

CHAPTER - I

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM SOCIETY IN BENGAL

This chapter looks into the Growth and Development of Muslim society in Bengal. After the conquest of Muslims, Bengal has become a healthy, brave and individual nation. The conquest of Bengal by the Muslims was more important than military victory. The political establishments that emerged as an outcome of new victory upheld the ideals of peace, discipline, equality in religious, cultural and social life. Thus, as a matter of fact, they did not only come as a warrior tribe but also brought some new ideologies in this nation. For this new ideology, a great revolution emerged in Hindu society and it was the renaissance era in Bengal history. Hindus and Muslims were the predominant presence in terms of population in this era. During that time Hindu population was in majority. Although a great number of Buddhists and low caste Hindus have been converted into Islam, Muslim population was less in number than Hindu population. But in the time of British emperor, we can see that the Muslims were in the majority in Bengal. Census report of 1872 reveals that the number of Muslims was 1crore 70 lakhs. In the census report of 1881, Muslim population rose dramatically and it surpassed the Hindu population by 5lakhs. They emerged as a major community. Muslim people were modest, educated and powerful in political aspects from the very beginning.¹

Two main communities, apart from some Buddhists and Jains, there were Persians also. Two main Communities had come to Bengal in the sixteenth century. Bengali Muslims were made from both foreign and converted Muslims. Foreign Muslims came from the

present-day Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and Arabian Peninsula. But there were some Osmanian Turks, Abyssinian and so on. Many Muslims were highly sophisticated and embellished for their great virtues. Spirited and brave Turkish had incredible military and administrative abilities. The Afghans hailed from powerful, brave and combative stocks. They prized individuality above everything else. Enthusiastic Mughals were famous for their organised education and cultural abilities. Iranians also had the same ability in sword fighting and intellect. They had a great interest in literature and were given to intellectual and refined pursuits. There was preference for Arabians in the ideologies of religious view as well as business and sea voyage. Abyssinians were well known for their immense patience and perseverance. Migrated Muslims infused new spirit in Bengal. And then toneless Bengalis gained a toned life and prosperity.²

Advent of Arabians in Bengal:

In 1203, after the conquest of Bengal in the hand of Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar khalji, Muslim locality had started to consolidate itself gradually. Some scholars say that many years ago before the conquest of Laxmanabati in the hands of a famous Turkish assemble; there were some Arabian merchants who settled their colonies in Bengal. But they do not have any strong evidence to prove this argument and that is why their thesis has been subject to criticism. Before discussing on the matter of Muslim population in Bengal, let us focus on the establishment of Arabian colony in Chattygram.³ Arabians were famous in the whole world for their sea-voyaging and trade; these Arabians travelled many lands of Eastern and Western countries through seaways. In 712 A.D., Sind and Multan were conquered by the Arabians. The route which the Arabs used during this time became so popular that the name of the Indian Ocean and the north-eastern Indian Ocean became transformed into Arabian water reservoirs. There is some evidence that Arabian voyagers followed the Bengal shore line and made trade relationships with the porting areas of this

country. And they used to give high premiums for this merchandise.⁴ According to traditional Geographers, Arabian markets survived 'Samandar', 'Ornasin', 'Abina' (Barma) during their sea voyages in eastern countries. One of Arabian geographer's conferred "if we examine the description of the port of then there is no doubt that it is the area of Bengal shoreline."⁵ Ibn Khurdaba (912) wrote "Rice and Aloe vera was produced at Samandar and imported from Kamrup to other locality within 15 or 16 days through river ways." Aal-Edrisi (late 11th c) also said " 'Samandar' is a fort and wealthy large city. There are great profits. This porting area depends on the king of Kaunoj. *Samandar* situated beside '*khoar*' floated from Kashmir ". He said that this land was popular for producing Aloe vera within 15 days by river way. He also said that the trade city was situated on the bank of a vast river in Musala. The writer of 'Book of Marvels' remarks this Musal River as an aromatic river.⁶ Aal-Edrisi never travelled this subcontinent. That's why the geographical knowledge which he had was mere delusion. But there is absolute equality in the description of Aal-Edrisi with Ibn Khurdaba. According to these two geographers- distance between 'kamrut' and 'kamrun' and the sea port was about 15 or 20 days far through river way. Aal-Edrisi called this place as 'Kamrut' Ibn Khurdaba called it '*kamrun*' but they both claimed that a large amount of Aloe vera was imported from there.⁷ The mountainous area of Shrihatta (Sylhet) was expanded to Kamrup and Assam. Now Kamrup is popular for producing Aloe vera. The name and the description of producing Aloe vera proved that '*kamrut*' and 'kamrun' is actually nothing but Kamrup. Kamrup attached with sea line and porting areas of Bramhaputra-Meghna floated in Bengal. Kamrup is a landlocked province in North Bengal. There is no way except sea way to enter here. So, if there were no policies between the port area and Bramhaputra-Meghna then it would have been impossible to export Aloe vera from Kamrup. The process took around 15 days long.

Aforesaid opinions are approved by Arabian geographers. They wrote, '*Samandar*' was situated the bank of a river and it was attached with Musala river. Then Bramhaputra River floated into Kamrup and met with Meghna from south sonogram and fell into the North-eastern Sea near Serendib. The port Samandar was situated beside the estuaries of the entire river near Serendib. Aal-Edrisi said that the king of Kaunaj was the owner of the port *Samandar*. Maybe he did that to make Gaur Sultan.⁸

There are more proofs that Serendib was a port at that time. Arabian merchants often came to travel these porting areas during their trades with orient countries. Aal-Edrisi wrote, "away from this *Samandar* Port there was a large overpopulated Island where all the merchants came to travel. It took around four days to get there from Serendib (Ceylon)." Meghna River from Serendib took four days long. To prove this opinion Aal-Edrisi as Serendib, Portuguese people gave their approval. In the description of Portuguese, Serendib was a very popular trade sphere.⁹ In the first 16th century, it was a very busy trade town.

The description of Arabian geographers absolutely proved that Arabian merchants were extremely familiar with Bengal and they called it as '*Rahmi*' or '*Ruhami*'. Ibn-e-Khurdaba said that *Rahmi* state was situated at the sea side and the medium of connection was only ship. The next state of *Rahmi* is named *Kamrun*(Kamrup). Masudi wrote *Rahma* was expanded both by sea and land. This was named Kamrup (Kamrun). Soleiman Banik (851) said that the king of *Rahmi* was very powerful. He had 50000 companions of elephants and 15000 soldiers. He fought with Balhoraha and Yuraj. Suleiman describes, to save the autarchy of Kaunaj; the king had accepted political diplomacy with the king of Dharmapal. Thus, the state of pal king was also named as '*Rahmi*'. The border of *Rahmi* state as described by Arabians was very similar to the geographical border of Bengal. Suleiman said about Aloe vera, cowries and a kind of fine and pure cotton clothes. Khurdaba also said about all these things. In the book '*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*', they claimed about a muslin cloth;

it was produced in the Ganges area of Bengal.¹⁰ All the aforementioned discussions proved that *Rahmi* and Bengal were the same country.

Origin of the word '*Ramu*' is '*Rahmir*'. *Ramu* was situated at Kaki Market in south Chattogram. Ralfe Pitch travelled through Bengal in 1585-86 and talked about Chatigaon, Rekan (Arakan) and Raame (*Ramu*). When this British traveller arrived, the above three kingdoms were governed by the Rekan king. This reveals that the place between Chattyogran and Arakan is called *Ramu*. *Ramu* was very famous among the Arabian merchants because it was situated at shorelines. However, the place between sea and Kamrup was popular by the same name. The Pal dynasty claimed that they are the kings of Gaur. Thus, they were not familiar with the words like '*Banga*', '*Bangadaha*'. It was also unknown to Arabian merchants. In conclusion it is to be said that Arabian merchants came to kakxmarket through Meghna.¹¹

After Muslim conquest Arabians established their habitation at Chattyogran. According to an Arabian chronology- after the ruin of an Arabian ship at Arakan coasted area, they established their colony here with the help of Ma-Ba-Toying-Da-Yaar (788-810). Dr. Enamul Hoque has also approved of this. From this chronology we know that the Arabian king Su-La-Toying-Saan-Tha-Yaa (951- 957) had attacked Bengal and won over *Tu-Ra-Tan*. Then he made a monument as a symbol of his victory at Sett-Ta-Goying (Chatgaon or Chattogram). Later in life he left war because the meaning of his word setr-ta-goying is 'warfare is unfair. Approximately said Chattyogran was called by the same name.¹²

According to Dr. Enamul Hoque *Tu-Ra-Tan* is the decomposition of sultan. From this statement he reveals that there was an Arabian kingdom in chattagram and the rulers of that place used the title sultan with their name. This proves that Arabian merchants travelled in *Samandar* and Serendib port and made a trade relationship with Bengal. It also reveals they began living here permanently since that time. In this way they established their habitation in Malabar, Singhal, Java, Sumatra, Malloy and so on. There is no doubt that they have attacked

the glorious things of the place and have started to live here forever. It is noted in 15th century that the inshore areas of Bengal, Hatia and Sarendib were not survived by Muslims. Despite that, when Barthema and Barbosa have come to travel near North-eastern Sea in the city '*Banga*', they saw many houses of Arabian Iranian Abyssinian merchants and some Muslims too. How did Muslim people come here? This proves that they came here for merchandising and made their houses. The origin of the name of Chattyogram reveals that there was a bonding from many days ago. Ibne Batuta, Chinese writer and Abul Fazal described that Chattyogram was situated near the estuary of Ganga River. Arabian merchants named Chattyogram as '*shat-aal-ganga*' (delta or extreme boundary) because it was in delta areas of Ganga River. Soon it becomes changed into '*Chatgaon* or '*Chattogram*'. Depending on a chronology, some scholar's say the name Chattogram was shat-ta-going or warfare is unfair, the word of Arakan king. But this opinion is not acceptable. Because the king seized the territory by war and established a monument for his victory. But it is to be noted that when he travelled there, he introduced the name of '*shat-aal-Ganga*'. Then he left warfare forever. In this manner, Chattogram is very similar to the Arabian '*Shat-aal-Ganga*'. Since the 10th century Arabians made a relation with Chattogram and from that time the word '*Shat-aal-Ganga*' was there. It was a very safe porting area. Arabian merchants popularized this port in Bangladesh. It had become a trade zone. Some traders started to live in Chattagram to supply merchandise from here to their country. These traders were famous for their education, culture and wealth. They also had a leader named Thu-Ra-Tan. Arakan king '*Su-La-Toying*' Saan-Tha-Yaa (951-57) claimed that he had defeated that person. Dr. Enamul Hoque's word Thu-Ra-Tan cannot to be ignored as mere imagination. There are no relations with any words of Hindus, Buddhists, Arakans. It is absolutely a coincidence that the word '*sultan*' word is pronounced as '*Surtan*' in Hindi. However, Sultan was the leader of those Arabian traders, but he was not the ruler of Chattagram and Noakhali. Except for many areas

of Bengal, Chattogram and Noakhali were very much connected with Arab. Thus, the people of this area got closer to the Arabians. If they had not come into touch with the local people then they would not be able to reveal signs of Arabian culture on them. In the first half of the 13th century, Muslims won north Bengal and other areas. After sometime, the conquered lands including Chattyogram had come into Muslim reign. On the other hand, Chattogram was won in the reign of Farukhuddin Mubarak shah in Sonargaon, some times before the 14th century. This proves that a long time after the conquest of North Bengal and other areas, Chattogram was won by the Muslims. If it is true, then Arabians should have their influence not on Chattogram. In reign of Muslim rulers, Islamic education and culture had already spread in many places except Chattyogram.¹³ Lastly, we can say Arabians were there about 200 years ago before the Muslim occupation.

According to grammarians of Bengali literature they have an immixture of words, accent and language in Chattagram and Noakhali. Even many Bengali poets also used Arabian words in their poetry. Many Arabian names are there since then and many Arabian traditions are there till now. In 13th century, explanation of Muslim reign reflects on Bengali literature in *Purbabanga*. Many Kulin Brahmin escaped from here to west Bengal, because they were afraid of cultural contact with those Muslims. According to Krittibas Ojha the writer of Ramayana in Bengali, an immense fear depressed some Kulin Brahmin; thus, they left the luxurious life and came to west Bengal. The fear that Krittibas talked about was a reference to the expanding population of Muslims. If Sonargaon was under Muslim rulers at time then it was won by them absolutely. Now the question is how Muslim people increased their population much more than Kulin Brahmins who were forced to escape from there. There is no doubt that many years ago before the victory of Muslims, Islamism was there. It may have been possible that it emerged with the arrival of the Arabian merchants. Moreover, there are also many evidences which claimed that Muslims had come to Bengal before the

victory of Ikhtiaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji. A Coin was found at a ruined Buddhist temple in Rajshahi, which was from khalifa Harun-Aal-Rashid in 172 *Hijri* (788). Some Coins were also found at the ruined Maynamati in Comilla. What is the explanation of that coin in Bengal? Rough answer is any preacher or any Arabian merchant brought it with them in the 8th or 9th century. The writers of *Tabakat-E-Nasiri* have motioned, the Muslims had some kind of trade relations with the Hindus.¹⁴ Minhaj said, when khalji came with his 18000 troops of horse (his main soldiers were behind it), people thought them horse traders. People didn't know that they had come to occupy the city. Now the conceptualization is that Muslim people were there before the Muslim invasion. Reportedly, some Muslim fakir lived there permanently and spread Islamism at the time of Hindu rulers. These fakirs are Baba Adan Shahid (Bikrampur of Dhaka), Shah Sultan Rumi (Netrakona district at Mymensingh), Shah Sultan Mahisawar (Bagura), Makhdum Sahdaula Shahid (Pabna), Makhdum Shah Gajnaki (Mangalkat in Burdwan) and so on.¹⁵ All the above discussion is going through the statement that those fakirs spread Islamism in Bengal before the victory of Khalji and made 'khanqah'.

