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ISLAM AND EGALITARIANISM IN COLONIAL BENGAL

THE MAKING OF A MORAL COMMUNITY

Ananya Dasgupta

ROUTLEDGE

Islam and Egalitarianism in Colonial Bengal

This book is a historical exploration of the social and cultural processes that led to the rise of the ideology of labor as a touchstone of Bengali Muslim politics in late colonial India.

The book argues that the tremendous popularity of the Pakistan movement in Bengal is to be understood not just in terms of "communalization" of class politics, or even "separatist" demands of a religious minority living out anxieties of Hindu political majoritarianism, but in terms of a distinctively modern idea of Muslim self and culture which gave primacy to production/labor as the site where religious, moral, ethical, as well as economic value would be anchored. In telling the story of the formation of a modern Muslim identity, the book presents the conceptual congruence between Islam and egalitarianism as a distinctively early twentieth-century phenomenon, and the approach can be viewed as key to explaining the mass appeal of the desire for Pakistan.

A novel contribution to the study of Bengal and Pakistan's origins, the book will be of interest to researchers studying South Asian history, the history of colonialism and end of empire, South Asian studies, including labor studies, Islamic Studies, and Muslim social and cultural history.

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The Making of a Moral Community

Ananya Dasgupta

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations from Bengali are mine, unless otherwise indicated. I have devised and followed my own code of transliteration in this book, keeping in mind that the non-English words and terms mentioned here appear in at least three, if not more South Asian languages: Bengali, Urdu, and Hindi. To mark their specificities in words and texts, I have abided by the following general rules:

1. I have avoided cumbersome diacritics, and instead, used phonetic transliterations attuned to American English. However, in remaining faithful to their usage in primary sources, certain non-English terms, personal and place names may appear in variant forms in quotations or titles. For instance, a term such as "zamindar" appears as "zemindar" in a quote, or the proper noun Abul Latif appears as Abdool Luteef in a quote from a colonial document.
2. Non-English terms are italicized. If a term is italicized and appears more than once in the book, its meaning is explained either in context, parenthetical remarks, or finds mention in the glossary provided at the end of the book. A few words common in Anglo-Indian usage are not put in italics, for example, zamindar, nawab, and bazaar.

All names of places have been transliterated according to the official spellings followed by the Governments of Bangladesh and India, respectively. The only exception is my use of the name Calcutta, instead of the now-official Kolkata, in part to denote a larger than colonial association with the name.

1 Introduction

It is widely known that Pakistan is the first country in the world to be formed on the basis of religious identity. Since religious identity is commonly understood as particularistic, narrow, and parochial, it has been easy to, somewhat uncritically, reproduce a stereotypical narrative of the social and political energies that informed the creation of Pakistan as narrow and parochial nationalist ideals. This book challenges such a one-dimensional understanding of the imagination of Pakistan. By focusing on colonial Bengal, it shows that in most historical tellings, the egalitarian and cosmopolitan impulses that animated the movement for Pakistan have been neglected. Developing a more complex understanding of Pakistan's origins requires a look at new sources as well as a long history of the way Muslim identity was fundamentally reconfigured and made synonymous with egaliatarianism in the early twentieth century.

On March 24, 1945, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League published a draft Manifesto, delineating in fairly clear terms what Bengal's Muslims should understand by the demand for Pakistan, which the League sought to popularise. According to its architect:

> The Manifesto embodied the recognition of the fundamental rights of man and proposed their implementation in that sovereign state…Right to work, right to education and right to health are the three cardinal rights of man. The state would guarantee work for all able-bodied persons assuring equal opportunities for men and women. Education would be a charge of the state and primary education would be compulsory. All monopolies and rent-receiving interests in land would be abolished and key industries and transport would be nationalised. Toilers would have the rights to enjoy their fruits of labor. Legislative measures for guaranteeing this right would be adopted. Provisions would be made for minimum wages, unemployment, insurance, old age pensions, trade union rights, etc. Rent-receiving interests in land would be abolished and the rights of peasants would be protected. Peasant proprietorship would be set up and collective farming and co-operative marketing would be encouraged. The Muslim

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> League would have the responsibility of protecting the rights of the non-Muslims. There would be no interference with the culture of the non-Muslim communities. Equal rights would be guaranteed to the depressed classes. The Manifesto was perfectly democratic, progressive, and conducive to the welfare of people as a whole.[1]

The author of the Manifesto, Abul Hashim, then the Secretary General of the League in Bengal, was almost single-handedly responsible for transforming Bengal's Muslim League, a hidebound, moribund political party dominated by feudal powers into a mass-based party, teeming with energetic ordinary cadres, students, party offices in every district, and support bases in the rural hinterlands, where the vast majority of Bengal's Muslims resided. Hashim's leadership, beginning in 1943, revived the Muslim League in Bengal to such an extent that within only a couple of years the party's membership in the province would outnumber the total membership of the League in the rest of British India – a remakable feat indeed.[2] Equally remarkable is the fact that the draft of the Manifesto, spelling out the nature of an independent polity as a manifestation of Muslim self-determination on the Indian subcontinent, which was in Hashim's own words, "based on the universal values of Islam preached by the prophet of Islam and his faithful followers" was drafted with the help of, as was acknowledged by Hashim, a then young, non-Muslim communist, Nikhil Chakravarty.[3] Remarkable, not least because Hashim himself, although he was a proponent of what can be called a kind of Islamic Socialism or Rabbaniyat, constantly fought off allegations of being a communist by fellow older members of the Muslim League; he cherished and flaunted the epithet "Maulana" that Jinnah reserved for him and was steeped in Islamic religious and philosophical learning. In Hashim's imagination – both political and religious – there was no contradiction between Islam and redistributive justice; indeed, Islam was, for him, a religion of social justice.[4] A way of thinking about Islam that was distinctively new had emerged. The change was dramatic in the context of colonial Bengal where *ashraf*, upper-class Muslims, were, even until the early twentieth century, mortified to consider their co-religionists, the overwhelming majority of people who toiled in the fields pushing plows, as Muslims at all.

But this is not mainly a book about famous political figures like Abul Hashim, who did for the Muslim League in Bengal what M.K Gandhi did for the Congress Party in British India – that is, make it a truly popular, mass party. It is more the story of thousands of peasants and ordinary people living out their lives in late colonial Bengal's countryside and suburbs who, like the more affluent and educated Hashim, saw no contradiction between Islam and redistributive justice. This message circulated during the Muslim League's 1946 election campaign in the form of posters and placards declaring "Land belongs to the Pough," "Abolish Zamindari (landlordism)," and "Pakistan for Peasants and Laborers."

It is tempting to explain this message in purely economic terms. Of course, in the wake of the horrifying Bengal famine in 1943, unimaginable rural distress, and food shortages that claimed millions of lives, economic motives mattered. But why did the Muslim peasants throw their lot behind the Muslim League, as it was seeking to become, to use Ayesha Jalal's famous phrase, the "sole spokesperson" of the Muslims? Why could the rural masses not sustain their enthusiasm for the Communists working especially concertedly in districts of eastern Bengal along purely class-based lines? Why was it that a call for Pakistan, an Islamic homeland – as a manifestation of Muslim self-determination – could take such a powerful hold over the rural Muslim masses as *sine qua non* for redistributive justice, a "peasant utopia," a "land of eternal Eid"?

In Historiography

Existing historiography has provided a resounding answer – the "communalization" of the Muslim peasantry.[5] For those not familiar, the charge of "communalism" or "communalization" carries a pejorative meaning in South Asian political vocabulary. It means that religious identity, at the cost of other identities, such as class, gender, caste, and indeed a deepening sense of hostility toward another religion, assumed political primacy. But to understand the "Balkanization of Modern South Asia" through the framework of communalization, a transition to parochialism, or the dominance of religious or ethnic identity politics, is unsatisfactory. There is, I contend, a need to emphasize and document the redistributive cultural and political energies that fed into the demand for new nation-states in South Asia.

Additionally, in Bengal, one of the provinces in British India where Muslims outnumbered Hindus, the imperative of the Bengal Muslims to be drawn into the Pakistan movement demanding separate statehood, in the years immediately preceding decolonization, cannot be explained as stemming from the community's fear of being reduced to a political minority in the impending postcolonial polity. Especially since Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award of 1932 dramatically altered the balance of power in the provincial political domain and gave the Muslims of Bengal a decisive edge in the domain of organized provincial politics. Yet, notwithstanding the political advantage accruing from their numbers, the demand for Pakistan found massive support among Bengali Muslims. How did the idea of Pakistan take root in Bengal?

South Asian historiography has been dominated by two ways of looking at the history preceding the formation of East Pakistan. The first, focusing on the Muslims of Bengal, propounds some variation or the other of "the communalization of the Muslim peasantry" thesis. The overarching narrative of such communalization thesis consists of how what was essentially a class-based movement of Muslim tenant-peasants got communalized (i.e. how the movement degenerated into the political organizing of a

religious community for the furtherance of its own ends, often in hostile and violent ways).[6] The starting point of the process of communalization varies – beginning way back at the turn of the twentieth century in one account,[7] or in the 1920s in another,[8] or in the 1930s in yet another.[9] The agents instrumental in thus communalizing the Muslim peasantry are variously identified – in the rich Muslim peasant, or the *ashraf*, or the *ulema*, or a combination thereof.

The second manner of dealing with the subject of the formation of East Pakistan is exemplified by the work of Joya Chatterjee. She focuses on the phenomenon of Hindu *bhadralok* communalism instead of Muslim communalism and, very crucially, the "event" of partition of Bengal is understood as the outcome of *bhadralok* separatism, instead of Muslim separatism. Her work has shown how following the Communal Award of 1932 and the Government of India Act of 1935, which dramatically expanded franchise by giving voting rights to an additional six million people, in effect, enfranchised four Muslims for every three Hindu voters in Bengal and drastically reduced the weightage of urban votes. The Hindu *bhadralok*, ensconced in the metropolitan centers, became increasingly anxious about living under the rule of a Muslim majority. This anxiety, ultimately, led to partition when the *bhadralok* class deployed the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha to its own ends.[10]

The scholarship that traces the communalization of the Muslim peasantry in terms of the rich (Muslim) peasant acquiring an upper hand in agrarian relations also points to the increasing absence of the Hindu *bhadralok* from rural Bengal as a precondition for the "rise of the rich peasants." Both Sugata Bose and Partha Chatterjee have argued that the process of empowerment of the rich peasants became particularly intensified with the onslaught of Depression in the early 1930s, when the *bhadralok* zamindars and moneylenders fled the countryside to engage increasingly in white-collar employments and trade. According to Bose, the exodus of the *bhadralok* from the countryside snapped practical patron-client relations that existed between them and the Muslim peasantry, thereby opening up a lacuna that came to be promptly occupied by Muslim *jotedars*/rich peasants who inserted themselves into credit relations (as creditors) at a time when rural indebtedness intensified with the collapse of a cash crop market centered on the capital-intensive cultivation of jute.[11] Chatterjee does not necessarily contradict Bose's thesis, but emphasizes that it was not merely in the relations of production that the Muslim *jotedars* assumed an increasingly advantageous position, but that they were successful in establishing hegemony over small Muslim peasants precisely because they rose to economic prominence from a hitherto culturally undifferentiated peasantry.[12] Yet the cultural worlds of the Muslim peasantry, the *ashraf*, or the *mofussil* intelligentsia, and the manner of establishing hegemony remain curiously understudied. His work continues to be governed primarily by naturalized political economic categories of labor, production,

rent, and debt overlaid with a political history of electoral politics in the Bengal Council and Legislative Assembly and a "prepolitical" history of peasant rioting.

In a more recent and compelling work of scholarship, Iftekhar Iqbal has emphasized the active presence and, indeed, the return of the Hindu *bhadralok* to rural Bengal in the early twentieth century. They were enticed by the agrarian possibilities in the deltaic regions of Bengal, where huge tracts of wastelands in the form of *chars* or alluvial deposits emerged out of the actions of rivers. Such land was excluded from the revenue code of the Permanent Settlement, and the colonial state made it available for cultivation by offering low rates of rent and lenient terms of tenancies to cultivating settlers.[13] Iqbal shows how in the 1920s and 1930s, the *bhadralok's* willingness to return to the agrarian environs of eastern Bengal was facilitated by a policy of preferential treatment meted out to them in allocating such reclaimable low-rent *khas mahal* lands[14] to settle as "ordinary cultivating *raiyats*." This was often done with the express purpose of re-orienting persons who had abandoned revolutionary anti-colonial terrorism to a life of productive citizenship. Of course, these newly settled *bhadralok raiyats* did not turn into actual cultivators. Instead, the productive power on their lands was largely harnessed from the ranks of *bargadars* and sharecroppers. "It was no wonder that some of the most serious communal conflicts took place when the ecologically better domain came to be dominated by the *bhadralok*," writes Iqbal. He adds, "the victimization of the peasantry during the great Bengal famine (of 1943) fueled further conflicts and suspicions between them and the *bhadralok*, these developments culminated in a support for partition."[15] In bringing the issue of class squarely back into the historiography of the pre-partition years, Iqbal warns against approaches that emphasize the "chemistry of culture" and "the fetishization of social difference."

Iqbal is right to draw attention to the riverine deltaic ecology of Bengal (particularly eastern Bengal), with land continually opening up from the rivers and made cultivable under arrangements where the government entered into direct settlements with the *raiyats* (tenants). Large swathes of land were either actually outside the purview of Permanent Settlement or settled in a manner where Permanent Settlement was practiced with calculated indifference. It is also true that Permanent Settlement has long dominated the historiography of Bengal as the bane of peasant discontent, and a focus on social relations on land settled otherwise is absolutely critical to consider. Yet it is well known that in 1946, both the Muslim League and the Communists shared the slogan "land to the tiller," and both demanded the abolition of Permanent Settlement set in place by the British in the late eighteenth century. The abolition of zamindari without any compensation to the landlords (or the abolition of Permanent Settlement) was declared an important objective of the party after the Bengal Muslim League Conference in January 1946, held under the presidency of Liaquat

Ali Khan, Jinnah's right-hand man. Such populist promises, without a doubt, contributed to the phenomenal performance of the Muslim League in the 1946 Bengal elections – bagging 110 out of 117 seats in constituencies reserved for Muslims – as it established itself credibly as the sole mouthpiece of the Muslims in Bengal. By 1946, "Pakistan" became a slogan of such great power among large sections of the peasantry in Eastern Bengal that Hindu communist leaders of the Tebhaga movement often had to assume Muslim names, attend *namaz* prayers with Muslim peasants in an expression of solidarity, and hoist both the Red Flag of the Communists and the Green Flag of the Muslim League at the same meeting venues. Muslim peasants chanted slogans in support of both Pakistan and Tebhaga at the meeting organized by Communist Party of India leaders.[16]

This raises the question: if large swathes of land were actually outside the ambit of Permanent Settlement, why then did the abolition of landlordism without compensation become such a powerful slogan among Muslims all over Bengal, particularly in the eastern part? Why was it one of the key planks on which the League contested the 1946 election, if social relations of production in the countryside where Muslims were most populous were, as Iftekhar Iqbal points out, not really over-determined by the terms of the Permanent Settlement?

Economic histories and political economic frameworks alone cannot adequately explain the conundrum thus posed: when there is no direct one-to-one correspondence or an easy fit between the affective power of a popular political demand and the social relations of production structuring the lives of those who demand it, how does one explain wherefrom the demand, the slogan, and the political culture in which it resonated drew their power, without raising the old bogey of "false consciousness"? I contend that we cannot advance a more persuasive explanation without a detailed empirical study of the cultural practices of Muslims in late colonial Bengal. These manifested themselves in simply rhyming verse for easy memorization in the countryside, in flamboyant apocalyptic poetry infused with a Bolshevik ethos, or in the reformist Islamic rhetoric of the *ulema* as much as in the nature of institutions in which such practices were anchored, whether in rural and mofussil *anjumans*, or literary associations and societies located in the urban centers of Calcutta and Dhaka. In studying the effects of such practices and institutions, this book attempts to trace the emergence of the concept of labor, which became the touchstone of Muslim politics in the Indian province of Bengal during the late colonial period.

In relation to the emergence of Pakistan, David Gilmartin, Marcus Daeschel, Taj-ul-Islam Hashmi, and Venkat Dhulipala have approached the subject of varying regional specificities that contributed to the strength of the Pakistan movement.[17] My own project is also an attempt to give substantial recognition to the popular energies at play in colonial Bengal that inflected the movement for Pakistan.

Gilmartin's study of colonial Punjab is pioneering in marking a departure from an exclusive focus on institutional party politics and prominent political leaders, whose actions and motivations historians had hitherto studied to explain the demand for Pakistan.[18] Gilmartin shifts the lens of inquiry on the relationship between Punjabi society and the state by delineating how the Pakistan movement in Punjab emerged through the interplay of two contending understandings of the Muslim community – premised on radically different cultures of socio-political authority – that were operational in urban and rural colonial Punjabi society.[19] The urban centers of colonial Punjab spawned a non-hierarchical, horizontal imagination of Muslim community through a politics of self-making routed through direct identification with Islam ideals as encapsulated in the classic Muslim idea of *musawat,* or the equality of believers, and the ideal of *mard-e-khuda*, the true man of God, who by saintly example and impassioned commitment to Islam could act as a bridge between common people and the supposedly classical Islamic ideals where *musawat* would be possible through individual moral transformation. But in rural Punjab, where the British had structured society through the recognition and patronage of "tribal- *biradari*" identities – organized through hierarchical relations of kinship – the Muslim community was premised on an ideology of socio-political authority and leadership that was vertical, kinship-based, patronage-oriented, and essentially mediated between the society and the colonial state. Gilmartin reads the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan as tapping into urban Punjabi Muslim society's search for a new moral, ideological foundation for a state which, far from being premised on the colonially sanctioned ideology of hierarchical, "tribal" patronage-oriented political authority, was to be founded as a direct expression of a religious community made up of individual Muslims who were self-made through moral action. And yet during the Pakistan movement, notwithstanding the rhetoric of direct, individual attachment to Islamic symbols that sought to be popularized by the Muslim League, the mobilizational strategies of the Muslim League in rural Punjab, as Gilmartin shows, were heavily dependent on region-specific, hierarchical, "tribal" patronage-based structures of political authority that the British had put into place. This was made possible by recruiting *pirs* (often *sajjada nashins*, or custodians of shrines whose power was grounded in hereditary rather than personal piety) who had influence over specific *baradari*/tribal kinship networks that structured local politics in the countryside, but had, since Mughal times, combined a concern for local mediation with a religious interest in the overall cultural definition of the state. In their ideological commitment to Pakistan, these *pirs* were able to bring together hierarchical, kinship-based *biradari* identities, around which local influence was built, and Pakistanism's express ideological commitment to a state resembling the perfect community of individual Muslims led by the prophet, without actually resolving the tension between *din* (exemplary

personal ideals) and *dunya* (the actual workings of rural socio-political structures of authority).[20]

Marcus Daeschel's work argues that the demand for Pakistan, as it came to be overwhelmingly articulated by the middle classes in Punjab and UP, is best understood in relation to an incipient culture of consumerism which – constituted through advertisements – structured middle-class politics. As advertisements re-signified consumption as an act of self-expression, inasmuch as via the choice of products one could showcase who he/she really was, consumerist logic created a style of "self-expressionist" politics which assumed that the only politically meaningful activity was the expression of an "inner"/"authentic" self. Daeschel argues that, in the Punjab and UP, the idea of Pakistan as a primarily middle-class demand was the commoditization and consumption of the middle class's need to generate some surrogate form of "authenticity" for itself. [21]

From Gilmartin and Daeschel, it is possible to aver that there were two distinct political cultures operating in late colonial Punjab – an urban, middle-class political culture (the outcome of Islamic reform or consumerism), where religion and politics were seen as expressions of some "authentic," "inner" self, and a rural political culture in which the question of "authenticity" of the self was not a necessarily a political (or religious) problem since here, politics was about managing social relationship through memberships in hierarchical kinship-based networks and not about the expression of some "inner self." But in Bengal, where peasant societies were not structured through policies and legislation akin to the Land Alienation Act (which required registering "agricultural tribes" and barring the sale of land from such "tribes" to those who were not members of such groups) that reified kinship-based or *biradari*-oriented access to state patronage and land, what was the nature of rural political culture on which the Pakistan movement took root? What kinds of institutions, discourses, and ideologies shaped rural Muslim political culture and notions of the Muslim community in late colonial Bengal? How did these interact with, contradict, or coalesce with conceptions of community envisioned by urban Muslims?

The cases of Bengal and Punjab are worth comparing not only because they were the two largest Muslim-majority provinces in British India but also because the differences between these provinces are just as worthy of attention. Unlike Punjab, where rural Muslim political mobilization depended on navigating networks of hierarchical, kinship-based structures of socio-political authority rooted in the *biradari*/"tribal" heads or *zaildars* who were almost always landlords, the political mobilizational success in drawing Muslim peasants in Bengal depended on a strictly non-hierarchical, even a counter-hierarchical, political language and agenda which, from the 1920s onward, staunchly opposed landlordism, sought to strengthen occupancy rights of *praja*-peasants, and by 1936 was actually calling for dismantling the institution of landlordism or at least substantially altering it in favor of *raiyati*/tenant interests. A comparison between the political

landscape of the two provinces in the mid-1930s effectively dramatizes this difference: whereas in Punjab, the 1937 elections brought to provincial political power the Unionists, commonly understood as the landlords' party, whose sphere of influence was rural Punjab, it was the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) that aggressively rose to political prominence in rural Bengal, contesting elections exclusively from Muslim constituencies on the plank of abolishing landlordism.

Even the terms in which rural interests in Punjab and Bengal were articulated were dramatically different. In rural Punjab, Unionist support lay in its promise of warding off any threat to the Land Alienation Act (introduced in 1901) that prevented the sale of land from groups that were gazetted as "agricultural tribes" (very often headed by landed *sajjada nashins*) to individuals who were not members of such groups, whereas one of the key demands of the *praja*/tenant movement in Bengal, even before it was formalized into the KPP, was the individual *praja*-peasant's right to freely transfer landholding without any legal constraint whatsoever. In other words, in Bengal, the *praja*-peasants' demands which became synonymous with a sort of Muslim popular demand, as they were articulated in the political domain through the 1920s and 1930s, were not, strictly speaking, communitarian in nature. We have to ask: were there organizations, styles of rhetoric, and ideologies operating among the Muslims in rural Bengal that can explain the formation of subjectivities which could inhabit political demands of a far more individuated nature than those of their counterparts in Punjab? My research confirmed that there were, and pointed in the direction of the *anjumans* in Bengal – distinctly Muslim forms of civil associations – whose local chapters in *mofussil* towns and far-flung villages were undergoing significant transformations and struggles in terms of their class composition as well as their manner of functioning in the 1910s and the 1920s. Most importantly, they appear to have played a major role in spreading a culture that gave primacy to voluntary association of individuals, and were key in disseminating practices of individual voting as the basis of decision-making in such institutions. This was at a time when franchise was severely restricted, and several Muslims members of such *anjumans* had not yet acquired political votes. The impact of such practices in shaping individuated subjectivities in rural Bengal has been explored in this book, in addition to the larger, but related question of how such *anjumans* were instrumental in changing the very notion of what it meant to represent the Muslim community, for such changing presuppositions about who could represent the community also took on a fundamentally anti-hierarchical character.

Ironically, the anti-hierarchical character of *praja*/tenant assertions increasingly demanding less stringent control of the *zamindars*/landlords over the sale and transfer of occupancy rights or tenancies had a tremendously damaging impact on the health of agrarian Bengal. During the Depression years, under duress of acute indebtedness, tenants with

smaller landholdings readily sold off their lands to bigger tenants and to the non-cultivating *bhadralok*, thus swelling the ranks of *bargadars*, share-croppers, and wage laborers, and paving the way for the consolidation of landholdings in the hands of the rich peasants and the *bhadralok* neo-*raiyats* into rural Bengal. I underscore this point to show that the increasing assertion of the value of labor (of cultivation) in the domain of Muslim politics, and indeed in Bengal's provincial politics as a whole, as signaled by the rise of the KPP, did not necessarily work to prevent the separation of actual producers from their ownership over the means of production and subsistence. Quite to the contrary, it appears to have accelerated such a separation. It is not that this connection between depeasantization and the increasingly vocal pro-peasant demands, raised in the domain of official politics, to the right to free transfer of *raiyati* holdings has not been noted by historians (particularly those of a Marxist inclination), either implicitly or explicitly.[22] As Ifthekhar Iqbal notes, when a version of the Land Alienation Act that was set in place in Punjab in 1901 to prevent land passing out of the hands of small cultivators to non-cultivating people was passed in Bengal in 1944, it was already too late.[23]

A logical next step, it seemed to me, would then be to probe into how such ideologies of labor, which produced and entrenched relations of capital, historically emerged and took root in society, why such ideologies became such a defining feature of Muslim politics in late colonial Bengal, and why some Muslim landlords were forced to seek election on KPP's (Peasant Tenant Party) tickets in spite of the party's avowedly anti-landlord stance. Existing historiography gave me no satisfactory answers. In fact, it would not be unfair to say that these questions had not really been posed with any clarity, even by historians of a most rigorous Marxist variety. In re-reading the existing historiographical literature on the period of my research, it then struck me that the posing of such questions was prevented by methodological impasses rooted in a peculiarly misplaced (and anti-historicist) Marxism, which in its unspoken assumption of the ontology of labor refused to historicize it. To put it simply, in such literature, the assumption that labor or production is the reliable and enduring source of all value acquired the status of metaphysics, which is to say that this assumption about value itself rested outside of critical examination and could not be historicized.

But if ideologies of labor, featuring prominently in the domain of Muslim politics in Bengal of the inter-war period, were major conduits for the production, reproduction, and entrenchment of relations of capital, that is to say, they effected the separation of the producer from the means of production (or "de-peasantization" to use a term more prevalent in Bengal historiography), then the manner in which an ontology of labor took root in Bengal's Muslim society needs to be historicized. Precisely, this historicist impulse lies at the heart of my project.

