'perverted' nature of religion as he understood it on the ground matches with Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), in which the author argues that the concept of jihad lost its original ethical ground with the beginning of Islamic expansion after the first four caliphs.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

92. From the *Javed-Nama*, 1932, cited in Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *Islam and Communism* (Lahore: Institute for Islamic Culture, 1951), p. 152.

93. See Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *Islam and Communism*, especially chapter 9, where he makes much the same arguments as Iqbal and Hashim.

94. For a useful overview of the origins and historical development of the language movement, see Omar, *Language Movement in East Bengal*, passim.

Conclusion

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not aim to break Pakistan. He was among those who supported Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan are the ones who made Pakistan.

—Anwar Dil, 2011¹

Choices about language made in the 1960s demonstrate the range of the politics of culture in the early days of Pakistan, and consequently, Bangladesh. Anwar Dil, an intellectual who lived through the tumultuous 1960s and initiated numerous studies about language, was one of the few who thought seriously about Urdu and Bengali in a comparative framework. For him, East Pakistani culture was creatively fashioned and included the legacies of generations of work to fit Bengali into a new world, which was seeing glimmers of manifestation in the 1960s in the form of conferences and attempts to bring both wings together. For a study of late colonialism, Dil's observation point to a deeper continuity in Bengali Muslim thought, literature, and life—the inclusion into pre-existing formats, Pakistan being one of them, as a facet

of Bengali Muslim literary culture. These two models of politics and thought—Bengali literary culture on one side, and Pakistan as a moral and political project on the other—were imbricated until the late 1960s, during the military crackdown on East Pakistan that began in 1969.

From the beginning of the BMSS to the 1952 language movement, Muslim actors cultivated a nationalist aesthetic without being tied to a particular model of a nation-state. The late colonial period that I examine is pivotal for understanding the long political history in Muslim South Asia, as the various forces that allowed for creativity and thought coalesced in ways that did not naturally lead to an eventual endpoint in Bangladesh. Bengali Muslims actually pointed to modern Muslim references that were developed inside of a Bengali literary tradition. The internal contingencies of colonialism and the rich world of localized Islamic cultural references need to be substantively inputted into any consideration of nationalist thought in South Asia. This insight allows for future re-examinations of post-colonial politics in many areas of the world where the precise contours of the late colonial movements for autonomy, dignity, and self-respect find themselves as an odd precedent to the actual politics occurring in these post-colonial eras. Recovering these sources and motives for local struggles against sources of cultural hegemony offers a guideline for a fuller appreciation of landmark changes in South Asia.

A landmark change in modern South Asia is the 1947 partition of British India and creation of Pakistan. From this account we have a fuller understanding of why so many Bengali Muslims supported the idea of Pakistan, and consequently, the idea of Bangladesh. A singular attachment to language that is commonly associated with the state of Bangladesh did not spring out of the blue, nor did it spring just from the economic and political oppression practiced by the West Pakistani government in the late 1960s. This longer historical view shows that one prominent portion of that attachment, important for understanding nationalism throughout the post-colonial world, arose from the late colonial period when creative nationalisms emanating out of intra-cultural and intra-regional debates were produced. In this case, the idea of East Pakistan, through language and political acts of inclusion that encompassed Hindus and Muslims alike, became the result of such debates. Emptied out of late colonial contingencies of localized challenges to hegemony, the singular attachment to language acquired a thoroughly different meaning in the world of nation-states.

Though the present-day politics of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have many issues which need to be addressed by concerned observers, activists, and scholars, so that change can be brought into effect, the study of the past need not point to the colonial state, colonial encounters, or colonialism as an abstract entity or as the sole parameters for historical analysis. Through this study, I have endeavoured to show how the study of a particular case from the late colonial period may yield insight into a colonial condition that offered examples of creativity, vibrancy, and political and intellectual activity that did not allow for Islam, Hinduism, or political identity to take on forms that necessarily led to the nuclearized and militarized politics of the present-day. Rather, the essence of these moments may show how the time of late colonialism and impending decolonization may be seen anew: a period when many aimed to create an independent nation in a world that beheld promises of multiple nations, but also a time for creativity within the political imagination.