Muslim Settlement after Muslim victory:

The door opened for external Muslims in 1203 with the victory of Khalji. Muslims came to Bengal as ruler, Soldier, Marshal, Preacher, Teacher, Traders. Arabian Muslims also came with those external Muslims. Mainly they were Sufi, preachers and traders. Each fakir came with their 120 followers to spread Islam. Sheikh Shah Jalal came with his 360 followers¹⁶ and they started to stay in Bengal. Barthema, Barbosa. Ceasar Frederick, Ralfe Fitch and Portuguese described that a large number of Arabian Muslim traders lived in in Sonargaon and Hooghly.¹⁷ In the 15th century Arabians emerged as a powerful community and thus Arabians got a chance to make their kingdom with the throne of Saiyed Alauddin

Hossain Shah (1493-1517). It was a wealthy state till the defeat of Saiyed by Shershah Suri in 1538. Obviously, this kingdom lured other Arabians from many countries to live in Bengal.

Most of the Bengali family Residents had originated from Arabian hereditary. Chistia Shekh Akhi Sirajuddin Ushman of Bangladesh was from the Koresh dynasty. Famous fakir Sheikh Alaul Hoque and Hajarat Noor Kutbul Alam were also from Arab.¹⁸ We can know about Arab patronymic from Bengali literature. One of Muslim poets Muhammad Khan (1646) claimed that he is the heir of a Sufi family named Mahisawar at the time of Badar Shah. BadarShah was a commander; Sultan Fakiruddin Mubarak and Muslim victor of Chattyogram and Kajal khan Gajnabi respected him. Mahi Sawdar married a Brahmin girl and gave birth to a son whose name was Hatem. Hatem's son was Sadik and Sadik's son was Rasti Khan who was the ruler of Chattagram under Sultan Barbak Shah (1459-1474) and he made 'Alaul Masjid' (874*hijri*/1473). Risti khan's son Mina khan known as Paragal Khan was the ruler of Chattagram at the time of Sultan Hossain shah. Some say that Mina Khan's son Gabun khan and Chuti khan marshal of Tripura and Assam victor Husain Shah is the same person. Gabur Khan's son Hamza khan was Amirja khan as described by Portuguese. He was the leader of Chattyogram at the time of Sultan Muhammad Shah. Poet Muhammad Khan's father Mubarik Khan was the grand-grand-son of Hamja Khan. Many people in Bengal explore their dynasty connected with Arabian merchants and fakirs. This reflects the image of Arabian colony after Muslim victory in Bengal. In the Abbas Khalifa, Persian Arabia language speaking people was also voyagers and traders like Arabians. They also made trade relations with Orient. Rationally we can say that some Iranians were also there in Chattagram with Muslims. Many Iranian teachers, traders, preachers, saint, came to Bengal and started to live there. Muslim historian Minhaj first described about Iranians. Minhaj wrote, one Impahani merchant from Laxmanawati have lost all of his wealth at the time of Aladdin Ali Murdan khalji. Then he asks for help to khalji.¹⁹ It proved that the Iranian traders existed at

the time of Muslim rulers. According to Bartheima and Barbosa, many Iranian merchants lived at the port areas. Persia is the origin of Sufism. Many Sufis had come from there to Bengal. Famous Sufi Sekh Jalaluddin Tabriji was Iranian. He spread Islamism in north Bengal. According to a letter of Hajarat Meer Sayad Ashraf Jahangir Simnamee, many followers of Shekh Jalaluddin Tabriji and Shekh Sihauddin Soharaowadeer made Bengal a holy land. Hazrat Sharfuddin Abu Tawama was a famous Iranian Sufi. He lived in Sonargaon with his whole family. Many Iranian lived there as royal servants. In the words of Minhaj, Baba kotwal was a Nagar Kotwal under Muhammad Bin Bakhtier Khalji.²⁰ When Mongols attacked Persia, many Iranians came to Bengal. When Shah Suja was Subahdar many Iranian had worked as royal servants under him. Meer Jumla, Sayesta Khan who ruled over Bengal was also an Iranian. That's why they showed much more favour to their countrymen. Nadir Shah attacked India and north Bengal was suffering from immense disaster. Many Iranians floated like rivers in Bengal. After the death of Nadir Shah, Persia was suffering from indiscipline and again so many Iranians came to Bengal. Contemporary history described many Iranians Muhajir. Ali-Bin-Tufayel, the writer of Tarikh-E-Mansoori was also an Iranian; he wrote Nawab Sujauddin gave shelter to many Iranians. Hakeem Meer Muhammad Hadi, a medical fractioned under Nawab Sujauddin was also an Iranian. He left a famous medical team in Bengal. Golam Husain gave a list of Iranian doctors, teachers, and scholars of Nawab Alibardi Khan. They are Muhammad Aal-Modobed Ali, Shah Muhammad Hasan, Saiyed Muhammad Ali, Haji Badruddin, Meer Muhammad Ali Fajal, Naki Ali Khan, Meer Muhammad Alim, Mulabi Muhammad Arif, Meer Rustam Ali, Shah Muhammad Amin, Shah Adam, Haibat Beg, Shah Khajar, Saiyad Meer Muhammad Sajjar, Saiyed Alim Ullah, Shah Haidary, Meer Muhammad Ali, Jayar Hossain Khan, TokeeKuli Khan, Haji Abdullah, Ali Ibrahim and Haji Ibrahim Muhammad Khan.²¹

History writer Yusuf Ali, Golam Hossein Tabatabai, Karam Ali and so on were Iranian. Thus, we can see the people who had come from Iran were not a few numbers at the time of Nawab. Habbsians came here as servants. Once upon a time 8000 Habbsy served under Barbak Shah. The Sultan was highly pleased by their jobs and gave some of them high positions of royal service. Islamism does not allow the difference between master and servant. Thus, Abyssinian servants took high positions by their ability. Day by day they became popular and established their kingdom. Later they were excluded by Sultan Hossain Shah for their violent nature. But some of them started to live here with Muslim people.²²

Many Turks Muslim came to Bengal. Successor Muhammad-Bin Bakhtier Khalji brought a troop of soldiers at the time of Laxman Sen. Minhaj said Muhammad-Bin Bakhtier Khalji leads his 10,000 horse-troop at the time of Tibet mission. However, the soldiers, who came with Khalji, also came with his family. In the description of Minhaj, many turkey soldiers died in Tibet mission. For that, wives of all the soldiers blamed on Muhammad Bin Khalji. According to *Tabakat-E-Nasiri*, Muhammad Bin Bakhtier Khalji's companion GiasuddinKhalji (first Hushamuddin Awaj) had come with his family.²³

Turks Muslim came to Bengal with every new ruler. Many Ilbari Turkeys came with Mugisuddin Turgil, ruler of Balban. To rule over Bengal and to attract or self-preserve, they needed too much soldier. And thus, three thousand soldiers came with Sultan Giasuddin Balban.²⁴ After defeating Turgil, sultan made her younger son Bugra Khan the ruler of Bengal. Bugra Khan had his own troop but his father also supplied him soldiers for emergencies. Many other Ilbari Turkeys came into Bengal with the successor Balban dynasty, Khalji. At the time of Tughluk Sultan in Delhi, a gang of korona Turkey came into Bengal. Farukhuddin Mubarak Shah, the independent sultan and Haji Shamsuddin Elios Shah independent sultanate needed more corps to rebel with Delhi authority. Authority transferred their capital from Daulatabad to Delhi. Thus, Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq city and other area

were suffering from great disasters. Then the sultan sent his people to Bengal because at that time Bengal was able to provide food.²⁵

Afganians were salaried servant under Turkish ruler. Habbsy sultan had thousand Afganian soldiers. Sultan Hossain shah also had Afganian soldiers. Sultan Ibrahim Lodi's brother Mahmud Lodi and his family and Husain Shah's son and his heir took shelter under sultan Nusrat Shah. Nusrat Shah married the daughter of sultan Ibrahim Lodi. After defeating Bengal and ruining Kororani rulers in Bihar and Lohani rulers in Odisha. Many Afganian established their colony. Reportedly, last Kororani Afgan ruler Daud had 40,000 horse troops, 14,000 sultan, 3699 companions of elephant 20000 cannons and hundred warships.²⁶ Sultan Hossain Sharqi was exiled from Jaunapur by sultan Sikandar Sheikh. Then he took shelter under Alauddin Hossain Shah. He took responsibility to feed all the new sheltered.

Mughal royal servants were employed in Bengal to serve their jobs. According to Badayuni, Akbar exiled many Ulemas into Bengal. It was very difficult for Mughal to reign in Bengal because of Zamindar. Beside that Mughal seized Hindu states like Cooch Behar, Kamrup, Kachar, Jayantiya, and Tripura. Thus, they send a large troop into Bengal. '*Bahabistan-E-Gayebee*' and '*Subaha-E-Sadik*' revealed that including three generations of that soldier was dedicated to serve royal duties and lived there. Mirza Nathan said that some servants and he too made houses at Jessore. According to *Akbarnama*, Emperor Akbar gave Jahangir freely to his royal employer and soldier Abul Fazal said that Akbar granted more than hundred jaghirs. Mirza Nathan said, Jahangir also gave Jaghir to his man. Mirza Nathan's father Ihatiman Khan got jagir at Sonabaju distributed among his servants. Tukmak Khan had a jagir in Sahajadpur. We can see in the description of Mirza Nathan, when Jahangir was on the throne, all the Mughal servants had their own Jaghir in Bengal. This Mughal soldier described chronologically in a book, "it was heavy raining and it was difficult to maintain the assemblage in Alap Singha. Thus, they return their Jahangir at the order of

Islam Khan." They all lived there for many years. Shah Suja had a huge number of followers among all the Mughals. Those followers never returned to their own place and started to live here together with the people of Bengal.²⁷ In this way so many Iranian, Muslims, Arabians, Mughals, Afghans, Habbsynians came to Bengal and established their habitation or villages to live here.

Expansion of Muslims Settlement:

It is needed to investigate about the outsider and converted Muslims and solves the riddle what scholars and *pandits* intertwine in their minds. These questions are how did Muslims become a major community in Bengal whereas Bengal was the last state won by the Muslim rulers? What are the origins of Bengali Muslims? It was absolutely a surprising matter to census authority. They revealed that Delhi, Agra and North Bengal was the centre of rulers and traditions for many years but few Muslims lived there. Although Bengal was the last state, it was an inhabitation centre of Muslim people and in 1901 they raised around 41% among total population.²⁸ H. Riley comments "the largest number of people lived in Punjab and Sindhu because those areas are in that place through which Afghans and Mughals came into India. But at the first stage they are not sure about their population in Bengal". According to census report in 1941, Muslim people were 55% of total population and in Bengal it was 66% of total population. When regular census started in 1872, British rulers became surprised to see the majority of Muslim people. The problem was solved with an illogical comment by H. Beverly and H. H. Risley. They thought all Bengali Muslims were converted from low caste Hindu. It effects on British rulers and writers. Beverly wrote, "but May Muslim majority was in delta areas, low caste people like Chandal, Rajbangsi of this area been converted into Islam."²⁹ To prove this statement he said, there are similarities in personality, culture and traditions in between low caste Hindus and converted Muslims. After an anthropological test of the noses of 185 low caste poisoning Muslims, H. Risley said,

Bengali Muslim been converted from Chandal, Koch, Rajbangsi.³⁰ It is remarkable that he examined the noses of low caste Hindu people too.

TABLE-1.1

Ethnographic test result of H. Risely:

Tribes	Average Height of Nose	Average Length of Nose
Brahmin	497	35
Muslim	494	383
Kayasthas	502	353
Bagdi	467	367
Chandal	962	367
Goyala(Milkman)	49	364
Kaivarta	48	366
Maali(Gardener)	43.9	41.5
Muchi(Shoemaker)	49.1	41
Podda	49.1	36.8
Rajbangshi	48.9	37.5
Sadgop	45.6	377

Source: H. H.Risely, *Tribes and Castes in Bengal*, Vol- 1, 1891, p. 91.