Andrew Sartori's intellectual history, *Liberalism in Empire*, makes a significant move in the direction of placing the ontology of labor under the lens

of scrutiny. He examines what he calls "the property-constituting power of labor," as something that derives from Locke and passed on to British colonial administrators and thinkers such as George Campbell and John Stuart Mill and, eventually, this "Lockeanism" undergoes a "vernacularization" in the politics of the colonial agrarian backwaters of Muslim Bengal.[24] Without surrendering to the temptation of such extrapolation from Western liberal political thought, my book is an attempt to trace the contours of a long historical moment during which the connection between agrarian labor politics and Muslim identity became possible and, in fact, interchangeable in late colonial Bengal. The transformation of the meaning of what it meant to be a Muslim required a reconceptualization of the very meaning of the community itself. This process had ethical dimensions: exploring and revising key theological issues, normative propositions on the morality of everyday life, questions about representing fellow co-religionists, the moral ordering of society, and visions of autonomy premised on Islam as an egalitarian, even redistributive, ethic. The making of a new kind of moral community is, thus, not epiphenomenal in any simple sense. The historical actors in this book were not victims of false consciousness as Sartori would have it, who were really talking about securing the property (even small landholding property) when they thought they were discussing the essence of their religion. They were, indeed, people who were active agents in forging new lifeworlds (and politics) even as they drew on resources that they believed were age-old in their religion.

Recent scholarship has also examined agrarian Islam in the early twentieth century as primarily a normative guide to navigating the market as peasant lives in Bengal became increasingly entwined with global commodity markets.[25] While this is a plausible explanation, the fear of markets as spaces of deception, where prices bore a fickle relationship to the degree of labor peasants put into cultivation, remained an unmistakable and dominant theme among Muslims in rural Bengal. The centrality of the power and discipline of one's own labor in securing one's life from the vicissitudes of the market lay at the heart of agrarian Islam.[26]

What This Book Is About

At the conceptual level, this book examines social and cultural processes that led to the rise of the ideology of labor as a touchstone of Bengali Muslim politics in late colonial India. It proposes that the tremendous popularity of the Pakistan movement in Bengal can be more adequately understood not just in terms of "communalization" of class politics, or even "separatist" demands of a religious minority living out anxieties of Hindu political majoritarianism, but in terms of a distinctively modern idea of Muslim self and culture which gave primacy to production/labor as the site where value (religious, moral, ethical as well as economic) would be anchored. Again, I use the phrase *the rise of an ideology of labor* to underscore the assumption

that value resides in the realm of production, in an activity such as tilling the earth, that to labor/to produce is the mark of measuring the (religious/moral) worth of man and the power of a (religious) community is not one without a history.

That labor is the primary, and authentic site of value is perhaps the most enduring presupposition of Marxist historiography and progressive politics alike; its axiomatic status has long resisted historicization. In analyzing the conjunction of a leftist-peasant populism and religious nationalism, and in accounting for the overwhelming participation of the peasantry in Bengal's Pakistan movement, existing historiography has paid little attention to inquiring how a group or a community comes to inhabit the assumption that value inheres in the site of production, as a precondition for asserting that a new nation based on Islamic identity would champion the cause of labor.

The story of how this modern Islamic identity was forged can be told from the bottom up. This is not a tale best told through an exclusive focus on elite politicians, or even political parties operating in the domain of official/electoral politics. I trace, instead, how an Islamic identity, anchored in redistributive justice and democratization, was forged between the 1910s and the 1930s, in the crucible of the Bengal countryside and small towns, by conventionally neglected historical actors – composers of cheaply printed religious tracts, itinerant clergy, mofussil intelligentsia, and organizations. I also trace how ideas disseminated in this rural and suburban domain were taken up variously by Muslim communists or socialists in arguing for the compatibility of Islam and socialism, as well as by social movements (like the tenant-peasant movement) and political parties such as the KPP, which had a meteoric rise in 1937 on a pro-tenant-peasant plank. The tremendous appeal of the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan – the plank on which it contested the 1946 elections – might appear as the popularization of a parochial kind of religious identity-based politics, eclipsing all other axes of identity that internally divided the Muslim constituency. But its success hinged on the Muslim League's absorption of the KPP's idioms of class politics, slogans of abolition of landlordism, its leaders, institutions, and support bases. So much so that on the eve of the 1946 elections, Abul Mansur Ahmed, a cultural activist of the Pakistan movement, formerly an activist of the tenant-peasant (krishak praja) movement and also formerly a fierce critic of the Muslim League as a party of feudal and elite vested interests, wrote in the journal *Millat*: "The Muslim League is the carrier and conductor of the Krishak praja/tenant-peasant movement… and the Praja movement has been successfully realized in the Pakistan movement."[27] How can we historically account for the conditions of possibility of such a formulation?

In order to answer this, I explore the following questions: in Bengal's Muslim social imagination, how did value come to reside in the realm of production or in the act of tilling the earth? If the instantiation of this social imagination centered on the ontology of labor had a history, what

discourses, institutions, practices, rhetorical styles produced this imagination? Which social actors were involved? If such actors belonged to different socio-economic strata, what maneuvers, or contingencies, or networks of patronage guaranteed that such socio-economic cleavages would not assume a relation of dominance that could explode an imaginary in which labor was the primary and enduring source of all value? And ultimately, as "land to the tiller" emerged as one of the most potent slogans of Bengali Pakistanism, did such ideologies of labor only become available to communalist appropriation, as historiography has conventionally claimed, or did it also make itself available to progressive articulations in legitimating the aspirations for a new kind of nation that Pakistan could stand for?

From the perspective of the Indian mainstream political establishment and popular understanding, the striving for Pakistan is viewed as the Original Sin, supposedly a form of "virulent nationalism" that is now used to justify a rising and virulent Indian variety of Hindu nationalism's anti-Pakistan, and by fallacious extension, anti-Muslim minority stances. This is all the more reason why we need to tell a history where Pakistan was not imagined as the consummation of an exclusivist, parochial, or religious identity-based politics alone. In the context of a Muslim majority province such as Bengal, Pakistan was also imagined in terms of a secular and egalitarian state at a time when decolonization was impending, but the geo-political and ideological shape of modern nations remained unsettled. At a time when the exact geo-political shape of British India was still being debated, the Pakistan movement cannot be understood through the lens of "separatism." It has to be understood in terms of different imaginaries of post-colonial nationhood that were competing with one another, and one that found resonance with a large number of Muslims. This book aims to trace the genealogies of the imagination of Pakistan that took root in late colonial India by unearthing the undercurrents of popular creative energies that animated it.

In this particular case, to write the history of thousands in the Bengal countryside throwing their lot behind the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan as a blip in history, a sudden frenzy of communalization of peasant consciousness is, I argue, simplistic. That is not to say that what we designate as "peasant consciousness" is immune to such impulses. Far from it. I will demonstrate, though, that "peasant consciousness" is more complex and more creative than the "communalization" trope alone conveys. And beyond the peasantry, avowed non-communalist, left-leaning members of the Muslim intelligentsia also pledged their allegiances to the cause for Pakistan, as an ideal of a post-colonial nation that would be truly anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, democratic, and egalitarian. Even the Communist Party of India and radicals like M.N. Roy (founder of both the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of Mexico) supported the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan on the pretext of minority self-determination. How are we to understand this?

To make sense of the braiding of peasant populism, leftist impulses, and religious nationalism via which the demand for Pakistan – a homeland for the Muslims – took root in Bengal's Muslim society requires tracking the socio-genesis of a distinctively modern, and in the context of the twentieth century, a novel concept of Muslim identity.

I argue that specific historical changes in practices and ideas about religion and representation (both political and literary) among the Bengali Muslims from the 1910s to the late colonial period linked notions of cultivation of the Muslim ethico-religious self and community to an egalitarian ethic. Key shifts in Islamic theological debates, ways of organizing Muslim forms of civil associations and social movements, and the emergence of a new ethos in literary culture combined to alter the meaning of being Muslim, in the context of twentieth-century Bengal, to re-imagine Islam as a specifically egalitarian faith. This book is the story of the emergence of an *ideology of egalitarianism*. I say ideology because this novel understanding of what it meant to be a Muslim was hegemonic: it was not restricted to a certain class of Muslims and was in fact effective in masking socio-economic differences. It thus made disenfranchised rural masses available for mobilization by political players and parties who championed the primacy of the producer in a claim to politically represent them – in the name of labor, redistribution, and Islam.

Approach and Sources

I have attended closely to the culturally specific articulations of economic phenomena and socio-political identities. These cultural artifacts have the power to explain how certain groups made meaning of supposedly self-evident and universally legible economic categories such as debt, for instance, or understood what it meant to be represented politically in modern democratic government. This attention to fresh sources shatters the illusion of a simple and transparent process that economic and political histories routinely reproduce.

Let me furnish a quick example. Credit relations in late colonial Bengal have been a topic on which historians have written volumes, and deservedly so. The Rent and Tenancy Legislations of 1859 and 1885 put checks on an arbitrary enhancement of rent by landlords (*zamindars*). The latter legislation in fact ensured that rent could only be raised once every 15 years, and fixed the degree of such enhancement. Rent ceased to be a major reason for peasant discontent,[28] while debt became the bane of the peasantry in the first half of the twentieth century.[29] Historians have typically been attentive to the demand and supply of credit, to the social identities of the creditors and debtors, and to the paucity of credit supply and its impact on agrarian social relations.[30] But none paused to ask, in the cultural world that the peasants inhabited, what did debt actually mean? Was economic distress the only meaning they attached to it? As the problem of debt resulting

from exorbitant rates of interest came to be identified increasingly as a problem affecting the Muslim community, did debt mean the same thing to the Muslim peasants of the countryside and their urban co-religionists? The so-called "prepolitical" resistance of the peasantry, as seen in rioting, for example, may be fully understood by complementing the economic fact of being in debt with a historically specific understanding of what debt meant, a meaning anchored in emerging religious and cultural forms. The religio-cultural meanings of debt, or economic interest on loans, might not share the presuppositions of economic historians who set out to analyze their impact. Joan Scott has famously argued that "gender" is not a category with the same meaning in all times and places, but one whose meaning has to be teased out in context. I argue similarly that categories such as "debt" and "labor" require similar interrogations.

To understand what debt, or labor, or political representation, or tenant-peasant (*praja*) identity, or citizenship in the nation-state of Pakistan really meant to the participants of the "prepolitical" resistances, the Muslim electorate, and the Pakistani nationalists from Bengal, I moved beyond the colonial official archives of land settlement records, debt settlement reports, and government files. I turned to a rich yet understudied world of Bengali vernacular texts. These included Muslim self-improvement texts; religious tracts; social pamphlets; autobiographies; memoirs and biographies of prominent Muslim social reformers, religious and literary figures from Bengal of the time; Bengali Muslim literary archives with poetry, short stories, essays, novels; and the institutional archives of Bengal's Muslim literary associations and other civil society organizations. Public libraries such as the National Library and the Bangiya Shahitya Parishad and private collections such as the Jatindra Mohan Granthasala and the Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Archives in Kolkata, as well as the Bangla Academy, the Dhaka University Library, and the Nazrul Institute in Dhaka were treasure troves for such sources.

My research uncovered a world of representations that was quite different from that represented in colonial official archives. Upon entering this world, I realized that ideological strands (such as the discourse of self-improvement), identities (such as *praja*), and institutions (such as *anjumans*) that informed the thought worlds and actions of rural and suburban Muslim populations were neither "communal" nor "secular," nor were they expressions of "secular" demands in a "communal" form. These categories were not quite relevant to the socio-cultural world I wanted to reconstruct. Instead, I have traced how what happened in this rural and mofussil domain created new social imaginations, which could then be taken up by or converge with those of the urban intelligentsia and parties engaged in formal politics.

This study thus has two core preoccupations. First, the imagination of the nation of Pakistan was realized from the bottom-up, not just the top-down. It is in this insight, and its consequences that I depart from some

prevalent formulations, according to which "it was for economic reasons, far more than because of any religious motivations, that the Muslim peasantry finally threw in their lot with the Muslim League and its claims for an independent Pakistan."[31] I show that economic motives, demands, and categories cannot be neatly separated from the religious dispositions, charismatic religious figures, and ethico-social ideological strands that re-shaped conceptions of self and community among Muslims in rural Bengal. Second, I trace how such conceptions were taken up and transformed by the urban Muslim intelligentsia and literati. These elites deployed these new conceptions in the sphere of cultural politics, where the imagination of a domain of Bengali Muslim cultural autonomy firmly linked itself to the political demand for Pakistan.

The Shape of What Follows

Chapter 2 shows how the seemingly transparent economic terms "labor" and "debt" have contingent historical meaning. It explores debt through its discursive representations in sites as diverse as Muslim literary journals, pamphlets, religious tracts, and Muslim self-improvement texts that circulated in early twentieth-century Bengal. In the early twentieth-century Bengal, at a time of acute indebtedness among the peasantry, debt, far from simply being an economic category, took on the distinctive valence of being "the burden of the Muslim." The problem of debt was often spoken of in relation to the Koranic injunction against *riba*, which, in popular understanding, prohibited transactions that generated profit as interest. In contesting interpretations over how to circumvent indebtedness, the meaning of *riba* emerged as a matter of fierce debate among the Muslims of Bengal. Debt, whether as a problem or an experience – as it got more and more entangled with interpreting the injunction against *riba* in public discourse – became inextricably linked to the problem of defining a moral vision of the Muslim self and community. In attending to the ways in which the interpretation of the *riba* prohibition by urban Muslim rationalists and reformers differed very significantly from their rural co-religionists, I show that such differing interpretations dramatized fundamentally different conceptions of what it meant to be a Muslim for these two constituencies.

"Labor" came to be understood as the site of the creation of value. Rather than provide a materialist account that takes labor for granted as a category, the chapter provides a history of materialism itself, a history created in part by actual laborers. The discourse of "Improvement" (*unnati*) circulating among the Muslims in the Bengal countryside during the 1910s and 1920s, in positing labor as the highest form of worship to Allah, structured the meaning of interest (or *riba*) as a mode of making wealth without expending labor, and a manner of prospering bereft of Islamic piety. Upholding the prohibition on interest by citing the absence of expenditure of labor, as the intent behind a Koranic prohibition was a stunningly novel spin introduced

by Muslim "Improvement" ethical discourse, and had no precedent in the Islamic theological discourse on *riba*. I track how this innovation was successfully taken up by left-minded members of the urban Bengali Muslim intelligentsia and introduced into the domain of formal politics to establish relationships of affinity between Islam and communism. Finally, I show how this development shaped the course of Muslim politics through the 1930s and informed the Pakistan movement in the subsequent decade.[32]

Chapter 3 explores the shifting presuppositions about political representation among the Muslims of colonial Bengal. Focusing on prominent Muslim public personalities of late nineteenth-century Bengal and institutions such as the National Mohammedan Association (1878), I show how for such figures and institutions, representation was based on a principle of distinction – rooted in wealth, social rank, influence, and a fundamental non-identification with the (Muslim) constituency one acted for. Those who considered themselves leaders of the Muslim community in Bengal signed on the Shimla Memorial in 1906, led by an all India-level Muslim deputation. The demand for separate electorates, self-contained legislative constituencies for Muslims, had been mooted in terms of receiving state patronage for a community, a system that protected the interests of the propertied Muslim tax-payer. But, by 1931, the plea for retaining separate electorates for Muslims was being raised by a prominent Bengal Muslim public personality, Azizul Haque, in terms of limiting the influence of men with wealth, rank, and influence – attributes that Haque's nineteenth-century predecessors considered essential preconditions for representing the community. This chapter explores how, in less than two decades, Muslim conceptions about representing the community had changed dramatically. The new terms of the demand for separate electorates provide clues to the changing self-definitions of the Muslim community in Bengal, which was now loath to accept a wealthy *ashraf* co-religionist as its true representative. What transformations in the moral vision of self and community can account for this change? This chapter shows how *anjumans*, distinctively Muslim forms of civil association, which spread across suburban Bengal, were crucial sites within which democratic practice and politics were being worked out in the early decades of twentieth-century Bengal. They spread a particular vision of Muslim community, which enabled habitations in politics rooted in popular mandate and equality.

Using *praja* materials such as pamphlets, autobiography, and newspapers, Chapter 4 traces how the early assertions of the *praja* (tenant peasant) movement in the second decade of the twentieth century were responses to experiences of social discrimination as Muslim *qua* Muslim. Non-violent methods of collectivization and negotiation were infused with dispositions shaped by a long history of Islamic revival movements that surged through rural Bengal in the nineteenth century. *Raiyat samitis* (tenant-peasant associations) in far-flung villages were often pioneered by locally influential, charismatic, Muslim religious leaders who were connected to *pirs* (Muslim

holy figures or leaders) wielding influence over several districts of Bengal. Such *pirs* were often themselves landed or at least patronized by the landed Muslim gentry. In tracing the nature of *raiyat samitis* or peasant-tenant associations' patronage networks, this chapter shows how potentially conflicting class interests between Muslim landed interests and the Muslim *raiyat*/tenant peasants were simultaneously produced and contained. The chapter shows that the language of *praja*-tenant mobilization tied visions of a more egalitarian social order to the restoration of a religio-moral Islamic order so effectively that the issue of religious legitimacy in the eyes of large populations of Muslims in Bengal became inextricable from the support for the *praja*-tenant movement. Religious figures, irrespective of bitter sectarian differences, started patronizing the movement. The rhetoric of the *praja*/*tenant* movement also enlisted the support of the *bargadars*/sharecroppers, even though the demands of the movement were not in their interest. I show how the movement's discourse made this possible. At one level, the discourse spread xenophobia directed not only against the Marwari moneylenders but also the Bihari coolies and the wage laborers from Orissa. At another level, it figured Bengal as a sedentarized realm of bounty vis-à-vis the "uncivilized" wilderness of Assam, latching on to the ideology of labor popularized by the Muslim improvement texts while expanding its meaning of a moral cultivation of self to diligence in cultivating land. This conception of moral cultivation encompassed not only labor, and the land one toiled on, but the land of Bengal at large. The rhetoric of the *praja* movement generated energies by which Bengali Muslim identity was formed at a grassroots level and entirely new kinds of assertions of ethnic belonging rooted in acts of cultivating the land of Bengal could be made. Claims of a distinctive (Bengali Muslim) ethnic identity would inflect the domain of organized provincial politics in the 1930s, where both the Muslim League and the KPP (Peasant Tenant Party) competed to represent the Muslims. Questions of which of them was the real *praja* party, and issues of Bengali Muslim-ness vs. non-Bengali Muslim-ness, made their way into claims of who could more authentically represent the Muslims of Bengal.

Chapter 5 explores how this Bengali Muslim identity forged in the discursive terrain of the *praja*/tenant movement converged with the cultural politics of the literary elite and intelligentsia located in Calcutta or Dhaka, as they strove to carve out a space of literary-cultural autonomy for the Muslims of Bengal. Connections between labor (land cultivation) and Islam (moral cultivation) were forged in the subaltern crucible of the improvement ethic. They were also taken up by left-minded members of the Muslim intelligentsia in Bengal, who explored the congruity between Islam and socialism literary imagination. By focusing on the figure of Nazrul Islam, who rose like a meteor in the literary world of Bengal in the 1920s, the chapter shows how his works and life choices, the body of criticism they generated, and the following that grew up around his literary style were key to the development of a subjectivity where Islam, redistributive justice, as

well as forceful individualism could seamlessly co-exist. This heady mix of Islam, socialism, and individualism brewing among sections of the Bengali Muslim literati from the 1920s onward informed the politics of cultural-literary organizations, such as the East Pakistan Renaissance Society (Calcutta) and the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Samsad (Dhaka), which came into being in the early 1940s with the express purpose of acting as cultural fronts of the Pakistan movement in Bengal. This chapter examines how a subjectivity that inhabited the Pakistan movement as a non-sectarian "people's movement" in the 1940s was historically formed. The manner in which this subjectivity was tied to a historically specific understanding of Muslim culture and identity can only be fully appreciated in light of how they were reconfigured through the first half of the twentieth century in Bengali Muslim literary praxis. Thus, an imagination of Pakistan that was put forth by intellectuals of the movement was not just a blip in history. Indeed, it emerged out of a long and sustained modernist, often internationalist, but locally grounded Muslim literary tradition in Bengal.[33]

Several left-minded members within the Muslim League continued to have friendly relations with Hindu leaders of the Communist Party in Bengal, even at the peak of the Pakistan movement.[34] As Abul Hashim, the General Secretary of the Muslim League in 1944 recounts, before the 1946 legislative elections the League attempted to convince Communist Party leaders to refrain from contesting the Muslim League in any of the Muslim constituencies.[35] Even though such an arrangement did not ultimately work out that it was seen as a distinct possibility by Leaguers such as Hashim and Abul Mansur points to how strong the idea of Pakistan as a coming together of individuals, abstracted from socially generated identities and committed to redistributive justice, was. At the same time, for activists like Mansur and Hashim, a commitment to universal justice and democracy – a vision of Pakistan where all individuals and communities would be accorded equal dignity and rights built on the redistribution of wealth – was rooted in the particularity of the "spirit of Islam" and did not, in principle, require the erasure of this particularity but a realization of its nature. Yet the story of how the connections between Islam, leftist populism, and democratic principles were forged remains an understudied aspect of Muslim politics and society in colonial India and Pakistan movement. *Islam and Egalitarianism* seeks to remedy that.

Notes

1 Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection* (Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 1974), pp. 80–81.
2 Ibid., p. 37.
3 Ibid., p. 79.
4 Ibid., p. 31.
5 See Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919–1947*, especially chapter 4 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth*

Century Bengal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims, 1871–1906: The Quest for Identity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988). Recent scholarship has tried to break away from this narrative of communalization of the Muslim masses as the sole vantage point from which the story of the demand for Pakistan can be told. See Neilesh Bose's, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014). This rich and detailed monograph documents the creative and political energies of Bengali Muslim literary figures, institutions, and publications to show how a modern regional Bengali Muslim identity emerges in the literary sphere.

6 This communalization of class thesis is most emphatically put forth by Taj-ul-Islam Hashmi. See Taj-ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant's Utopia: Communalization of Class in Bengal*. 1920–1947 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

7 See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims, 1871–1906: The Quest for Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

8 See Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

9 See Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919–1947* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Ifthekhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State and Social Change, 1840–1943* (Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

10 See Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

11 Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, social structure and politics, 1919–1947* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

12 Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920–1947: The Land Question* (Calcutta: Center of Studies in Social Sciences [by] K. P. Bagchi, 1984).

13 See Ifthekhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta*.

14 *Khas mahal* lands were typically outside the purview of Permanent Settlement, where the government had entered into direct settlements with the *raiyats*.

15 Iftekhar Iqbal, "Return of the Bhadralok: Ecology and Agrarian Relations in Eastern Bengal", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 6, Nov. 2009, p. 1352.

16 Taj-ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal*, pp. 219–267.

17 See David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1988); Taj-ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant's Utopia*; Marcus Daeschel, *Politics of Self Expression: The Urdu Middle Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Dhulipala argues that in the period between 1937 and 1947, the idea of Pakistan as a separate territorial nation-state was vigorously debated and fleshed out in the North Indian public sphere. He contests an influential historiographical line of thinking expounded by Ayesha Jalal that the idea of Pakistan was deliberately amorphously defined by Jinnah and the Muslim League so that Jinnah could use the idea to bargain for a federated postcolonial state structure with greater autonomy (but not a separate nation-state) for the Muslim majority regions on the Indian subcontinent. Also see Faisal Devji's *The Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). For Devji, regional specificities really did not contribute to the strength of the Pakistan movement as Pakistan was conceived as a purely abstract idea, which had no connection to the land and people inhabiting the areas that came within the territorial

limits of the nation-state that would be formed in 1947. Devji likens Pakistan to settler colonial states. His reading has been convincingly critiqued by historians such as David Gilmartin. Gilmartin rightly points out, "Devji's account comes very close to implying that the Pakistan project was entirely a project of those outside what became Pakistan, who projected it on a 'new' land. There is, no doubt, a grain of truth to the story that support for the Pakistan idea came late to the Muslim-majority areas, particularly to the Punjab (pp. 45–46). But it is important to note that this is only a grain of truth, for support in Bengal came earlier, and without eventual support in the Punjab Pakistan would never have been created. To see the 'Pakistan idea' as the projection of a 'new' homeland, a 'Muslim Zion' detached from history and geography, while ignoring almost entirely the politics and ideas of thinkers from the areas that ultimately became part of the new country (as Devji does) leaves an impression of the Pakistan movement that could only be characterized as bizarre. Pakistan was of course nothing like Israel in this particular respect, for the areas that became Pakistan were already occupied by tens of millions of the Muslims in whose name the state was created. That these may have been viewed by some Pakistan ideologues of the new state as not fully developed as Muslims is of course a subject that some historians have explored. But to ignore this population and their own thinking about the meaning of Pakistan, while projecting the story as one of a Muslim Zion, like a settler colony, amounts almost to historical erasure." David Gilmartin. See Review of Devji, Faisal, Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. January 2015. http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=41773

18 Ayesha Jalal's, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985) exemplifies this approach of exclusively focusing on political leaders and parties.

19 See David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*.

20 Ibid.

21 See Marcus Daeschel, *Politics of Self Expression: The Urdu Middle Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

22 Both Partha Chatterjee and Iftekhar Iqbal made a note of this process of de-peasantization.

23 Iftekhar Iqbal, "Return of the Bhadralok: Ecology and Agrarian Relations in Eastern Bengal, c. 1905–1947", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 6, Nov 2009, p. 1351.

24 Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

25 Tariq Omar Ali, "Agrarian Forms of Islam: Mofussil Discourses on Peasant Religion in the Bengal Delta during the 1920s", in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 5, Sep. 2017, pp. 1311–1339.

26 Ananya Dasgupta, "Debt and Muslim Self-making in Late Colonial Bengal", in *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2016.

27 As quoted in Tariq Omar Ali, *The Local History of Global Capital: Jute and Peasant Life in the Bengal Delta* (Princeton, NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 174.

28 Bipasha Raha, *The Plough and the Pen: Peasantry, Agriculture and the Literati in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), p. 15.