This book has shown that the deep history of Bengali Muslim literary-cultural conversations from the 1910s through and beyond the late colonial period in many strands sought to include and address Hindus, and to simultaneously construct a Bengali past out of Muslim trans-regional elements. Indeed, for any Bengali Muslim to write in Bengali, and in order to reach the Bengali readers, and to write about the language itself as a medium, the Hindu and local element of the language would have to be addressed. This process differed from the modern vernacularization of the majority of Bengali Hindus who rarely gave any thought to the Muslim component of either the language's history or the different inflections of writing by Muslims. Their usage of the language and their ability to imagine a regional identity through the language was necessarily constrained by the politics of the emergence of a vernacular, done exclusively in Hindu Sanskritic terms. Therefore, looking at the Muslim approach to language in the Bengali context gives us an inclusive and more balanced view of the history of the language.

This book also complicates the periodization of modern South Asian history. The periodization of political change, normatively understood through markers like 1905, 1947, and 1971, must be revised if Bengali Muslim conversations are to be taken seriously. The year 1911 was when the BMSP was founded, marking it as a milestone in Bengali regional history. For the first time, Muslims, many new to the city of Calcutta, and not riding the crest of landed or otherwise wealthy origins, began

to write and organize in Calcutta's public on behalf of Bengali culture. The year 1926 serves as another milestone because, in Dacca, the other urban centre of Bengal, Muslims again promoted and embraced Bengali as a language for secular and religious reasons through the auspices of the MSS. In 1933, the pioneering journal *Bulbul*, showcasing the marker of a new form of Bengali Muslim folklore, formed a new period, culminating in 1942, the year the Pakistan concept emerged in Bengali-language conversations. Such a re-thinking may contribute to the provincialization of West Bengali Hindu perspectives on South Asian history, which have often inserted these markers of 1905 and 1947 to metonymically stand for colonial Indian history.

These markers are not merely highlighted in service of a Bengali Muslim history, since any analysis of Bengali Muslim history would beg the questions of Bengali Hindu histories, Bengali Buddhist histories, Bengali Christian histories, and then, for other regions, and the histories of many different possible combinations. Rather, the point is to reflect on and revise common-place notions of region and nation that plague South Asian history, which, in this context, are more often than not, based in the Bengali Hindu experience, but metonymically standing in for all of Bengal, and somehow stripped of all contestations, challenges, and dynamism. Capturing the Muslim component of this contestation merely highlights the fact that a 'region' in modern South Asian history is no category to be taken for granted. Muslims, along with many other groups in modern South Asian history, and their responses to colonial modern contexts are far from predictable or telegraphed through the communalized, nuclearized, and militant forms of nationalism that are often read from contemporary headlines in South Asia. Calling attention to the Muslim components of this contestation is not to show how Bengal's regional history is more Muslim than Hindu, or to equalize the Muslim and Hindu components, but rather to problematize assumptions about region and nation in modern South Asia.

When examining the question of hegemony within language, it becomes immediately clear that linguistic identity for Bengali Muslims was neither simply a disavowal of relationships with the broader Urdu-based South Asian Muslim intellectual ecumene nor was it a disavowal of the rich tradition of standardized Bengali led by Hindus in the nineteenth century. Advocating the usage of one's mother tongue of Bengali was not a straightforward precursor to a 'national' language, as the original

intent of Bengali language activists was actually to fit into a broader scheme of 'South Asia Muslimness', rather than to challenge or disavow such Muslimness. In the early days of Pakistan, the very same language activists pushing for Bengali before the state actually occurred continued to press for Bengali's recognition alongside Urdu as a state language, not as a replacement for it. If we simply interpret the Bengali Muslim as a feature of Bangladeshi (post-1971) society, we would miss how deeply intertwined the arguments made about Bengali by Muslims in the late colonial period were linked to pre- and early-modern literary history in Bengal, since there exists an appreciation for Urdu, and an appreciation, however critical, of Hindu Bengalis.