It would be wrong to make a prejudice about the physical personality of all Muslims people only because of some low caste imprisoning Muslim.³¹ It can be said through research that some Muslims have more handsome, slim and neb nose than high caste Hindu. Fazle Rabbi was true that Mr. Risely was trying to insult Bengali Muslim. Non-anthropological statement cannot define the physical beauty of Muslim. Rather history can enlighten the castes. According to census report in 1872 at the time of British ruler revealed a truth that Muslim population raised in much number at that time. C.J.O. Denel said in 1891 of a census

reports, 'In 1872 Muslim people were less in 5 lakhs than Hindu. Now, (1891) they have overcome, with 15 lakhs more than Hindu'.³² He also wrote 'according to statistics, from 1872, Muslim people turn into large number among 10,000. In north Bengal 10 people, East Bengal 262 people and in West Bengal 101, total 157 Muslims are excess. 'Mr. Denel said "The raises of Muslim people are pure and massive. "If it is going on, then within 650 years, the religion of Muhammad becomes a universal religion and in East Bengal it will be similar within 600 years."³³

Above discussions are absolutely meaningful. It reflects that the number of Muslim people rose because of their growth rate of high birth. "From 1872 to 1881 in undivided Bengal, Hindu people growth rate was less than 1% and Muslim people growth rate was more than 7%. From 1881 to 1891, Muslim people growth rate was 9.6% and Hindu people growth rate was 4.7%." According to next census report, again Muslim people growth rate was higher; thus, their growth rate was recorded 10% in 1901 and 10.4% in 1911. It is to be said that the growth rate was higher in East Bengal, 123% from 1891 to 1901.³⁴ Hindu people growth rate was 4.8% and 3.9% in 1901 and 1911. In 1872 there was only Hindu majority. But in 1911 Hindu people growth rate was 45.2% and Muslim people growth rate was 52.30.³⁵ In 1872 Bengali Muslim people were 16,370,967; in 1901 they turned into 24,237,228 people and in 1941 it became 3 crore 70 lakhs. However, at this same time Hindu majority turned into 3 crore 10 lakhs from 1 crore 7 lakhs.

Above discretion proved that Muslim people growth rate was higher in number than Hindu people; especially in East Bengal. This growth rate during 70 years astonished census authority; nothing but immense birth rate was the main cause of this majority. In 1891, census report author says "it is sure that physical relation is the main cause than ideology for the growth of Muslim people."³⁶ Mr. J.A. was said in the census report in 1901, "Muslim people growth rate was higher than Hindu people. It was not for mere conversion. Because

this kind of people are less recorded. Multimarriage (polygamy), remarriage of widows, difference between the age of husband and wife are the causes of this kind of high birth rate."³⁷

There are not any other causes for this kind of Muslim population at the time of British rulers. It was a situation when there were no converted Muslims and also migrations of foreign Muslims did not happen at that time. No doubt Polygamy, nutrient food and so on are the causes of high birth rate of Muslims in Bengal in the time of British rulers.

TABLE-1.2

Growth of Muslim population in 1872-1941

Census Report	Total Population in India	Total Muslim Population in India	Total Population in Bengal	Muslim Population in Bengal	Hindu Population in Bengal	Comments
1872	25 corer, 50 lakhs	-	36,769,735	16,370,967	18,102,348 (1 crore 63 lakhs are appropriate)	Many non-religions counted as Hindu. Pure Hindu people were 10 crore 68 lakhs
1881	-	4 crore, 99.5 lakhs 19.97% in total population	35,607,628	1,86,411	17,254,120	Population reduced after attaching Sylhet with Assam

Census Report	Total Population in India	Total Muslim Population in India	Total Population in Bengal	Muslim Population in Bengal	Hindu Population in Bengal	Comments
1891	287,223,431		38,277,338	19,582,481	18,068,655	
1901	-	-	-	21,907,980	20,150,541	The Growth rate in 10 years of Muslim 10% Hindu 4.8%
1911	-	-	-	24,237,228	20,945,379	The Growth rate in 10 years of Muslim 10.4% and Hindu 3.9%
1641	38 crore, 89 lakhs	9 crore, 5lakhs 24.28% in total population	Roughly 7 crore	3 crore, 70 lakhs	3 crore 10 lakhs	Influence by political issues Hindu Muslim both grew their population

Source: Mohammad Saduzzaman, 'BangalarSamajik O SangskritikItihas'-Vol-1, (Bengali Translation of "Social and Cultural History of Bengal" By Dr. M. A., Rahim.) Bangla Academy Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1995, pp. 41.

In 70 years (1872-1941) Indian population growth rate is 52%. In 60 years (1881-1941) Indian Muslim population grew double 4 Crore 99.5 lakhs to 9 Crore 44.5 lakhs. In 70 years, 1872-1941 Bengal Muslim population grew in double 1Crore 60 lakhs to 30 crore 70 lakhs, growth rate is 131.2%. In years 1872 Muslim population was less than Hindu population average 5 lakhs, but in 1861 they overcame Hindu population by 15 lakhs. In 70 years 1872 -1941 Hindu population growth rate was 1 crore 8 lakhs to 3 crore 10 lakhs; 1 crore 40 lakhs, 82.3%. East Bengal Muslim population was highest in number.³⁸

Muslim majority effects on Bengali literature too. Poet Mukundaram said 'Hajjams are won't be able to take rest for so many khatna (circumcision) of Muslim children'. Polygamy was a very common social custom. Rulers and rich people marry numberless women and feed them. Poet Bipraprasad said about farmer Hasan in Hasanhati that Hasan spends his days with his hundred wives happily." Bipraprasad said this in his poetic language. Because, any Muslim couldn't marry more than four wives. Somehow Hasan had four wives and other women were maids of their harem. Portuguese visitor Barbosa also said about this polygamy custom in '*Bagala*' city. He said "each rich Muslims have their four wives." Poet Bipraprasad said " Hasanhati Muslims marry again and again and live their life with so many women." Hindu community did not allow the marriage of widows but on the other hand Muslims did. Difference between the age of husband and wife is the fact of so many widows. 10- or 12-years old girls were forced to marry 50- or 60-years old men. We can find so many examples in Bengali literature. These are the facts of being a minority of Hindu population. In 70 years (1872) in Bengal Muslim people growth rate was 131.2%. In 1941 both Muslim and Hindu people were bulging out for political reasons.³⁹ Thus it would be proper to depend on census reports from 1872 to 1911. In forty years, Muslim population revised with 50% (1crore 60 lakhs to 2crore 40 lakhs) and Hindu population raised with 23.5% (1crore 70lakhs to 2crore 10 lakhs). So, in hundred years, Muslim and Hindu population decorously raised

with 125% and 60%. According to census report there were no converted Muslim people in the time of British rulers. So many Muslims came from North India for Government services making trade relations. This is the cause of 25% growth of them. So, they raised their population 100% in 100 years. According to this poll the number of Muslim people was 82 lakhs in 1772. In a review of the population of Bengal, before 1772, the great Disaster in 1770 is the cause of the death of 1/4 people. Before this great disaster Muslim and Hindu people were gradually 1 crore 9 lakhs and 1 crore 41 lakhs, total 2 crore 50 lakhs. However, there were also other communities. Recently we have discussed that many other communities had established their habitation in Bengal.⁴⁰

Recently it is to be said that 1,000 Arabians had come into Bengal in 1220 and 14th and 15th century, at the time of the reign of Elias Shah and Hussain Shah, there were 2000 Arabian residents. Bengal victor Muhammad-Bin-Bakhtiar-Khilji; brought so many soldiers with him. Reportedly, he commanded 10,000 soldiers in the mission Tibet and at the same time he also took responsibility to protect them. Many Khalji, Turkish came with their wives or whole families. In view of this situation, we can know that 40,000 Khalji Turkish had come with their wives and children in between 40 years. At the time of Nasuruddin Bugra Khan, son of Balban, 15,000 Ilbari Turks including women, men, children as residential people in Bengal. In the way about 5,000 Koran Turkish had come to Bengal at the time of Tughluk Sultan in Delhi. About 8,000 Abyssinians were there at the time of Barbak Shah in mid-15th century. At the time of Afghan rulers, there were not less than 2,00,000 Afghanians. At the time of Emperor Jahangir, total number of Mughals, soldiers, women and others were 15,000. Muslim incoming was prohibited at the time of Emperor Alamgir.⁴¹ So there were not a few newcomers. Here comes the following chart:

TABLE-1.3**Establishment of Pre- Resident:**

Arabian	1770	1,000 people within 5 centuries	48.000
	1220		
	1400-1500	2,000 people within 3 centuries	16.000
Iranian	1220	1000 people within 5 centuries	48,000
	1576-1756	50,000 people within 1 century	1,50,000
Khalji Turks	1220	40,000 people within 5 centuries	16,00,000
Ilbari Turks	1330	15,000 people 4 centuries	4,20,000
Karona Turks	1320	5000 people within 4 centuries	1,20,000
Abyssinian	1450	8000 people 3 centuries	32,000
Afghan	1570	2,00,000 people 2 centuries	8,00,000
Mughals	1620	15,000 people 1 centuries	37,500

Source: Mohammad Saduzzaman, *BangalarSamajik O SangskritikItihas'*- Vol-1, (Bengali Translation of "Social and Cultural History of Bengal" By Dr. M. A., Rahim.) Bangla Academy Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1995, pp44.

Before the terrible famine in 1770, the total number of Bengali Muslim were 1crore 6lakhs and 30 lakhs 27 thousand were external Muslims, 70 lakhs 33 thousand were converted Muslims. If we count the growth of birth rate as 100% then we can see that before 2 centuries, the external and converted Muslims were 8lakhs and Hindus were 41 lakhs. That time in Bengal, the total population was 68lakhs and Buddhist and others were 70 lakhs.

There were 39.6% Muslims in this state. 29.6% external Muslims and 70.40% converted Muslims were in Bengal.⁴²

Conversion of Buddhists and higher-class Hindus:

A number of Muslims had been converted from higher class Hindu people. There is much evidence that many Brahmins and kayastha girls married into Ruling class Muslim family. This time, rulers or rich Muslims did not want to make any relationship with lower caste Hindus. Only high cultured and educated Brahmins or kayestha got the opportunity to make relations with Muslims. Marriage was a method to make a bonding between two communities. Reputedly, Sultan Shamsuddin Elias Shah married a Brahmin widow and named her Fulmati Begam who gave birth to the children of Sultan.⁴³ Poet Muhammad Khan said, his grand-grand-father Mahi Sawar married a Brahmin girl. For this marriage, Mahi Sawar had a famous family of brave rulers at the time of Elias Shahi and Hussain Shahi.⁴⁴ A Hindu poet named Vijay Gupta in the 15th century described a marriage of a higher caste Hindu woman with a kaji who was a scholar of Hindu sastra. This woman gave birth to kaji's son. Legend Isha Khan, the leader of '*Masnad-E-Ala*' of Barbhuiyan, married Sonamoyee, the nephew of famous Brahmin Zamindar Kedar Ray at Sripur. Sonamoyee gave birth to Isha Khan's two sons named Adam Khan and Bairam Khan. Some said that these two men also married two daughters of Kedar Ray.⁴⁵ Shamsar Ghaji described in his book that he himself married a Brahmin girl.⁴⁶ At the end we can say that Muslims people married higher caste Hindu women. If we do not consider local reports, still there we can see the tradition of marriage between Muslims and higher caste Hindu women. We have given only a few examples. It is not true that all converted Muslims are come from low caste Hindu people. There are so many educated Hindu people were attracted by Islamism and been converted into Islam. Brahmins and Kayesthas were highly educated and traditional. They got the respected position at the durbar of Muslim rulers. These Hindu people who were royal

servants, neighbour and powerful got the opportunity to make a connection between Muslim tradition and them. Muslim people also got the opportunity to study Hindu culture. Some Hindus attracted by Sumahan ideology in Islam and took shelter under it. According to a Sanskrit ancient book named *Amritakhandā*, we can know that one of Vedanta Brahmins came from vow in Laxmanabati at the time of Muslim rulers. He discussed philosophy with kaji Rukunuddin and took to Islamism. This same book also said about one more sadhu named Amvanath of Kamrup who also converted into Islam.⁴⁷ There is no doubt that son of king Kans, Yadu also took Islam. He was a powerful and higher-class Brahmin child. After conversion he named as Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah. He was the founder of a royal family in Bengal.⁴⁸ The marshal of Solayem and Daud Khan, Kalapahar was a converted Muslim from kayestha custom. He became famous after winning Odisha at the time of SolayemKararani. In 1576, Kalapahar was injured in the war of Rajmahal.⁴⁹ Maybe there he died. We can gather much information from contemporary historians. Isha Khan's father Kalidas Gajdani was a Rajput kshatriya under the royal authority of Hussain Shahi Sultan. He took Islamism and was named as Solayman. He married a girl of the family of Hussain Shahi and gave birth of Islam Khan and Isha Khan.⁵⁰ Khan Jahan's vizier Muhammad Tahir of Bagerhat was a Brahmin. He is named as '*Pir Ali*'. According to Mirza Nathan Raghu, the son of ZaminderRajarai at Sahajadpur in Pabna district, took Islamism at the time of Islam Khan Subadar. Murshid Quli Khan, the Nawab of Bengal was also a southern Hindu Brahmin. Similarly, there are so many examples that Hindus took shelter under Islamism for peace of mind. Zamindar of Singhatia, Kamaluddin and Jalaluddin were Brahmins. They disgraced socially to make relation with Muslims rulers. That's why they took Islamism from Pir Ali. Many people like them who molested by their own communities converted into Islam. Sher khani, Sreemanta khani classes came from those Brahmins and kayestha.⁵¹ Many Travellers and poets said about those conversions and no matter whether the causes are social or