29 See Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*.

30 Ibid.; Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal, 1920–1947*: The Land Question, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Center of Studies in Social Sciences, K. P. Bagchi, 1984); Ifthekar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecolology, State and Social Change, 1840–1943* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

31 Willem Van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 93.
32 A version of this chapter has previously appeared in article form. See "Debt and Muslim Self-making in Late Colonial Bengal", in *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2016. I'm grateful to the Taylor and Francis Group for granting me the permission to reproduce it in this book from the journal *South Asian History and Culture*. A link to the journal can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rsac20
33 See Khizar Humayun Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims (1917–1947)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015). Ansari's important monograph on the history of Muslim socialists in North India in the first half of the twentieth century focuses on organizations like the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). He examines how from endorsing a Congress-led Indian nationalism, PWA eventually moved to a pro-Muslim League position on the issue of Pakistan. The Muslim socialists in PWA supported the demand for Pakistan on the basis of the principle of self-determination. Ansari sees this shift as the betrayal of a greater cause and attributes it to the blunting of the anti-colonial edge of PWA's politics, ideologically forced as they were to support Britain during World War II, especially after 1941, when the Soviet Union joined the Allied powers. These Muslim socialists placed the fight against fascism and their ideological allegiance to the Soviet Union above the fight against British imperialism and lost Congress support, as restrictions on their activities were increasingly relaxed by the British colonial government that began to see them in a favorable light. For Ansari, the transformation of the PWA to a pro-Pakistan stance was also a capitulation in that in warding off allegations of pornography (in reality, probing questions about sexuality) in their writings made by the Muslim League, the PWA became increasingly compliant with conservative Muslim public opinion. The literary organizations championing East Pakistan that I have studied tells the story of historical actors who were decisively progressive and were effective in battling conservative and communal visions of Pakistan with a politics that could seamlessly meld Islamic ideals with radical ideas. In fact, they drew the radicalism, anti-colonialism, and modernity of their political ideas from what they believed to be the spirit of Islam.
34 Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, p. 101.
35 Ibid., pp. 101–102.

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2 The Muslim's Burden

Riba and the Value of Labor

The burden of debt made its appearance on the discursive terrain of the early twentieth-century Bengal as a distinctive kind of burden – "the burden of the Muslim." The figure of the debt-ridden Muslim peasant of the Bengal countryside – mostly passive and emaciated, but occasionally insurgent and avenging the local Hindu moneylender – forms a staple in the histories of twentieth-century colonial Bengal. Was the insurgent Muslim peasant "communally" motivated? Or was his act of rage propelled by the "economic fact" of his indebtedness? Put simply, is it religion or economics that can most satisfactorily explain the widespread unrest among sections of the overwhelmingly Muslim peasantry of Bengal that sporadically erupted in collective acts of violence, throughout the 1920s and the early 1930s, in which the targets were inevitably moneylenders? These are questions that plague today's historians, much in the manner in which they plagued colonial officials who set out to understand, control, and often brutally suppress such "riots" or "disturbances." Today's historians, in the manner of the British officers of colonial India, continue to adjudicate on these matters – religious or economic, Islam or debt, this way or that. Mine is a stubborn refusal to partake in such adjudications by entertaining the possibility that this debate itself – "religious or economic? Islam or debt?" – is, in all likelihood, a misplaced one; it may not be possible to historically disentangle the religious from the economic. So I take another tack in asking a different set of questions, which are of this nature: what was the meaning of "debt" as it emerged in the discourses circulating among the Muslims of Bengal in the 1920s and 30s? In what terms did Bengali Muslims speak of the problem of "being in debt," and in what kinds of spaces was the meaning of "debt" being negotiated and determined?

In Bengal, by the 1920s, exorbitant interest on loans was identified as the prime reason for indebtedness; newspapers and journals from the time are replete with reportage of how a relatively small sum loaned by an unsuspecting peasant transformed fantastically into an unbelievably huge and incomprehensible debt. The monthly journal *Mohammadi*'s account of the plight of one Zeenat Ali Sheikh is typical of such reportage. According to a 1928 issue of the journal, published from Calcutta, Zeenat Ali Sheikh,

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a small peasant of Ilbari village had borrowed a sum of Rs. 22 from one Mahendra Chandra Pal on a rate of interest charged at 200 percent, with an additional clause that in the instance of default on annual payment, the interest would be added to the principal amount loaned on which, as per the algorithm of compound interest, interest would be further calculated. Within a brief period of time, Zeenat Ali Sheikh's loan of Rs. 22 had transformed itself into a debt amounting to a mammoth sum of Rs. 37721. In the same year, when this piece of news from the *Mohammadi* was quoted in a cheaply printed tract titled *Krishaker Unnati* (*Improvement of the Peasant*), directed primarily to a rural audience, the debt of Zeenat Ali Sheikh of Ilbari had come to be seen as a debt of the entire Muslim community in Bengal, and "indebtedness" came to be identified as the root cause of the economic and spiritual degeneration of the Bengali Muslims.[1]

In late colonial eastern Bengal, the paucity of rural credit supply in the wake of the economic slump of the inter-war period impacted agrarian social relations. The drying up of credit and the concomitant strain on exploitative yet symbiotic relationships that existed between a largely Muslim small-holding peasantry and their Hindu creditors led to the increased polarization of socio-religious identities.[2] But in Bengal during the inter-war period, rural indebtedness acquired a distinct class and social character where the victim could be typified in the gullible, small peasant, Zeenat Ali Sheikh, who plight drew urgent attention from the Calcutta-based Bengali Muslim journal with a more literate readership as well as a more popular, low-brow Muslim tract.

As the problem of debt resulting from exorbitant rates of interest came to be identified increasingly as a problem affecting the Muslim community, did debt mean the same thing to the Muslim peasants of the countryside and their urban or town-based educated co-religionists? It is possible that the resistance of the Muslim peasantry documented in instances of rioting that occurred in parts of eastern Bengal in the depression-affected early 1930s, where debt bonds were the central objects of the rioters' destruction and rural moneylenders emerged as principal targets, is better understood not only in terms of the economic fact of being in debt (e.g. paucity of rural credit), but in the historical specificity of its religio-culturally defined meaning?[3] More importantly, did the religio-culturally defined meanings of debt or economic interest (through which debt accumulated) share the presuppositions that structure such phenomena for economic historians who set out to analyze their impact? These are some of the questions I seek to answer. The chapter's penultimate section does so by examining the historically specific discursive articulations of the economic phenomena of "indebtedness" – in its polyvalent complexity – to explain how subaltern groups made meaning of supposedly self-evident and universally legible economic category such as "debt" in ways that implode the glass ceiling of apparent transparency that economic historians routinely place on such a phenomenon.

Historians have analyzed how following the breakdown of symbiotic relationships between the Muslim peasantry and the traditional class of moneylenders, it was not merely in the relations of production that the Muslim big tenants (*jotedars)* assumed an increasingly advantageous position, but that Muslim *jotedar*-peasants were successful in establishing hegemony over small Muslim peasants precisely because they rose to economic prominence from a hitherto culturally undifferentiated peasantry.[4] But what remains unexamined is the content of the religio-cultural matrix within which the somewhat undifferentiated peasantry in eastern Bengal operated, and from which, arguably, the Muslim *jotedars* mobilized consent in establishing hegemony. In this chapter, I use as my archive popular self-improvement tracts circulating in the countryside that sought to provide the Muslim peasantry with a practico-moral compass as an entry point into examining the historically specific meaning of debt, and the problem of indebtedness, that had to be navigated by the Muslim peasantry in terms both practical and moral.

The first decade of the twentieth century was the very early phase of the introduction of co-operative credit societies that were being set up in rural and urban centers of Bengal in order to facilitate rural lending. Despite some degree of government initiative, progress was slow. In 1905, there was only one rural credit society in Eastern Bengal. By 1910, even though the number had grown to 402, the growth of co-operative credit societies was woefully inadequate for a predominantly agrarian region where the expansion of jute economy and cultivation had massively enlarged the credit needs of the peasantry.[5] Some Muslims of local standing and influence, from East Bengali towns, urged the government to budget sufficient advances to the local co-operative credit societies as the route to freeing the peasantry from the clutches of the *mahajan*-moneylender. At the first conference of the Co-operative Credit Societies, one such figure accused both the moneylender and the itinerant Muslim clerics ("the *mollahs*") operating in the countryside as the "worst enemies" of the Muslim peasantry, in the course of advancing his opinion that "Muhammadan Law, while forbidding usury, sanctioned payment and levying of interest at reasonable rates."[6] The Government's Revenue Department seemed to be aware of the "unwillingness of certain sections of the Muhammadan community on religious grounds to take part in transactions whereby interest is exchanged on money lent."[7] Officials were pleased to learn that in some cases, "Mohammedan societies" had collectively "got around the difficulty by applying the interest so earned to public objects for the benefit of the village."[8]

This debate pertaining to the relationship between "Muhammadan Law" and the permissibility of transactions involving interest really intensified in the Bengali Muslim public sphere in the 1920s and 1930s, facilitated by commercial printing, and necessitated by the credit-intensive jute economy in which eastern Bengal's largely Muslim peasantry was entrenched. In a wide

array of writings dealing with the problem of debt, by English-educated Muslim "progressive" intellectuals such as the members of the Dhaka-based Muslim Sahitya Samiti, social reformers such as Abdus Sattar, journalists and well-respected Islamic scholars of the likes of Akram Khan based out of towns and urban centers as well as the itinerant *ulema* preaching in the Bengal countryside, the condition of indebtedness was all too often spoken of in relation to the Quranic injunction forbidding Muslims from engaging in *riba* or usurious activity – more generally, understood as partaking in any transaction that involved the receiving or giving of interest on loans. The intra-Muslim debate on how to circumvent debt was fierce. Some argued that the Muslim's burden of debt was an outcome of flouting the Islamic injunction against interest-related transactions, which jeopardized not only one's worldly (*duniyabi*) condition but also one's relationship to religion (*deen*). Yet loans were almost always available on interest and were needed, the opposing camp contended, for commercial and agricultural ventures and, therefore, urged the *ulema* (the legal scholars) to rethink the prohibition on *riba* in light of practical necessities. Moreover, some Bengali Muslim social reformers even argued that Muslims being forbidden from wealth-making activities that generated profit as interest, in fact, impoverished themselves both materially and spiritually, since the spiritual well-being of the community was inextricably tied to its material well-being. This essay traces the terms in which the status of the *riba* prohibition was debated in the Muslim public domain of the early twentieth-century colonial Bengal. Here, no consensus emerged regarding the manner in which this "traditional" injunction prohibiting *riba* had to be dealt with or indeed understood and the diversity of opinions ranged from declarations of complete irrelevance of the *sharia*'s injunction, to a plea to re-interpret the *sharia*, to advocating strict adherence to the injunction as the duty of every good Muslim.

To suit the commercial and consumer credit needs of Muslims integrated into the arena of Indian Ocean markets, Omani Islamic jurists of the mid-nineteenth century recognized *khiyar* sale deeds – forms of sale that could be rescinded following the lapse of a flexibly determined period of time, which could in some cases span multiple generations – as legitimate contractual relationships between creditors and debtors. The widespread practice of somewhat similar revocable sale of custody of property, institutionalized in *'uhda* transactions, in the Hadramawt region of Yemen in the early twentieth century, received near-unanimous sanction from local Shafi jurists, thus serving the credit needs of different sections of society, including a large emigrant population, while at the same time preserving the Quranic prohibition on *riba*.[9] No such creative instruments of credit, compatible with the dynamism of Islamic jurisprudence in dealing with matters relating to non-familial economic transactions and successfully responding to the socio-economic needs of the Muslims while upholding, in theory, the prohibition on *riba*, could evolve in late colonial Bengal where British officials, since the 1860s, took comprehensive steps to formalize Islamic law

within the delimited sphere of "personal law."[10] Possibly, it is for this reason that the Bengali Muslim debate on *riba* was of a very public nature – beyond the exclusive preserve of Islamic legal scholars, it spilled over, drawing opinions from actors belonging to different walks of life. Yet the limits of the debates in the public domain, notwithstanding the multiple and contradictory positions on the issue, were structured by the near impossibility of any Muslim in Bengal of the time to speak of the condition of indebtedness without referring to the implications of his position to his identity as a Muslim. The condition of indebtedness, whether as a problem or an experience – as it got more and more entangled with the status of the *riba* prohibition in public discourse – became inextricably linked to the problem of defining a moral vision of the Muslim self and community.

Rationalist and Reformist Remedies to the Problem of Debt

In 1929, at the third annual session of the Muslim Sahitya Samiti, a literary association comprising primarily of Muslim teachers and students of varied ideological persuasions, that grew out of Dhaka University, Nazirul Islam, an important member of the association, attacked Islamic law for suppressing intellectual freedom (*buddhir mukti*) and attributed the Muslim community's lack of economic development to this suppression of intellect.[11] According to Nazirul Islam, although Islamic texts had taught Muslims social and economic egalitarianism by upholding the abolition of interest and the introduction of *zakat* (obligatory payment to be made annually for religious and charitable purposes), such decrees suited the needs of people at the time they were introduced, but had gradually become oppressive and outmoded. Nazirul Islam saw the introduction of compound interest in Europe as the key economic innovation that fuelled and sustained the industrial revolution. As per his largely distorted but tidy narrative of Europe's "progress," people deposited money in banks, and the principle of compound interest – by which money speedily begot money – enabled capital to be invested in building newer industries and infrastructure, thus leading Europe up the path of progress.[12] The Muslim, he lamented, could not accept this "creativity of humans" and Islamic societies remained resistant to change, economic innovation, and, ultimately, progress. To quote Nazirul Islam:

> He [the Muslim] opened the decaying pages of religious texts. He saw in there that it is an act of *haram* (sinful) to take interest… what happened, as a result, is that egalitarianism within Muslim society continued according to the rules of Islamic texts. But, between the Christians of the West and the Muslims, the inequity in material conditions assumed the vast distance between the sky and the earth…Applying *mukta buddhi* (freedom of intellect) will equip [the Muslim] to adjust and achieve victory in the changing circumstances of the world.[13]

The economic development of the Muslims, for Nazirul Islam, would require the application of emancipated intellect (*mukta buddhi*). To the question of what the intellect would have to emancipate itself from, his answer was unequivocal: from the coercive forces of religious injunctions that did not serve the economic/material needs of the time. According to his formulation, the soundness of intellectual judgment was to be based on the condition of "freedom" or "autonomy" under which it operates – freedom from the bindings of religion and an autonomy vis-à-vis religion. Significantly, and indeed ironically, this secularized "emancipated intellect" (*mukta buddhi*) on which an influential group of Dhaka-based Muslim rationalist humanists placed premium, even as it freed itself from religion, could not free itself from the realm of "economic needs" to the satisfaction of which every intellectual judgment had to be, ultimately, directed.

I will briefly focus on three other vocal participants in the *riba* debate, who were based out of the urban centers of Dhaka or Calcutta, and were men in positions of considerably influencing public opinion by virtue of being prominent public personalities or renowned Islamic scholars who held key editorial positions in popular Bengali Muslim (and Urdu) newspapers and journals.

Mohammad Abdur Rashid, the editor of a well-known Bengali weekly called *Moslem Jagat* (*Muslim World*) and a short-lived literary journal *Raktasetu* (*Bridge of Blood*), was also a prominent member of the Muslim Sahitya Samiti based out of Dhaka University. From a reformed religious stance, Rashid argued that even though "the Quran has forbidden interest," for Muslims to successfully compete with other *jatis* (communities) in the "economic sphere," the giving and taking of loans on interest was a necessity. According to him, adjusting to the requirements of the present was in consonance with "the spirit of Islam."[14] In his view, it was through the application of proper judgment that such adjustments were to be made. Unlike the radical humanists of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj, for whom the application of judgment would first require the intellect to be freed from the constraining forces of religion, Rashid drew on the tradition of *ijtihad*, or independent judgment of original Islamic sources, emphasized in the theological writings of the likes of Shah Waliullah, a noted Islamic scholar of eighteenth-century South Asia. Rashid saw the exercise of *ijtihad* as key to resolving the problem posed by the *riba* prohibition and argued that it was only via the exercise of *ijtihad* that "the continuity of the inner meanings of *Shariat*" could be maintained to meet "the new necessities…of time and age." He emphasized that "this adjustment would not mean a change of inner thought and meaning of the *Shariah*, but only a rational change of their exterior form."[15]

Akram Khan's "*Sudh Samasya*" ("The Problem of Interest") was precisely such an exercise in *ijtihad*.[16] Khan, a noted journalist, political activist, and a religious scholar theologically close to the Alh-i Hadis, denounced the utter chaos that resulted from the multiplicity of arguments

on the issue of the prohibition on *riba*, in the tradition recognizable as the Ahl-i Hadis's aversion to dissension within Muslim society.[17] He identified the views of the key camps in the *riba* debate – the reformist, the Hanafis, and the secularists. The reformists, Khan pointed out, in reading the Quran and the *hadith,* had ascertained that according to the Quran, *riba* was forbidden, but made a distinction between *riba* and modern-day interest; in refusing to equate the two they concluded that although *riba* was *haram* (unlawful), modern-day interest in falling outside the Quranic category of *riba* was *halal* (permissible). The *ulema* of the Hanafi *madhab* was of the opinion that the injunction against *riba* could be effective only in *Dar-ul-Islam* (the land of Islam), but since Muslims were living in *Dar-ul-Harb*, the land ruled by infidels – namely, the British colonizers – it was permissible to receive interests from non-Muslims. Akram Khan reserved his most disparaging comments for the so-called secularized Muslims, who he alleged, "were generally least concerned with the well-being of the Mussalman, but when it came to the issue of interest made a big noise." According to him, the so-called progressive Muslim secularists were on a mission to prove that Islam was not fit for "our [*sic*] times" and used the injunction against *riba* as an attack on the faith. The problem, Khan argued, lay not in the Quranic injunction against *riba*, but in the failure of all parties invested in the debate – the *ulema*, the reformist intelligentsia, and so-called "progressives" – to attend closely to the Quran and the *hadith*. Khan pointed out that even the religious scholars took a partial view in their reading of the prohibition on *rib*a, and thus missed the most basic principle that ought to guide the reading of the Quran – this principle, for him, was the recognition that in the scripture, every prohibition was complemented by a direction, and alongside every renunciation was an acquisition. For Akram Khan, the denial implied in the injunction prohibiting *riba* could only be fully understood in relation to the positive duty of *zakat*. He argued that loans taken out on interest became a necessity only in conditions of extreme economic desperation and the *farz* (religious duty) of *zakat* (charity) worked toward eliminating such economic desperation in society in the first place. Therefore, until the institution of *zakat* was not well entrenched in society, *riba* or interest could not be prohibited. He concluded that the *riba* prohibition was not a problem of Islam that had to be confronted and solved, but a problem that arose from partial readings of the Quran, which resulted from failing to exercise proper judgment. The lack of proper judgment led to misrecognizing the part for the whole and prevented a grasp over the basic principles of Islam.[18]

While addressing a large gathering at the Islamia Jila Conference in Chattagram in 1925, Abdus Sattar – a social reformer, lawyer, and at the time a young, promising member of the Calcutta Bar Association – expressed concerns that insurmountable debts, which kept growing with high rates of

interest charged by non-Muslim communities, resulted in the loss of land and property of several hundred Muslims who could barely prevent their ancestral homes from being auctioned off by moneylenders.[19] In addition, he claimed, the profit-making activity of lending out money on interest in being forbidden by Islam aggravated the Muslims' condition of indebtedness, turning them into perpetual debtors, who were handicapped by not being able to benefit from the profits that interest – as the money-value of passing time – generated. Sattar urged the *maulavis* to consider special procedures exempting the Muslim community from the prohibition on interest-generating transactions."[20] He argued that his plea was in consonance with the express agenda of the district-level conference, which was, "to deliberate on the ways in which the community, in its current state of religious degeneration, could improve itself in the sphere of both *din* (faith) and *duniya* (worldly matters)." An accurate understanding of *din,* according to him, would require inessential customary practices to be stripped away from the essential "rational core" of religion, and attributed the "present" economic condition of backwardness in Muslim society to slavish subservience to "customs." To help the *ulema* identify Islam's "rational" core, Sattar suggested some concrete measures to the gathering, key among which was an initiative, undertaken under the supervision of the conference committee, to modernize the district madrasa by the inclusion of Economics (*arthakari bidya*) in its curriculum while turning all other local village-level madrasas, modeled on the district madrasa, into its branches. Economics, he believed, would help the *ulema* grasp the material, "economic needs" of the present, and in light of these needs, enable them to deliberate on separating inessential religious practices (such as the injunction against usury) from the core/inner meaning of Islam.[21]

In the writings and speeches of these urban social and religious reformers, the meaning of *sharia* was to be grasped through an interiorized process of intellection, not through outward practice. In their formulations, the exercise of intellectual judgment held primacy – it was the basis on which the distinction between the "inner meaning" of the *sharia* and its mere "exterior forms" could be made in the first place. The application of judgment, which for religious reformers such as Akram Khan and Abdur Rashid was itself sanctioned by religion, thus took precedence over religious practice and determined what outward practice ought to be. For Muslim social reformers such as Nazirul Islam and Abdus Sattar, the relevance of religious practice was contingent on whether or not they were rational. The ability of religious practice to be able to adequately fit the "economic needs of the time" was seen as the touchstone of rationality. In other words, for them, the needs of the economic sphere as the final determinants of material conditions were absolute givens, whereas the requirements of religion (understood as an organizing principle of the social structure) could be molded and constituted in accordance with the absolute given of economic needs.

The Muslim Self-improvement Texts: How to Prosper in This World and Beyond?

The emphasis on the need to improve the *duniyabi* (worldly) condition as a prerequisite for the successful upholding of *din* (religion) that we find in speeches and writings of Muslim social reformists, such as Abdus Sattar, was also to be found in cheaply-printed Muslim improvement texts in verse and prose which proliferated from the 1920s onward and circulated in the Bengal countryside. Unified by the theme of the Muslim peasant's self-improvement, these texts were written in country dialects and oriented primarily toward rural, barely literate, or even non-literate, audiences. It is difficult to satisfactorily reconstruct the performative contexts, but such tracts, frequently composed in rhyming couplets, lend themselves more readily to be learned by rote and were, in all likelihood, read out to audiences of eager listeners more frequently than they were read in silent contemplation.

One such tract repeatedly emphasized the need for material stability as the key to upholding religion, by drawing on the example of the Malkana Rajputs, whose material impoverishment made them easy targets for the Hindu reformist Arya Samaj's aggressive drive to "reconvert" certain populations back into the Hindu fold through the "*suddhi* (purification) movement" of the 1920s:

> Listen, my Muslim brothers,
> The one who dwells in daily poverty,
> Finds it hard to maintain his *imaan* [religious integrity]
> Have you heard of the happenings in Rajputana?
> Several Muslims have become Hindus,
> Compelled by poverty,
> They parted with *din* Islam.
> Helped by the Arya [Samajis] who provided succor,
> They became Hindus…
> Listen, O Muslims brothers, if you're keen
> To uphold *din* Islam,
> Then come together
> To alleviate the poverty (*deen*)
> Of your *jati*.
> Look at other *jatis*
> Who loot our money
> And by engaging in business
> Become masters, as we become impoverished.[22]

Typical of such verses was an interesting word play on the very different meanings of *deen*, which, in Bengali, could mean one's faith (*din* or *deen*) but also helplessness (*deen*). Muslim improvement texts typically spoke of how difficult it was for the economically helpless (*deen*) to be faithful to an Islamic way of life *(deen)*. The condition of impoverishment (*deenata*)

was therefore understood as both a material and a spiritual condition, and spiritual poverty (*deenhinata*) could both be the effect of material poverty or its cause. But interestingly in most self-improvement tracts, both material and spiritual poverty resulted from incorrect/irreligious practice. Such texts, in general, evinced a marked difference from the urban Muslim reformists' take on the question of interest-related financial transactions. By and large, the Muslim self-improvement texts did not advocate a repeal of the "traditional" injunction against the giving and taking of interest, but asked for a strict adherence to the practice of the prohibition on *riba*. In other words, practice, in the case of improvement tracts, was not deemed secondary to the material well-being of a Muslim. Indeed, such texts worked to delineate how it was through correct religious practice that both material and spiritual well-being could be best maintained.

The self-improvement text in verse titled *Duniya O Akherat Do Jahan-er Najat* (*Prosperity in this World and Beyond*), composed by Abdul Aziz, published from Noakhali in 1925, identified the condition of indebtedness as the cause of the Muslim's religious as well as economic impoverishment; the point was illustrated by example through the supposedly "true" story of two Muslim brothers from Noakhali district who got into a row over a petty domestic matter. In lively colloquial verse, it narrated the manner in which, the quarrel between the siblings spiraled out of control and got violent; egged on by villagers, they dragged each other to the court of law; the protracted legal battle that ensued between the two brothers proved too expensive, resulting in a total depletion of cash, leading them to the door of the usurious village *mahajan* (moneylender) to meet the legal expenses. The verse tract goes on to speak of how the brothers, neck-deep in debt, were, ultimately, driven out of their ancestral home by the moneylender who usurped their house and the plots of land they had mortgaged in taking out loans. In this popular tract, the plight of the brothers was shown to be the outcome of flouting the religious injunction prohibiting *riba*. The message is loud and clear: in taking loans given out on interest, the brothers not only reduced themselves to a state of penury but also committed a grave sin (*gunah*) that Allah would never forgive. The consequences of this irreligious act, the closing lines of the verse say, would last beyond their life in this world (*duniya*) and condemn them to burn in the fires of hell (*jahannum*).[23]

Khademol Islam, an itinerant preacher who traveled extensively in the countryside of Bengal and Assam and was associated with the Furfura Pir, Maulana Abu Bakar Siddiqui's Anjuman-e Wazin-i-Bangla, wrote a popular prose tract called *Krishaker Unnati* (*Improvement of the Peasant*). The tract posits indebtedness as a problem for both the material and religious life of the Muslim peasant:

> Incurring a debt (*rin*), even in performing a good deed (*punya*), is not in accordance with the *shariat*. If the ignorant peasants could understand this simple matter, then they would not jeopardize their

> existence in this life and after. Incurring a debt is a grave sin (*maha paap*) – for the debtor can never enter the house of *behesht* (heaven) until he frees himself from the web of debt. For those that are suspicious of what I say, I have quoted a saying of the Prophet. Readers, from this you will understand the gravity of the sin of incurring debt. Hazrat says: – "In the hour of *qayamat*, a debtor will be imprisoned for not paying off his debt."

