

Contributions of the Muslims for Creative Writings: A Study on North Bengal with Special Reference to Malda (1835- 1947)

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Abstract

The major part of population in few districts of West Bengal especially Malda are the Muslims. In the early phase of colonial period, the Muslims were not able to take the advantage of western education and even they refused to learn English language and as a result of which they lagged behind the Hindus in various types of writing. But the fact is that, they did not lack skills in writing. The number of their writings was relatively small but their contribution to different types of writing was important. They also tried to enhance the writing culture of this region. The present article will focus the historical and literary works of the Muslim writers of North Bengal with special reference to Malda from academic point of view.

Key Words: *Literary, Malda, Muslims, North Bengal, Writing*

Introduction

Among the districts of North Bengal, Malda is such a place where a major part of population is constituted of the Muslims who had given their best to develop the socio-cultural phenomenon among the Muslims along with the Hindus. Yet, the number of written literature about their contribution is inadequate. Although there are few written books available on Bengal Muslims, which is not covered all aspects of their life. The aim of the present paper is to highlight the contribution of the Muslims of the region of Malda district where they wrote different kinds of interesting writings. It will be discussed from the introduction of western education in India to independence because an allegation was imposed on them that they were not competent enough as they refused the western education. But there was considerable consciousness regarding education among

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the Muslims and consequently they came forward for the development of writings. It is necessary to mention here that we would analyse the writings of the Muslims of present North Bengal instead of previous North Bengal and will also try to give description of those areas which was previously the part of present North Bengal as far as possible.

The Rulers of the Sultanate period of Gauda of the then Malda encouraged the writers to write valuable writings¹ on which we all know as a student of history and those who are conscious about history. It was their glorious past. Similarly in the period of our study we find a contribution of an eminent Muslim person who helped a man by providing valuable documents for creation of history writing.² Therefore, we may say that, from the beginning the interest of writing was present among the Muslims. These were the indirect involvement of the Muslims in promotion of writing and at the same time their direct involvement also found to some extent.

Categorically, the writings of the Muslims may be divided into three parts such as history writing, writing of literature and writings related to religious matter.

Historical Works

The awareness and deep interest of the Muslims regarding history writing was present in the twentieth century. According to the desire of the King Bhup Bahadur of Cooch Behar, the responsibility of writing the history of Cooch Behar was taken by the then secretary of the *Cooch Behar Sahitya Sabha*, Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed.³ *Cooch Beharer Itihas* was his famous writing which was published in 1936.⁴ The book was written on the basis of scientific method of history writing and no such type of books of any other person can claim such achievement like him. It is evident that he had deep interest in writing history. In the first session of the *Cooch Behar Sahitya Sabha*, he presented an essay about the ancestors of Cooch Behar royal family⁵ and in the second session, he offered another essay on the ancient language of Cooch Behar.⁶ Apart from this, he concentrated on publishing the history of the past by deciphered different kinds of coinage with the help of other Muslims.⁷

In case of Malda, few important writers have been found whose contribution in writing history is still afresh in the memory of the people. *Riyazu-s-Salatin* of Ghulam

Hussain⁸ of Malda was the first period of the Muslim composition, although it is not within the period of the article yet it is important to mention his name and the composition to express the tendency and pride of history writing by the Muslims in this region.

However, the name of Sayed Ilahi Bakhsh Alhussaini Aungrezabadi is well known who had started to write the famous history book *Khursid-i-Jahannama* (world displaying sun) from 1853 and spent his entire life to complete the work. The book gives the description of ancient Malda and intends to fill the gap which Golam Hussain didn't describe properly.⁹ He had done a lot of research work and used his local experience in writing and that is why his writing became commendable in the history of Gauda.¹⁰

Another important historian of the regional history of Malda is Khan Sahib Abid Ali Khan who became famous for his remarkable historical work on the Medieval Monuments of Malda, *Memoirs of Gauda and Pandua* (originally *Ruins of Gauda and Pandua*)¹¹ published in 1931. Both the books i.e. *Riayazu-s-Salatin* and *Khursid-i-Jahannama* were written in Persian language but Abid Ali wrote his book in English. Though before completion of his book, he wrote a short descriptive book in 1913 titled *Short Notes on the Ancient Monuments of Gauda and Panduah* to provide an idea about these monuments before the forthcoming visit of Excellencies Lord and Lady Carmichael to the district.¹² Mazharul Islam Taru in his book '*Chanpai Nawabganjer Itihas O Oithya*' has mentioned that Mjibur Rahaman of Nawabganj wrote *Andhakup Hatya Rahasya* and for that he became popular.