religious. Poet Brindaban Das also said in Chaitanya Bhagwat that "Hindu Brahmins willingly took Islamism." Portuguese merchant came into Bengal in 1581 and wrote "king is a moor; he is a great and wealthy ruler. He rules over Hindu kingdom. Many Hindus getting converted into Islam to get the favour of king." If we look at the contemporary Bengali literature, then we can see whenever any Brahmin took Islam, he had tried to include his family too. There are descriptions of 3 Brahmins in the book of "*Victory of Rasal*" by Shekh Chand who took Islam and included their whole family too. Many times, when Brahmins defeated by Muslim Ulema in the religion or political debate, they forced to make their conversion. At the court of Shekh Jalaluddin and king Laxman, many Hindu pundits defeated at religious debate and converted into Islam; however, there is not any pure evidence. Moreover, we can say that many Brahmins made their conversion for their defeat. Above discussion proved that many Brahmins and kayestha came into Muslim community; thus, Bengali Muslim was the leader of those converted Muslims whose ancestries were higher class Hindus. In this way, those Buddhists and tortured Hindus also are counted as Muslim who came under the shelter of Islamism. Most Buddhists were kshatriya or kayestha. We already know that Buddhism and Jainism emerged by the torture of Brahmins. These people were belonging to second class Hindu people.⁵² So, after their conversion many people came into Muslim society. Now we can say that more than 70% converted Muslims came from Buddhism and higher-class Hindu people and 30% from lower class Hindu people.⁵³ Thus, it is mere false statement that all converted Bengali Muslim are from lower class Hindu people. According to the census report there are two reasons for the conversion of non-Muslims. These are either forcefully or through a caste system. Boverly said, Muslims were always ready to make their victory approved by using weapons as well as Koran. Some say, Sultan Jalaluddin(yadu) wanted to finish all Hindu people at that time. Moreover, Islamism was a liberal religion. That's why Hindus of lower class and tortured one are attracted to Islamism.

They did not get any respect from their own religion.⁵⁴ It is not true that they only forcefully converted. From census reports of 1891 and 1901, we can know that at this time there were few converted people in Bengal. It is remarkable, at the time of British rulers, although Muslim people was suffering from social and political absences, so many people been converted into Islam willingly rather forcefully. On this ground we can say the information which proved that Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah wanted to finish Hindu communities is mere false statement. He didn't torture Hindus but favour them. He was a great supporter of Sanskrit *pandits*. He has a court where he used to invite Hindu *kavi* (poets), *pandit* and intellectual people. He titled Sanskrit pandit Brihaspati with 'Rai Mukut' and other five titles. He also gave him wealth and so many precious stones. Maybe he was angry with the Brahmins who organized the '*Suddhi*'(purification) ceremony to purify Hindus. After all the ceremonies and rituals still, those people counted as outcaste. If Muslim rulers forced them, they would not able to dwell there for five hundred years long. Muslim rulers were tolerant and liberal. Only for these Muslim rulers Vaishynava dharma has been emerged as a powerful class. Great inherent ideology is the cause of expanded Islamism what attracted educated and intellectual people in Bengal. Islamism brought a relief warrant to tortured Buddhists. Brahmins tortured Buddhists very badly. We get information from a table of Nalanda that the Barman king burned more than half Buddha Bihar at Sombihar.⁵⁵ Tibetan Buddhist saints came into Bengali in the 16th century and described that Buddhists were tortured by Brahmins so brutal. These people welcomed by Muslim community and they helped Muhammad-Bin-Bakhtiar Khalji to win Bengal.⁵⁶ In the first era of Bengali literature, we can get the description how Brahmins tortured upon Buddhist and forced to go under the tree of Islam. Poet of 14th century, Ramai Pandit said– "sixteen hundred families are there in Jajpur. They travelled many places to collect their bounty. They nab too much money as tax from the people of Maldah. Fraudulence is their nature. They become very powerful. All the

time they are cursing people here and there. Common people getting and afraid with them. They believe that they can destroy nature with Veda mantras. Common people prayed to religion itself to save them. One man came with black scurf and took bow and arrow as Yaban (unknown Muslim). They called one god– who is shapeless. All devtas (gods) came together. Brahma as Muhammad; Vishnu as Paygambar; Shiva as Adam; Ganesha as Gaji; Kartika as Kaji; Hindu saints as Muni; Shekhs as Muslim saints; Indra as Maulana; Chandra, Surya as Hawabibi; Padmabati as Bibi Noor. All came into Jajpur and destroyed temples and murtis and killed every culprit." Poet Ramai Pandit described a dark side of Brahmins in this way. Thus, tortured people wanted a spiritual peace and Islamism gave them this opportunity. Poet also said that God was also unhappy with those Brahmins and took avatar as Muslim saints to defeat them.⁵⁷

The role of Sufi saints in the spread of Muslim society in Bengal:

Every region of the Indian subcontinent was the abode of the Sufis and the scene of their spiritual activities. Everywhere they have left an impact on their character and work. Bangladesh was once blessed with the presence of a large number of saints and their influence in this region is much deeper and more lasting than anywhere else. The majority of Muslims in Bengal and the mystical nature of the Bengali inhabitants bear bright evidence of this. Bengali saints served Islam and society in many ways and they made a long-lasting contribution to the betterment of Muslim society even beyond the Muslim conquerors, generals and rulers.

Hundreds of Sufi saints and their followers came to Bengal at different times and spread to different towns and villages and even to the secluded corners of the province. Their objective was to promote religion and propagate mysticism and heavenly love. In this way they helped in the moral and mental improvement of the people at large. Their exemplary moral character and their deep sympathy and service to the society and to the downtrodden

drew the non-Muslim masses to them as well. Added to this was the generosity and cultural supremacy of Islam that the Sufi men presented to the followers of idealism and also the oppressed and degraded people of the society. So, the preaching of all these ideal men attracted equally the Buddhists, the non-Muslims and the Hindus of all classes under the cordial and gentle shelter of Islam.⁵⁸ As a result of the efforts of Sheikh Jalal ud-Din Tabrizi and his followers, significant descriptions of the districts of Maldah and Dinajpur in North Bengal show that they were baptized and tread the path of spirituality. A contemporary account of this Sufi ascetic reveals that upon their arrival in Pandua, a large crowd gathered around him and embraced Islam at his hands. Many people of North Bengal were baptized in the religion of Islam by renowned Chishtia Sufi men like Ankhi Siraj, Alaul Haque and Nur Qutb Alam. According to Ibn Battuta, the people of Sylhet were attracted to Sheikh Jalal's (Shah Jalal) religious preaching and were converted to Islam. Local literature too supports the views of this Moorish traveller. There is a mention in a folk music that, "There were millions of Hindus in Sylhet but no Muslims. Shah Jalal was the first to raise the call of Azan and preach Islam at that place."⁵⁹

Islam spread in the region of Khulna Jashohar through the efforts of Mujahid Darvesh Khan Jahan Ali. The Chittagong-Noakhali region was conquered by the Muslims in the middle of the fourteenth century. Hence, there was a large Muslim majority predominant in the region. How was this possible? In fact, it was the immortal glory of the Muslim Sufi saints; they entered this non-Muslim region and with great patience and perseverance spread the religion of Islam and its faith among the masses. The fame of the Sufi saints became popular among the locals. Many of these legends may be difficult to accept in the absence of accurate historical evidence, but they do reflect the extensive missionary work of Sufi saints in different parts of Bengal.

Bengali literature reveals that the Muslims of East Bengal had considerable influence in the late thirteenth century. According to the poet Krittibas, the Muslim influence increased so much that the Brahmins of East Bengal had to leave their ancestral home in fear of amalgamation with the Muslims. The poet writes that his ancestor Narsingh, who was a member of the court of Danuj Mardan Dev of Sonargaon, (in the late thirteenth century), had left East Bengal at that time and moved to West Bengal. Sonargaon had not been conquered by the Muslims before in the second half of the thirteenth century. So how did the number of Muslims in that area increase so much at that time. This indicates that there were many Muslims in the Sonargaon area before it came under Muslim occupation. Sheikh Sharfud-Din Abu Tawama established '*Khanqah*' and Islamic Education Centre in Sonargaon in the 70s of the 13th centuries. The establishment of an Islamic educational institution for the education of Muslims in the area reinforced the idea that before Sheikh Tawama reached Sonargaon, there were Muslim residents there beforehand. The existence of a Muslim population in Sonargaon before it was conquered by the Muslims was the result of the propaganda activities of the Sufi saints.⁶⁰

Expansion and solidarity of the Muslim state:

In addition to the spread of Islam, Muslim Sufi saints played a significant role in the expansion of the Muslim state of Bangladesh and in the constitution of the Muslim state. Sometimes they themselves, in collaboration with the Muslim generals, established Muslim rights to the last frontier of the province. Local legends mention the jihad of some Sufi men against Hindu kings for religion, such as Baba Adam Shaheed, Shah Sultan Mahi-sawar, Makhdum Shah Daulla and others. Some of the saints joined Muslim rulers and generals to expand the religious boundaries in Bengal and to alleviate the miseries of the Muslim subjects living in the areas of small Hindu kings and zamindars. The presence of Sufi saints

in the Muslim army had given rise to a huge moral and spiritual force and upliftment among the soldiers. In this way the Muslim soldiers became victorious over the non-Muslim soldiers.

Mujahid Darvesh Jafar Khan Ghazi and Shah Safi-ud-Din fought against the Hindu king of Sat Gai and included the region in the Muslim kingdom of Bangladesh. Shah Jalal and his disciples collaborated with Sikandar Ghazi's Muslim army in the war against the Hindu king of Sylhet and established Muslim dominance there. Although based on folk lore, it is true that Sufi Mujahid Khan Jahan Ali conducted regular expeditions to the remote areas of Khulna Jashor and turned it under Muslim rule. Ismail Gazi's contribution to the expansion of Sultan Barbak Shah's kingdom is well known. He successfully fought against the Hindu kingdom of Orissa and conquered the area of Mandaran. According to a popular legend, Sufi saint Shah Mahmud Ghaznabi established Muslim rule in Mangalkot of Burdwan district by fighting against a Hindu zamindar. There are many more such hearsays about the contribution of Sufi saints in the spread of Muslim rights in different parts of Bengal.

The contribution of Sufi saints in the consolidation of Muslim rule in Bengal was also significant. In fact, in addition to the military and geographical conquests of Muslim generals, the Sufi-saints added moral victory to Islam by recruiting disciples and disciples, thus providing a source of responsibility and power for the Muslim state in a non-Muslim country. Without the silent pursuit of the saints, it became a problem for the Muslim rulers to dominate a large number of people of different religions, relying on only a small number of troops.

These saints had saved the Muslim state and society during the times of danger and crisis. There are many stories of folklore that Sufi saints came to the Muslims and guided them as their guardians on the day of their misfortune and calamity. The Hindu kings and zamindars have stopped the oppression of Muslims by their outstanding spiritual and moral power; they have stopped the oppression of the Muslims in the hands of the Hindu kings and

zamindars. If moral strength was not effective enough in defending the Muslims, they had also taken up arms. Hayyat Nur QutbAlam saved the Muslim state and society of Bangladesh from destruction. As a result of the liberal rule of Ilyas Shah Sultan, the Hindus occupied the high, dignified posts of the kingdom and the Hindu servant Raja Kansa was established the head of state. King Kansa tortured and persecuted the saints and waged a religious war against the Muslims and as a result, the Muslims of Bengal had to face a calamity. Nur QutbAlam devoted himself to spiritual pursuits; he could not remain indifferent to the fate of the Muslim community and the state in that moment of crisis. He devoted himself to uniting the Muslims by overcoming their differences. He sought the help of Ibrahim Saki to save the Muslims of Bengal. The Muslim state and society were saved from a catastrophe and became stronger because he came to the aid of the Muslims in this calamity. In this way, Nur Qutb Alam was the savior of Muslim Bengal. As a result of his work force, Muslims were established in harmony and a new force of state and society was produced. In reality, his contribution to the progress of the Bangladesh Muslim community was very important.