According to the *hadith* collection, *Chahi Mocholman*:

> "O inspired Prophet, if in receiving the blessing of Allah, I move ever forward and die in *jihad*, in exchange will Allah forgive all the sins I have accumulated in the course of my lifetime?" The Prophet replied, "Yes". But as soon the man turned to proceed homeward, Prophet addressed him and said, "All your sins will be forgiven, but not the sin of incurring debt. This has been told to me by Jibrail."[24]

But if debt was such a grave sin, how could the peasants circumvent the condition of indebtedness? In the manner characteristic of Muslim self-improvement tracts, *Krishaker Unnati* advocated a spirit of diligence, hard work, avoidance of extravagance, and an inculcation of the virtue of thriftiness. Disciplines of diligence and thriftiness, it was said, could lead to self-sufficiency of the individual Muslim peasant and the betterment of the Muslim community as a whole. Again, in the manner typical of such tracts, *Krishaker Unnati* maintained that for the peasant, diligence was warranted because cultivation held a special place "among all the occupations that Allah has created for man" and iterated that many prophets of Islam – those that came before Mohammad – were cultivators:

> Hazrat Adam and Lut were both cultivators. So were Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Maksud. The problem is that the educated look down upon those that feed them by calling them *chasha*.[25]

That tilling the earth was not a simple act of labor but an act laden with a religio-moral valence was a theme that pervaded the Muslim self-improvement tracts. To quote from the verse tract, *Najat*:

> O brothers, listen to what the *shariat* says,
> Labor in this world *(duniya)*
> For it is your action in the world, that will determine your end (*akher*)
> According to the *sharia*,
> Allah says, "I have created man and animal
> Only so they can worship me"
> Now listen, only for worship (*ibadat*)
> If Allah had created us

Why did he create work in the world?
Listen O Muslim brothers,
The truth (*haqiqat*) is
All work is worship
… And agriculture is the original work.[26]

Another popular tract, *Adarsha Krishak* (*The Ideal Peasant*), from the 1920s then went into several reprints, re-iterated that the labor of cultivation was man's original work:

Adam and Eve lived in the world
And tilled the earth
We who are alive,
Bear their ancestry,
Whether we are beggars or kings.
(Adam o Hawa thake
duniya-e, Karen chasher kaj/
tar-I bangsha bhabe, achi mora
shobe/kangal ki maharaj)[27]

In the Muslim self-improvement tracts, the ability to perform labor, especially the physical labor of cultivation, was depicted as the highest form of worship to Allah, and tilling the earth acquired the status of man's original work. The relationship between land and labor was posited as a religiously sanctioned one – to respect this relationship was held up as the duty of a good Muslim and the proof of his religiosity. Of course, the belief that to be a good Muslim one had to cultivate the earth, as Adam once did, was not an invention of the popular self-improvement tracts. As far back as the sixteenth century, this idea found expression in Sufi texts such as *Nabi Bamsa*, in which, the messenger Gabriel after giving Adam a plow, a yoke, two bulls and seeds, addressed him with the words, "God has commanded that agriculture will be your destiny."[28] Though Adam's career as a tiller of the soil is also found in the Book of Genesis, such an association is not made in the Quran. In the Muslim world, Richard Eaton contends, the perception of Adam as the first cultivator, and of his cultivating the earth at the command of God was possibly a distinctive variant of Bengali Islam.[29] And yet, even in using these ideas that already held a place in the Islamic cultural repertoire of Bengal – of Adam as the cultivator and cultivation as man's oldest and original work – the early twentieth-century Bengali self-improvement tracts actually achieved something quite new. They created a religio-moral vision of the Muslim self and community, where value lay in the act of cultivating, i.e. in production, while consistently depicting the realm of exchange, in this case, the market (*bajar*) as a morally bankrupt realm of deception, duplicity, and lies.

The self-improvement prose tracts, while firmly anchored in templates of Muslim self-making, provided a good deal of practical advice on quotidian matters: how to weave bamboo baskets; methods of tending kitchen gardens; merits of using ash from burnt banana leaves instead of washing soda for greater durability of clothes; how buying soap from the *bajar* to clean one's hair is useless, when one could just bury some rose beneath soft earth and after a few days wash hair with the scented earth.[30] Such quotidian advice, whether on personal grooming or household matters were, ultimately, tied to the suspicion of the marketplace and rooted in an anti-proletarian ethos of the Muslim peasant's self-sufficiency. The ethos of self-sufficiency was instantiated through seamless movements between greater self-awareness of religious obligations (such as tending one's land; teaching children prayers) and secular rights (of *prajas*/tenants). At times, directives against unnecessary visits to the market were clearly linked to the awareness of the *praja's* rights – "Do not buy fish from the *bajar*, go fishing in the ponds and lakes on which cess is levied from you."[31]

This deep suspicion of the marketplace that characterized the Muslim self-improvement tracts shows affinities with metaphors of the *bhava-bajar* that were part of the Baul tradition, drawing followers from the lower classes of rural Bengal. The metaphor of the *bhava-bajar*, the marketplace of the world, is replete with connotations of chicanery and deceptions of the material world or *samasara*, while offering, in contradistinction, the vision of a spiritual marketplace in the Love "*bajar*" of the Baul path.[32] A sect of more urban colonial origins, that became popular around Calcutta in the nineteenth century – the Kartabhajas – also appropriated the metaphor of the spiritual marketplace from older literary and oral traditions of Bengali Vaishnavism dating back at least to the seventeenth century, if not earlier, to critique the allegedly corrupt Vaishvana tradition and set itself apart as the true dealer in "spiritual commodities."[33]

Traditionally, at markets and fairs lying along pilgrimages routes, consumption and redistribution went hand in hand with the acquisition of religious merit. Popular fairs were associated with *urs* of Sufi saints as market transactions on those days were considered particularly propitious. In Bengal, market fairs on the *urs* of sufi saints such as Yakdil Shah in Barasat, Pir Gorachand in Balanda, and Patharchapuri in Birbhum, among numerous other *dargahs* and *nazargahs*, urged peasants, herders, artisans, and boatmen to travel to the market on specific days.[34] As Sudipta Sen has pointed out, in Bengal of the eighteenth century, idioms of the marketplace pervaded devotional and eulogic poetry in ways that invoked authority over marketplaces as earthly signs of spiritual eminence.[35] But in the Muslim self-improvement tracts that began proliferating the Bengal countryside in the early twentieth century, this was far from the case – peasants were consistently warned that the market was the domain of misrepresentation and deceit. Notwithstanding apparent affinities with heterodox metaphors such as the *bhava-bajar* (the deceptive market of the world), the Muslim tracts

critiqued the marketplace to focus solely on self-sufficiency through a regimen of work, on modes of being in the world that could ensure material and spiritual prosperity in "this world and beyond."

In highlighting the dubiousness of the domain of exchange, the self-improvement tracts directed predominantly to the Muslim peasantry, forged a regime of value – both economic and moral – that unambiguously accorded primacy to the site of production. The widely read tract, *Adarsha Krishak* (*The Ideal Peasant*), authored by Abdul Hai and published by Mymensingh in 1920 provides a telling example of the manner in which this regime of value was discursively instantiated:

> It could be said, "I buy food grains in the market with money, so why should I care about the peasant?" But imagine a time of famine…when food grains are not available. During a famine, it is a fistful of rice that can save a man, not bags full of wealth. He could be sitting on a pile of gold (coins), but he would be loath to even touch it. Instead if a fistful of rice is brought to him, he would devour it like a lion and regain life. Then, if we pose the same question, "what is of greater value? Money or a fistful of rice?" He will most definitely answer, "rice". If it is asked, "Is a wealthy man your friend? Or is a peasant your friend?" "A peasant", he will answer. So if a person believes that I buy with money, why should I be grateful to the peasant, such an opinion will be foolish indeed.[36]

Here, the labor of cultivation occupied a depth, a profundity, and a potential which money as a medium of exchange could only represent at a surface level or potentially misrepresent. Thus, the hypothetical buyer in *Adrasha Krishak* was said to confound the source of rice to be the market (instead of properly identifying it in the labor of the peasant) and mistakenly locate value in money (instead of the productive activity of labor). Value was represented as emanating from a depth – the potential for productive activity or labor – that the surface realm of exchange, namely, the market, could only ever misrepresent. In another tract published from Mymensingh in 1923, the salience of one's power to produce as a safeguard against the dangers of the market is put bluntly: "The Muslim peasant should never take money to the market. They should take the seasonal fruits of their own labor to the *bajar*."[37]

It is also important to note that this value expressed in the relationship between labor and land was to be maintained through the centrality of practices – practices that, according to the self-improvement tracts, constituted a good Muslim. Daily offerings of *namaz* and teaching one's children how to offer prayer were as important as the daily activity of tending one's land with meticulous care – which was also a practice in *ibadat* (worship). When addressing the issue of how indebtedness was to be overcome, in the manner of urban or town-based reformers such as Abdus Sattar or Abur Rashid, the improvement texts did not advocate a repeal of the scriptural

prohibition on *riba* by arguing that such practices were secondary to the inner essence of Islam, and therefore could be adjusted to the "needs of the present" so long as they were "in continuity with the inner essence" of Islam. But in the self-improvement tracts, the problem of indebtedness was to be countered through everyday practices of frugality and thriftiness that were supposed to be enjoined by Islam. As *Krishaker Unnati* noted: "The plight of Bengal's peasantry is largely caused by extravagance. In the Quran, Allah has said that extravagance is the brother of *shaitan* (the devil)."[38] This emphasis on practice, which dictated that indebtedness could be solved through the correct practice of thriftiness, also posited the problem of indebtedness as a matter of incorrect and un-Islamic practices of the Muslim peasant. Extravagance at weddings and an over-enthusiasm for litigation were identified, among others, as incorrect/un-Islamic practices that resulted in debt.

These cheaply produced Muslim tracts, in performing their pedagogic function of teaching their audience how to be self-sufficient peasants and good Muslims, always stressed on the centrality of practice. It was through practices of labor and worship that the good Muslim/good peasant's relationship to the land was established. Again, it was through correct practices that the Muslim peasant's burden of debt could be mitigated. Via concrete practices prescribed by such self-improvement texts, such as tilling, weeding, and pruning – in short, a meticulous regime of care for the land – which were also practices of worship to Allah, one's relationship to the land one occupied as a tenant and worked on as a share-cropper could be morally and legitimately maintained. The zamindars and *mahajans* (moneylenders) were non-cultivators who did not produce value. Land that accrued to such non-cultivators could be de-legitimized on the basis of the concept of the economic that the improvement texts had produced – where cultivation was the essential and enduring source of value. Such tracts show a clear understanding that the land of the zamindars and landlord-moneylenders, and the wealth that accrued from such land was nothing short of deceit through which non-cultivators had usurped the land of the cultivators:

> Not only is the *raiyat* (tenant-cultivator) not the owner of wealth, as a matter of fact, in the eyes of law, he is not even the owner of land. Those that have accumulated wealth through deceit and force, those whose ancestors had endeared themselves to Lord Cornwallis' Company agents and those who in broad daylight committed theft through usury are today the owners of land. But those poor creatures who turned their lifeblood to sweat – clearing dense jungles or by ceaseless toil, ploughed deeper and deeper into the earth to bring out ambrosia (*amrita*) – have no claims on the land today; they are merely hired hands.[39]

In trying to understand the condition of possibility of the violent acts of peasant self-assertions characterized by the targeting of moneylenders

and the destruction of debt bonds that mark the history of the early 1930s Bengal – insurrections of the kind that colonial officials labeled "disturbances" and often brutally repressed – the regime of value that emerged as an effect of the discursive practices of the improvement texts have to be taken into account. A concept of the economic where laboring-activity was seen as the sole fount of value was the condition of possibility of acts of peasant self-assertions. The discursive practices of the Muslim self-improvement texts, with the emphasis on labor and the correctness of practice, rendered the moneylender illegitimate on two principal counts. Firstly, he was guilty of incorrect/irreligious practice, namely, partaking in usurious activity. Secondly, his relationship to his wealth was morally illegitimate because it was acquired by deceit, not the correct and value-generating practice of labor. For example, in 1930, reporting on the widespread disturbances in the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district the District Magistrate, L.B Burrows, account of Muslim peasant agitators involved in acts of violence and intimidation that affected ninety villages in the district, describes how mobs from anywhere between 100 and 1000 men would collectively threaten moneylenders demanding credit and mortgage documents in their possession, on failing to yield such documents, mahajans' houses were looted and set on fire. According to a petition from Kishoreganj, "the ruffians entered the houses of Hindus" armed with "holy *khargos* reserved for sacrificing animals on special festivals." From reports and petitions that populate the colonial archive, it is evident that during these disturbances, all raids on moneylenders occurred during daytime, since the raiders thought that to go out in the night was thieving, an act that was against the *shariat*, but was laudable to commit loot and plunder before sunset.[40] The manner in which raids on the moneylenders were often carried out – in deference to the *shariat* which, supposedly forbade stealing at night as cowardly – attests to the premium placed on correct religious practice even during instances that were recorded by the colonizers as extreme unruly behavior.

Historians have primarily seen such acts of violence by a predominantly Muslim peasantry to have an essentially economic basis, arising from indebtedness coupled with strains on relationships of economic dependency on rural moneylenders. I have tried to suggest that it is hasty to attribute such causality to indebtedness as an "economic fact" without paying attention to the ways in which the meaning of debt was being historically determined by specific discursive practices of representation. For the urban and town-based Muslim rationalists and reformers, interest (which resulted in massive debts), as the money-value of passing time, increased incrementally all along the linear infinity of time, irrespective of practice. Time itself could generate value. It was this understanding of interest which necessitated that practice to be maneuvered –the prohibition on *riba* be repealed or reinterpreted – to remedy the "Muslim burden" of debt and meet the needs of (value-generating) time. But in the Muslim improvement texts directed to the semi-literate and non-literate peasants, debt was a problem that accrued

from incorrect/irreligious practice and could be remedied through correct religious practice alone. The time of debt was made contingent upon practice, and was not, in principle, either infinite or independent of it. In other words, time itself was no guarantor of value. As I have elaborated at length, the "economic" as an object of knowledge that emerged in improvement texts attributed value to the practice of labor, not to the realm of exchange (of money-interest for time). Therefore, the Muslim burden of debt, as it was understood, could be remedied through correct practices – foremost among which was the activity of labor.

Increasingly, a principled refusal to repay their debts to the landlord-moneylender was becoming a matter of resolve among sections of the peasantry in eastern Bengal. In the early 1930s, colonial officials reported meetings where it was resolved not to pay interest to the moneylender, and in some cases landlords and moneylenders were forced to relocate with their families to safer areas."[41] To explain such scenarios, I am proposing that we understand these refusals of the overwhelmingly Muslim sections of the eastern Bengal peasantry to pay interest not simply through the dominant concept of the economic where interest is legitimately posited as the money-value of passing time, but through the possibilities opened up by the discursive practices of Muslim self-improvement texts as they proliferated and circulated in the early twentieth-century Bengal, where the concept of the economic dictated that value accrued to the practice of labor alone. Here, value could not be legitimately generated through a process where money could beget money, because money (as a medium of exchange) was already the misrepresentation of labor, for labor alone was the guarantor of value and the site of its genesis.

In fact, a Bengali journal called *Langal* (*The Plough*), a mouthpiece of the Labour Swaraj Party, for the first time made explicit the relationship between the Islamic prohibition on *riba*, the concept of labor, and communism. The Labour Swaraj Party founded in Bengal in November 1925, was a congregation of left-minded individuals and communists who worked within the umbrella of the Indian National Congress. It had links with the peasant-tenant movements developing locally across Bengal, and soon, within a year, changed its name to The Workers and Peasants Party of Bengal. Kazi Nazrul Islam – a revered Bengali Muslim poet, a champion of the underclass, and a dear friend of Muzaffar Ahmed a founder-member of the Communist Party of India – was given the task of editing *Langal*, the mouthpiece journal of Labor Swaraj Party. In the fifth issue of this short-lived journal, an essay titled *"Samyavad ki?"* ("What is Egalitarianism?") was devoted to explaining the relationship between Islam and Communism and allay anxieties of any contradiction between the two. To quote from this essay, published in January 1926:

> Some Muslim leaders have alleged that *samyavad* (egalitarianism) is the enemy of Islam. Quiet to the contrary, it is only Islam that

> is a greater oppositional force to *dhaniktantra* (plutocracy) than *samyavad*…Without labor, enjoying interests is forbidden, thus the taking of interest on loans is forbidden among Muslims. *Because earnings from such interests are earning without expending labor, Islam does not tolerate those who make money from interests on loans.* Communism has also declared the taking of interest to be illegal.[42]

Here, the authoritative manner in which the prohibition on *riba* was equated with interest is telling, not least because the precise elucidation of *riba* in Islamic theological and legal discourse was a matter historically ridden with several contradictions and complexities that were completely glossed over, but more significantly because in this essay, interest (understood as *riba*) was deemed to be prohibited in Islam because it was a form of profit that was earned without expending labor.

The first statement of the Quran about *riba* is to be found in the Surah al Rum, which states:

> "And whatever you invest by way of *riba* so that it may increase upon people's wealth, increases not with God, but what you give away by way of *zakah* seeking the pleasure of God, those they receive recompense manifold."[43]

In the Quranic Surah al Baquarah, the prohibition on *riba* is asserted in the most emphatic terms, accompanied by a threat, "Those who consume *riba* shall not rise except like the one who has been struck by the devil."[44] In explicating the meaning of *riba*, historically there seemed to be a scholarly consensus that its most literal Quranic meaning was "in excess"; there was no consensus, however, on what constituted "excess" – what objects in excess, or what modes of giving, the prohibition pointed to. The *hadiths* differed from one another, and complicated any easy equation of *riba* with interest. For instance, in the *Muwatta* of Malik and the *Sahih al-Bukhari* (900 A.D.), the excess was deemed to be permissible in a transaction of cattle, even on credit, and such excess could not be characterized as *riba*.[45] According to Fazlur Rahman, the *Sahih* of Muslim and other *Sahih* works contain *hadiths* according to which credit transactions, not only of cattle, but also of slaves and copper coins were permissible even when such transactions involve excess (in taking back what was given).[46] Contradictions had historically existed in the Islamic discourse on *riba*, across *hadith*, dictionaries, and works on jurisprudence, as well as among them. There were questions asked about what objects received in excess of giving would come under the purview of the *riba* prohibition – to which we find varying answers; there were questions asked about the existence, or not, of contracts of sale in determining what constituted *riba* according to the Shariah; in some cases, there was even a distinction made between permissible and prohibited *riba* in terms of whether what was given was a gift or a debt.[47] But the

criterion of the expenditure of labor, or the lack of it, in determining what constituted *riba* and what did not, was never posed in these discussions.

In the case of Bengal, by the late nineteenth century, the equation between *riba* and interest had become commonplace, but even then theological arguments in favor of the prohibition of interest were never made in terms of labor. In 1870, when Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, the renowned theologian and preacher of Sunni Islam, who had spent 50 years of his life preaching in the eastern districts of Bengal, issued his much-publicized fatwa declaring that British India was *Dar-ul-Islam* (the land of Islam), not *Dar-ul-Harb* (the land of the infidels), and therefore, it was "not lawful for Mohammedans of British India to make Jihad," he spoke in favor of the *riba* prohibition in very different terms.[48] Issuing his fatwa verbally to the "learned" Muslims gathered for the annual meeting of the Mohammedan Literary Society founded by Nawab Abdul Latif, at the Calcutta Town Hall, Keramat Ali set out to answer the question of whether or not it was lawful for the Muslims to wage war against their British rulers who professed Christianity. His answer was that such jihad was not lawful, because British India was indeed the land of Islam. To bolster his argument, he furnished the following example:

> From the commencement of British Rule, all learned Mohammedans of India have considered it unlawful to take Interest (on money lent) not only from Mohammedans, but also from Infidels… Had this country been *Dar-ul-Harb*, the very reverse would have been the case. For it is lawful to take Interest from infidels in *Dar-ul-Harb*."[49]

For Keramat Ali, the prohibition on interest was unlawful because colonial India was still, according to him, the land of Islam. The status of the *riba* prohibition was determined in terms of the distinction between *Dar-ul-Harb* and *Dar-ul-Islam*, not in terms of the lack of expenditure on labor.

Upholding the prohibition on interest by citing the absence of expenditure of labor as the intent behind a Quranic prohibition was a stunningly novel spin introduced by Muslim self-improvement texts, which proliferated in the early twentieth century. It was an innovation that was successfully taken up by left-minded members of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia to establish relationships of affinity between Islam and communism. These developments were not without important ramifications for Muslim politics in the late colonial period. In the Bengal province of colonial India, the mid-1930s saw the rise of the Krishak Praja Party – with an overwhelmingly Muslim mass base, which came to political power on the plank of legislating greater rights for tenant-cultivators; its rise marked a shift toward a growing left-oriented populism that would henceforth characterize Muslim politics in late colonial Bengal.[50] Even the Muslim League, on the eve of the 1946 elections, raised slogans such as "land to the tiller" and "Pakistan belongs to the peasants."[51]

Conclusion

In analyzing this curious conjunction of a sort of leftist populism and religious nationalism and in accounting for the overwhelming participation of the peasantry in Bengal's Pakistan movement, historiography has not paid adequate attention to inquiring how a group or a community come to, in a phenomenological sense, inhabit the assumption that value inheres in the site of production, as a precondition for such assertions. But how did value come to reside in the realm of production, in an activity such as tilling the earth? How did the ability to labor/to produce become the touchstone of measuring the worth of man, the tensile strength of an economy's backbone, and the power of a community? By focusing my lens of scrutiny on popular discourses about debt in the Bengali Muslim public domain of late colonial Bengal, this chapter has attempted to trace how the realm of production came to be valorized thus over and above circulation and exchange. I have focused on the ways in which debates on debt and interest played out among the Muslims in the public domain of the early twentieth-century colonial Bengal, not to simply show up the messy entanglements of putatively economic categories in the realm of religion. But more importantly, I have examined the manner in which these debates and contentions on the status of interest in the Muslim public domain of late colonial Bengal – in negotiating the relationships between the practical and the ethical, the essential and the inessential, the material and the spiritual, the man of need and the man of ideals – had the *effect* of historically instantiating labor or the realm of production as the positive repository of value.

Notes

1 Khademol Islam, *Krishaker Unnati* (Mymensingh: Mohammad Moyejjadin Hamidi, 1929).
2 See Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*.
3 See See Bose, "The Peasantry in Debt: The Working and Rupture of Systems of Rural Credit Relations", in Bose (ed.) *Credits, Markets and the Agrarian Economy of Colonial India* (Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 248–300.
4 Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920–1947: The Land Question*.
5 *Proceedings of the First Conference of Co-operative Credit Societies, Eastern Bengal & Assam* (Dacca: Sreenath Press, 1911).
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 For nineteenth century Islamic juristic discussions on credit-related transactions in Oman see Bishara, "Paper Routes: Inscribing Islamic Law across the Nineteenth Century Western Indian Ocean", *Law and History Review*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2014), pp. 797–820; For a detailed discussion on revocable sales that functioned as de facto credit instruments in early twentieth century Yemen see Boxberger, "Avoiding Riba: Credit and Custodianship in Nineteenth and

Early Twentieth Century Hadramawt", pp. 196–213. See Fahad Ahmad Bishara, "Paper Routes". Also see Linda Boxberger, "Avoiding Riba: Credit and Custodianship in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Hadramawt", *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1998), pp. 196–213.

10 Eleanor Newbegin, "The Codification of Personal Law and Secular Citizenship: Revisiting the History of Law Reform in Late Colonial India", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2009), pp. 86–89.
11 "Manab Pragati o Mukta Buddhi", in Mustafa Nurul Islam (ed.) *Sikha Samagra: 1927–1930* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2003, reprint), pp. 373–387.
12 Ibid., pp. 383–385.
13 Ibid. p. 383.
14 Abdur Rashid, "Amader Nabajagaran o Shariat", in Mustafa Nurul Islam (ed.) *Sikha Samagra*, p. 99 (reprint).
15 Ibid., pp. 100–101.
16 See Khan, Akram Khan *Samasya O Samadhan* (Calcutta: 1930), pp. 11–26.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 18.
19 See Sattar, Abdus. *Presidential Address of the Chattagram Islamia Jila Conference* (Chittagong: 1925).
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 See Abdul Aziz, *Duniya O Akherat Do Jahaner Najat* (Noakhali: Noakhali Khodamel Islam Samiti, 1925).
23 Ibid.
24 See Khademol Islam, *Krishaker Unnati* (Mymensigh: Mohammad Moyejjadin Hamidi, 1929).
25 See Islam. "*Chasha*" literally means peasant but carries the derogatory connotation of an uncouth and uneducated country bumpkin.
26 See Aziz, *Duniya O Akherat Do Jahaner Najat.*
27 See Abdul Hai, *Adarsha Krishak* (Mymensingh: Abdul Hai, 1921).
28 Richard Eaton, *Essays in Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 132.
29 Ibid.
30 See Abdul Samad, *Prajasatta Nuton Ain O'Prajar Kartavva* (Dhaka: Shatrauja Islamia Press, 1923).
31 Ibid.
32 Hugh Urban, "The Marketplace and the Temple: Economic Metaphors and Religious Meanings in the Folk Songs of Colonial Bengal", *The Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. 60, no. 4 (2001), pp. 1085–1114. See p. 1094.
33 Ibid., p. 1104.
34 Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 38.
35 Sen, *Empire of Free Trade*, pp. 30–50.
36 See Abdul Hai, *Adarsha Krishak*.
37 See Samad, *Prajasatta Nutan Ain O'Prajar Kartavva*.
38 See Islam, *Krishaker Unnati.*
39 Samad, *Prajasatta Nuton Ain O'Prajar Kartavva.*
40 GB Poll. File 613/30. WBSA.
41 Bose, *Agrarian Bengal*, p. 195.
42 *Langal*, vol. 1, no. 5 as quoted in Sunil Kanti De (ed.) *Nazruler 'Langal' Patrika-e Krishak Sramik Prasanga* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2010). *My italicization*.