As Zutshi has explained eloquently in *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, early modern and modern Kashmiri writers and intellectuals did not rigidly distinguish between a 'regional' and 'religious' or 'universal' and 'vernacular' form or sense of politics. Rather, regional cultures had long traditions of finding expression in classical languages like Persian and within Islamic universalist languages.² As in Kashmir, Bengali Muslim engagement with Islamic reference points often manifested as a particular variant of regionalism, not a statement of difference from Hindus.³

This leads us away from interpreting Bengali Muslims as merely imitating their allegedly more developed and more modern Hindu counterparts or Indian Muslim intellectuals writing in Urdu or Persian. Rather, their labours as litterateurs must be seen in a framework of internal and intra-cultural power relations. Conceptions of culture are never fixed or settled, but are rather constantly contested.⁴ The contestation of the Bengali Muslim, if we see literature in these terms, opens a window into the late colonial past that would otherwise be closed if only canonical modern forms of literary criticism were pursued.

As Tschacher notes in a study of Islamic literature in Tamil, scholars of South Asian Muslim studies outside of Urdu and Persian-based sources have few conceptual models to follow, besides that of a 'perpetual exception' (which creates new, impenetrable walls of grand narratives) or a generalizable unfolding of 'Islamic universalism', which presumes a central point in either the Arabic-speaking Western Asian context, or, familiar to South Asians, the Urdu and/or Persian-based north Indian heartland.⁵ Bengali Muslim Bengali is neither a perpetual exception nor is it a simple unfolding of Islamic universalism. It contains within it a politics generated

by late colonialism, shared by many other languages, but obscured by the history of nation-states that have retroactively linked language with the dictates of a centralized nation-state.

Pakistan and the Bengali Muslim

Current scholarship on late colonialism in South Asia has established that a move towards a separatist or exclusive Muslim political or cultural space was not the driving motivation behind the movement for Pakistan in the 1940s. Rather, the decision to partition colonial India was decided by particular individuals and ideological manoeuvres that differed greatly from ideals for Pakistan that rested on self-determination and just governance.⁶ Such scholarship has deconstructed the motivations and decisions of political leaders at the time of decolonization to expose the confusion and ill-informed decisions surrounding the transfer of power. But when discourses of regionalism come into focus, particularly within those regions crucial to the partition of British India like Bengal, scholarship has not adequately examined the form and content of regional and religious identity of Bengali Muslims.⁷

Ideas about and aspirations for a 'Pakistan' were central to Bengal in the 1940s. Nearly all the major 'Bengali Muslim Pakistanists'⁸ emphasized the role of a specifically Bengali Muslim literary and cultural programme for the creation of a new state. Since the early twentieth century, Bengali Muslims had been constructing a cultural nationalism that engaged with both sameness and difference. Being Bengali Muslim included the discourse of Islamic practice, language and a literary-critical consciousness, and varying forms of redress of social discriminations and bigotry. At times, this last element would appear in specific Bengali Muslims allying with the Communist Party, and at times, it would appear in Muslim politicians allying with peasant political groups (from 1936–41, the Krishak Praja Party as the all-Bengal representative of Bengali peasant groups), and finally, it would appear as part of the basis of the concept of Pakistan. At one level, these three facets of social life were connected on literal bases of solidarity, and so writers and literary critics would support both peasant and Pakistan movements as a substantive portion of their own claims to identity. Similarly, peasant leaders and politicians, like Fazlul Huq, Maulana Bhasani, and Abul Hashim, would all attend literary, cultural, and in the 1940s 'renaissance' gatherings designed to encourage Bengali

Muslim self-confidence. At another level, the claims of literary critics, politicians, and politicians who spoke languages of religion (and writers of religious-themed texts, often not being one and the same) would all speak a shared language in which literature, along with socio-economic self-sufficiency inspired by religion, was necessary for cultural regeneration between the 1840s and 1950s.