The Sufi saints and *Darvesh* were proponents of Islamic principles in the system of governance of the Muslim state of Bangladesh. Usually, they did not interfere in the affairs of the state. But they never remained indifferent in the days of danger to the Muslim state and society. The Sultans of Bengal like Ilyas Shahi adopted a policy of recruiting more Hindus in their system of governance and placed them in positions of responsibility in the state. Following such a national policy, they felt the need for the cooperation of the majority Hindus in defending their sultanate against the imperialists of Northern India and wished to build the source of their power on the patriotism of the Bengali people. But at that time, the *Darvesh* and *Ulema* considered it inappropriate to appoint Hindus to responsible positions in the state. Sheikh AlaulHaq realized that pursuing such a policy had the potential to endanger the Bengali Muslims. That is why Sheikh Alaul Haq warned Sultan Sikandar Shah about this.

But the Sultan did not listen to him; and moreover, fearing the Sheikh's great influence on the people of Pandua, he exiled him to Sonargaon. Subsequent events have shown that Sheikh Alaul was completely wrong in his review of politics. If Sultan Sikandar had taken the advice of Shah Sheikh, then the sufferings of the Muslims due to the establishment of Hindu supremacy through Raja Kansa and the dangers that the Muslim state and society faced during the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah could have been avoided from the outset.

Even, Hazrat Maulana, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi had informed Sikandar Shah and his successor Ghiyasud-Din Azam Shah about the impropriety of appointing a large number of Hindus to high positions in the Muslim state of Bangladesh. The Sheikh then in his letter referred to the Bengali Sultan the *Quranic* prohibition on intimacy with unbelievers, "Those of you who believe, do not give your inwardness, to those who are in the outer row." He also quoted the words of the Muslim religious leaders. They say that a believer should never accept non-Muslim or strangers as trustworthy, intimate or spell case. Sheikh argues that the reason for making Hindu friends is not rational and justifiable. He quotes from the Quran to show that such a policy would bring misery and sedition to the Muslim state. The non-believers will never back down from destroying the Muslim rulers and lead them astray. An unbelieving infidel may be given a job but he should not be appointed as a ruler or a manager; in short, he cannot be given the responsibility to rule over the Muslims. Allah has said, "The believers will not accept friends and help from the disbelievers, nor will they neglect Allah. If anyone does that, they will not be helped by Allah in anything. You will only be warned so that you can protect yourself from them (the non-believers)." Sheikh also says that, "There are warnings in the Qur'an, *Hadith* and historical books against those who have given authority to the unbelievers over the believers. Allah bestows wealth and provisions on people from unexpected sources, and He delivers them from their hands." Human resources have a promise of victory and prosperity. The defeated unbelievers hang

their heads down and wield power and authority and rule the country under them. But in the land of Islam, they have also been appointed as royal counterpart and they now had authority over Muslims. Such incidents should not be allowed to happen.⁶¹

During the reign of Ilyas Shahi Sultan in Bengal, the letter of Hazrat Maulana Muzaffar Shams Balkhi revealed the great influence of Hindu employees in the Muslim state. This was an indication of the future danger of Muslim rule and society. Sheikh considered it his moral duty to advise Sultan Ghiyasud-Din against the stupidity of appointing Hindus to important positions of responsibility in the state. But the Sultan did not accept his advice. Disobeying this rational advice caused great suffering to his heirs and put the Muslim state in great danger. The illustrious intervention of Hazrat Nur QutbAlam freed the Muslim state from this danger.

Contribution of Sufism to Education and Culture:

Most of the Sufi saints were scholars. The lives of Maulana Sharfud-Din Abu Tawama, Makhdum Sharfud-Din Ehia Maneri, Hazrat Nizam ud-Din Auliya, Sheikh Alaul Haque, Hazrat Nur Qutb Alam and other Sufis is a perfect example of this. In fact, the origin of religious knowledge and its depth was vital for the Sufi saints of the first period of Muslim rule in Bengal and the subcontinent. Akhi Siraj ud-Din Usman's statement about accepting discipleship was supported by Nizam ud-Din Auliya. We see that many of the Sufi saints were great scholars of the era and their established monasteries were centres of learning and knowledge. These learning centres had attracted students from all over. We can mention the names of a number of Islamic learning centres which were built in the *khanqah* of the Sufi saints and their scattered enlightenment illuminated Bengal and North India.

Sheikh Sharfud-Din Abu Tawama was one of the famous scholars of the second half of the thirteenth century. He had great depth in Islamic teachings and other sciences. He

established a Madrasa in Sonargaon. Students from different parts of Bengal and even from Northern India gathered here. *Makhdum Sharfud-Din Ehia Maneri* was his most famous student at Sonargaon Academy. Sheikh Saifud-Din Abu Tawama Tasauf wrote a valuable book named '*Makamat*' on '*Tasawwuf*' or Islamic mystics. There was a widespread popularity of '*Makamat*' among the educated circles throughout the subcontinent. There is evidence that the demand for this book was in remote areas like Lahore. Written in the form of Persian poems named '*Fikah*'- Sheikh Abu Tawama was credited with writing a book based on this. Even if this book was not written by him, then it must have been one of the disciples who compiled it based on his teachings.⁶²

Makhdum Sharfud-Din Ehia Maneri, one of India's most accomplished men, was indeed a deserving student of his great teacher. He gained a reputation as a Sufi man and scholar. His bibliography bears the imprint of his profound erudition and Sufi knowledge. Few of the names of the bibliographies of Makhdum Sharfud-Din Maneri can be mentioned here. *Aajiba*, the book on mysticism written for his disciples in the form of questions and answers. An essay book about *Fawaid-e-Rukni-Haji* by Ruknuddin, *Irshadul Talebin* of the book discussion by to help the truth seekers, *Irshadul Salekin* by the Essay book on pantheism. *Risallah Al Makkiya* book written on self-philosophy. *Ma'dan Al-Mani* Essay book on Sufism compiled by the Jainbadr Arabs between 1348 and 1350 A.D. *Lutf-al-Ma'ni*- Short speech by Ma'dan Al Ma'ni. Mukh Al Ma'ni- Collected by Shihab ud-Din Halifi. *Tuhfa-e-Gayebi*- Compiled by Jain Badr Arari. *Khayan-e-pur Niyamat*- Compiled by Jain Badr Arari. *Sharah-e-Adab Al-Muridin*- Written notes on Jiya ud-Din Najib Sohrawadir's 'Adab Al-Muridin' by *Makhdum Sharfud- Din Maneri* in 765-65 AH. *Aka'id Arshafi* to discuss Sufism.

Sharfud-Din Maneri had written a large number of letters, all of which contain his profound knowledge of mysticism and Islamic theology. So far, all his letters that have been

discovered are classified under the following names: *Maktubat-e-Sadi*- Hundred letters written by Kazi Shamsuddin, the ruler of Jugar. *Maktubat-e-Dusadi* One and a half hundred letters written to various Sheikh, Qazis and Sultans. *Bishatwa Hasat* by the Letters written to Maulana Muzaffar ud-Din.

Sheikh Ali Siraj, Sheikh Alaul Haque and Hazrat Nur QutbAlam were all famous for their scholarly knowledge and skills. They were equally interested not only in the spread of spiritual knowledge but also in the spread of general education. Nur QutbAlam had established a Madrasa and later, Sultan Hussain Shah donated generously to the institution. The fame of these renowned Sufi men and scholars attracted disciples and students from all over North India and Bengal. Mir Syed Ashraf Jahangir Simnani, Sheikh Nasir ud-Din Manikpuri, Sheikh Hossain Jukkar Posh and many others from North India received spiritual knowledge and Islamic education from Sheikh Alaul Haque at his Pandua Educational Centre. The few letters found by Husamud-Din Manikpuri, Sheikh Kako and others from Hazrat Nur Alam show his deep knowledge of Islamic mysticism. Some of these letters were written to saints, *Ulema* and disciples.⁶³ Hazrat Hamid Danishmand Khanka College of Education, better known as 'Hawda' Mia, was upgraded in Bagha, Rajshahi. It was noticed by Abdul Latif, a Mughal traveller from Emperor Jahangir's Alam.

In short, the khanqah of the Bengali Sufi saints was the great center of religious and intellectual life. These centers gave birth to saints and scholars not only for Bengal but for the whole of India. Sharfud-Din Maneri, Jahangir Simnani, Nasir ud-Din Manikpuri, Sheikh Hossain Jukkar Posh, Husamud-Din, Manikpuri, Sheikh Kaku and a few others were eminent students of the spiritual and intellectual life of Bengal in North India. In this way, the saints have made important contributions to the educational advancement of the Bengali Muslims.⁶⁴

Public welfare activities by the Sufis:

The *khanqahs* of the Sufi saints turned out to be huge philanthropic institutions for the masses. This is where they began their search for the Creator and found their peace of mind and satisfied their spiritual aspirations. The *khanqah* were both hospitals and shelters where the deranged, insane and sick people sought shelter and also directly benefited. They provided medical care and sincere care to the Sheikh and his disciples. Each *khanqah* had an anchorage or a system of providing free meals to the poor and unfed people. Subject property was also donated for the maintenance of such '*langar*' or anchorages. The institutions of Sheikh Jalal ud-Din Tabreji and the famous Sufi saints of Pandua had huge stretches of revenue-free land. In this way, the *khanqah* anchorages of the saints opened a door of spiritual salvation and liberation for the distressed and calamitous people. By providing free food and shelter, the saints were able to come in contact with the poor and common people of the country and understand their feelings, hopes and aspirations.

During the Muslim period, Bangladesh was the scene of the activities of hundreds of Sufi saints. As a result, the Bengali Muslims came under their closest and direct influence. These wise saints also exemplified spiritualism and generosity in their lives. They properly dedicated themselves to the realm of spirituality and demonstrated indifference towards all the worldly pleasures and affairs and gave liberal explanations of religion.

Bengali Muslims embraced the spiritualism and generosity of all these great religious teachers. This spirituality is so deeply ingrained in the minds of the people that even today the character of Bengali Muslims has the inspiration of mysticism on one hand and aversion to the world on the other. Bengali literature, especially local folk music, is a beautiful expression of their mystical feelings.

These *khanqahs* were the meeting place of people of all faiths, Hindus and Muslims alike. These centres also became unobstructed institutions and platforms for open discussions. In this way, these institutions created a liberal and conducive environment for building understanding between the two communities. As a result, people from both classes came closer to each other and understood each other's opinions. This liberal environment gave rise to the worship of '*Satyapir*', a common cultural doctrine, and accelerated the development of Bengali literature. The liberal climate created by the Sufi saints in the country made possible a liberal reform movement in the Hindu society of Bengal and its full development took place in the Vaishnavism of Sri Chaitanya in Nabadwip.

The honesty and personality of the saints, their friendly behaviour, humanity and generosity of service attracted all classes of Hindus, both educated and uneducated. Many of them converted to Islam at the hands of the saints, while others defended their own past and religious beliefs. Yet they became ardent admirers of the Sufi saints and recognized their miraculous powers. They started worshipping the Pir and sought the blessings of the Pir in the spirit of fulfilling their inner desires. Even Hindus for centuries have been paying homage to the memory of Sufi saints with devotion and visiting the shrine in the hope of receiving their blessings. This reverence of the Hindus towards the Muslim saints and *Darvesh* is reflected in the descriptions of the Hindu poets and Bengali literature.

The author of the Sanskrit books '*Sheikh Shubhodaya*', Halayudha Mishra, mentions the deep respect of Hindus towards Sheikh Jalal ud-Din. They sought his help in the hope of deliverance from misery, and in his holy name they offered half of their property.

The poet further wrote that people prayed for his grace in the hope of healing, bearing children and good fortune. The seventeenth century Hindu poet Kshemananda is seen paying homage to the thirteenth and fourteenth century Muslim saints. The poet in the introduction of his poetry '*Manasa Mangal*' has praised many other saints apart from Senior Khan Ghazi

and Suba Khan. Another eighteenth century Hindu poet Vidyapati had paid homage to the sacred memory of the great Tapas Khwaja Moinud-Din Chishti, Zafar Khan Ghazi, Senior Khan Ghazi and Ismail Ghazi. The poet says that he composed his poem '*Satyapir's Panchali*' on the orders of the Muslim saint Satyapir. Poet Krishna Hari Das has introduced himself as a disciple of the saint named Tahir Mahmud in his poem. Muslim saints have left a deep and lasting impression on the minds of the Hindu people with their great spiritual personalities and philanthropic deeds.⁶⁵

These are just a few of the many examples. In reality, the Muslim heroic saints were rightly the symbol of the spiritual and cultural heritage of Bengal.