43 Fazlur Rahman, "Riba and Interest", *Islamic Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1964), p. 3.
44 Ibid., p. 4.
45 Ibid., 21.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 "Abstract of Proceedings of the Mohammedan Literary Society of Calcutta, 23 November, 1870" as reproduced in Enamul Haque (ed.) *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif: His Writings and Related Documents* (Dacca: Samudra Prokashani, 1968), pp. 75–111.
49 "Abstract of Proceedings of the Mohammedan Literary Society of Calcutta on 23 November, 1870" as reproduced in Haque, *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif*, pp 75–110.
50 See Harun-or Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947* (Dhaka: The University Press Ltd., 2003).
51 See Taj-ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: Communalization of Class in Bengal, 1920–1947* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

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3 The Making of Democratic Islam

Changing Ideas of Muslim Political Representation

This chapter examines transformations in ideas and practices of political sovereignty (and political representation) among the Muslims in Bengal, by focusing attention on the views of key political figures of nineteenth-century Muslim politics in Bengal, and contrasting them to the views of Muslim political luminaries who rose to prominence in the early twentieth century. I explore how practices and organizational structures of distinctively Muslim forms of civil society institutions, the *anjumans*, were critical to transformations in conceptions of political sovereignty, and enabled large swathes of Muslims in colonial Bengal, still excluded from the privilege of franchise, to inhabit modes of representational practices oriented to the novel conception of political sovereignty based on people's mandate.

From Patronage to People's Power

In a letter to *The Times*, Ameer Ali, a Shia man of letters prominent in the public life of Calcutta who served as a High Court judge between 1894 and 1903 defended the Muslim League's demand for separate electorates (self-contained legislative constituencies for Muslims) in arguing that:

> The importance of a nation cannot always be judged on numerical considerations. Whatever may be the view regarding the historical and political position of the Mohammedans, to which the government of India attaches some value, Mohammedan loyalty is an asset to the Empire which I venture to submit ought not to be lightly put aside.[1]

Here the Muslim demand for separate electorates was justified not merely in terms of an institutional measure to offset the numerical disadvantage that would be suffered by Indian Muslims in the context of joint electorates (though that too was recognized). The demand for separate electorates, very significantly, was posited as a "just" and "fair" reward for loyalty displayed to "His Excellency" and articulated with the expectation that in return for loyalty, recognition and protection were due.

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Ameer Ali saw himself as a leading man, a representative, and a spokesman for the Muslims in Bengal, and indeed all of India, and wrote extensively about their plight. "Perceiving the complete lack of political training among the Muslim inhabitants of India, and the immense advantage and preponderance the Hindu organizations gave to their community," Amir Ali founded the National Mohammedan Association in Calcutta in 1877 and served as this organization's secretary for over 25 years. The Association held meetings and conferences; to promote the interests of the Muslim community, it published articles on issues confronting Muslims in newspaper and presented memorandums and pleas to the government. Ali was born in Chinsura, a former Dutch settlement in the Hooghly district of Bengal in 1849. He received his early education from the Calcutta Madrasah, subsequently shifted to Mohsin College in Hooghly from where he graduated in 1867, and became the first student from the College to earn a Master's degree in History and Political Economy. He advocated in favor of the Bengal Tenancy Bill, proposed by the Government in an effort to grant occupancy rights to tenant-cultivators, and argued that such a measure was a step in the right direction in being "the only means of promoting the agricultural prosperity of the country."[2] Yet Ameer Ali cared little to identify with Bengal or its Muslims. Indeed like most *ashraf*, his greatest pride lay in his foreign origins – whether Persian ancestry or Arab Sayyid heritage. Nor did he ever assert that his claim to representing the Muslims of Bengal was founded on a genuine association with his Bengali domicile co-religionists.

The claim to represent, to speak for, and act for the Muslims of Bengal was not, in the self-understanding of late nineteenth-century leaders such as Ameer Ali, based on a principle of likeness with the constituency they claimed to represent, but rather on a principle of distinction – on social rank and moral worth. His "*Memoirs*" begins with an account of his family's descent from the Prophet, followed by detailed descriptions of high offices held by his ancestors – one among whom was "a grand-chamberlain to the King who ruled over Persia shortly after the Afghan invasion," another was the "Chief Mujtahid at Qum, a city in Persia famous for its scholars" and his grandfather, Mansur Ali Khan, was in the service of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula of Oudh as a revenue collector and died in 1820 in a battle with a Raja "who had rebelled against his liege-lord." Ameer Ali saw himself as part of the cosmopolitan ruling elite that flourished under the Mughals. He was brought up on family lore of his grandfather's loyalty to the Nawab exemplified by his death in the battlefield fighting a rebel.[3] It is in this context that his premium on Muslim loyalty as an asset to the British Empire has to be understood. For men such as Ameer Ali, loyalty to the state was not a question of pragmatism alone, it was equally, and perhaps more significantly an Islamicate code of behavior that governed those who partook in political governance and a desirable moral attribute of men of rank and influence worthy of official recognition.[4]

British officials, during the period of Company rule and even into the Raj, continued to cultivate loyalty through Indo-Islamicate rituals and codes of behavior by presenting *khil'ats* (robes of honor) to zamindars and other persons of importance in order to forge vertical relations of political fidelity. Such rituals were central to the performance and instantiation of political sovereignty in pre-colonial Bengal.[5]

A contemporary of Ameer Ali, Abdul Latif (1828–1893) was appointed a Deputy Magistrate by Sir Herbert Maddock (the Deputy Governor of Bengal) in 1848. Later he rose to the rank of the Presidency Magistrate and was posted in Alipore, Calcutta. After the passage of the Indian Councils Act in 1861, Abdul Latif was also the first Muslim who was appointed to a seat in the Indian Legislative Council. When a Municipal Corporation was first created in 1863 for the town of Calcutta, he was nominated to serve in the civic body called the "Justices of Peace," a component of the Calcutta Corporation. He was a prominent official and a distinguished man of letters, who was nominated as a Fellow of the Calcutta University.[6] In 1880, the Viceroy and Governor General of Bengal conferred upon him the title of Nawab "as a personal distinction" in "recognition of the public services rendered by the distinguished Moulavie, chiefly in the cause of Education and improvement of the Mohamedan community." This was an event widely reported in the English Press.[7]

The *Indian Mirror* provides an interesting glimpse into the details of the ceremony of conferring the title that took place on June 4, 1880, at Alipore, in the upper flat of the Office of Mr. J. Monro, the commissioner of the Presidency Division. It mentions how the Alipore flat was made appropriate for the occasion, how the room where the ceremony was to be held was covered with the Durbar carpet with the Royal Arms embroidered in gold at the center, fringes of gold running through the whole length of the four sides of the room, and the display of red cloth fitting for a place where a Durbar was to be held. In short, the Alipore upper flat was converted into a "Public Durbar," where "a select gathering of European and Native Officials of the District of 24 Pergunnahs and a few Native Gentlemen assembled to witness the ceremony."[8]

Every part of the event was reported in the English press with ceremonial precision and attention to detail: we learn that the Commissioner of the Division entered the Durbar room and took his seat on a State Chair at the south end of the room, on the left of which the Officials were seated and to the right of which were the Non-Official attendees. Then, Abdul Latif was brought before the Commissioner by his personal assistant and Mir Monshee. After a brief conversation with the Commissioner, Abdul Latif was taken to the robing room. There he was invested with the "*khillut,*" which consisted of "a diamond ring, a *Surpech* with *Kulghi*, and a Sword with richly embroidered Belt and Shield." Latif was then brought back before the Commissioner, where the Collector of the 24 Pergunnahs handed over to him a valuable gold watch with an engraved inscription. The inscription

read "Presented to Moulavie Abdool Luteef Khan Bahadoor, with the title of Nawab, conferred upon him by his Excellency the Viceroy and the Governor General of India. Calcutta, April 12, 1880." This was followed by the Commissioner presenting Latif with a "*Sunnad* of the title of the Nawab." Abdul Latif presented the usual "*Nuzzarana*" and thanked the government for recognizing his humble service to the "cause of Muhammadan improvement" and iterated that this recognition would go a long way in convincing his "co-religionists of the interests which the government takes in their progress." The Commissioner then presented *pan* or betel and conversed with the Nawab. At the close of the proceedings, Nawab Abdul Latif was led to his carriage by the same officials who had escorted him to the Durbar at the start of the ceremony.[9] The conferment of title in a such elaborate ceremonial fashion, with the bestowal of the *khil'at* (robe of honor), the *sanad* (title deed which in pre-colonial Mughal and Nizamat Bengal were often accompanied by grants of tax-free land, though no such grant was made to Abdul Latif), and the exchange of betel as a pledge of protection point to the ways in which such pre-colonial rituals of poltical sovereignty were performed not only by the Company, but also by the Raj.

The *khil'at* that the Raj conferred upon Abdul Latif, alongside the title or *sanad*, was a common ritual in Bengal during the Mughals and the Nizamat. By conferring a *khil'at*, a ruler proclaimed his sovereignty and incorporated the recipient into the governing class; by accepting the *khil'at*, the recipient acknowledged his donor's over-lordship and pledged loyal service. F.W. Buckler argues that the *khil'at* was a symbol of "continuity of succession" and that "continuity rested on a physical basis, depending on the contact of the body of the recipient with the body of the donor through the medium of clothing."[10] The donor incorporated the recipient within his own person through the medium of his wardrobe. Via such rituals, Islamicate sovereignty operated by the parceling out of patronage, protection, and recognition passed on from the superior to the inferior in rank and status, and instantiated relationships of protections and loyalty through practices such as gift-giving. Such practices were simultaneously rituals of incorporation that consolidated relationships between the patron and the client. For over a century, the British continued to partake in traditions of political sovereignty that were familiar to the Mughal and Nizami ruling elites.

Thus, when decisive moves by the colonial government and the Congress toward electoral representation were made in the late nineteenth century, it is in the context of such patronage-based understanding of political power and state, that the initial unease of the Muslim leadership in Bengal, and indeed elsewhere in India, needs to be understood. They preferred the system of nomination to election. A petition with the signatures of 40,000 Muslims was sent to the House of Commons in 1890 to prevent an expansion of elections as a mechanism of political representation. But in 1896, there was a change in calling for the system of nomination to be

replaced by the institution of separate electorates. The Shimla Memorial presented by a "Mohamedan Deputation" to Lord Minto in Shimla in October 1906 was the first document formally mooted before the British government that elaborated a systematic defense of separate electorates or self-contained legislative constituencies for Muslims as key to adequate political representation for the Indian Muslims.

At one level, the Shimla Memorial marked a shift from the politics of nomination to the politics of elections – an idea they had previously rejected.[11] And its demand for separate electorates accepted the principle of popular representation, but denied that it involved the representation of individual interests; it endorsed elections but only on condition that electorates were organized on religious lines. Yet it is important to note that the Shimla Memorial, while it recognized numerical considerations as important to the distribution of political power, held that they were essentially secondary to the questions of social status and moral virtue. Political representation, in this scheme of things, was still a function of official patronage accorded to communities with "status and influence" and thus the memorial proposed that due weight be given to the position Muslims "occupied in India a little more than hundred years ago, and of which the traditions have naturally not faded from their minds."[12] Political representation, in the understanding of the memorialists, was not a function of popular sovereignty or the will of the people. The "people" as the fount of political sovereignty had not yet emerged as the protagonist in the arena of Muslim politics in India, since the signatories of the Shimla Memorial, even as they demanded separate electorates for Muslims, remained firmly grounded in an understanding of political sovereignty in which political power or the business of political representation was an outcome of official recognition. In other words, in the understanding of the "Nobles, Jagirdars, Talukdars, Lawyers, Zemindars, Merchants" who were the signatories on this document, political sovereignty lay in "the dispensation of State patronage," not in the mandate of the people. Thus, the demand for separate electorates was justified as a plea for protection from the state in exchange for loyalty displayed by such men who were recognized by the government to be representing "Muslim interest." And since the dispensation of state patronage at the local level, in "the representative institutions of the European type," translated into the number of seats on Municipal and District boards, the memorialists urged that the proportions of such seats be determined "in accordance with the numerical strength, social status, and local influence of either (the Muslim or the Hindu) Community – in consultation, if necessary, with their leading men."[13] The primary aim of this modality of distribution of state patronage, suggested by the Shimla Memorial, was to ensure the adequate representation of the "Mosulman tax-payers."[14] Since taxation was measured by property, it was the Muslim property-holder, synonymous with men of rank and influence, who were required to be adequately

represented via protected constituencies, namely, the separate electorates. The memorialists pleaded with the Government that in allocating the balance of patronage to various communities, the leaders of such communities be consulted. What criterion would be used to determine who the leaders of communities were? Of course here again, popular mandate or the will of the people had little to do with notions of leadership. The Shimla Memorial is silent on the issue, but from the tenor of the text – its emphasis on according patronage and protection to the loyal subjects – it is fairly clear that the leaders were those who had historically cultivated, at least in theory, the moral quality of loyalty. In this sense, the Shimla Memorial had a forerunner in the memorial presented to the Government by the National Mohammedan Association in 1882. This memorial clearly shows the manner in which the rules for dispensation of patronage were understood by men such as Ameer Ali and Abdul Latif as being essentially in contradistinction to procedural standardization entailed by the British education system:

> Your memorialists would humbly suggest, in the first place, that the balance of State patronage should be restored between the Hindus and the Muhammadans. In the actual distribution and dispensation of State patronage, an undue importance is attached to University education. It happens frequently that when there are two candidates, one a Hindu, the other a Muhammadan, preference is given to the Hindu candidate, on the sole ground that he possesses a University certificate, although, as regards general education, the Muhammadan may possess superior qualification. As a matter of fact, owing to some extent to the declared policy of Government, University education did not take root among Mohammedans until very recently, the consequence of which is that, proportionately, there are fewer graduated and undergraduates among the Muhammadans than among the Hindus. At the same time there are many Muhammadans who, without having graduated at the Calcutta University, possess as thorough an acquaintance with the English language as an ordinary B.A. *Your memorialists would, therefore, humbly suggest that in the dispensation of State patronage no regard should be paid to mere University degrees, but the qualifications of candidates should be judged by an independent standard. It will not be considered presumptuous on the memorialists' part if they venture to submit that stamina and force of character are as necessary in the lower as in the higher walks of life; and these qualities can scarcely be tested by University examination.*[15]

For the likes of Ameer Ali, since "stamina" and "force of character" were the criteria for the bestowal of official recognition, and therefore, a measure of political power, the lower order of Muslims, was not considered fit candidates for state patronage. The lower orders could be represented

only by the *ashraf* class, which considered itself historically adept at cultivating virtues such as loyalty and force of character. Indeed, according to Delawar Hossain, another prominent member of Ameer Ali's Central National Mohammedan Association, the root of the plight of the Muslims of Bengal lay in a crisis of leadership, and the ascendancy of village-based, low-born leaders such as Teetu Mir and Dudu Miyan who were influencing the masses of Muslims in Bengal's villages and disseminating an interpretation of Islam that was bigoted, ignorant, and inherent with "decidedly democratic tendencies."[16] The other major problem, according to Hossain, was the practice of *ashraf* marriages with the inferior classes – a problem that supposedly emerged out of the necessities spawned by colonialism itself.

For prominent Muslim men of Bengal who represented the community to the British government in the nineteenth century, so important was the principle of distinction with the mass of the co-religionists they represented, that intermarriage with such people would, in their view, in fact undercut their ability for social and political representation by weakening their "physical powers," "intellectual faculties," and "moral constitution" – qualities that, as Ameer Ali and his fellow memorialists had stated, were essential to leadership. Calcutta-based associations such as the Mohammedan Literary Society started by Abdul Latif in 1863 and Ameer Ali's National Mohammedan Association founded in 1878 conducted all their proceedings in Persian, Urdu, and English, but not in Bengali. Nawab Abdul Latif, though born and raised in the Faridpur District of East Bengal and a fluent speaker of Bengali, never used Bengali in public or in any activity of the Mohammedan Literary Association.[17] Delawar Hossain advocated the use of Bengali for the *ashraf* in Bengal only because:

> [T]he difference of language between the higher and the lower Moslems has placed the Feraizis of Eastern Bengal under the influence and leadership of men like Teetu Mir and Dudu Miyan. The higher Musalmans, disdaining or neglecting to learn Bengali – the only language that the great majority, if not the entire body, of the Mohammadans understand – gradually forfeited their claim to the guidance of these people. The educated continued to compile in Persian and declaim in Urdu, but the position vacated by them was adroitly occupied by men who are the founders of what is called Mosalmani Bengali, men generally ignorant and bigoted but with decidedly democratic tendencies.[18]

According to Hossain, the vernacular was a means "for the advancement in broad views and liberal ideas" among the bigoted lower orders of Muslims and a vehicle for translating the rational impulse of Islam and the science and literature of the West to those whose poverty prevented them from devoting part of their time to English or Persian education.[19] For Hossain,

Bengali was to be adopted by the *ashraf* in Bengal only as a means of communicating ideals rooted in Persianate cultural productions and Western education to the lower orders; it was not a basis for identity.

In contrast to the basis for representing the Muslim community that undergirded the memorial of the National Mohammedan Association and the Shimla deputation's plea for separate electorates, it is interesting to note the presupposition about representation and political sovereignty that underlay Azizul Haque's "Plea for Separate Electorates," which he placed before the government in 1931 in response to the recommendations of the Nehru Committee Report.[20] Haque, a prominent educationist, lawyer, government servant, and Muslim public intellectual by this time, was educated in Urdu, Persian, English, and Bengali. In 1929, the Nehru Committee recommended that the institution of separate electorates put in place by the colonial state, ostensibly to protect the political interests of the Muslim minority, be abolished in the Bengal Presidency since "here the Moslems (had) nothing to fear." In response, Azizul Haque put forth a compelling counter-argument. He argued that the numerical majority of the Muslims in Bengal did not obviate their minority status in the electoral arena, as the right to vote was determined by property qualifications that ensured that the voting strength of the economically weaker Muslim community could never be in proportion to the Muslim population. Furthermore, he argued that abolition of separate electorates could only, under these circumstances, lead to the rule of the numerically smaller Hindu minority, and would thus be contrary to the spirit of "democracy (which) is not the rule of the minority." Finally, he asserted that contrary to widespread misconceptions about the unifying force of joint electorates, they would fan communalism since in such electorates the Hindus and Muslims contesting against each other would be forced to keep alive communal passions and be led astray from true nationalism.[21]

In Haque's formulation, wealth or property (with their correlates in rank and influence), far from being the basis of representing the Muslims, was clearly an impediment to representing the community. For Haque, wealth was a "great danger to the return of Moslem members in any joint electorate." Drawing on data from the provincial elections in Bengal held in 1926, Haque showed that in the popular Hindu constituencies, no less than 26 out of 41 seats were captured by landholders, at least 15 of who were from renowned zamindari families. According to him, the land-owing classes had spent thousands of rupees to "gain election" and had succeeded by "sheer power of money." By contrast, he stated, the elections in Muslim constituencies were run on comparatively lower costs, not exceeding Rs. 2000–3000 per candidate. He thus concluded:

> It will not be possible to contest the elections in any scheme of joint electorate if they (Muslims) choose to run Muslim candidates on condition of their terms. Since the more ambitious among them may be

> tempted to barter their views in exchange for sure victory at the polls with no financial embarrassment on their own behalf. Thus the scheme of joint electorates, if introduced at this stage would in turn swell the number of such candidates, and the very expense of such elections will have the effect of driving out those who have struggled to represent the real interest of the community.[22]

At one level, for Haque, the institution of separate electorate was to be maintained simply because the restricted franchise accorded to Indians by the colonial government was mediated by property qualifications, excluding those who did not pay above a certain amount in taxes. In empirical terms, this meant that despite the numerical strength of the Muslim population in Bengal, very few would qualify for franchise. Muslims would not have voters in proportion to their actual numbers. But at a more fundamental conceptual level, by the 1930s, when Haque made his plea for separate electorates, the very premise on which the Muslim community could be represented had undergone a massive transformation.

Clearly wealth, rank, and influence, in short, attributes which were hitherto seen as hallmarks of the true representative of the community, were now not only deemed inadequate, but seen as real impediments to representation. The deployment of wealth in elections was now understood as the use of "undue influence" that had the effect of supposedly driving out those who were true representatives of the community. The premise of representation had transformed from a principle of distinction with the constituency one acted for to a principle of likeness with the constituency one acted for as the mark of a true representative. Unlike Delawar Hossain's assertion that the crisis of leadership in Bengal's Muslim community resulted from living in close social proximity with the lower orders of co-religionists and inter-marriages with them, for Haque, the key to representation was to be one of them, or at least like one of them. How was this principle of likeness achieved? If Haque's plea provides a clue to the changing self-definitions of the Bengali Muslim community itself, which by 1931 was loath to accept a wealthy *ashraf* Muslim of Bengal as its true representative – an attitude toward representing and leading the Muslim community in Bengal that veered sharply from the attitudes of Muslim leaders and public intellectuals in the latter half of the nineteenth century who boasted their *ashraf*/elite descent – what transformations in the moral vision of self and community could account for this change?

New kinds of political institutions and practices, such as political parties and elections (with severely restricted franchise up until 1935), cannot adequately account for this transformation. Such transformations in the self-understanding of the Muslim community were, at least in part, the effect of changes that occurred in the institutional practices of the *anjumans* – distinctively Muslim forms of civil associations.

Focusing on the Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla founded in 1913, and to a lesser extent on the Faridpur chapter of the Anjuman-I-Islamia, I examine the *anjuman* as a crucial site within which subjectivities oriented to democratic practice and politics were being worked out in early twentieth-century Bengal. Such institutions had reached far beyond the urban centers of Calcutta and Dhaka and were key to the dissemination of a novel and egalitarian vision of Muslim community.

The *Anjuman*: Muslim Civil Association and the Practice of Democracy

Tamizuddin Khan, or Maulavi Tamizuddin Khan as he was popularly known, was a prominent member of the Muslim League in undivided India. In 1926, he ran for a seat in the Bengal Legislative Council from Sadar and Goalando divisions of Faridpur and emerged victorious. He won the Legislative Council elections again in 1930 and 1937. From 1937 until the partition of India in 1947, Maulavi Khan held portfolios in the Ministry of Health, Agriculture and Industry, and Education in the Bengal Cabinet.

In his biography, *The Test of Time: My Life and Days*, Maulavi Khan charts the beginnings of his involvement with communitarian politics. Strikingly, his account of the beginnings of his involvement with Muslim politics had little to do with the Muslim League of which he was a member, by nomination as it were. A membership which, by his own account, took him by surprise, even though he was elated at being "recognized" and was pleased by the "distinction" that accrued from it:

> While I was still fledgling in my profession (as a lawyer), in the autumn of 1915, I got a letter from the Secretary of the All India Muslim League informing me that I had been nominated as a member of the organization and that I should send as soon as possible the annual subscription of Rs. 20. I felt elated at the distinction – there being no other member from the town of Faridpur and probably none in the entire district and send the subscription by money order though it was hard for me in those days to spare such a substantial amount.
>
> For many years, however, I was to all intents and purposes only a nominal member of the Muslim League, not having the means to attend its annual sessions. The only part I took was to express my opinion in writing about draft resolutions send to me for the purpose, from time to time. …The Muslim League had no district branches in those days. At least there was none in Faridpur. Local interests had to be looked after by other organizations. …The establishment of Muslim Associations (such as) Anjuman-i-Islamia almost in every district of the province even before the formation of the All India Muslim League was significant in this regard.[23]

Although his membership to the Muslim League remained patently nominal for a long time until after the Khilafat movement was on the wane, he was very actively involved with the Faridpur chapter of the Anjuman-i-Islamia, which was founded in 1892, well before the formation of the Muslim League. Political parties such as the Muslim League really had no presence in non-urban areas until well into the 1930s. It was the *anjumans*, specifically Muslim civil society associations, which undertook programs of social, political, economic, religious, and educational matters. Some of them spread across non-urban centers in Bengal were recognized by the government. The chapter to which Tamizzudin Khan belonged certainly was. His account of his involvement is full of interesting details about his clashes with other personalities prominent in the local Anjuman. His tussle with the older and "ultra-loyalist" Abdul Ghani sheds light on the kinds of struggles going on within such associations in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Khan's felt profound unease with the fact that the Anjuman's members were permanent incumbents and decision-making was the privilege of "prominent people" who acted in obedience with the wishes of Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka. His struggle to include the shopkeepers of the locality into the organization was met with conservative backlash by the old guard who felt that the presence of such "lowly people" as Muslim shopkeepers would lower the prestige of the organization. It was not until Khan was elected the Secretary of the Anjuman that widespread reforms could be carried out – the organization's membership grew all over Faridpur, and in all four subdivision branches of the Anjuman were established. Periodic public meetings were held, and the annual sessions of the Anjuman-i-Islamia became big shows that attracted large Muslim crowds.[24] Maulavi Khan clashed with Abdul Ghani on another matter pertaining to the Anjuman when the British Government gave the association the privilege of nominating candidates for the appointment of Muslim marriage registers or *quazis*. In favoring the nomination of a candidate from the weaver class for such a post, on the grounds that the person in question was adequately qualified, Khan locked horns with Abdul Ghani who vehemently opposed the nomination on the ground that such a nomination would mar the prestige of Muslim marriage registers as a class. Reminiscing on the incident, Khan writes

> It is an unfortunate fact that the shadow of the Hindu caste system overtook Muslim society in India, at least to the extent of ostracizing the weavers and a few other classes (of Muslims) with regard to the privilege of intermarriage. Since the weaver had adequate qualification I took up the stand (of supporting his nomination) to dispel any suspicion that he was discriminated against on account of his birth…I staked my position as Secretary (of the Anjuman) on this grave issue, and through the grace of Allah I succeeded.[25]

Maulavi Khan's struggle against the likes of Adbul Ghani within the Anjuman-i-Islamia evinces a tendency toward democratization within such suburban organizations. What we see dramatized in the struggles of Tamizuddin Khan is a clash between two visions of representing the Muslim community in Bengal. The older understanding of representing the community on the basis of distinction, social status, and class privilege and a newer, more democratic vision of representational claims based on principle of likeness with the constituency one seeks to represent.