Following Zillur Khan's observation that the 'the blending of the religious and the political in the growing consciousness of Bengali Muslims is an area that cries out for detailed research',⁹ I have added literary-cultural consciousness into this religio-political platform. A new approach to this consciousness includes the assessment of the Pakistan movement in its theory and execution in the Bengal region. Pakistan mobilization in Bengal was a culmination of ideological forces—literary identity, alienation based in bigotry via religious difference, and a political Muslim interest grounded in an Islam tied to both agriculture and social justice—at a specific moment at the end of empire when the forces of decolonization mandated a change in political structure.

The tension between region and centre, as well as intellectual constructions of the Pakistan demand originated in structural particularities similar to the Punjab but provided different results. Bengal's regional counterpart—the KPP—saw its support base, organizational infrastructure, and political platforms all swallowed up wholesale by the BPML by the early 1940s. By the time of this historic resolution, the majority of the KPP's leaders had joined the BPML, whereas in the Punjab, the regional Unionist Party's leadership had switched to the ML side only in 1946. In Bengal, many individuals who embraced the Pakistan demand in the mid-1940s had been working for years to construct a workable cultural and linguistic autonomy for Bengali Muslims.

In a brief comparison of the Punjab and Bengal Pakistan movements, Gilmartin notes that 'the concept of Pakistan as an overarching moral and national community was thus far more readily linked in Bengal [than in the Punjab] to a simultaneous recognition of regional identity as an ongoing frame for definition of local communities and the particularities of place'.¹⁰ Though Gilmartin devotes only a few paragraphs to this important comparison, he concedes that the Muslim League government in Bengal in 1946–7 'did not define itself in cultural opposition to the politics of regional identity in quite the same way as the Punjab'.¹¹ As I have demonstrated, the BPML of the 1944–47 period and the various

types of support they galvanized for a Bengali Muslim Purba Pakistani renaissance very much depended on their location within regional formations of Bengali-ness. Though I don't argue for a linkage of the 'Islamic moral community to the soil', as Gilmartin surmises for Bengal, I demonstrate how being Muslim, Pakistani, and Bengali were part of a broader narrative of Bengali regional history.

Also unlike the Punjab, Bengal holds a long history of combined religio-agrarian politics that have meshed with disturbances in power relations. Bengal's Pakistan movement did not lead to a pyrrhic and empty version of Pakistan without any real connection to the regional aspirations of people. It is undeniable that the Muslim League in Bengal broke down shortly after independence, but not because of weak organizational structures and empty links with the masses. The ML disintegrated because of an increasingly rigid attitude of the newly implanted Bengali Muslim League leadership after 1947. The intellectual leaders of the BPML such as Hashim, Suhrawardy, the theorist Abul Mansur Ahmed, and the peasant leader Bhasani, all wished to dissolve the League as a representative structure of colonial-era authority, although they all vigorously supported the BPML in the days of decolonization. The problem lay rather in the leadership continuing colonial methods in a new national framework.

Abul Mansur Ahmed and the Concept of Pakistan

As many Bengali Muslims felt alienated from two mainstays of cultural capital in the form of Urdu and high Muslim culture as well as Bengali culture and literature dominated by Hindus, Bengali Muslim intellectuals and activists focused on language and literature as the basis of counter-hegemonic attempts to define a culturally autonomous space. Abul Mansur Ahmed's literary career serves as a useful reference point to understand the hegemonic consciousness of Bengali Hindus, and it also gives us an idea of the counter-hegemonic responses to such Hindu power in the late colonial period. In 1922, as a committed Congress Gandhite, Ahmed attempted to publish a story with the Calcutta publisher, Bhattacharya and Sons. He was enthusiastically accepted for publication, but the editors required him to publish a glossary for the so-called non-Bengali words such as *Allah*, *roza*, *namaj*, *dojak*, and so on. Fifteen years later in 1937, when submitting the recommendations