Literary Works

In the field of literary practice, the Muslims composed various contemporary literature. The Muslim compositions were affronted as '*puthi of battala*'¹³ or low graded books but its significance must not be ignored because it had its own style of composition by which the image of their society, religion and culture is been reflected. To counter this kind of conception about the Muslims and their literary attributions, Abdul Gafur Siddiki wrote an essay titled '*Musalman O Bangasahitya*' (Muslims and Bengali literature) where he had given a series of names of Muslim writers and their writing compositions¹⁴ which was most important in the field of literature particularly in North Bengal. In his

description a details of the sole literary work of Dinajpur *Khaibarar Jangnama* (1284 B.S) by Moulavi Dost Muhammad Chwdhury is been given.¹⁵ There was another important *puthi* literature named, *Jawheral Momenin* written by Munshi Jawhar Ali of Dinajpur.¹⁶ It should be mentioned that ‘*puthi* literature’ of nineteenth century was so popular in Malda especially among the rural educated classes.¹⁷ Akimuddin and Munsir Nasiruddin of Chanpai Nawabganj of the then undivided Malda were two famous writers of ‘*puthi* literature’.¹⁸

Apart from this *puthi literature* there was lots of modern literature too. In connection with this a question may arise, if the Muslims were lagged behind the Hindus in respect of education, then how a number of Muslim writers emerged? The fact is that, some eminent educated Muslims wrote different essays in different contemporary news papers and delivered speeches in many literary associations through which they have been encouraged the Muslims to bring advanced their community as a whole. Similarly, they didn’t want to remain behind in the field of literary practice through Bengali medium. As a result of this a huge number of literary practices could be seen in the district.

Moulavi Nafaruddin Ahmed was the first Muslim young novelist of Dinajpur, who wrote a historical novel named ‘*Bhagya Lipi*’ based on the events during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin and Gyasuddin Balban.¹⁹ Ekin Uddin Ahmed was a distinguished lawyer of Dinajpur by profession but he was also a novelist who wrote a novel ‘*Shantiniketan*’ published serially in a contemporary Bengali journal.²⁰ Begum Safura Khatun of Jalpaiguri was also a novelist, who wrote a novel in 1934 named, *Narir Mulya* (value of women).²¹ Besides this, Begum Azijunnesa, first English educated Muslim woman of Tetulia of undivided Jalpaiguri translated the book ‘*The Harmit*’ of Tomas Persele into Bengali in 1884.²² ‘*Pally Gazal*’ (about the sadness of the villagers) and ‘*Chashir Gazal*’ (sad story of farmers) were the two valuable poem books of Dinajpur, wrote by Moulavi Sayed Kochgrami and Moulavi Muhammad Usuf Ali Bhagbi respectively.²³

There are some important name of writers and poets in the Malda district who contributed towards the literary field. The good writings of any Muslim writers and poets

may not be ignored and always be acceptable.²⁴ The authenticity of this statement is seen especially in the case of two persons such as Jahanara Chowdhury of Shibganj Thana of undivided Malda and A.K.S. Nur Muhammad of Gayeshbari area of same district. Both the writer and poet were praised by the great poet Rabindranath Tagore for their works.²⁵ Nur Muhammad loved to write poems and some of his books containing poems were *Banshari*, *Aleya*, *Moslem Veena*. Along with poetry he also wrote a novel named *Dulali*, stories like *Utsab*²⁶ and *Ostad O Shishya*. The last one had got the place in the then popular children magazine among the other most popular writers of Bengal like Kazi Najrul Islam.²⁷ There was another poet of Nawabganj, Sardar Abdul Hamid who also known for his book *Kusum* and *Swapnasudha*. Faijuddin and Abdul Gafur of Nawanganj who became popular for writing novels like *Silsilatub* and *Milanbasor* respectively. Similarly Abdul Karim Mandal of Shibganj became popular for his book *Ashabriksha* and especially for his drama *Jagat Mohini* because he was the second person who wrote the drama after Mir Mosharrif Hossain.²⁸ Khan Sahib Moulabi Abdul Gani of town area, was one of the pioneers of Malda Muslim renaissance who wrote a play named *Najibudoulla*.²⁹ (regarding the conspiracy and desire of power of the British) Mention is to be made of Sardar Abdul Hamid, resident of town area of Maldah, who became popular for his writings.³⁰ Alongside these, many Muslim poets and writers have been found who have kept their names by their short essays and poems in different contemporary periodicals.

Religious Works

There were a lot of religious text books which written by the Muslims of North Bengal. But why they wrote this type of books? The fact is that, the Muhammedans of Bengal believed that their students are gradually becoming fond of Hinduism because the education especially of Bengali literature they received from the school is related to Hindu religion and there were no trace of Islamic ideology and as a result, indifference towards their religion will be expressed.³¹ Probably they deemed it as an aggression of Hindu religion towards Islam. And they thought that to save Muslim culture of Bengal they have to emphasis on Islamic culture along with Arabic language- literature.³² Though, it may not be considered to be the only reason, but it was effective and

significant one. Ekinuddin Ahamed of Dinajpur and Moulavi Abdul Gani of Malda both were emphasised on good learning of their own religion through Urdu and Arabic. Abdul Gani especially wanted to emphasis on Arabic learning through Bengali medium.³³ However, its impact was very clear, if we look at their increased religious literature which were much acceptable to their own society such as-