Anjuma-e-Ulamae Bangla was founded in 1913 and was much more radical and arguably more important in disseminating among the Muslims of Bengal a vision of Muslim community that was fundamentally democratic and egalitarian. Among its founding members were prominent public personalities such as Akram Khan, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Maulavi Abdulahel Baki, and Maulavi Shahidullah. The *anjuman*'s headquarter was located in Kolkata, though it delineated the whole of Bengal and Assam within its ambit of influence and activity. It was an avowedly pedagogical enterprise, which at the time of its inauguration expressly stated a refusal to participate in any political activity. But it would eventually emerge as a vehicle of *praja* (tenant-peasant) politics. The stated objectives of the *anjuman* were to counter criticisms of Islam that were emerging from the Christian missionaries and the Arya Samajis, distribution of Islamic literature among the masses free of cost, and a consolidated and organized effort to check internal conflict and dissension among the *ulema* in Bengal, thus uniting them in the service of the community.

Islam Mission was a branch of the *anjuman* that comprised of preachers who traveled to the remotest corners of Bengal and parts of Assam to "counter the influences of Christian missionaries, to eradicate *shirk*, *bidat* and superstitions from Muslim society and encourage non-Muslims to embrace Islam." But according to the Anjuman's Joint Secretary, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, one of the chief purposes of Islam Mission, was to emancipate society from the clutches of those "*maulavis* and mullahs who preached the religion of the *murshids* (discipleship), and in so doing served their own interests while destroying all possibilities of social advancement." For Islamabadi, the Mission's aim was to save *jatiyo jiban* (the life of the community) from the influence of those religious charlatans who placed premium on the value of spiritual intercession in reaching God and bred dependence on human agents by claiming to possess higher spiritual authority.[26] *Al Islam*, the mouthpiece Bengali journal of the Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla, relentlessly attacked all forms of social and spiritual hierarchies and distinctions, strongly opposing the division of Muslim society along lines of socio-economic classes of the *ashraf* and the *atrap*. This is not surprising. Islamabadi and Akram Khan, both the co-editors of *Al Islam,* were involved in peasant politics. For Islambadi, the goal was to awaken society from the lower strata. He wrote prolifically on several subjects – the role of Islam in science, treatises on the Koran,

but also on the conditions of the peasantry in Bengal. Pleading the cause of the tenant, preaching anti-landlordism and cultural democracy as well as instructing Muslims as an egalitarian moral community in correct religion became the primary goals of the Anjuman under his leadership. Indeed, Islamabadi was also a founder member of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity, which would morph into the Bangiya Musalman Shahitya Parishad, an institution dedicated specifically to the carving out of a distinctively separate Bengali Muslim literary space and a site where an articulation of Muslim culture as open, ration, and redistributive-justice oriented was developed, while promoting tolerance and community amity.[27]

In 1920, Mohammad Moijur Rahman wrote in *Al Islam*:

> In Bengal, creatures that call themselves *sharif* have done indescribable harm to the Muslims. Allah has made the high and the lowly from the same ingredients. The sense perception of the high is the same as that of the lowly. With the right opportunity, both communities can consolidate their strengths – there is no doubt about that.[28]

The Anjuman preached that since Islam has no respect for lineage, a sweeper or chandal, once they have been converted to Islam, could offer namaz alongside the Mughal and the Pathan. Another prominent member of the anjuman, Mohammad Rampuri ruled that although Islam's key attribute was *samya* (egalitarianism), Muslims of the day had no regard for an egalitarian ethic. He urged his fellow co-religionists:

> Open your eyes and see…Qutbuddin, Iltutmish, Ghiyasuddin were all Slaves. *Ashraf*, have your dignity, prosperity and influence surpassed theirs? …. In Bengal today, who is your slave? Is the *atrap* lower than a slave? There is still time to rectify the situation. Wake up from your slumber, announce the objective of the *ulema*! Spread the power of truth everywhere![29]

Mohammad Rampuri's suggestion that the political power of the Slave Dynasty in India was the most compelling historical evidence of Islam's egalitarianism would be echoed by Azizul Haque in his presidential speech at the 52nd session of the All India Muslim Education conference held in Calcutta.

Under the patronage of Nawab Kamal Yar Jung Bahadur of Hyderabad (Deccan), the 52nd session of the All India Muslim Educational Conference was held in Calcutta in December 1939, where a committee was appointed to survey the problems of Muslim education all over the Indian States, with a view to preparing a broad-based scheme of education helpful to the preservation of Muslim culture. Accordingly, a committee was constituted with the Nawab as the Chairman and a few other members, including Azizul Haque, who at the time was the Speaker of the Bengal Legislative

Assembly and held the post of Vice-Chancellor at Calcutta University. At the presidential address of the session on December 29, 1939, Haque, who was then struggling to establish the department of Islamic History and Culture at the University of Calcutta, amid great opposition, stated:

> In the welter of many small states, each divided against the other, with people still more hopelessly divided among themselves came the Musalmans with their teaching of brotherhood and fellowship. *By a divine coincidence in history, the first dynasty of Muslims that ruled was the Slave Dynasty and the first King of Delhi was a slave himself to teach the eternal lesson that the Commonwealth of Islam, even as a slave has the fullest right of a man and can be a king, in a caste-ridden, divided country…Let us remember that in the very threshold of modern civilization stand the distinctive marks of Islamic teaching and its cultural contributions to the history of modern thought. The recognitions and vindications of the principles of equality have been the very fundamental characteristics of Islamic ideal and outlook.* It is a matter of history that from its very inception Islam has been a great democratizing process and Islam and its prophet preached the principles of equality and democracy as the basis of human relationships. To preserve and safeguard these principles, wars and revolutions have ranged loud and long in the world. The world has not yet seen the last of the struggles for the recognition of these vital pre-requisites of human freedom. And yet centuries back when it was totally unknown to contemporary thought, Islam proclaimed to the world the overwhelming sanctity of the principles of Equality. Islam declared that Muslims are not only equal among themselves, but also before God! "The white man is not above the black, nor the black above the yellow; all men are equal before their Maker", declared the prophet of Islam, and the Kings and the monarchs, had to bend low in giving recognition to these principles. Equal before the eyes of God and equal before law, Moslems all over the world constitute a commonwealth of individuals over which the sovereignty of God is direct and absolute. I pause here for a moment to ask, if there is anywhere in this wide world of ours a greater and better definition of Equality, a more absolute and unreserved surrender to the ideal of human freedom?…Today the rule of democracy may have been temporarily eclipsed in some countries… but I have no doubt in my mind that this is merely a passing phase; the ultimate victory of the forces of democracy is certain–it is more so because democracy has behind it the genuine loyalty of millions of Muslims. The day is not far off when democracy, clad in the glorious mantle of Freedom and Equality–will once again break through the clouds, which deepen the world gloom today, and when the great day comes, it is the spirit of Islam which will once again come to rescue the aggrieved world. And in this scheme of human affairs there is no place

> for steam-roller democracy which does not take into consideration, the cultural, political and social rights of minorities.[30]

I have quoted from Haque's speech at some length to demonstrate the ways in which Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla's rhetorical linking of a principle of egalitarianism, democracy, and Islam had become widespread and commonsensical among sections of Bengal's Muslim intelligentsia by the 1930s. And even though, this rhetorical linkage was by no means inaugurated by the Anjuman, nor was it a discourse that was the *anjuman's* exclusive preserve, the Anjuman-e-Ulema-Bangla certainly was the first Muslim organization in Bengal to have systematically advocated it in both rhetoric and organizational structure.

Membership to the Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla was, least in theory, open to any man or woman committed to the *anjuman's* agenda; it was an association based on voluntarist engagement and funded largely by the subscriptions of the members. Membership could be maintained by paying an annual fee of Rs. 1. The *anjuman* had three types of members: the *alem*, knowledgeable in Arabic and Islamic jurisprudence, who would deliberate and adjudicate on all *dini* (religious) disputes; the well-wisher members which included all those who were sympathetic to the agenda of the *anjuman*, and finally, the life members, whose membership did not need to be renewed annually since they were required to make a one-time subscription payment of Rs. 150. A working committee of 125 members, holding office for two years, was elected by the general assembly of members. The Working Committee was in charge of executing the *anjuman's* agenda, hiring preachers, collecting subscription, and overseeing budgetary matters. Yet amendments in the *anjuman's* rules and procedures of functioning, reconstitution of the Working Committee, approval of the *anjuman's* annual budget, impeachment of a member of the Working Committee as well as defeating or passing a proposal put forth by the Working Committee were decided in the general assembly of members through the principle of voting. In the instance that a member from the mofussil could not be physically present at the general assembly meeting, the person could mail in a vote to the Calcutta headquarter. Since the salaried and honorary preachers of the Islam Mission – a branch of the *anjuman* – were engaged in missionary activity over a wide-ranging area covering Hooghly, 24 Parganas, Rangpur, Medinipur, Pabna, Bogra, Mymensingh, Tripura, Shillong, and Guwahati, they could recruit members from a fairly expansive geographical radius.[31] The *anjuman* was thus a significant historical force at two levels – the monologic sermons of its preachers and the freely distributed literature advocating egalitarianism as a vision of Muslim society circulated far beyond the urban centers of Calcutta and Dhaka. More significantly, the *anjuman* played a role in the penetration of "democratic" practices in wide-ranging mofussil areas, thus training Bengali Muslims in the novel principle of representation

premised on people's mandate well before the successive expansions of franchise following the constitutional reforms of 1919 and 1935, and before political parties such as the Congress and the Muslim League became mass-based organizations. And yet the most important contribution of the Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla was this: in discursively positing Islam as a religion that had absolutely no regard for social distinctions and in working out an organizational structure that so closely approximated democracy by popular mandate, it had resolved the oppositional relationships between "modernity" and "tradition," between the "West" and the "East" by positing the modern principle of political representation – "people's mandate" – as both a continuation and a culmination of the egalitarian spirit of Islam. Thus, in the late 1930s, it became possible for Azizul Haque to assert that the teaching of Islamic culture and history was necessary, not merely to maintain an identity that was under attack, but because Islam was the only true precursor of modern thought and ideas of democracy and equality were born in the crucible of Islamic civilization long before the West reinvented restricted and corrupted versions of political existence that could at best be called "steam-roller democracy" and at worst, dictatorships.

The contrast between Haque's articulation and that of the Shimla deputation seems stunning when we recall a few lines from the 1906 document presented to Lord Minto:

> We hope that Your Excellency will pardon our stating at the outset that representative institutions of the European type are entirely opposed to the genius and traditions of the Eastern Nations, and many of the most thoughtful members of our (Muslim) community look upon them as totally unsuitable to the social, religious, and political conditions obtaining in India.[32]

But for Azizul Haque, the Muslim community needed separate electorates in order to ensure that political representation was an expression of people's mandate (the touchstone of a modern idea of political sovereignty) – a mandate that could be insulated from the "corrupting" and "undue" influence of wealth and distinction. This was in stark contrast to the ideas about political sovereignty and representation that were held by the Muslim memorialists of the Shimla deputation in 1906, where "rank", "influence," and "distinction" were keys to the exercise of political sovereignty – a form of sovereignty that was supposedly "the genius and traditions of the Eastern Nations."

According to the older view, rank, hierarchy, and distinction were not, in principle, inimical to the true and proper expression of political sovereignty, in fact these were the requisites for proper governance. The idea of people's mandate as a principle of political representation, though it was a stunningly novel idea in early twentieth-century Bengal, became

habitable for the Bengali Muslims precisely because this new presupposition of political representation sat well with, and drew its energies from reformist visions of Islam where the Muslim community was repeatedly being posited as a collection of equals, and Islam as a religion was understood to be fundamentally premised on an egalitarian ethos. This egalitarian ethos was the basis on which the Muslim community was meant to distinguish itself from other religious communities that were ridden with hierarchies, stratifications, and inequalities. Rank, distinction, and hierarchy were thus not only understood as "corruptions" of an idea of political sovereignty premised on people's mandate, but also "corruptions" of what the reformist vision held up as the "true" vision of Islam and the basis of distinguishing the Muslims as a religious community from other religious communities with whom they co-habited. The presence and influence of reformist *anjumans* in early twentieth-century Bengal point to the critical coalescing of seemingly contradictory vectors – on the one hand, the practices and rhetoric engendered by the *anjumans* opened up possibilities for habitations within models of political sovereignty premised on people's mandate, following a modular "universal" form, on the other hand, positing this universalism as the essential spirit of Islam worked to distinguish the Muslim community from other religious communities, and rooted "universalism" in a "particularity" that simultaneously worked to protect and delineate the boundaries of the Muslim community. Thereby hardening identities based on religion. The relationships of such organizations with ideas of religious nationalism that took root in the Bengali Muslim public sphere and eventually translated into the demand for Pakistan need to be more systematically analyzed. Yet it is possible to make a considered conjecture that attention to the organizational structure, recruitment practices, and the rhetoric of distinctively Muslim civil society institutions such as the Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla provide critical windows into understanding the production of the Bengali Muslim public sphere as a mode of address whereby it became possible for Muslim leaders, often occupying class-positions very different from that of the bulk of the Muslim population, to credibly represent – both discursively and politically – the (Muslim) nation, which as Benedict Anderson has pointed out, is a *imagination* predicated on the horizontality of the political community.[33]

Conclusion

The fact that separate electorates (self-contained legislative constituencies for Muslims) put in place by the colonial government led to the hardening of Muslim identity has almost acquired the status of historiographical commonsense. Yet little scholarly attention has been paid to how the premise upon which Muslims maintained the demand for separate electorates shifted considerably in the course of the colonial career of Muslim politics in the first four decades of the twentieth century. In 1906, if the

Shimla deputation's plea for separate electorates was made in terms of the need to maintain the "status and influence" of the "Musalman community," to give due recognition to "their political importance" and "due weight to the positions they occupied in India a little more than a hundred years ago, of which the traditions have naturally not faded from their minds," the plea for separate electorates as articulated by Azizul Haque took on a radically different tone two decades down the line. To recapitulate, for Haque, separate electorates were a necessity in Bengal (where Muslims were numerically larger but economically weaker) in order to secure a true people's mandate and to prevent the principle of popular sovereignty from being undermined by the "undue influence"/"corruption" of wealth and distinction, which he claimed "would have the effect of driving out those (Muslims) who have struggled to represent the real interest of the community." I have attempted to suggest that focusing our lens of scrutiny on avowedly apolitical, civil society associations such as the Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla as well as the struggles that ensued within rural local chapters of the Anjuman-e-Islamia can provide clues to the manner in which the Muslim "community" was transformed in a way to become congruent with the conceptions of political sovereignty rooted in the "people" – an imagination predicated on horizontality.

Notes

1 "From Moslem Representation and Indian Reforms" (Letter to *The Times*, January 14, 1909) reprinted in Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work* (Lahore: Publishers United Ltd, 1968), p. 314.
2 Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *Ameer Ali*, p. 314. Also see Introduction.
3 See *Memoirs* by Ameer Ali as reprinted in Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work*.
4 It is well-known that high Perso-Islamicate culture had evolved elaborate political rituals for the exchange of protection and loyalty which, in Mughal India and in the courts of Murshidabad and Awadh that emerged following the decline of the Mughals, organized relationships between the officers and the emperor. ritual exchanges of loyalty for patronage through "the ideology of the salt" thoroughly permeated the ruling elite of Mughal Bengal, and similar rituals of forging loyalty through the gifting of robes, betel, and titles to the client persisted through the eighteenth century and, indeed, lasted well into the late nineteenth century and were made use of by the British to induct the Mughal administrative elite into its fold. Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 183.
5 John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth Century Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 112–114.
6 See "A Short Account of My Public Life (1885)" as reproduced in Md. Mohar Ali (ed.) *Nawab Abdul Latif: Autobiography and Other Writings* (Chittagong: The Mehrub Publication, 1968), pp. 1–34.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.

9 See "Title of 'Nawab' Conferred upon Moulavie Abdool Luteef Khan Bahadoor", in *The Gazette of India*, May 29, 1880, as reproduced in Md. Mohar Ali (ed.) *Nawab Abdul Latif: Autobiography and Other Writings*, pp. 34–40.
10 F.W. Buckler, "The Oriental Despot", in M. N. Pearson (ed.) *Legitimacy and Symbols: The South Asian Writings of F.W. Buckler* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985), p. 179.
11 See Farzana Sheikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
12 Sharif Al Mujahid (ed.) *Muslim League Documents, 1900–1947: Volume 1 (1900–1908)*, (Karachi: Quaid-I-Azam Academy, 1990), pp. 90–91.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 "Memorial of the National Muhammadan Association (1882)" reproduced in Khursheed Kamal Aziz, *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work*, p. 35. *My emphasis.*
16 "The Future of Mosalmans" as reproduced in Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.), *Muslim Modernism in Bengal: Selected Writings of Delawarr Hosaen Ahmed Mirza (1840–1913),* vol. 1 (Dhaka: Center for Social Studies, 1980), pp. 74–75.
17 See Francis Bradley Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Kolkata: S.K. Lahiri, 1910).
18 See "Future of Mosalmans".
19 Ibid., p. 113.
20 See Azizul Haque, *A Plea for Separate Electorates in Bengal* (Calcutta: Karim Bux Bros., 1931).
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Tamizzudin Khan, *The Test of Time: My Life and Days* (Dhaka: University Press Ltd, 1989), p. 90.
24 Ibid., p. 91.
25 Ibid., p. 92.
26 Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Islam o Mission", *Al Islam* (1917), pp. 393–405.
27 Ranabir Sammadar, *Emergence of the Political* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 2010), pp. 85–91.
28 "Samaj Chitra", *Al Islam* (1920), pp. 247–248.
29 "Ashraf o Atrap", *Al Islam* (1919), pp. 662–664.
30 "Presidential Address of Azizul Haque", reproduced in Shahanara Alam and Husainara Huq (eds.), *Azizul Haque: Life Sketch and Selected Writings* (Dhaka: Zaman Printers, 1984), pp. 46–47.
31 Sunil Kanti De, *Anjuman-e-Ulemae-Bangla O Muslim Samaj 1913–1919* (Calcutta: Chintamani Press, 1992), pp. 5–13.
32 Sharif Al Mujahid (ed.) *Muslim League Documents*, p. 91.
33 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

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4 From Respect to Redistribution
The Hegemony of *Praja* Identity

Early Praja Assertions

The first expressions of tenant-*praja* assertion in rural Eastern Bengal often took the form of self-respect movements and did not necessarily dwell on economic issues, as would later become the case. Landlords *(zamindars)* addressed Muslim tenants in the second person singular *"tui"* or *"tumi"* instead of the more respectful "*apni*," which were reserved for upper-caste Hindu tenants. While their upper-caste Hindu counterparts were allowed to sit inside the *kutcherry* (the zamindar's office), the Muslim tenants were not allowed to occupy seats. These discriminatory social attitudes percolated down to the zamindar's petty officials, to the priests, lawyers, and doctors on the zamindar's estate, as well as to the low-caste *talukdars* and moneylenders who emulated their social superiors.[1] For a whole generation of rural Muslim youth growing up in the 1910s and 1920s, these social attitudes rankled. To them, it was clear that such derogatory modes of address or the customary spatial positioning of bodies inside the zamindar's office were not, as Abul Mansur put it, "the natural relationship between the *praja* and the zamindar," but a specific relationship between the zamindar and the Muslim *praja*.[2] This was precisely why even as a nine years old growing up in a village in the Mymensingh district of eastern Bengal, when the *amlas* knocked on the door of his family home to intimate him that the zamindar, Jatindra Narayan Acharya Chowdhury, had summoned Abul Mansur to his *kutcherry* (office) to furnish clarifications about rumors of his participation in a *praja* (tenant-peasant) meeting and addressed him in the less respectful second person *"tui"* (often used to address children as well), he irately responded that unless appropriately addressed he would not visit the *kutcherry*. Mansur recounted that his own outburst was a result of intense shame and anger that rose incrementally each time he heard the zamindar's officials and the village *chowkidars* (guards) address the elders in his family as *"tui."*[3]

While still a schoolboy, Abul Mansur organized a *praja* meeting in 1909 in the Dhanikhola area of Mymensigh. Notices for the *praja sabha* (tenant meeting) were written in pencil on pages torn from a school exercise book

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and distributed to five mosques in the area. The meeting's venue was carefully chosen – in a secluded spot on the riverbank, with no homestead within half a mile of the location. The village *hat* (bi-weekly market), though a more convenient meeting spot where cultivators would go not only to buy and sell but also to meet friends and hear news of the neighborhood and nearby towns, was deliberately avoided for fear of the zamindar's officials forcefully breaking up the meeting upon hearing about it. Zahriruddin Tarafdar, a man well-regarded in the five neighboring villages, was appointed as the meeting's president. The resolutions passed at the meeting included that a demand be raised for allowing *prajas* to sit inside his *kutcherry* and that a stop be put on the levying of *abwabs* or compulsory surcharges for the purposes of Kali puja, a Hindu festival. When the zamindar, who lived in the city, arrived in Dhanikhola during the annual survey of his estate, the demands of the Muslim tenants were placed before him, and a few of them were approved. Henceforth it was decided, inside the *kutcherry* ordinary tenants would be seated on mats and tenants who were also village headmen would be seated on "*benchees,*" which stood at half the height of benches reserved for the zamindar's officials.[4] Another *praja* conference in the area in 1911, which received publicity in *Mohammadi* and *Mihir o Sudhakar*, passed resolutions demanding that all the zamindar's officials be recruited from among local people so as to generate employment opportunities as well as facilitate realization of rents due to the zamindar.[5]

That the *praja* movement first took root in areas where populations of Muslim tenant-cultivators were predominant is perhaps not surprising given the nature of these early demands, even though not a single demand was articulated in sectarian terms per se. But early *praja* demands such as that of banning the practice of *abwabs* or customary surcharges levied on the Muslim peasantry for the purposes of sponsoring local Hindu festivals fed into distinctive religious dispositions cultivated since the mid-nineteenth century, particularly in areas of eastern Bengal, where cultivators had come under the influence of reformist Faraidi leaders. Nineteenth-century Faraidi religious reformers like Haji Shariatullah, first instructed the Muslim peasantry to not pay *abwabs* on the grounds that forcible requirements of financing Hindu festivals were in contradistinction to the central Islamic tenet of *tauhid* or the oneness of Allah. And, thus, in effect these payments coerced the Muslim peasantry to partake in the sin of idolatry.[6] Abwabs, although made illegal by the British colonial government since the Permanent Settlement in the late 18th century, far from disappeared as a feature of rural life. Landlords continued to levy an array of illegal but customary surcharges on the hapless peasantry not only to finance Hindu religious festivals but also on major life occasions – of births, deaths, and marriages in the landlords' families. Typically, the often forcible collection of such surcharges was a way of extracting more from the cultivators, without going through the official process of hiking rent.[7] When inspired by Haji Shariatullah, the payment of *abwabs* – particularly those payments

that were seen to force participation in idolatry – ignited a resistance movement in parts of eastern Bengal in 1837, it set a significant precedent for Faraidi communities. Such communities spread rapidly in the districts of Fureedpore, Backergunge, and Mymensingh.

It is not surprising then, that for *praja* activists such as Abul Mansur, growing up in Mymensingh, raised in a family influenced by the Faraidi movement, distinctively Faraidi dispositions shaped their attitudes toward issues such as the collection of *abwabs* for the zamindar's Kali *puja,* which informed and resonated with early praja demands. Mansur was born 1898. His earliest memories were of himself as a child singing a rhyme from a Faraidi *punthi*, which went like this:

> If Allah wills, I will go to Lahore
> There I will wage *jihad* against the Sikhs
> If I emerge victorious, I will become a Ghazi
> If I die, I will become a *shahid* (martyr)
> Instead of my living body, *tauhid* will live.[8]

Mansur recounts how, his uncle Samiruddin Faraidi was a man highly respected in Dhanikhola for his ability to recite Faraidi *punthis* in musical tones. Maulavis from far-flung areas would come to the village to conduct *waz-mehfil* sermons and stay at their house. Mansur's grandfather's older brother, who died in 1868, was still remembered in the area as "Ghazi sahib" or a "brave warrior" who fought in the army of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi and waged *jihad* against the Sikh "infidels".[9] It is difficult to say if Abul Mansur's *borodada* (grandfather's brother), Ashequllah Faraidi, was fighting in the northwestern frontier under the leadership of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi or his successors, the brothers, Inayat Ali and Wilayat Ali.

Barelwi's popularity in Bengal is well known. His tours in Bengal to mobilize support for the jihad – a religious, political, and military campaign – against the Sikhs in Punjab after his return from Mecca in 1823 attracted huge crowds. He is known to have made many converts. In 1931, in the battle of Balakot against the Sikh army, Barelwi's *mujahidins* were badly defeated; Barelwi himself was killed. But even after his death, several of his followers from Bengal, among them many Muslim peasants, traveled all the way to Afghanistan to join the *mujahidin* or holy warriors against Ranjit Singh, the ruler of Punjab, whose policies of banning the Muslim call to prayer and desecration of mosques within the territory of his princely state were the immediate pretext of Barelwi's mobilization of religio-military campaign against the ruler. Many among these followers of Barelwi refused to believe that he was dead; they went to join the jihad on the frontier in hopes of fighting a holy war under his leadership. The belief that Barelwi was not really killed in the Battle of Balakot continued to be systematically fuelled by Inayat Ali and Wilayat Ali – two brothers from Patna and Barelwi's *khalifah*-lieutenants, who tried to intensify the

frontier *jihad*. Bengal's Muslim peasantry was particularly receptive to the preachers from Patna who spread out to gather military recruits and material support for the jihad. They responded by joining the mujahidin army or if they could not, by donating rice to a common fund to keep the jihad going. At one point in the early 1860s, there were 900 military recruits in the northwestern frontier from Bengal alone.