for a Bengali textbook, the textbook approval committee returned with the sentiment that 'Hindu' feelings would be hurt if such 'Muslim' words were included. Six years after that episode when he addressed the East Pakistan Renaissance Society conference in 1943, he declared that the creation and maintenance of a Pak-Bangla literature, replete with imagery from East Bengal, Islamic words and phrases, and a realization of bigotry and social discrimination, was the foundation for Pakistan. Ahmed specifically described this entire process as 'hegemony', as he devotes many pages in both of his memoirs, 'Amar Dekha Rajnir Panchas Bachar' (Fifty Years of Politics as I Saw It) and *Atmakatha* (My Story), to highlight the 'cultural vested interests' and 'hegemonic' powers inherent in Bengali Hindu attempts to exclude Muslims from sharing a creative and open-ended approach to language and its literature. He even went so far as to say that the division of the country was necessarily a division of the literature. For him, an undivided Bengal would mean that literature would always remain hegemonically in the hands of Hindus. He did not exactly support a 'divided Bengal', as much as he opposed a Bengal where Muslims would be politically and culturally under-represented. Transforming Bengal into the Purba Pakistan portion of a greater Pakistan would provide the means to fully represent Bengali Muslim cultural and political potentialities.

These experiences were mirrored throughout the literary world of Bengali publishing, as Abul Kalam Shamsuddin recounts the elder Shiraji talking of the inferiority complex insinuated into the heads of Bengali Muslims. Scores of writers would take Hindu pseudonyms out of fear of not being published. Social and 'ordinary' life in the Calcutta of the 1920s through the end of colonial rule was marked by sharp communal divisions in day to day business, so that looking like a Muslim may prevent one from being sold *misti* (sweets) or being accommodated in public shops or other spaces. In nearly every public portion of daily life—before the idea of Purba Pakistan—many Muslims were afraid to merge their Bengali and Muslim facets in the Calcutta public space, knowing that ridicule or neglect, would accompany such expressions.

Many East Bengali writers in addition to Ahmed, some Hindu writers included, experienced discrimination and bias at the hands of their Calcutta counterparts, such as Golam Mostafa, the poet who loudly proclaimed the need for Urdu singularity in the midst of the language movement, which was oddly enough written in Bengali. As a

schoolboy Mostafa was mercilessly ridiculed for his rustic, East Bengali pronunciation while teaching at a Calcutta school. Pre-modern ridicule and exoticization of the 'East' in Bengali cultural history began with the Vaishnava saint Sri Chaitanya (1486–1533) whose biographies mention his ridicule of the 'Bangal' or East Bengali. From the 1920s, the 'Bangal', usually referred to those rustics who were also 'Muslim' in the popular parlance of Calcutta stereotypes. The idea of the 'Bangal', however, reverts to a geo-political and not religious notion of difference.¹²

Abul Mansur Ahmed turned to religion and its forms of identification reluctantly, out of a negative politics of celebration (as Gramsci had remarked about racial identity for African Americans), but religion turned out to be a significant marker of identity, rather than being merely a tool to fight the bigotry of everyday life, important as that fight was for Ahmed. Rather than find in their Bengali Muslim selves a narrow conception of religion, activists and leaders like Hashim and Bhasani imbued religious activism with a spirit that accommodated young Muslim intellectuals ready to include the historic and temporal grievances of Muslims into a religious identity that would incorporate the religion itself into a measure of politics. This merely follows from a long tradition of religiosity and political activism that draws on powerful appropriations of the Qur'an for political objectives. These appropriations resonated greatly with the legions of peasant, student, and religious leaders ready for such an organizational paradigm. Such a shift coincided with the monumental intellectual developments that defined Pakistan as a place for justice.