Marginalization of Muslim society in colonial and post-colonial Bengal:

This looks into Bengali Muslim identity in colonial Bengal and post-colonial Bengal focusing on the period from 1870 to 1920. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1918, which finally took the form of Government of India Act, 1919, had a deep impact in the politicization of community identity and hardening of religious boundaries. The reforms proposed more Indian representatives in the services, territorial representation, and the introduction of diarchy in the provinces. The fluid terrain of Bengali Muslim identity took a decisive turn in the wake of new constitutional reforms in the 1920s.⁶⁶ Under the reforms, provincial legislatures constituted at the end of 1920 were responsible for local governance and answerable to a substantially enlarged electorate. Increased elected representatives in government offices provided a new structural definition of Muslim community. A “bureaucratically fixed frame for Muslim community definition”⁶⁷ emerged and this seemed to be in sharp contrast to the public debates on Bengali culture and language that appeared in print before 1920). The colonial reforms resulted in creating the “image of a common Muslim identity, fixed by state definition,”⁶⁸

In the context of South Asia, the case of Bengal has assumed especial salience with regard to the question of Muslim identity formation. In 1871, the colonial census revealed that in the province of Bengal, Muslims were a numerical majority.

Subsequently, scholars have studied how and why a dense and numerically large Muslim population emerged at the frontiers of the Mughal Empire (i.e. Bengal and Punjab) where, paradoxically, the Mughal state's investment in "converting" the local population was the least. Scholars have argued that the Mughal state was not only indifferent to proselytizing in Bengal, but often actively discouraged programs of Islamization.⁶⁹

Scholars like Rafiuddin Ahmed and SufiaUddin who have investigated the question of Muslim identity formation in colonial Bengal have repeatedly focused on the chasm between this rural, peasant *atrap* (non-elite) majority that comprised the bulk of the Muslim population in the province and the Urdu-speaking *ashraf* (elite) who traced their descent from Persia or Arabia or to the Mughal centre of power in North India. According to this body of scholarship, the Bengali Muslim identity that emerged was a predominantly non-elite, peasant-based identity whose site of formation was the Bengal countryside.⁷⁰ As Sufia Ahmed's work shows, acting as a critical link between the Urdu speaking *ashraf* and the non-Urdu speaking *atrap* was the Bengal Muslim literati whose emergence can be traced to the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁷¹

The existing scholarship on the emergence of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia is somewhat fragmentary and unsystematic. What was distinctive about the Bengali Muslim middle class intelligentsia is that unlike the Urdu-speaking *ashraf* they did not disown the Bengali language as part of their Islamic heritage. But as Anindita Ghosh's work shows, the Bengali that was emerging in the haloed portals of the Fort William College in the early nineteenth century, as well as the late nineteenth century nationalist attempts to forge Bengali

as a modern vernacular was way too Sanskritized (and Hinduized) to become the basis for a Bengali Muslim identity.⁷²

Rafiuddin Ahmad made a major contribution to understanding the formation of Bengali Muslim identity. According to Ahmad, such tracts began circulating in the Bengal countryside in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Alongside the dialogic debate-oriented practices of the *bahas* (religious debates) and the monologue *wazmahfils* (gatherings to hear religious sermons), the tracts on reform that often appeared in the form of manuals or *nasihatnamas* (manuals of religious instructions) contributed to the formation of distinct and unified Muslim identity at the grass roots level.⁷³

In Ahmed's reading, the Muslim identity in Bengal was essentially a class-based identity that transmuted into the self-consciousness of being Muslim through the waves of reformist Islamic movements that swept across the Bengal countryside in the mid nineteenth century (Faraizi Movement) and the late nineteenth century (which focused on social reform). Ahmed, however, fails to explain why peasants responded so eagerly to the proselytization campaigns of the reformist mullahs in the villages.⁷⁴

P K Datta, in his more recent study, focuses on peasant improvement themes in vernacular tracts produced in the early twentieth century.⁷⁵ Instead of jumping to the easy association of equating reform/revivalism with fundamentalism, Datta shows how a specific ideology of Islamic reform could be harnessed to speak for multiple identity claims. Like Rafiuddin Ahmed's study of the nineteenth century sources, Datta reads the vernacular tracts directed to village audiences in the early twentieth century, especially the 1920s which saw the emergence of a new 'peasant improvement theme' in these tracts. The articulation of this 'improvement' ideology was sometimes along exclusivist lines (e.g.: the need to stay away from the Hindu moneylenders).⁷⁶

Mohammad Shah in a recent article has traced the evolution of Bengali Muslim identity in the colonial period in three phases.⁷⁷ In the first phase lasting till 1911, he suggests, “Muslim leaders devoted the greatest part of their energies upon the protection of their *communal* interests and by remaining loyal to the British government.”⁷⁸ He then reads a very short-lived inter-communal union in the second decade of the twentieth century.

In the third phase beginning in the 1920s and characterized by electoral reforms, Mohammad Shah sees the hardening of Muslim attitude towards the Hindus, and concludes, “Hence in the 1930s and 1940s Muslim separatism became a reality.”⁷⁹ Muslim separatism for him is not only the articulation of Muslim politicians or British policies; rather “it was also based on his [Bengali Muslims] separate communal identity.”⁸⁰ According to him, “if the Muslims as a community did not feel separate from the Hindus, India would not have been divided on the basis of the two-nation theory, or at least Bengal and Punjab would have remained undivided.”⁸¹ Historians, like Shah, by focusing their lens on separatism foresee the transfer of power to colonial subjects in the 1920s, a good two decades before Partition became a reality.⁸² He fails to read the social, political, and economic contexts that lead to Partition. The assumption here is that Muslims and Hindus belong to separate cultural spheres, which cannot be reconciled. This kind of an understanding spills over in theorizing Bengali Muslim identity, for they see a deep chasm between being a Bengali and a Muslim simultaneously. Joya Chatterji explores the ways in which a historicization of Islam in Bengal in the pre-modern period could be productively brought to bear upon the question of the Bengali Muslims in the modern period in order to dispel certain binaries like *ashraf* / *atrap*, Muslim/Bengali and so on that continue to plague a large body of otherwise painstaking and excellent scholarship on the issue of Islam in Bengal. Instead of assuming these binaries as given, a rigorous historicization of how these binaries came into being could be a very fruitful exercise. For instance, she reads Richard Eaton to show how the *ashraf* emerged from social

and political contingencies very specific to Bengal in the Sultanate period. So *ashrafism* is as Bengali as the popular sorts of Islam that emerged at a later date.⁸³ Chatterji also adds an important corrective to the historiography of Muslim separatism. She provides for a communal reading of *bhadrolok* (educated Bengali Hindus) culture, which plays a significant role in them demanding the separation of Hindu majority provinces from the Muslim majority ones. In the process Chatterji argues that the demand for a separation was not the preserve of the Muslims, rather the *bhadralok* discourse on national consciousness through the idiom of culture was equally culpable of it.⁸⁴

Between the poles of Muslim and Hindu separatism, Sana Aiyar by focusing on the particularities of Muslim majority Bengal challenges the “assumption that Muslim identity was constructed as a linear progression towards a highly communal, exclusive and oppositional politics at an all-India level.”⁸⁵ Her central argument is that the provincial government of Bengal in the early 1940s provided a ‘third alternative’ that attempted to “reconcile religious and regional identification within a political discourse that was not exclusionary.”⁸⁶ Her study focuses on the coalition government in Bengal, which was formed on the basis of cross-communal alliance and emphasized regional solidarity, without claiming to be secular in nature. Political mobilization for the government was done in communal terms, yet it was not based in opposing the communal other, rather it called for the “recognition and reconciliation of different religious identities.”⁸⁷ She refers to a section of Bengali Muslim leaders who were against Partition and voiced their opinion for an independent Bengal. The movement for an independent Bengal was based on a “cultural and regional solidarity among Bengali Muslims, who wanted to preserve their particular identity,” and claimed to be culturally different from Muslims in other parts of colonial India.⁸⁸ Sana Aiyar’s ‘third alternative’ that focuses on culture, religion, and region in defining Bengali Muslim identity, comes to its logical conclusion in 1971 with the formation of Bangladesh. It

is here that such nuanced scholarship runs into problems of falling into the trope of separatism. Just like Muslim separatism has been cited as the reason for the formation of Pakistan, Aiyar's 'third alternative' is guilty of foreshadowing the emergence of Bangladesh, twenty-five years before the new nation comes into existence.⁸⁹ Also, if it was true that Bengali was the cementing factor after 1971; the Bangladeshis should have become part of unified Bengal. Rather their claim to a separate national identity became their main characteristic.

The British classified people by religious belief and in the manner of response and debate, the idea of being a Hindu or Muslim became central to community identity. The colonial censuses of Bengal were instrumental in creating new identities for the Bengali Muslims.²⁹ I would argue that due to categories invented by the colonial censuses for defining people, the Bengali Muslims in response to categorization developed a new narrative of themselves in which their Muslim-ness became central to their identity. This was a break from pre-colonial Bengali Muslim identity, where religion was not the only boundary for the purpose of self-definition. The colonial project of categorizing people heightened religious awareness in contrast to other cultural commonalities between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. The Bengali Muslims increasingly started identifying with Islam only, foregoing other cultural markers as part of the Bengali Muslim identity. The opposition between Bengali and Islam, I will argue, was to a large extent a fall out of the operations of colonial census, which set the limits of the discourse of defining Bengali and Muslim identities. The tension between Bengali and Muslim as projected in the census had to be addressed, which in turn led to new definitions of what it meant to have a Bengali Muslim identity. Edward Said argued that the colonialist project is "absolutely anatomical and enumerative: to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularizing and dividing of things Oriental into manageable

parts.”⁹⁰ In this chapter my effort is to situate how the ‘imagined communities’ of Hindus and Muslims in the colonial *imaginative* became “enumerated communities.”⁹¹

In order to understand what changed during the colonial period it is important to know the nature of Bengali Muslim society during pre-colonial times. The advent of Muslim rule in Bengal has been traced to the late fifteenth century with the establishment of the Husain Shah dynasty in Bengal. The Husain Shahi period of the independent Bengal Sultanate, which lasted for two hundred years, saw the emergence of Islam in Bengal. M R Tarafdar’s important study of this period reveals that “the foreign rulers who had come in the wake of Muslim conquest were yet to settle down here, and the local converts who seem to have originally belonged to the lower grades of the Hindu society had hardly any sociological reasons to spring suddenly into a stable group of enlightened people.”⁹²

Tarafdar argues since Brahmanical orthodoxy looked down upon low-caste Hindus, the Muslim missionaries faced no difficulty in converting people to the new faith, but “Islam sat quite lightly on the heart of this region,” till orthodoxy swept the region during the colonial period.⁹³ Islam in its simple and austere form did not appear to characterize the life of the people. The literature of the period shows some form of folk Islam among the Muslim masses, who were hardly connected with the dogmas of religion. Popular Islam was not free from accretions and deeply influenced by Hindu customs. Popular or folk Islam assimilated a variety of beliefs and practices that were present in Bengal’s pre-colonial religious environment. Apart from the veneration of pirs (holy men and saints), Muslim converts had faith in Hindu divinities.⁹⁴ This was partly because of the efforts of Muslim Sufi saints who “appear to have brought about a cultural synthesis by adapting yogic and tantric philosophy to Islamic mysticism.”⁹⁵

Historians have argued “Islam in traditional Bengal was...marked by its tendency towards convergence with and assimilation to the local cultural milieu.”⁹⁶ The authors of the

early Bengali Muslim literature were ‘instrumental in casting Islamic tradition in a syncretic mould’. They reconstructed Islam according to the specific needs and demands of the social and cultural milieus.⁹⁷ The popular worship of Satyanarayan by the Hindus was borrowed from the Muslim tradition of *Satya Pir*. Popularized by Hussain Shah, the tradition idealized the ‘symbol of Hindu-Muslim syncretism’.⁹⁸ Further evidence of a syncretic culture was a significant Muslim population having Hindu names. The Bengali Muslim “masses, particularly those at the poor levels of society, had a tendency to retain local names and appellations, such as Mandal, Pramanik and Sarkar family names, occupational in their origin, to be found among the Hindus as well.”⁹⁹

The nature of Bengali Muslim identity took a new turn in late-nineteenth century colonial Bengal. Historians of colonial Bengal have argued the importance of reform movements in purging syncretic tendencies and articulating a Bengali Muslim identity exclusively cantered on religion.¹⁰⁰

Bernard Cohn’s seminal essay “The Census and Objectification in South Asia” shows how the colonial census was not a passive instrument of data gathering but an active process that created new identity for Indians. According to Cohn “the census was one of the situations in which Indians were confronted with the question of who they are and what their social and cultural systems were.”¹⁰¹ Unlike the census in Britain, which was a “secular institution in the collection and presentation of data,” census taking in colonial India had a different purpose altogether.¹⁰²

In India the question on religion, caste and race was introduced since the census began in 1872, and religion was used as a fundamental category in census tabulation. The point is illustrated in the 1872 census: “In the forms provided by the Government of India for exhibiting the results of the census, the population is supposed to be divided into five religious classes, namely, Hindus, Muhammadans, Christians, Buddhists, and Others.”¹⁰³