According to village lore, Barelwi's successor, Inayat Ali, lived in Abul Mansur's ancestral home when he visited Dhanikhola for the purpose of preaching or *tabligh*. And as Mansur makes clear, his grandfather's brother, Ashequllah Faraidi, was under police surveillance up until the very last days of his life. Legends about Mansur's *borodada* were numerous and often fantastic – they celebrated his remarkable ability to train young boys in the village in *lathi*-wielding and swordsmanship. Village lore about Ashequllah Ghazi Sahib was passed down to the younger generation through family elders, *ulema*, *mullahs*, and *mulavis* in the area. Mansur speaks of a degree of social distinction that his family enjoyed among fellow co-religionists on account of being good Faraidis and, most importantly, on account of being related to the Ghazi who was the stuff of local legends.[10] This sense of social distinction, which accrued from keeping up the pride of a Faraidi lineage by maintaining strictures of religious life and honoring the memory of the *jihadi ghazi*, contributed to a sense of self-worth that was wounded each time his family and community elders were addressed by the landlord's petty officials condescendingly. It is true that not all Muslim young men growing up in Dhanikhola, Mymensingh, at the turn of the twentieth century could boast a bloodline that could be traced back to a "*ghazi sahib,*" but many such young men and boys belonged to Faraidi families, or grew up on lore that celebrated frontier-warriors who laid down their lives waging a war against "infidels." Such local lore definitely contributed toward instilling a sense of self-esteem and social worth, which could be translated into *praja* demands that all tenants (including Muslims tenants) be treated with respect in the zamindar's *kutcherry*.

The collectivization of tenant-cultivators and the nature of *praja* demands in the early days reveal that such assertions were not based on economic issues such as the reduction of rent, amelioration of debt, occupancy rights and, the abolition of the zamindar's rights to *nazar* or *salami* on the transfer of occupancy holdings, which would be included in the charter of demands of the *praja* movement from 1914 onward.[11] Quite to the contrary, as the character of the Dhanikhola *praja* assertions indicates, the demand for the employment of local people in the zamindar's *kutcherry* was made in terms of generation of employment in the locality, but also justified in terms of such a measure facilitating the collection of rent if local officials instead of non-locals went around the business of rent collection. This appears to be a far cry from the no-rent mentality of the tenant-cultivators that would plague landlords in eastern Bengal in the 1930s – a "mentality" conventionally attributed by historians to the intensification and spread of the *praja*

movement, the institutionalization of the movement in the formation of the KPP, and KPP's entry into the domain of formal provincial politics. The demand against illegal exaction of *abwabs* for Kali *puja* was not articulated in terms of the economic exploitation or distress of the tenants. It did not ask for a ban on *abwabs* per se. For example, abwab payments levied during major life events in the zamindar's family, or the ones extracted for road construction in the village or the maintenance of village security guards or *chowkidari* force did not make it to the list of early praja demands. It was only one specific kind of *abwab* that was deemed a threat to the maintenance of a specific kind of reformed spiritual disciple involved in protecting the tenet of *tauhid* (the Oneness of Allah) that made it to that list.

It is perhaps not surprising then, that at least two of the major leaders of the *praja* movement, Abul Mansur Ahmed, and the older Akram Khan, came from families who drew lines of descent from frontier *jihadis*, locally revered as valiant warriors for the cause of *tauhid*. Akram Khan's father, Maulana Abdul Bari, was also known to be part of the *mujahidin* of the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya founded by Barelwi.[12]

Religious Legitimacy and Patronage of Raiyat Sabhas

Akram Khan was one of the founder members of a more organized *praja* movement which started in earnest with the Kamariarchar Praja Conference in Jamalpur subdivision of Mymensigh district in 1914 which, for the first time, forged links between localized, fragmented, and sporadic movements of *praja* assertions and urban Muslim professionals. Fazlul Huq, a lawyer from Bakarganj, Akram Khan from Calcutta, and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, a well-known editor of five reformist periodicals from Chittagong attended the conference.[13] The resolutions passed at the conference included the following demands: abolition of the zamindar's right to *nazar* and *salami*; reduction of rent; effective measures against illegal exactions by zamindars; occupancy right to tenants when the land is cultivated by them for 12 years, and the tenant's right to plant trees on his land. This conference received great publicity in the weekly newspaper, *Mohammadi*, edited by Akram Khan, and in *Muslim Hitaishi*, patronized by Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura.[14] That both Khan and the Pir of Furfura converged on the issue of supporting the cause of the tenant-cultivators is significant, since on several religious issues they did not see eye to eye. In fact, Akram Khan's weekly *Mohammadi* was singularly responsible for publicizing *fatwas* issued against the Pir of Furfura, declaring him as "an enemy of Islam." Khan was sympathetic to the Ahl-i Hadis variety of reformism and had an acrimonious relationship with the Hanafi catholicism of Bakr.

Abu Bakr, a hugely popular *pir*, wielded influenced over more than 50 districts in Bengal and Assam. Associated with eighteen organizations throughout his life, including Anjuman-e Waizine Hanifiya, Anjuman e Islamia (Faridpur), and Anjumane Tabligh e Islam (Rangpur), he had

influence over 20 newspapers in Bengal. At his seat in a village called Furfura in Hooghly, *Isal-i-Sawab*, a festival of offering prayers for the dead, was celebrated over a duration of three days annually with great pomp; he spend lavishly on the festival at which lakhs of Muslims from all over Bengal converged.[15] The Ahl-i Hadis (also called Mohammadi) clerics were thoroughly opposed to practices such as *Isal-i-Sawab*, which they deemed un-Islamic. Akram Khan's *Mohammadi* not only carried reports of debates between the followers of Bakr and the Mohammadis, but also published *fatwas* issued by other reformist sects that were active in attempting to delegitimize the Pir of Furfura.

One such *fatwa* issued by a Jaunpuri cleric – a follower of Keramat Ali Jaunpuri – Maulana Mohammad Hamid, declared that Abu Bakr of Furfura had invented *kalmas* which were not in the Koran, that such *kalmas* were polytheistic, and thus to be a *murid* of Bakr was equivalent to being a *murid* of a *yogi* or a *sanyasi*. The *fatwa* also forbade dining with Furfuris, entering into relationships of marriage with them, and reading the *namaz* in a mosque while being seated next to them.[16] The *fatwa*, originally published in Urdu, was translated into Bengali and published in the weekly edited by Akram Khan.[17] The Jaunpuri clerics, who much like the Mohammadi ones, had fractious relationships with the Pir of Furfura, suffered from a disadvantage in Bengal since most of them wrote in Urdu, which was inaccessible to Muslim masses in the region.[18] Publications such as Akram Khan's *Mohammadi* performed the important function of translating and disseminating such anti-Bakr opinions. Bakr was also wealthy, and so were a lot of his followers, drawn as they were from *ashraf* landowning families from Hooghly. The Jaunpuris by contrast were not so well financed, their clerics poor and not connected to the English-educated Muslim intelligentsia quite in the manner that Bakr was.[19] An entire panoply of organizations and print media over which Bakr commanded influence via "beardless, English educated *maulavis* who were not sufficiently learned in religious matters" was a cause for great consternation among rival groups such as the Jaunpuri and the Mohammadi clerics.[20]

Given this general milieu of sectarian acrimony, that a newspaper such as the *Muslim Hitaishi* of the Bakr group (the Furfuris or the Bakris as they were called in popular tracts) would lend support to the cause of the tenant-cultivators by publicizing a meeting led by Akram Khan is not insignificant; it points to the necessity of tapping into the domain of *praja* grievances for the purpose of religious legitimacy. By the third decade of the twentieth century, contests over who represented "Islam" and battles over who was acting in the interests of the Muslim community could not be fought without linking the issue of religious legitimacy to upholding the interest of tenant-cultivators. *Raiyat samitis* and *Raiyat sabhas* (peasant tenant associations) mushroomed rapidly all around rural Bengal. By the mid-1920s, there were *praja* and *raiyat* associations in virtually every district in eastern and northern Bengal.

Such *raiyat* and *praja samitis* were often locally pioneered by followers of charismatic religious figures. The followers were also engaged in the production of a huge bulk of printed ephemera in the Bengali language – pamphlets, tracts, songs, open letters to government officials, and poems. For instance, a tract titled *Desher Katha* published in 1925 by the Jalangi Raiyat Samiti of Murshidabad, announced that one Munshi Tariqullah, a disciple of Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura, had set up a *raiyat* association in the village of Jalangi. The tract, much in the manner of many improvement texts, is a long poem in colloquial Bengali.[21] It opens with "*Bismillah al Rahman al Rahim*" and then goes on to list the innumerable sufferings of peasants in the hands of the zamindar and his officials. In verse, the tract speaks of the burden of paying *nazar* even when the peasant's crop is destroyed by floods; it speaks of the humiliation of being dragged through dust by the *naib*'s men in the dead of the night; and of blood dripping down the peasant's back from being flogged for late payment of rent. "Where is the justice of British rule?" – the text poses a question. In the second section, the verse announces the "stirrings of a new age" (*navayug*) now that Munshi Tariqullah had started a *raiyat sabha*. Tariqullah is introduced as a truthful and committed man, a *haji*, and a friend of the impoverished. The *raiyat sabha* over which he presides is set up in opposition to the *kutcherry* of the zamindar. Unlike the zamindar who is surrounded by sycophants, who cannot see through the lies of his officials and is hard-hearted, Tariqullah, we are told, is "a strong man who is not swayed by sycophants," "when he hears the oppressed weep, he is ready to lay down his life for them," and his *sabha* is a place where truth is spoken and heard, and justice delivered. Tariqullah, the text proclaims, "has drowned our (sic) sorrows in the high tide of the Padma" and made the *naib* fearful. It tells us that Hindu *prajas* have also joined the *praja* collective and warns "if you have any shame, do not break up the *samiti*, if you are weaned by the sweet words of the zamindar now, there will be no remedy later." *Desher Katha* also warns the peasants against riding the *swadeshi* wave. Though the flags are flying high in all directions, Mahatma (Gandhi) is meditating, and Deshbandhu (C.R. Das) and the Ali brothers are busy popularizing the slogan of Swadeshi, the texts warns, *prajas* are nothing but goats to be sacrificed on the altar of *swadesh* (home rule). It further warns that if the *praja* issues are not taken seriously, most peasants will go back to being indigo coolies. The tone is loyalist. An entire section of the verse is dedicated to the British official, "Magistrate W.A.D Sahib," who is seen as a force for good. He is applauded as a "defender of the *prajas,*" as someone who has put the zamindar's officials in place. He is also praised for dismissing the policemen and *darogas* who routinely refused to register complaints against the excesses of the zamindar's officials. The final section of the verse-tract links the chaos wrecked upon the lives of the *prajas* by illegal and oppressive practices of zamindars, *naibs*, and *darogas* to the chaos or the theological concept of *fitna* or chaos prevailing in society in general. Wives, we are

told, are not obedient to their husbands, adultery (*zina*), and gambling have spread like an epidemic, the world is a web of lies and deceit, and people do not know *haram* from *halal*. There is a sense in which Tariqullah – Pir Abu Bakr's disciple – and his *raiyat sabha* is understood to have arrived on the scene to bring peace to the social lives of the peasants as well as restore moral order in the world. Figures such as Tariqullah were endowed with a certain charisma, surrounded by an aura of religio-moral worth; he was shown to have descended from a locally respected and virtuous lineage, and his charisma and moral worth were utilized in mobilizing peasants in the area to join the *raiyat sabha*.

Extant historical scholarship has typically portrayed the *praja* movement as a secularized rubric of peasant mobilization, which recruited an overwhelming number of Muslim peasants only because they happened to be more numerous.[22] As readings of hitherto neglected cheaply printed ephemera produced by local *raiyat* associations reveal, this was far from the case. Links existed between *pirs* and *maulavis* who enjoyed popular following in wider circles and local village-level organizers of *raiyat* associations they patronized. The language of mobilization tied issues of social order and prosperity to the restoration of religio-moral order.

Raiyat association leaders and Furfuri clerics, who were spread far and wide, encouraged *praja*-cultivators to attend Bakr's *Isal-i-Sawab*. In 1924, at the *Isal-i-Sawab* organized by Bakr in Furfura, a resolution was passed opposing any form of Swaraj that would not be governed by Islamic laws. Curiously, at the *Isal-i-Sawab,* Bakr's status as a landlord was emphasized; his financial support of the festival was posited as an example of how a Muslim landlord could fruitfully deploy his wealth to create a community of Muslims occupying disparate class-positions. According to one account, an attendee of Bakr's *Isal-i-Sawab* repeatedly stressed on how, unlike other ostentatious *pirs*, Bakr was simple and austere in dress and habits, how his children mingled with ordinary children at the festival.[23] Interestingly, while it was in the name of personages such as Bakr that tenant-cultivators were being mobilized against landlords and organized in far-flung rural districts into *raiyat* associations, in a movement seemingly consolidating a class, or at least, a sectional interest, it was also under Bakr's patronage that a larger Muslim community was instantiated during festivals such as *Isal-i-Sawab*, where antagonistic relationships between sectional interests within Muslims could be contained and the Muslim landlord's wealth displayed in actively producing bonds of religious community. It was as an effect of the braiding of such contradictory vectors, often traceable to key personalities (such as Bakr) that fault lines within the Muslim community simultaneously tended to be produced and sutured, underscored and effaced. Those *praja* assertions in the 1920s and 1930s more frequently lashed out against Hindu zamindars than Muslim ones was perhaps as a result of such an effect, rather than an active process of communalization that singled out the Hindu zamindar as an enemy any more than rivals belonging to different *madhabs*.

Winning Over the Bargadar and the Production of Bengali Muslim Identity at a Grass-roots Level

The term *praja* or tenant came to be commonly applied to all those who had property rights below the zamindars. It was, in a sense an umbrella term that included the intermediate tenure-holders, the tenant, and sub tenants. However, there were *prajas* without any tenancy rights such as the *bargadar*, the *adhiar*, *bhag-chashi*, *khetmajur* who were directly involved in production.[24] For instance, in *Barga,* a system of sharecropping, half of the produce had to be paid as rent to the landowner or tenure-holder. The *bargadar* himself supplied the means of production — cattle, seeds, plough, and so on, could not claim any rights in occupancy.[25] So in the building of the *praja* movement, there were fault lines along the concept of the occupancy or tenancy rights. How, then, would the *bargadars*, with no occupancy rights, for instance, be mobilized to the praja cause? What did they have to gain from joining the tenant associations, which were primarily demanding the strengthening of the occupancy rights of peasants? How would they be recruited in protests and processions?

In 1921, a special committee was formed to make recommendations on what amendments to the existing Bengal Tenancy Act were necessary. Presided over by John Kerr, the committee's report and a draft of the proposed amendments, which appeared in the Calcutta Gazette in 1923, raised a storm of controversy.[26] To the chagrin of landlords and pro-tenant supporters, the Kerr Committee's report recommended, for the first time in the history of land-related legislation in Bengal, that a bona fide cultivator, who supplied his own implements of agriculture, paying a share of the produce as rent to a proprietor or tenure-holder be deemed a tenant.[27]

This suggested provision threatened the large tenure-holders and other occupancy *raiyats* who often let out their lands on a *barga* (sharecropping) basis. Interestingly, the pamphlets issued by tenant associations, in calling for *praja* unity, did not exclude the *bargadars*, but included them in their address. In fact *praja samiti* tracts from the early 1920s reveal that a concerted effort was made by the *praja* leaders to convince the *bargadars* that the Kerr Committee's recommendations were actually against their interests. One such *praja* pamphlet from Mymensigh, published in 1923, which appeared hot on the heels of the Kerr committee's recommendations, takes the form of a dialogue between a *jotedar* (Bhuiya sahib) and a *bargadar* (Garibullah) that occurs when the *bargadar* comes looking to get on *barga*:

Jotedar: Don't you know that land will not be let out for sharecropping anymore? A new legislation is on its way, according to which, *bargadars* will be given occupancy rights. Should I starve myself by allowing you to sharecrop on my land holding?

Bargadar: Bhuiya Sahib, I did not understand what this legislation is all about. Can you explain in greater detail?

Jotedar: This plot of land has two levels of property rights – the proprietor's and the occupancy *raiyat*'s, you know that. Starting this November, if I allow you to be a *bargadar* on my land holding, and, if you – using your own plough, ox, and seeds – grow crops on my land, then you will be deemed my *praja*. And I will not be able to get my land back from you. You will retain right to my land, and will be required to pay me rent ascertained by the courts of law – I will not be able to object to that. And Chandu Sheikh, my under-*raiyat* will have rights to my land as well. As in the past I cannot demand produce rent; I will be forced to accept rent in cash if he applies for commutation of produce rent to money, and if such an order is passed by the courts of law. Garibullah, do you understand?

Bargadar: I do. But tell me, if such a piece of legislation is passed, what will be the condition of the *bargadars*?

Jotedar: No one will be willing to give out land on *barga*. They will not be encouraged to settle *korfa prajas* on their lands. Since the Act stands to be amended, many have already wrested away their lands from *bargadars* and under-*raiyats*. If I do not find wage-laborers, I will let my land stand fallow, but I will never give out land on a sharecropping basis. I might employ you as a wage-laborer, but if you charge too much, I will be forced to replace you with coolies from Orissa. So either you will be forced to run away to the dense jungles of Assam, or be compelled to tie a noose around your neck and you family's. But you will not get land on *barga*.

Bargadar: I had another question. A few days back Fateh Ali died; he left behind two widows and four minor children. If the widows give out their land on *barga*, will they also lose rights to their land? What will be the way out for them?

Jotedar: The way out? The beggar's bowl! Or perhaps the noose or the river![28]

According to the *praja* pamphlet, if the existing Act was amended along the lines recommended by the Kerr Committee, which proposed to give occupancy rights to all bona fide cultivators, including *bargadars*, landowners, and other tenure-holders would be forced to replace *bargadars* with day laborers from outside the province to get their land cultivated. Local protagonists of the *praja* movement also played on the anxieties of widowed wives of *jotedars* and *raiyats* who were often left in charge of feeding households with no able-bodied adult male and depended on letting out their land holdings to *bargadars* for cultivation. The *praja* leaders, in mobilizing against the recommendations of the Kerr committee report, deployed a devious language of protectionism. The *praja* movement was putatively necessary to protect lives of *bargadars*, widowed women and minor

children, which the proposed amendments had supposedly rendered precarious. And finally, in the pamphlet, the *bargadar* is won over; he is successfully recruited to the *praja* cause to protest against the proposed legislation:

Bargadar: Bhuiya Sahib, what are we to do now? What is the responsibility of the *praja*?

Jotedar: There is little time. The government has published a draft of the Act to seek our opinions. We have to hold protest meetings. We have two months to express our grievances. A mother does not feed her child unless it cries! Take the name of Allah and plunge into action.[29]

It is a clarion call for the *prajas* to collectivize, to stop paying illegal cesses (*abwabs*) to the zamindar, a wake-up call for the Muslim cultivators to realize that "it is *haram* to lend financial support to zamindar's *pujas*." *Prajas* are encouraged to join meetings in large numbers, draft resolutions, write open letters to the government, and protest the suggested amendments to the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. In addition, they are encouraged to draft resolutions demanding free and compulsory primary education, a reduction in rates of interest, and the right to cut trees on their land holdings.

In the proposed Bill, the Kerr committee also addressed the issue of transferability of occupancy rights and proposed to legalize the practice.[30] The Kerr Committee was in favor of legalizing such transfers by fixing a fee of 25 percent of the consideration money payable to the zamindar, and by enabling the zamindar the right to transfer the holding to himself.[31] Legalization of land transfer on these terms was anathema to the *raiyat* associations since fixing a salami amounting to 20 percent of the sale price to the zamindar would, they feared, put an end to the flexibility of terms and modes of negotiations customarily practiced through, as a pamphlet states, "flattery, hospitality (*khatir andaz*) or simply tears" by which a smaller sum was often arrived at. The landowners' right to pre-emption made the *raiyat* associations equally anxious. In this specific clause, *raiyat* associations saw a golden opportunity for the zamindars to acquire occupancy land holdings and convert them into *khas mahal* lands, which were government lands allocated at low revenue rates and with special facilities in the deltaic region of eastern Bengal. It was said, with this piece of legislation, the zamindar would be "like a bear with a bunch of bananas in his hands" greedily buying off land holdings from actual cultivators, thus rendering them landless, and then letting land out to actual cultivators on a more profitable *barga* basis.[32] Indeed, as Iftekar Iqbal's study has revealed, this process was well underway by the 1920s, when the British government actively implemented policies of allocating *khas mahal* lands preferentially to members of the Hindu *bhadralok*, in part, to "enable persons who have abandoned terrorism to settle down to a life of productive citizenship"

and in part, to contain possible resentment among educated *bhadralok* youth arising from high unemployment rates in the inter-war period.[33] The number of actual cultivators possessing occupancy rights had been undergoing a steady decrease. Between 1921 and 1931, there was an estimated 49 percent increase in the number of landless laborers in Bengal.[34]

As more and more cultivators got reduced to the status of *bargadars*, the onslaught on the possibility of conferring any substantive rights on the *bargadars* intensified from all sides involved in the debate – the *praja* leaders, the zamindars, as well as the *bhadralok* neo-*raiyat*. In the debates that ensued in the legislative council when the Tenancy Amendment Bill came up for discussion in 1928, Akhil Chandra Datta of the Swarajist bloc, in defending status quo, declared that *bargadari* was:

> *[T]he most equitable arrangement that one can conceive of between capital and labor… May I ask if there is any other industry where you can find a more just share given to labor than what is given, viz., half to the capital and half to the labor…*If you want a Bolshevik legislation have it by all means. Let us improve the condition of the actual tiller of the soil, even by sacrificing all other people.[35]

Particularly concerned with championing the interests of the bhadralok neo-*raiyats* who were supposed to be "returning" to agriculture, J.L. Banerjee said:

> Let us accept the plain fact that at present we cannot recognize the *bargadar* as a tenant…We are not legislating *in vacuo*: we are legislating upon a background of past history and custom: and we cannot leave public opinion out of the account. Under the existing condition the *bargadars* and *adhiars* [sharecroppers] are not recognized as tenants and the Government cannot give them the rights of tenants without flouting public opinion. *Is the only cultivator of the land the man who tills the land with his own hands? Has the bhadralok agriculturalist who invests money in land no place in economy of things? And should not his land be recognized as much as the right of the man who actually tills the soil?*[36]

Datta and Banerjee sought to posit the institution of *bargadari* (sharecropping) as a fair and equitable distribution between the owners of land and the owners of labor power. The presupposition underpinning such formulations was that the owners of land and the owners of labor met in the domain of exchange: both parties engaged in an economic activity where in an exchange of land and labor, both sides took home an equal share of value produced in and through such exchange. Here, economic activity in being determined by exchange was shown to occur, to use a spatial metaphor, on a planar surface. In an understanding of economic activity dominated by an idiom of exchange (of land and labor), the owners of capital were deemed to

have contributed as much to the production of value as "the man who tills the land with his own hands." Banerjee's argument was not very carefully crafted, its logic weak and quite obviously flawed. By Banerjee's own logic, the *bargadars* ought to have been granted rights on the land by virtue of being participants in the economic activity of exchange, but his formulation does not follow this logic to its end and instead, led the likes of Banerjee to completely disregard the rights of the *bargadars*, in upholding the rights of the owners of capital. Yet notwithstanding the relative strength or weakness of these arguments, they bring into sharp relief the manner in which the problem of granting rights (or not) in land was linked to conflicting concepts of the economic or, to use an Althusserian distinction, the theoretical presuppositions that underwrote the "economic" not as an "object of the real," but as an "object of knowledge."[37]

Contra Banerjee, the champions of *praja* interests, aggressively touted a very different concept of the economic. Unlike the pro-landlord lobby, which located value-producing economic activity in the site of exchange, the pro-peasant *praja* activists sought to displace an understanding of labor as commodity-in-exchange to give way to a profoundly powerful presupposition about labor in which labor becomes a producing/productive activity that is the source of value. If a pro-landlord understanding of labor as commodity made labor subject to price fluctuations, demand, and supply, in the *praja* movement's understanding about labor it acquired the status of an ontology, which far from being effected by fluctuations in variables, was posited as the constant and reliable source of all value. In 1921, in an open letter to the Governor of Bengal, Lawrence John Lumbley Dundas, Earl of Ronaldshay, the Secretary of the Bengal Raiyat Association – Naziruddin Ahmed – pleaded the governor to make a tour of rural Bengal to witness the miserable plight of the *raiyats*, who were the "backbone of the nation," the "real producers," the motor which drove society, for on their labor rested "the *nawab's nawabi*, the *babu*'s *babudom*, the *bhadralok's* genteel manners, the zamindar's arrogance."[38]

The 1920s *praja* pamphlet from Mymensingh written in the form of a dialogue between the *bargadar* and the *jotedar* gave an account that was fairly typical of the widespread manner of narrating the history of accumulation of wealth in tracts issued by *praja* associations:

> Not only is the *raiyat* (tenant-cultivator) not the owner of wealth, as a matter of fact, in the eyes of law, he is not even the owner of land. Those that have accumulated wealth through deceit and force, those whose ancestors had endeared themselves to Lord Cornwallis' Company agents and those who in broad daylight committed theft through usury are today the owners of land. But those poor creatures who turned their lifeblood to sweat – clearing dense jungles or by ceaseless toil, ploughed deeper and deeper into the earth to bring out ambrosia (*amrita*) – have no claims on the land today; they are merely hired hands.[39]

As per such accounts, capital was fundamentally theft and not simply a thing produced via a mutually beneficial exchange between the owners of land and the owners of labor power.

Praja pamphlets such as *Krishker Unnati* provided detailed guidelines on how *raiyat* interests were to be organized. It recommended that *raiyat samitis* at the village and district levels under the umbrella of a *Bangiya raiyat samiti* (Bengal tenant's association) – a well-linked network of organizations – be set in place so that "if one part is affected the entire body reacts." *Praja* pamphlets also advised that in case of forceful eviction of a *raiyat* from his land by a zamindar, no other *raiyat* ought to come forward to buy the right of tenancy on such land, and when the *Bangiya Raiyat Samiti* declared a particular zamindar as an oppressor or the collector of illegal cesses (*abwab*), *raiyats* ought to collectively boycott such a zamindar by refraining from taking up employment as the zamindar's doorman, or *paik* or *barkandaj.* Most importantly, such pamphlets lay down that in order to protect the interest of the *raiyats,* there could be no discrimination on the basis of localities, districts, or the religion of the affected *raiyat*.[40] Such non-sectarian calls for unity were, however, at the expense of the *bargadars* who owned no rights to the land on which they cultivated. But given that improvements texts and *praja* pamphlets had already forged a regime of value that accorded primacy to the labor of cultivation, on what terms could a staunch resistance to conferring rights to the *bargadars* be justified by the *praja* movement?