Such justice, though inclusive of symbols and references to Islam, depended on a notion of 'culture'. This notion, though nominally similar to the Bengali Hindu intellectual moves towards consolidating an idea of culture from the 1880s to the 1930s, was carved out of somewhat different content. The relationship between Muslims and Hindus at one level may be read as a continual catching-up and *anusharan* (imitation) in all the areas where Hindus leapt forward in the nineteenth century: English education, government jobs, and the cultivation of Bengali literature. Abul Mansur Ahmed's exhortations towards a specifically Bengali Muslim cultural and literary programme in the 1940s appropriated a larger 'culture concept', in which self-determination appeared linked with a distinctive collective force. The culture concept acquired legitimacy, though, only in a temporally precise moment, during the interplay

between regionalizing and trans-regionalizing forces in the midst of sharp anti-colonial fervour.¹³

Bengali Muslim visions of community, which held together relatively coherent boundaries of differentiation and included, instead of challenging, the large-scale movement for Pakistan. Pakistan was then part and parcel of the Bengali Muslim history of communitarian self-expression and political realization. On one level, the very same Bengali progenitors of the Pakistan idea before 1947—Abul Mansur Ahmed, Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Abul Hashim, Maulana Bhasani, and Muhammed Shahidullah—vigorously supported the idea of Bengali linguistic autonomy during the East Pakistan period, later leading to Bangladesh. For Bengali Muslims, Bengali linguistic autonomy was written into the entire idea of Pakistan itself between 1944 and 1947. Pakistan, as an ideal and as a political theory, did not aim to thwart an already-unified Bengali edifice of culture. It was, rather, one part of the long history of being Bengali and being Muslim. Additionally, it was one part of being *Bengali* and *not only* being Muslim. That the idea of Pakistan was appropriated by a variety of forces—Western Pakistani power-players, majoritarian bigots, capitalists with an eye towards exploitation—should not obscure this facet of Bengali Muslim political, socio-cultural, and intellectual history.

* * *

Bengali Muslim visions of Pakistan included subjunctive feelings of hope and excitement, as opposed to a precisely figured plan. These hopes and questions were then shaped by the brutalizing violence of 1946 and 1947, which turned these questions into rushed attachments to a new state, partially seen as an escape from the continuous violence. From 1947 to 1952, this emotive attachment to a different vision of the nation-state, inclusive of both social equity, linguistic-cultural autonomy, and the protection of minorities continued as the complete inverse of post-colonial reality. From 1952 through the most of the rest of the history of East Pakistan, these ideals continued to press upon the political destinies of the main thinkers of the movement. Unlike the move towards existentialism of many of European thinkers of the same time period, like Jean-Paul Sartre, Bengali Muslim intellectuals like Abul Mansur Ahmed wrote voluminously about protecting the ideals of Pakistan and actually putting them into practice as opposed to lapsing into nihilistic or existentialist despair.

The details of the 1952–71 period remain for another intellectual history of East Pakistan, though I have aimed to show how conceptually separating Pakistani-ness from Bengali-ness because of the great tragedies of the late 1960s and 1970s imprisons Bengali Muslim history into sterile nationalist and statist frameworks. Striving for a Pakistani ideal must be understood historically as a constituent part of Bengali, and broader South Asian, history, not an aberration on the journey to the creation of Bangladesh. As David Washbrook in a recent historiographic review has remarked, a history of Bengal from its eastern and Muslim perspectives would greatly energize understandings of the late colonial era.¹⁴ These perspectives show how the inspirations behind and motives for nationalist movements of the twentieth century cannot fit into narrowly defined containers of language, culture, and religion when viewed through the lens of cultural and intellectual history.

Notes

1. Personal interview by Dr. Iftekhar Iqbal for the Bengali Intellectuals in the Age of Decolonization project, 6 February 2011.

2. See the analysis of vernacularization in Zutshi Chitrlekha, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 25–8.

3. As mentioned earlier, no Bengali Muslim could write in the language and reflect on its uses without on some level encountering Hindu histories and uses, whether positively or negatively. This was simply not an option for Hindus who imagined the language to be only their own.

4. See Antonio Gramsci, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, and David Forgacs (eds), *Selections from the Cultural Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), especially Part II, 'Gramsci on Culture'.

5. Torsten Tschacher, 'Islamic Literature in Tamil and the Study of Muslim Vernaculars in South Asia', unpublished conference paper, delivered at the Margins and Centers in South Asian Islam conference, University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA, March 11, 2011.

6. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) along with the same author's 'Pakistan's Present in India's Future', *Seminar* (January 2009) and 'Nation, Region, Religion: The Punjab's Role in the Partition of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33, 12 (August 8, 1998) Jalal, Ayesha.

'Nation, Region, and Religion: Punjab's Role in the Partition of India' *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 33, No. 32 (August 8–14, 1998): 2183–90. Also see Sugata Bose's 'Nation, Region, and Religion: India's Independence in International Perspective' *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 33, No. 31 (August 1–7, 1998): 2090–97. A recent work presenting similar conclusions is Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), in which the 'inevitability' of partition is contested through a revisionist treatment of Punjabi Hindu politicians and an analysis of historical memories of Punjabi Hindus in post-partition India.

7. One may argue that Bengali Hindus also have not received adequate treatment that rigorously distinguishes between post-1947 Indian nationalist rhetoric and the empirical record of Bengali Hindu politics in the late colonial period. Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947*, remains the last book-length study of Bengali Hindu politics during this time period and is hotly contested.

8. An important exception would Maulana Akram Khan, a Pakistan supporter who did not side with the large numbers of Bengali literary and cultural activists in the Pakistan movement and did not support the Bengali language movement which began in 1952. However, it must be recognized that he ardently promoted Bengali as a medium of instruction for Muslim youth, pioneered the translations of works about Islamic topics into Bengali, and wrote many books in Bengali about Islam, such as a biography of the Prophet, *Mostafa Charit* (Calcutta: Mohammadi Book Agency, 1926) and *Muslim Banglar Samajik Itihas* (Social History of Bengali Muslims) (Dhaka: Oitijya, 2002). Along with his son Mohammed Khairul Anam Khan, he also initiated and edited the *Azad* newspaper from 1937, a widely read Bengali newspaper that addressed Muslim readers, which later continued into East Pakistan and then Bangladesh until 1990. Though he did not combine Bengali-ness into his conception of Pakistan, he undeniably believed in the importance of the Bengali language and literature.

9. Zillur Khan, 'Islam and Bengali Nationalism', *Asian Survey*, 25, 8 (August 1985): 841.

10. David Gilmartin, 'Pakistan, Partition, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57, 4 (November 1998): 1088.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 1087.

12. See Sirajul Islam Choudhury, *Middle Class and the Social Revolution in Bengal: An Incomplete Agenda* (Dacca: University Press Limited, 2002), pp. 46–7. Dipesh Chakrabarty also mentions this stereotype of the 'Bengal' having pre-modern origins but does not reflect on how Muslims themselves reacted to and engaged with the gradual inclusion of the 'Muslim' into this 'Bengal' stereotype.

See his *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 127–37.

13. Andrew Sartori, 'Abul Mansur Ahmed and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism' in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (eds), *From the Colonial to the Post-Colonial: India and Pakistan in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

14. David Washbrook, 'Toward a History of the Present: Southern Perspectives on the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' in Dipesh Chakrabarty, et al. (eds), *From the Colonial to the Post-colonial*.

Glossary

<i>abwab</i>	taxes or impositions in excess of rent that were levied on tenants by landlords. In Mughal India, all taxes over and above regular taxes were termed <i>abwabs</i> . Any temporary taxes would collectively become known as <i>abwabs</i> in the colonial period.
<i>anusharan</i>	imitation
<i>ajlaf</i>	those of common birth, distinctive from the <i>ashraf</i>
<i>ashraf</i>	lit. the plural of <i>sharif</i> , or high-born; in South Asia, used to denote descent from noble or aristocratic families and implied knowledge of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu.
Bangaal	those from East Bengal, often used in derogatory ways to denote lack of culture or education
<i>behesta</i>	heaven, traditionally used in Muslim contexts
<i>bhadralok</i>	well-mannered and cultured gentleman. A term used in the historiography of modern India to refer to many different political and socio-economic persuasions, from