Prior to the census, the British had started revenue surveys. Accurate information on village lands was gathered, which later formed the geographical unit to conduct the census.¹⁰⁴ The village became the ‘dominant site of social life’ where a caste relation was one of the determinants of social position. A society based on caste was different from Western society “for caste was opposed to the basic premises of individualism” and it even “actively resisted the modern state.”¹⁰⁵ Following James Stuart Mill’s *History* the British were engaged in identifying features of India that would be objects for “rational policies of social reform.”¹⁰⁶ Under the British caste and religion became categories that would be “capable of systematizing India’s diverse forms of social identity, community and organization.”¹⁰⁷ Since the Indians loosely defined religion, the British sought to impose a formal definition in order to ‘systematize’ the population. The new definition of religion reinforced the British understanding of communities in terms of their religious identity. The colonial administrators did not understand the social structure, but they formulated new definitions that stimulated the process of altering the identities of Hindus and Muslims.¹⁰⁸

The Bengali Muslim identity was constructed with religion as the locus of the community. New definitions of Muslims emerged in response to census enumeration, and how the debates and responses these descriptions generated altered the people’s understanding of community identity. It has been argued by Cohn that “through the asking of questions and compiling of information in categories which the British rulers could utilize for governance, the census provided an arena for Indians to ask questions about themselves.”¹⁰⁹

The presence of a large Muslim population in colonial Bengal as reported in the first census of Bengal in 1872 came as a surprise to the colonial administrators. The census report of 1872, emphasized lower-caste conversion as the primary cause for this large presence. But the administrators were not certain whether they could be called ‘Muslims’ because their practices did not adhere to orthodox Islam. Beverley, the Census Commissioner of Bengal

“doubt[ed] much whether such conversions have been advantageous to the proselytes. They call indeed upon Allah and the Prophet; but still I doubt much if they have been weaned from any of their superstitions. The higher ranks of Moslems here in general abstain from making offerings to the pagan gods, but the multitudes in all distresses have recourse to the idols, and even make offerings at many holy days.”¹¹⁰

According to Beverly, “not the least interesting of the facts brought out by the late census is the large number of Muhammadans found in Bengal. The total number of Muhammadans in these provinces exceeds twenty and a half million (20,664,775). The vast majority of them, namely seventeen and a half million are found in Lower Bengal.”¹¹¹

The preponderance of the Muslim population in Bengal was a new discovery for the colonialists, which the census report attributes to conversion: But that conversion was very largely carried on in Bengal, appears, not only probable, but is the only explanation of the large numbers of Muhammadans found here in the present day who occupy the same social position as their Hindu ... “The existence of Muhammadans in Bengal is not due so much to the introduction of Mughal blood into the country as to the conversion of the former inhabitants for whom a rigid system of caste discipline rendered Hinduism intolerable.”¹¹²

The question of conversion has been a subject of debate in historiography, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹¹³ My point here is the issue of a large presence of Muslim population in Bengal, as pointed out in the 1872 census, generated a particular kind of response from the Bengali Muslim community, which was instrumental in forging an Islamized identity among the masses, that was projected as the other of Bengali culture and language.

The 1901 Census of Bengal describes the storm of protest from the educated Muslims refuting the local origin theory of Muslims. E. A. Gait in his report of the 1901 census writes, “a Muhammadan gentleman has recently published a book in which he attempts to contradict

the statement made by Mr. Beverley in the Census Report for 1872.”¹¹⁴ The reference here is Khondkar, Fuzli Rubee’s *The Origin of the Muhammadans of Bengal* published in 1895.¹¹⁵ Rubee refuted Beverley’s thesis and argued that the Muslims descended from religious teachers, officers and soldiers who came there from the Muslim world during five and a half centuries of Muslim rule in Bengal. Another cause was the influx of political refugees from northern India. The 1901 census also mentions one “Abu A Ghaznavi, a leading gentleman of Mymensingh, who has prepared an excellent account of the Muhammadans of that district, and who is a strong supporter of the theory of foreign origin.” Ghaznavi argues that “roughly speaking 20 percent of the present Muhammadans are lineal descendants of foreign settlers, 50 percent of them have an admixture of foreign blood and the remaining 30 percent are probably descended from Hindu and other converts.”¹¹⁶

These responses to the theory of Beverley resulted in a new trend among the masses to belong to any one of the four respectable social groups Syed, Sheikh, Mughal, and Pathan. This preoccupation is gauged from the census report of 1901: Amongst the earlier converts, and especially in the functional groups, Hindu names and titles are still very common. Names such as Kali Shekh, Kalachand Shekh, BrajaShekh or Gopal Mandal are constantly met with. When a Mullah affects a conversion at the present day, he usually gives the neophyte a new name, but it is often chosen in such a way as to give some indication of the old one; Rajani for example becomes Riaz-uddin.

This reminds one of the ways in which a Muhammadan of low social position gradually assumes a more high-sounding designation as he rises in life.¹¹⁷ In 1872, the number of claimants to these respectable social orders for Bengal was 266, 378-of this 232, 189 were returned as Sheikhs, 9, 858 as Syeds, and 2, 205 as Pathans-out of a total Muslim population of 17, 609, 135.¹¹⁸ By 1901 the numbers claiming Sheikhs had increased to 19, 527, 221, in a total Muslim population of over twenty-one and a half million.¹¹⁹

O' Malley in the census report of 1911 mentions that the government issued orders, "in the case of Jolahas, Kulus, etc., if a person returns himself as such, the name of the caste should be entered. If, however, he does not do so return him, even though the enumerator considers him to be Jolaha, Kulu, etc., the entry should be Sheikh, Pathan, etc., as in the case of other Muhammadans."¹²⁰

Kenneth Jones has argued that the census was a catalyst for change as it both described and altered the environment. He notes, "Describing meant providing order to that which is described, and at the same time stimulating forces which would alter that order."¹²¹ Jones' formulation that 'categories necessitate definition and definitions impose order' is useful in understanding how religion became the central marker for Bengali Muslims. I delineate the process through a specific example from the 1872 census return.

Some scholars have characterized this distinction that 'Hindus were Bengalis and Muslims were only Muslims,' as a response to the effects of cheaply printed vernacular reformist literature whose thrust was toward the Islamization of society.¹²² Jones' formulation that 'categories necessitate definition and definitions impose order' is useful in understanding how religion became the central marker for Bengali Muslims. I delineate the process through a specific example from the 1872 census return.

A sample return of the 1872 census in village Tribeni in Hooghly district showed all Hindus returning as Bengalis under the heading 'Race or Tribe' and the Muslims returning as Syeds, Sheikhs and Pathans.¹²³ Since these appellations fit the bill of a normative Islam, the masses showed a tendency to be identified with such names. In a way the census contributed toward the development of a normative Muslim identity, reflected in the trend among Muslim masses in villages to adopt titles associated with *ashrafs* to define their Muslim-ness in contradistinction to Bengali-ness.

Some scholars have characterized this distinction that ‘Hindus were Bengali and Muslims were only Muslims,’ as a response to the effects of cheaply printed vernacular reformist literature whose thrust was toward the Islamization of society. They argue, “the multifaceted efforts at Islamization at first confused the masses. More and more, they were made to feel that as Muslims they were different from their Hindu neighbours. The constant harping on extraterritorial links created in their minds a vague, yet persistent, notion that perhaps most, if not all, Muslims were aliens in Bengal.”¹²⁴ Not undermining the role played by such literature, I argue here that the category of religion in the questionnaire prepared the initial ground for the ways in which the Bengali Muslim community defined themselves.

As mentioned earlier, for the British caste and religion were central to the understanding of Indian society. Religion and caste played a central role in colonial imagination because it provided fertile grounds for production of colonial knowledge based on objective science. The privileging of religion in the census questionnaires consciously underplayed other social differences and similarities that existed between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. Most importantly was the fact that the non-*ashrafs* were organized into separate endogamous societies that ‘paralleled the organization of Hindu society.’¹²⁵ Apart from this the majority of Bengali Muslims belonged to the Sunni sect, with a minor population of Shias mostly found in cities and erstwhile seats of Muslim power.¹²⁶ In the sample return of Tribeni, it is interesting to note that both language and sect were not used as enumerative categories. It is my consideration that the use of these as enumerative categories would not have reinforced religion as the site of identity for the Bengali Muslim community. Since both the Hindus and the Muslim masses spoke Bengali, it would have been difficult for the British to project the communities as different from each other.

The 1872 census of Bengal had originally intended to collect data on the basis of sects, but Beverly mentioned, “The column was on further consideration omitted” because “the scanty particulars that have been recorded on this head in some of the returns are only calculated to mislead.”¹²⁷ He gives the example of only 92 persons returning themselves as Brahmors (a monotheist Hindu sect which opposed ritual practices), though the number was thought to be far more by him. The same paragraph also mentions Sunnis and Shias but does not provide information on their numbers. The colonial administrators presumed it to be ‘misleading’ for it did not have the potential to create the essential zing of difference between Hindus and Muslims, which was a central concern of Orientalist discourse.¹²⁸ In the context of colonialism, census was an attempt to get “precise information regarding the numbers of people,” because without it the British “felt a serious inconvenience in the administration of Bengal.”¹²⁹

In West Bengal, there are several groups of people belonging to various races, religions, languages, and cultures and they ruled Bengal for several hundred years. Muslim rule influenced profoundly socio-religious structure of the Bengali people. The British came to Bengal in 1690 for trade, but gradually their increased influence resulted in conflicts with *Nawab* in Bengal and with diplomatic efforts and series of conspiracies captured power in Bengal. In 1905 the British for the first-time partitioned Bengal on the basis of religion into West Bengal and East Bengal. Again, in 1947 at the time of independence, the province had been divided into two halves between India and Pakistan on the basis of the same religious considerations. The Hindu-majority West Bengal became a part of Indian union and Muslim-majority East Bengal became a part Pakistan named as East Pakistan which later emerged as an independent country as Bangladesh in 1971.

TABLE-1.4**Trends of Muslim Population in West Bengal (in percentage):**

1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
19.85%	20.00%	20.46%	21.52%	23.61%	25.25%	26.86%

Source: Census of India.

In West Bengal Hindus are the majority with 72.47 per cent (58 million), while Muslims constitute as the largest minority community with 25.25 per cent (20 million). The Muslims in West Bengal reside across the state and yet their concentration varies substantially. These two communities (Hindus and Muslims) share more than 97 per cent to the total population. The above table shows the trends of Muslims population (1951-2041) in West Bengal. In 1951 Muslim population accounted for 19.85 percent. The dominating position of the share of Hindu population continued, but then the share declined from 78.45 per cent in 1951 to 72.47 per cent in 2001 (Census of India, 2001). Although, all religious communities have increased but among them Muslims have more positive growth in terms of percentage shares to the total population. Overall, it has been observed that Muslims have been experiencing higher population growth rates than the Hindus and this is sometimes made into a political issue. Demographers have observed that the higher growth rate among Muslims is mainly due to their higher fertility rate, to some extent be associated with their low socio-economic¹³⁰ and educational status. They have further tried to explain this in terms of the time lag and delayed changes in proximate variables between different religious groups in undergoing demographic transition.¹³¹

Distribution of Muslim Population:

Muslims occupy an important position in society and culture of the state of West Bengal. Muslims are in minority both numerically as well as in terms of their position in

greater socio-economic and political structure in Bengal as well as of the country also. Muslims in India constitute one of the most backward sections of the society, along with the neo-Buddhists, and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes etc, in terms of both educational spread and the quality of performance. They are characterized by socially backward, economically poor and politically powerless indicators¹³². According to 2001 census, West Bengal occupies third position among various states and union territories of the country in terms of percentage of Muslim population (i.e., 25 per cent) after Jammu and Kashmir (67 per cent) and Assam (30 per cent). The Muslim population in West Bengal was 201240543 which formed 25.25 percent of the total state population and 14.64 percent of the country's total (138188240) Muslim Population. 83.22 percent (16845034) Muslim population lives in rural areas and 16.78 percent (3395509) in urban areas. Geographically Muslims are unevenly distributed throughout the state. There are ten districts of the state in which Muslims have a million plus population.

The highest share of Muslim population with 63.67 percent (i.e., 3735380) is found in the district of Murshidabad while the district of Darjeeling has lowest share with 5 percent (i.e.,85378) of total population. Three clusters of districts are made according to the concentration of Muslim population with the help of their mean and standard deviation which is shown in the Table-2. It may be considered that the districts where the concentration is more than 32.91 percent may call as "*Muslim concentrated district*". Further, the districts where the Muslim population is less than 16.95 of the total population may be called as '*low Muslim concentrated districts*'. It is evident from the table that out of the 18 districts of the state, 5 districts show relatively higher concentration of Muslim population. They are Murshidabad (63.67), Malda (49.72), Uttar Dinajpur (47.36), Birbhum (35.08) and S 24 Parganas (33.24), forming a continuous region of high concentration of Muslim population in the middle parts of the state. During the Muslim ruling period in Bengal, Illiyas Shah's

Kingdom at Gour and Sultan Nasiruddin and Hasan Shah's at Gour and Pandua of presently Malda district, and Nawab Shirajud Daula's Kingdom in presently Murshidabad district, are main reason for higher concentration of Muslims in central part of West Bengal (i.e., districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur and Birbhum). Demographic concentration of Muslims in this region may be significant for their socio-economic and educational development as well as for political action if sincere efforts are made.