Wakafnama of Abdul Rahim Bax Peskar of Jalpaiguri,³⁴ *Eslam Tari* by Moulavi Muhammad Usuf Bhagbi,³⁵ *Nabi Amader Uttam Adarsha, Satyer Pracher, Namaz, Kabar Puja* etc. of Moulana Moniruddin Anowari, *Holy Quran on Sectarianism, Musalmaner Tetrish Koti Devota, Koran Probeshikkha* etc. of Muhammad Taimur,³⁶ and *Islam Dharmaniti* of Ekinuddin Ahamed of Dinajpur were important books.³⁷ Similarly, Moulavi Abdul Gani of Malda wrote *Islam Bilap* where he has mentioned that his objective was to improve the Muslim society. The book first published in 1908 and has written in the form of varse.³⁸ Not only that, Abid Ali Khan who was famous for his historical book *Memoirs of Gauda and Pandua*, wrote four religious books namely *Maulud Sariph O Hajrat Charit* (The Holy Birth and the Life of Prophet Muhammad), *Shahadat Nama Va Maharam Parva* (Martyrdom or the Maharam Festival), *Gulsane Hind* (The Garden of India)³⁹ and the last one is *Prayer Book for the Muslims with the Risala-i-Namaz*.⁴⁰ The book was printed along with in both Aabic and English languages. According to the author's description, "there is a large demand for the 'Prayer book for Muslims,' in foreign countries viz., Trinidad, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Hongkong, and Ceylon."⁴¹ A person named Najir Ahmed Chowdhury wrote an essay on 'Bengali Musalmaner Sahitya Sadhana' (Literary pursuit of Bengali Muslims) in a contemporary Bengali periodical *Masik Muhammadi* of 1337 B.S. where he wrote that "we have to awaken self-respect by reading the glorious story of Islam, but we have to be careful that our vision and judgment power should not be covered" and this was so significant to this section.

Other Educational Works

Out of above mentioned categories there was another category where the Muslim writers wrote books for the educational institutions specifically for *Madrashas* to improve their students. As per the Govt. notification of 1925, the books written by the Muslim writers

on the subject Bengali and History will get preference for *Maktab* students.⁴² Here we find the glorious contributions of few Muslims of North Bengal as well as Malda like Usuf Ali Bhagbi of Dinajpur, Khan Sahib Moulavi Abdul Gani, Khan Sahib Abid Ali Khan and Moulavi Muhammad Taimur of Malda district in this regard.

Usuf Ali Bhagbi was very popular name for his novel *Bhagyalipi*. He also wrote few essays for *maktab* students like *Maktab Shishu Sikkha* for class students of primary level for better knowledge in Bengali alphabet. His essays were published in different Bengali periodicals of the time.⁴³ Another important name was Moulavi Muhammad Taimur who was associated with *Malda Moslem Shikkha Samiti* which had the objective to increase the educational atmosphere among the Muslim community. To fulfil this target he wrote a school level book *Gyan Vikash* for the students of fourth and fifth standard⁴⁴ of any community. Moulavi Abdul Gani was the main person who introduced *Malda Moslem Sikkha Smiti*, who wrote *Banga- Arbi Byakaran* in two parts for easy understanding of Arabic through Bengali language.⁴⁵ In the similar way Abid Ali Khan wrote four books out of which two belongs to Mathematics (*Mansanko O Shubhankari Sambalita Dharapat* and *Moukhik Anko*)⁴⁶, the other one Bengali (*Sachitra Bangla Sikkha*)⁴⁷ and the last one on Urdu (*Urdu Primer*)⁴⁸ languages. Though he was an engineer of P.W.D. under British Govt. but he thought deeply for the upliftment of the Muslims and wanted to consolidate the educational foundation of the Muslim students and other students of the society.

Conclusion

After foregoing study and survey it may be summed up that the Muslims were not lagged behind the Hindus in the field of writing history and other literary works. They came forward for the development of writings since the medieval period. But, the proper investigation of their works on micro level has yet not been done from the academic point of view. Perhaps, it is a high time to investigate their works to plug the research gap. It is evident that few eminent Muslim writers wrote their book complying scientific historical method. The tendency to remove the allegation that they were wadding behind the Hindus was seen in different fields, writing is one of them. It is not completely ignored that the Muslims made much of their society dynamic through writing. They tried to

preserve their society, religion and culture by increasing their religious literature, they created the history conscious mentality by writing history and similarly through the different fields of literary practice along with the Hindus they also made the society prosperous. They expanded the path to forward among the Muslim masses by weapons of writing. In this way it is found in deep analysis that their writings played an important role in bringing Muslim renaissance in North Bengal as well as Malda. Alongside it may also be mentioned here that their writings not only encouraged their own community to strengthen their self confidence but also encouraged all to make good interest in writing forever.

Notes and References

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