	the salaried worker to the rent-seeking landlord and to politicians of persuasions on all ends of the political spectrum.
<i>byabsha</i>	business
<i>bojakh</i>	hell, traditionally used in Muslim contexts
<i>beresta</i>	angel, traditionally used in Muslim contexts
<i>boonda</i>	criminal
<i>Hadith</i>	narratives of the Prophet Muhammad's life experiences
<i>iman</i>	faith
<i>iswara</i>	Sanskrit term for God
<i>jotedar</i>	peasant farmer, usually with large holdings
<i>leto</i>	Bengali folk performance, combining song, dance, and dialogue, often using myths, historical figures, and religious narratives
<i>maktab</i>	traditional primary school for Muslims
<i>mahajan</i>	lit. great man; moneylender in the rural Bengali context
<i>maulana</i>	title of a respected religious scholar
<i>mufassil</i>	hinterland; district town far from an urban centre
<i>mullah</i>	a local Islamic cleric who has studied Qur'anic literatures, the Hadith, and Islamic law (<i>fiqh</i>). In the rural Bengali context of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, the mullah was often understood as an ignorant, bigoted figure.
<i>Namasudra</i>	Bengali Hindu caste community, mostly cultivators and boatmen, often politically allied with Muslim activists in eastern Bengal in the late colonial period
<i>namaz</i>	prayer, traditionally used in Muslim contexts
<i>narakh</i>	hell, traditionally used in Hindu contexts
<i>paigambar</i>	Prophet, traditionally used in Muslim contexts
<i>pani</i>	water in Bengali Muslim usage (idiomatic); counterpoint to Bengali Hindu idiomatic usage of <i>jal</i>
<i>patrika</i>	magazine
<i>punthi</i>	lit. manuscript, also a reference to Bengali Muslim pre-modern manuscripts of folktales and Islamic stories
<i>rabbaniyat</i>	spirituality, or elevation of the human mind into a non-material plane, in Muslim contexts, based on Rab, or the Creator
<i>roza</i>	fasting, traditionally used in Muslim contexts

<i>samiti</i>	local organization
<i>sanyassi</i>	Hindu ascetic, a religious mendicant
<i>shalishi</i>	dispute boards based on local legal traditions in East Bengal
<i>sufi</i>	Muslim mystics emphasizing personal communion with God and bodily ecstasy instead of ritual, dogma, or belief
<i>swarga</i>	abode of the Gods, loosely translated as heaven
<i>swatantrata</i>	difference, distinctiveness
<i>tafsir</i>	translation and exegesis of the Qur'an
<i>tamaddun</i>	culture, originally 'civilization' in Arabic; first used in Urdu to denote Islamic culture by Abdul Halim Sharar in his serialized <i>Hindustan Men Mashriqi Tamaddun Ka Akhiri Namuna</i> (The Last Example of Eastern Culture in Hindustan) between 1913–20.
<i>upabash</i>	fasting, traditionally used in Hindu contexts
<i>upashana</i>	prayer, traditionally used in Hindu contexts
<i>zakat</i>	tradition of giving away excess income to the poor, one of the five pillars of Islam
<i>zamindar</i>	originally a term for all rent-receivers above cultivators in Mughal India; from the 1793 Permanent Settlement, hereditary proprietors of land. Zamindars were abolished in 1950 by the Government of Bangladesh.

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<i>Bangadarshan</i>	<i>Ganavani</i>
<i>Bangali Mussalman Sahitya Patrika</i>	<i>Gulistan</i>
<i>Baromaas</i>	<i>Islam Darpan</i>
<i>Basumati</i>	<i>Islam Darshan</i>
<i>Bengalee</i>	<i>Islam Pracharak</i>
<i>Bijali</i>	<i>Jagaron</i>
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<i>Bulletin of the Rationalist Society</i>	<i>Krishak Langol</i>

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<i>Muslim Hitaishi</i>	<i>Sikha</i>
<i>Muslim Jagat</i>	<i>Simanto</i>
<i>Nao Belal</i>	<i>Soltan</i>
<i>Navajug</i>	<i>Som Prakash</i>
<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Star of India</i>
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