TABLE-1.5

Concentration of Muslim Population, West Bengal 2001, Region Wise.

Region	Concentration	Districts
High	More than 32.91	Murshidabad (63.67), Malda (49.72), Uttar Dinajpur (47.36), Birbhum (35.08), S 24 Parganas (33.24)
Medium	16.95-32.91	Nadia (25.41), Howrah (24.44), Koch Bihar (24.24), N 24 Parganas (24.22), Dakshin Dinajpur (24.02), Kolkata (20.27) Bardhaman (19.78)
Low	Less than 16.95	Hugli (15.14) Medinipur (11.33), Jalpaiguri (10.85), Bankura (7.51), Purulia (7.12) and Darjeeling (5.31).

Source: Census of India, 2001, West Bengal.

Muslim population ranging from 16.95-32.91 percent of the total population is considered as the '*medium slab of Muslim concentration*' which include the districts of Nadia (25.41), Howrah (24.44), Koch Bihar (24.24), N 24 Parganas (24.22), Dakshin Dinajpur (24.02), Kolkata (20.27) and Bardhaman (19.78). Remaining six districts fall under "low concentrations of Muslims", these districts form two notable regions in the state, Jalpaiguri

(10.85) and Darjeeling (5.31) in the northern parts and Hugli (15.14) Medinipur (11.33), Bankura (7.51) and Purulia (7.12) in the south-western part of the state.

Literacy Rate of Muslims:

The literacy rate in West Bengal is not so bad and it is higher than the national average. The literacy rate in West Bengal is 68.64 per cent against the national average of 64.85 per cent. Rural literacy rate in West Bengal is 63.42 per cent and in Urban part of the West Bengal literacy rate is 81.25 percent. There is also inter-religious inequality in literacy level.¹³³ Hence, it would be apt to examine where the different minority groups stand in terms of literacy¹³⁴. Educational backwardness is a key factor responsible for the social, cultural, economic, and political backwardness of the Muslim community in Bengal.

TABLE-1.6

Muslim Literacy Rate in Comparison to Other Religious Communities in West Bengal

Muslim Literacy Rate in Comparison to Other Religious Communities	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhist	Jains	Total
Male	81.12	64.61	77.20	91.37	83.09	96.46	77.02
Female	63.09	49.75	62.30	81.98	66.22	88.87	59.61
Total	72.44	57.47	69.72	87.19	74.73	92.81	68.64

Source: Census of India 2001, West Bengal.

Condition of the Muslims is worse than that of all other religious communities of the state; they recorded lowest literacy rate among the religious groups as only 57 of them are literate. Literacy level of Bengali Muslims are not only less than the state's and national

average literacy level but also national Muslim average literacy level, where only 64.61 per cent of males and 49.75 per cent of females are literate, or in vice-versa they are the most illiterate religious community in the state of West Bengal. The highest literacy level is found among Jain (92.81 per cent), while Sikh accounted for 87.73 per cent and Buddhist and Christian with 74.73 per cent and 69.72 percent of literacy level respectively, occupy third and fourth position among the six religious' groups of the state.

TABLE-1.7

District wise Literacy Rate of West Bengal 2001

District Name		General			Muslim		
		Person	Male	Femal	Person	Male	Female
1	Darjeeling	71.79	80.05	62.94	50.38	60.86	37.92
2	Jalpaiguri	62.85	72.83	52.21	55.34	64.98	45.01
3	Koch Bihar	66.30	75.93	56.12	56.07	64.59	47.11
4	Uttar Dinajpur	47.89	58.48	36.51	36.04	45.98	25.50
5	DakshinDinajpur	63.59	72.43	54.28	67.21	72.81	61.33
6	Malda	50.28	58.80	41.25	45.30	51.56	38.68
7	Murshidabad	54.35	60.71	47.63	48.63	54.21	42.76
8	Birbhum	61.48	70.89	51.55	59.86	68.28	50.97
9	Barddhaman	70.18	78.63	60.95	68.79	75.54	61.39
10	Nadia	66.14	72.31	59.58	49.41	54.42	44.03
11	North 24Parganas	78.07	83.92	71.72	65.05	71.41	58.13
12	Hugli	75.11	82.59	67.21	73.50	79.43	67.31
13	Bankura	63.44	76.76	49.43	59.91	71.81	46.96
14	Puruliya	55.57	73.72	36.50	53.44	71.32	34.14

District Name		General			Muslim		
District		Person	Male	Femal	Person	Male	Female
15	Medinipur	74.90	84.91	64.42	64.97	75.05	54.36
16	Haora	77.01	83.22	70.11	67.80	74.13	60.78
17	Kolkata	80.86	83.79	77.30	68.06	71.25	63.61
18	South 24Parganas	69.45	79.19	59.01	59.83	68.84	50.27
West Bengal		68.64	77.02	59.61	57.47	64.61	49.75

Source: Literacy Rate of West Bengal, Census2001, West Bengal.

Female literacy is one of the important indicators of educational development for any society. The table shows that the Muslim female literacy level (49.75 per cent) is lower than the general female literacy (59.61 per cent) by 9.86 percentage points. In case of state average also, Muslim female literacy rate is accounted for only 49.75 per cent which is much less than the Muslim male literacy rate (64.61). It is an interesting feature that the gap between general literacy rate of the district and Muslim literacy rate of the district varies significantly. It is clear from the table 4 that the gap between Muslim and general level of literacy is highest in Darjeeling (21.41), where the general literacy rate is 71.79 per cent, wherein only 57.47 percent of Muslims are literate. From the same table it can be inferred that as far as major districts are concerned Muslims are most backward in Darjeeling followed by Nadia (16.73), North 24 Parganas (13.02), Uttar Dinajpur (11.85) and Koch Bihar (10.23). The state government needs to pay special attention towards the Muslim education of these districts in particular and in the state in general as per as the Muslim literacy level is concerned, there are 18 districts out of which four have their literacy rate at below 50 per cent. However, it is surprising to note that in the district of Dakshin Dinajpur, where Muslims have registered (67.21) 3.62 percentage points higher than the general literacy level (63.59). The highest

literacy levels among the Muslims have been 73.50 per cent in Hugli. There are two districts (Bardhaman and Hugli) where the literacy rate of Muslims is slightly higher than the general literacy level. The low level of literacy in the Muslim community is caused by their poor socio-economic condition or their poor socio-economic condition may be the consequence of low level of literacy rate of that community. For the investigation associated with literacy rate and socio-economic character, community wise detailed study of both the aspects is crucial and is the base of diagnostic planning for human development.

Educational Backwardness of Muslims:

There is definite correlation between the socio-economic conditions of the overwhelmingly large number of Muslims and the state of their education, which is supposed to provide a key to people's development. But this is the darkest and most discouraging aspect of life of the Muslims in the state. Though Muslims constitute 25 per cent of the total population of the state, their representation in the educational field is far warranted by their population share. Muslims are the most backward section of the society, in terms of both the educational spread and the quality of performance. This fact has been recognized by the programme of action relating to the New Education Policy (1986) which has specified Muslims and neo-Buddhists as educationally backward minorities. It speaks of providing suitable incentives to all educationally backward sections of the society, particularly in the rural areas. More specifically, referring to the minorities, it recognizes that 'some minority groups are educationally deprived or backward. It resolves that 'greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interest of equality and social justice. If Muslims continue to lag behind in educational and economic spheres, it will have the effect of pulling down the general growth rate.¹³⁵

The relative backwardness of the Muslim community and particularly of Muslim women has been noted as a factor of comparatively high fertility rates observed among the

Muslim population¹³⁶. The census of India collected information regarding the literacy rate with certain details of male-female and rural and urban bifurcation. The coefficient of equality for the total literacy rate is 83.73 comprising 87.66 and 81.54 for rural and urban areas and 83.88 and 83.46 for male and female respectively.

TABLE-1.8

Muslim Educational Backwardness in West Bengal, 2001 (Region Wise)

Muslim Educational Backwardness in West Bengal, 2001 Region	Backwardness	Districts
High	More than 16.22	N. 24 Parganas (83.32), Uttar Dinajpur (75.26), Nadia (74.72) and Darjeeling (70.18)
Medium	7.08-16.22	Malda (90.09), Murshidabad (89.48), Jalpaiguri (88.04), Howrah (88.04), Medinipur (86.75), S. 24Parganas (86.15), Koch Bihar (84.58) and Kolkata (84.17)

Source: West Bengal Government (2004): West Bengal Human Development, Report p.03.

The clustering of the districts shows that there is comparatively high level of backwardness prevailing in the four districts namely N.24 Parganas (83.32), Uttar Dinajpur (75.26), Nadia (74.72) and Darjeeling (70.18). The backwardness is comparatively less in the district of Dakshin Dinajpur (105.69), Bardhaman (98.02), Hugli (97.86), Birbhum (97.35), Puruliya (96.17), Bankura (94.44). A closer look of this scenario says that the high backwardness does not follow any pattern of the concentration of Muslim population.¹³⁷

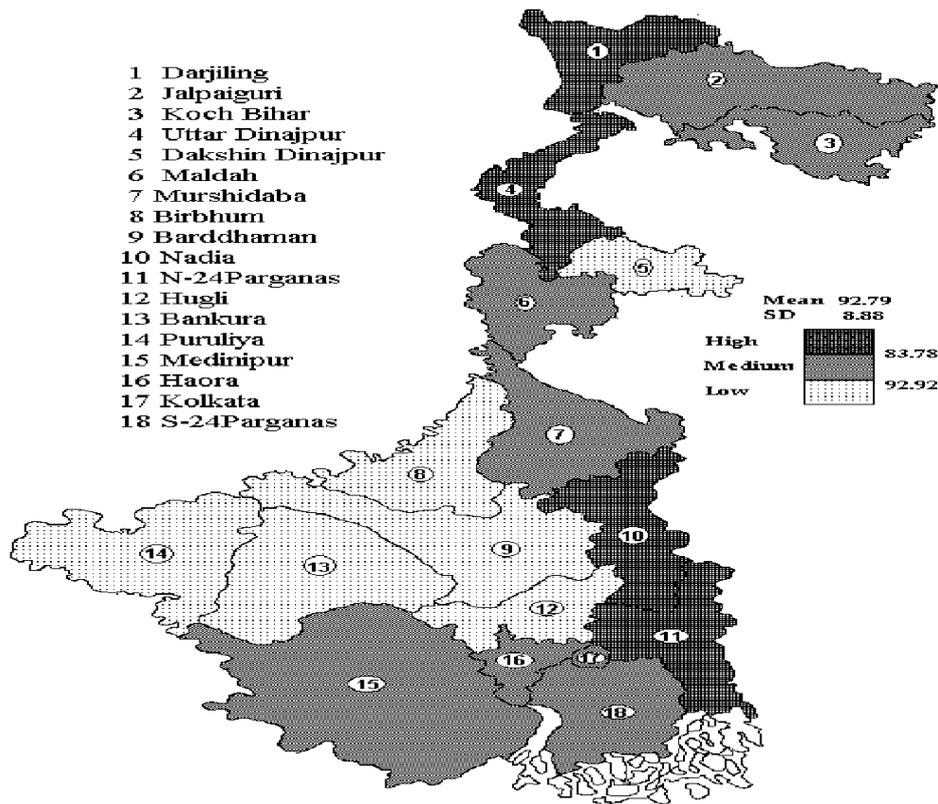


Figure: Pattern of Muslim Educational Backwardness in West Bengal.

Muslims form the largest minority in West Bengal, although they constitute 25 per cent of the population of the state, their concentration in six districts (where they form more than 25 percent of population of the district) are of paramount significance. It is found that the growth of Muslim minority is slightly higher than that of the general population. It generally shows that the lesser percentage of Muslims in a district, higher is their literacy level. Whereas, the district in which the Muslim concentration is low they also recorded lower than the general literacy of the state except Darjeeling. So, the concentration of Muslims in one place prevents them from education, the government discriminates those areas where the Muslims are concentrated more. It may apparently be perceived that Muslim community is the problem for achieving socio-economic development of a region or an area. But from the above analysis it may be inferred that Muslims are the most backward section of society, standing at bottom position in the educational field when compared to the general

population of West Bengal. No doubt, Muslims are not the main problem; rather mass illiteracy prevailing among them is the root cause of socio-cultural and economic development of the state in general and Muslims in particular. Immediate conclusion drawn is that the community needs development and progress which should be about 1.47 times of what exists now, to be at par with the general population of the state of West Bengal. Raising the level of literacy is the only solution to bring social consciousness among them. No doubt, socio-economic development of Muslim community might diminish the existing human group disparities. Thus, Muslim dominated regions are bound to remain in low level of development may be due to the irrational allocation resource for and negligence of planners and policy makers towards these regions. Therefore, it is explicit that no region is lagging behind solely because of Muslim habitation as well as deprived but it is implicit in the socio-economically backwardness of the region to which they belong.

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