In the Bengal Legislative Assembly, two pro-peasants councilors, Ekramuk Haq and Emdadul Huq, argued that where ordinary poor but respectable cultivating families made a living by letting out their holdings to the *bargadar*, conferring tenancy rights to *bargadars* would be extremely mischievous – it would foster strife and litigation. For fear of such strife and litigation, they claimed, many holdings would remain unploughed and those who tilled on *barga*, unable to make a living in their villages, would be forced to make way to the hills and jungles of Assam, and perish there.[41] In demonstrating the ill effects of the proposed legislation, the *praja* tracts and pamphlets constantly played on an anxiety about the exodus of cultivators from Bengal to the wilderness of Assam. As an effect of the legislation, *bargadars*, they projected, would be driven to the unfriendly jungles of Assam because occupancy *raiyats* would refuse to let out land on a sharecropping basis, and occupancy *raiyats*, reduced to landless labor following the conversion of their holdings into *khas mahal* lands, would be forced into the tiger-infested jungles of Assam too. This anxiety of depeasantization was conveyed powerfully by activating an imagination of Bengal as a civilized realm of sedentary cultivation vis-à-vis its neighboring Assam, a supposedly inhospitable and "uncivilized" wilderness. Such pamphlets pleaded with the *prajas*: "Teach your children the name of Allah and Rasul. Even if you have a tiny plot of land left, do not go to Assam. Stay back in your *desh* and plough the land. If required work as a coolie, there's no shame in

that."[42] Since the late nineteenth century, the Bengali word *desh* operated on a rather fluid semantic terrain – it could refer to one's ancestral village or place of "origin" but also mean country or nation. Even today, the word *desh* continues to be used in both these senses. The *praja* pamphlets played on this double semantic usage of *desh*. The discourse of the *praja* movement emphasized *desh* as a place to which affiliation was understood to be structured by ties of kinship, through land which the "son inherits from his forefathers."[43] Yet, in *praja* discourse, one's ties to one's *desh* did not simply appear as a matter of inherited occupancy or proprietary rights, but as an affective relationship that had to be maintained by continuing the activity of labor of cultivation. It was through the labor of cultivation that one's relationship to one's *desh*, as place, and to the province of Bengal could be rightfully maintained.

In introducing the new Tenancy Bill in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1928, Provash Chandra Mitter remarked, "if this house can settle the conflicting interests with justice and fairness to all, it will be laying the foundation of true nationalism in this Province."[44] If in Mitter's understanding, *desh* or nation was an agglomeration of different and conflicting sectional interests, and the forging of national unity required that no one sectional interest be ridden over roughshod. In *praja* literature, the interest of the cultivators did not make an appearance as a sectional interest but as an expression of national interest, since *prajas* were posited as the motor driving the entire nation of Bengal, the "life force of the nation":

> The fact is that the government and a handful of our countrymen have been conspiring against the *prajas* who are the life force of Bengal… The Government has enslaved the educated *bhadralok* by bestowing upon them zamindaris and clerical jobs. The educated have spread their influence over the administrative institutions of the country. They come to represent their interest as the interest of the *desh*, politics is the politics of their interest, and the Congress and the Council are playgrounds for their moves.[45]

Therefore, the *praja* pamphlets asserted that the zamindars in reducing the actual cultivators of the soil to their present plight had in fact reduced the whole of Bengal, the "*jannat-e-belat*" ("heaven on earth") of the Mughal era to "a burial ground."[46]

The *praja* movement's avowedly non-sectarian claims of protecting peasant interests irrespective of locality, district, and religion, however, rested on propagating acute xenophobia at another level, directed not only at the "Marwari moneylenders" and "upcountry Bhatias," but also at the wage laborers and coolies from Bihar and Orissa – the "*pashchima* coolies" as they were called in popular *praja* literature. The *bargadars* were advised to drive the "*pashchima* coolies" out of Bengal, and via the continuing act of the labor of cultivation claim their *desh* – both in the sense of a place to

which one is attached through kinship ties and to the land of Bengal. As I have shown in the Chapter 2, improvement tracts posited cultivation as the highest form of *ibadat* (worship) to Allah, and reinforced an older idea of Adam as the first cultivator and cultivation as the foremost command of Allah, and in so doing created a religio-ethical vision of Muslim self and community rooted in linking the cultivation of the self to the act of cultivating the earth. The relationship between land and labor was posited as a religiously sanctioned one; to respect this relationship was the duty of a good Muslim and the proof of his Muslimness.

Praja pamphlets continued this discourse where the labor of cultivation was the source of all value, but also linked the act of cultivation to the land of Bengal. Popular *praja* literature including tracts and pamphlets that circulated in the Bengal countryside, thus went a long way in the production of Bengali Muslim identity at a grass-roots level.

In the historical context of Bengal, the setting up of a relationship of contiguity between land, labor, and Muslim-ness was significant. For as Rafiuddin Ahmed has noted, an interesting aspect of *ashraf* behavior in Bengal in the late nineteenth century was reflected in their attitude of aversion to physical labor. Any Muslim, with even the barest claims to high social status, held such labor in great contempt.[47] In 1876, Carstairs observed that in the late nineteenth century, the repugnance for physical labor extended even to many of the less privileged groups, particularly in Eastern Bengal, so much so that the labor for public works generally had to be sourced from outside.[48] Carstairs' observation was most certainly a gross exaggeration, for the bulk of Bengal's peasant-cultivators were Muslims. But what it points to was a tendency among Muslims in Bengal to emulate co-religionists of higher social status in an aspiration to be deemed as properly Muslim – a process Ahmed identifies as *ashrafization*. The fear of being labeled "*atrap*" (derogatorily connoting a low-born peasant "convert" who was only nominally Muslim), led to a tendency of adopting "foreign" lineages and adopting names and manners of the "high-born" *ashraf* who claimed superior social status, mostly resided in urban centers and claimed to be of Persian, Arabic, Pathan, or Mughal descent. As Ahmed points out, Islamic reform movements that swept through large parts of the Bengal countryside in the late nineteenth century intensified this propensity to adopt fictitious foreign ancestries in aspirations for social distinction and Muslim "authenticity."[49] But by the second decade of the twentieth century, however, Muslim identity in Bengal had not only come to be structured by labor's relationship to land, where this relationship itself was represented as sanctioned by religion, but the relationship was also structured as a relationship between labor and the land of Bengal.

Thus, as the basis of Bengali Muslim identity, assertions of belonging rooted in the land of Bengal emerged at this specific historical juncture. Precisely because this identity was forged in the improvement-*praja*

movement discursive terrain, the issue of Bengali identity played out most explicitly in the campaign of the KPP before the 1937 elections, where the League Parliamentary Board's assertion of Muslim solidarity faced direct challenge from KPP leaders on account of the fact that the League was dominated by non-Bengali Muslims. Among the League Board's candidates, there were as many as 10 members belonging to the Urdu-speaking Dhaka nawab family – a very wealthy family of hide merchants who had moved to Bengal in the eighteenth century from Kashmir.[50] Drawing the attention of the electorate to the phenomenon of non-Bengali influence within the Muslim League, Fazlul Haq, the chief of the KPP remarked in a statement to the United Press:

> This brings me to the question, what am I fighting for? As I have made it abundantly dear already, I am fighting for a satisfactory solution of the bread problem or in other words, of the "dal-bhat" problem of Bengal and also for the thorough overhauling of the Tenancy Laws in Bengal so as to give some relief to agriculturists. *This cannot be effected by the Muslim League Parliamentary Board because in that Board out of 28 members, as many as 11 are non-Bengalees who hail from Ispahan. Teheran, Badakshan and Samarkand and other places outside Bengal and 89 per cent are landlords and capitalists.* These landlords and capitalists cannot certainly join us in this fight, because they are the very people with whom we will have to carry on a life and death struggle.[51]

The Muslim League, in turn, continued to stress on religious solidarity, claiming that the "praja movement is essentially a narrower expression of the Muslim national genius than it needs."[52] Its campaign also involved fear mongering that should the KPP win, all Islamic religious schools would be closed.[53] What occasioned such propaganda was probably the fact that even though the KPP was contesting elections from separate electorates reserved for the Muslims, not the general electorates, there was nothing in the Party's manifesto that was sectarian per se, none of its promises addressed Muslims *qua* Muslims. It's 1936 election manifesto adopted distinctly secular aims of abolition of landlordism (*zamindari)*, reduction of land rent, the creation of debt settlement boards, fixing of interests on long-term loans at 4 percent to circumvent peasant indebtedness, compulsory primary school education at no cost, the resuscitation of dead and dying rivers to improve agriculture, and complete self-government in Bengal.[54]

But despite KPP's non-sectarianism in its election manifesto, which in any case was restricted to literate audiences, in its election campaign in the rural areas, no frontal attack on the League's line of communal solidarity was mounted.[55] Instead the line taken was that real Muslim unity had to be forged among the 95 percent Muslim cultivators living in the

villages of Bengal, and not in the courtyard of Ahsan Manzil – the residence of the Urdu-speaking Dhaka Nawabs.[56] In Mansur's own district of Mymensingh, in spite of the fact that Jinnah himself had undertaken a visit to the district to campaign for the League, the KPP emerged victorious.[57] The League campaigns in general were much better financed, in comparison with the KPP – which was not patronized by Muslim zamindars and Calcutta-based Muslim trading families to the extent that the League was.[58] It was not that the KPP did not enjoy the patronage of Muslim zamindars at all – Ismail Chowdhury of Chiramati, Abdul Latif of Ulania, Barisal, Ghyasuddin Chowdhury and Moham Mian of Faridpur, Ashrafuddin Chowdhury of Comilla, and Nawabzada Hasan Ali from Tangail were KPP members and patrons.[59] Yet in comparison with the League, the KPP's campaign budget was modest, its meeting and rallies could not display the pomp and show of the League meetings; the KPP primarily depended on door-to-door canvassing. At the rural level, with a masterstroke as it were, the KPP managed to turn its ill-financed campaign into an advantage, rather than an impediment. Deploying the rhetoric of frugality and austerity reminiscent of the Muslim improvement discourse (see Chapter 2), the KPP chided the ostentatious rallies and meetings of the League as wasteful expenditures, which were essentially bleeding the Muslim community, and were also, implicitly, out of line with the Muslim improvement ethic. Instead, it proposed that joint meetings where both parties would debate each other face-to-face in the tradition of the *bahas* (theological debates between rival *madhabs*), familiar to rural Muslims from the nineteenth century onward, be popularized as a modality of pre-election campaign. That the League recoiled in the face of such proposition was, according to Abul Mansur, one of the major reasons leading to the undoing of its electoral fortunes in much of rural eastern Bengal.[60]

As far as KPP leaders were concerned, the real cause for worry was the defection of Akram Khan, Tamizuddin Khan, and Abdul Momin to the League before the 1937 elections, as these were senior KPP leaders who had been associated with the praja movement since its early days.[61] But the crisis cut both ways. The League too was forced to posit itself not only as the true Muslim party, but, indeed, as the "true *praja* party."[62] *Maulavis* and *pirs* were recruited by the League to make statements against the KPP. In November 1936, Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura, the patron of several *raiyat* associations in the 1910s and 1920s, issued a *fatwa* stating that the League was the true Muslim party and the true *praja* party, anyone casting a vote in favor of the KPP or any party subservient to the Hindu Congress would mean the destruction of the Muslim community.[63] Evidently, even in the domain of formal politics, *praja* identity had assumed a certain hegemonic status, which any party aspiring to be a serious contender from the electorates reserved for Muslims had to lay claim to.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide an account of how the hegemony of *praja* identity was forged in the domain of Muslim politics. By focusing on the early days of the *praja* movement, I have tried to demonstrate that early *praja* demands were not merely about the economically exploitative nature of the relationship between the zamindar and the *praja*, but pertained to the unjust and discriminatory nature *specific* to the relationship between the zamindar and the Muslim *praja.* As such discriminations were directed to Muslims *qua* Muslims, in its early days, assertions of self-respect were central to *praja* demands. The All Bengal Praja Samiti was formed in 1929. In 1931, the All Bengal Praja Samiti resolved to participate in government institutions, legislatures, municipalities, and union boards. From 1936, it came to be called the KPP. Even when it entered the domain of formal politics, and its demands and programs became more or less economic in nature, the early legacy of *praja* assertions that were responses to social discrimination was never entirely lost. This explains why the KPP enjoyed the robust support of young Muslim professionals – lawyers, doctors, journalists, and teachers – both at the level of leadership and sympathy. KPP leaders such as Shamshuddin Ahmed, Abul Mansur Ahmed, and Humayun Kabir were all members of professional classes who had made their journey to the metropolis of Calcutta from provincial towns and villages as young students to attend Presidency College, Bangabashi College, or Calcutta University. As Suchetana Chattopadhyay's study has shown, for Muslim students, accommodation in the city was a persistent problem as Hindu house-owners and mess-keepers refused to let out their premises to them. This shortage of accommodation sometimes forced Muslim students to give up their studies in Calcutta and return home.[64] Such experiences of discrimination faced as Muslim *qua* Muslim by young boys and men from provincial towns and the countryside trying to get an education in Calcutta led them to gravitate toward the *praja* cause as well, since it was only in the articulations of the *praja* movement that the problem of social discrimination of Muslims was nailed down.

Secondly, the early history of *praja* assertions points to the manner in which conceptions of spiritual discipline shaped by discourses of Islamic reformism popularized by the Faraidis and the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya, which emphasized the principle of *tauhid,* were coded into *praja* demands. Again, ideas of spiritual discipline, rooted as they were in the everyday practices of frugality and austerity enjoined by the Muslim self-improvement discourse that emerged in the early twentieth century, were later mobilized by the KPP in countering the well-financed electoral campaigns of the League and delegitimizing big rallies and public meetings as wasteful expenditures (by implication a sign of a lack of spiritual discipline). As I have pointed out, the KPP, despite its secular manifesto, was endorsing election meetings reminiscent of forms of public associations centered on

dialogic theological debates or *bahas*, which were popular in the Bengal countryside from the nineteenth century onward. Notwithstanding the secular nature of the KPP's aims and political programs, its strategies of political mobilization were not, strictly speaking, secularized. The party's demands – of abolishing the practice of *abwabs*, for instance – secular though they were, resonated with distinctly reformist Islamic dispositions.

Thirdly, I have very schematically pointed to the curious nature of *praja* patronage in the 1910s and 1920s, whereby potentially conflicting class interests between the Muslim zamindar and the Muslim *raiyat* were simultaneously produced and contained. Such contradictory double movements were effected by networks of patronage pivoted on popular religious figures (such as Pir Abu Bakr), who patronized *raiyat* associations in far-flung villages of Bengal, thus, accentuating fractures within Muslims along class lines while simultaneously financing religious festivals of the nature of *Isal-i-Sawab* that had the effect of displaying how the wealthy Muslim landowner could use his wealth in productive ways toward the building of a harmonious Muslim community. It is not surprising then, that the League would, in 1936, recruit a figure such as Bakr to legitimize its claim to being both the "true Muslim party" and "the real *praja* party." This curious nature of patronage during the early days of the *praja* movement also made it possible for a Muslim zamindar such as Nawabzada Hasan Ali from Tangail to position himself both as a representative of *praja* interests and their paternalistic patron in seeking election with a KPP ticket in 1937.[65]

Fourthly, the popular literature disseminated by local-level *raiyat* associations played a key role in the production of Bengali Muslim identity at the grass-roots level. This was achieved by harping on the affective ties of the cultivator to the land on which he cultivated, and by a clever rhetorical maneuver, expanding the scale of representation to the land of Bengal, while propagating xenophobia directed to Marwari moneylenders, upcountry traders, Oriya wage laborers and Bihari coolies alike. The production of Bengali Muslim identity in this manner also led the *bargadars* to support the *praja* cause, against their own interests. At this level too, the *praja* movement had achieved hegemony, where Bengali Muslim became a *sine qua non* for the cultivators of Bengal, and *praja* became an all-encompassing term under which solidarity was sought, irrespective of the gradations of land-holdings or the lack of it. As the movement formalized into a party and entered the domain of formal politics, the *bargadars*, acting against their interests, also became the mass base of the party, although their support did not translate into votes as they were still disenfranchised in a time where voting depended on property qualifications.[66] The KPP's rhetoric of routing out the non-Bengali raj of a League, dominated by Urdu speaking candidates, certainly had an affective purchase that could enlist the support of *bargadars* who otherwise had little to gain from the KPP's program.

It is because Bengali Muslim identity was being forged at a grass-roots level via *praja* discourse that literary institutions such as the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity (Bengal Muslim Literary Association; henceforth BMSS), formed by the urban Muslim intelligentsia with the express agenda of building a Bengali language and literature for the Bengali Muslim community, drew on the political vocabulary of the *praja* movement to assert a distinctive Bengali Muslim identity. In 1925, at the presidential address of an annual meeting of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti, S. Wajed Ali related the "backwardness" of the Bengali Muslim community to its neglect of the mother tongue. Every self-respecting community, he claimed, needed a *jatiyo sahitya* (national literature) of its own. He argued that until the Bengali Muslims could build a national literature of their own, they would remain objects of contempt, or at best, sympathy in the eyes of the Bengali Hindus and the Muslims from other parts of India. Modern Bengali literature, he remarked, had thus far been nurtured by the Hindus and shaped by the mental-world and ethical universe of Hinduism. To make Bengali literature fit for Bengali Muslim society and religion, he urged, the language and the content of literary works had to be shaped anew.[67] But how was literary language being recast by the BMMS?

In 1919, at the third convention of the BMSS, Akram Khan, in his presidential address, responded to the problem of words that were too Hinduised to be used by Bengali Muslims in their literature. According to him, although Bengali was the mother tongue of the Muslims of Bengal, the Sanskritized Bengali, which had become the hallmark of Bengali literary production, was not something Bengali Muslims could claim as their own, especially since words pertaining to religion were imbued with Hindu ideas and symbolism. For Bengali Muslim literary production, some Islamic words were fundamental and could not be substituted by more prevalent Bengali words. For example, according to Khan, "*allah*" could never be replaced by "*Iswar*"; the Hindu connotations of *Iswar* meant that it smacked of polytheism and was thus not adequate to the (*tauhid*) monotheism of Islam. Similarly, according to him, *roza* could not be substituted by *upvas* – since *roza* was a specific kind of religious fasting, and *upvas* was fasting in a general sense and could even result from the husband refusing to eat his dinner in showing that he was upset with his wife. Akram Khan countered allegations that the Bengali Muslim Literary Association was trying to needlessly inject an excess of Perso-Arabic words into the Bengali language in order to stamp it with the mark of Muslim communal identity. According to him, greater currency of certain Perso-Arabic words was a necessity for Bengali Muslims and he was baffled by why that would upset the Bengali intelligentsia and literati at all. To quote Khan:

> There are several naturally existing Arabic and Persian words in the Bengali language. Now, even certain English words have become naturalized in the language. If these can exist, why not a few other words?

> Adherence to certain words is crucial to our religious identity. In the upper echelons of the literary establishment it has been ascertained that only words that are in usage under the current arrangement (*haal bandobasto*) have the right to occupancy (*kayemi satva*). Why our authors would want to banish words such as *allah*, *rasul*, *namaz* and *roza* from the realm of the literary, I cannot fathom. In banishing such words, we (the Bengali Muslims) will give permanency (*sthayitto*) to a language that is not our own.[68]

It is telling that Akram Khan in attempting to carve out a separate space for Bengali Muslim literature, used words such as "occupancy right" (*kayemi satva*), "permanency" (*sthayitto*), and "current arrangement" (*haal bandobasto*) that were staples of the political vocabulary of the *praja* (tenant-peasants') movement which was gaining momentum in a fragmented fashion across large parts of eastern Bengal where Muslims were most populous. In using a political vocabulary that would resonate with the grievances of the tenant-peasants' (*praja*) movement against zamindari and the Permanent Settlement (of land), he sought to merge the political affect that was being mobilized against the then current colonial arrangement of proprietorship in land with an affective response against the current arrangement (*haal bandobasto*) of Bengali literary language as well.

Since specifically Islamic dispositions coupled with reactions to widespread attitudes of social discrimination against Muslims had congealed in the articulations of *praja* grievances and assertions, they provided apt analogies for speaking of discrimination in the domain of culture as well. Thus, when Akram Khan in addressing the Bengali Muslim Literary conference drew on the political vocabulary that had come to be identified with the *praja* movement in order to make an argument for a distinctive vocabulary for Bengali Muslim literature, he was exploiting this widespread perception of the *praja* issue as a Muslim issue. In effect, he was implying that just as the arrangement in proprietorship in land was tilted against *praja*/Muslim interests, similarly the current arrangement of Bengali as a formalized, literary language was tilted against the Muslims, and thus, required unsettling.

One of the most remarkable features of the Pakistan demand, as it emerged in Bengal in the 1940s, was the intensity of literary activism surrounding it. This is a topic I have dealt with at length in the subsequent chapter. But here, suffice it to say that for the pro-Pakistan literary activists, Pakistan was a demand for "cultural autonomy" or "*tammaduni azadi*." In 1944, Abul Mansur Ahmed, who by then had joined the Muslim League, in delivering his presidential address at the East Pakistan Renaissance Society asserted that both religion and culture accounted for the distinctiveness of Bengali Muslim identity. Culture's relationship to religion, he argued, was analogous to that of a tree and a seed: while religion, in the manner of a seed, could traverse geographical boundaries,

culture, like a tree, even as it sprouted from the seed (religion), remained firmly rooted in the land on which it flourished. Ahmed's botanical metaphors chalked out a space of cultural autonomy for the Bengali Muslims, vis-à-vis Bengali Hindus as well as Muslims in other parts of India. He contended that the creation of Pakistan was imperative for the realization of this cultural autonomy of Pak-Bangla where its distinctive literature and language could flourish and words integral to the speech of Bengali Muslims such as "*allah-khuda*, *haj-zakat*, *ibadat-bandagi*, *wazu-goshol*, *khana-pani*" would not be shunned by littérateurs and universities as "foreign." Pak-Bangla literature's relationship to Bengali literature was, for him, structurally the same as the relationship between Irish literature and English literature – in short, the former could not realize itself without asserting its independence against the oppression of the later.[69] Clearly, Pak-Bangla literary activism was drawing on ideas already popularized by institutions such as Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti, which in turn had drawn its energies from the political affect generated by the *praja* movement at a grass-roots level.

Even in the domain of party politics, following Mansur Ahmed's defection to the Muslim League in 1944, there was a slew of defections from the Praja Party, which included Abdullahel Baqi, Hasan Ali, Shamshuddin Ahmed, former Praja Party Secretary and its former assistant secretary, Nurul Islam Chowdhury.[70] Ahead of the crucial 1946 elections, where success would establish the Muslim League as the sole spokesperson of the Muslims in Bengal, Abul Mansur Ahmed was appointed the publicity secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Under his supervision, from the Central Election Committee office in Calcutta posters were printed with slogans that had emerged in the crucible of the *praja* movement in Bengal, which read: "the land belongs to the tiller," "abolition of permanent settlement without compensation," "the worker is the owner," "People's Pakistan," "Pakistan belongs to peasants and workers."[71] These posters were sent out to far-flung mofussil towns and villages. In areas with a history of strong *praja* movements such slogans readily gained in popularity and contributed to the overwhelming electoral success of the League in 1946.

Faisal Devji has argued that Jinnah's idea of Pakistan as a Muslim nation was a "pure abstraction" that worked for a thorough erasure of religion as it was lived in "nature and history." For Jinnah and the Muslim League, according to Devji, "Muslim" remained a juridical rather than a phenomenological category. In other words, the demand for a Muslim nation was a matter of the "right" of the Muslims and not how they inhabited their religion, because the business of inhabiting religion was itself tricky, and, ultimately, ridden with energies that were potentially more divisive and differentiated than with the unifying forces needed to build a constituency.[72] Contra Devji, in this chapter, I have attempted to show that the success of the League in the 1946 elections which established it as a credible mouthpiece of Bengali Muslims were due, at least in part, to phenomenological

densities that had accumulated in colonial Bengal's Muslim society via practices and ideas popularized by the *praja* movement, which coded specifically Islamic dispositions to spiritual discipline alongside experiences of discrimination faced as Muslim *qua* Muslim in secular, non-sectarian terms, thus shaping ideas of Bengali Muslim self and community in relation to specific pressures exerted by colonialism. I hypothesize that such an approach is fruitful in showing the manner in which the territorial nation, not as a thing but as a relationship between the nation-state and the individual citizen, far from being an outcome of abstract juridical conceptions of an individual (Muslim) citizen-subject rightfully inhabiting a (Muslim) nation, was historically an outcome of concrete practices of religio-cultural and political assertions through which regionally specific socio-economic conditions were negotiated and inhabited.

Yet the figure of the individual abstracted from social bonds, as it were, coming together to demand a nation would indeed become a claim quite central to the cultural politics of Pakistanism in Bengal. Such a claim would be raised primarily by literary organizations committed to articulating the demand for Pakistan such as East Pakistan Renaissance Society and Purba Pakistan Sahitya Samsad that were developing in the 1940s. This praxis of abstraction was hardly an invention of such organizations, which were essentially drawing their energies from literary and religious discourses, and institutions developing since the 1920s. My point, however, is quite simple: the praxis of abstraction – whose nature will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter – had to acquire phenomenological density, i.e., it had to be *inhabited.* In the next chapter, I delve into how this habitation became possible.

Notes

1 Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajniti'r Panchash Bochor* (*Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It*) (Dhaka: Nowroj Kitabitan, 1970), p. 163.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., pp. 19–20.
4 Ibid., pp. 17–19.
5 Ibid., p. 20.
6 Moin-ud Din Ahmad Khan, *History of the Farai'di Movement in Bengal, 1818–1906* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1965), pp. xcii–xciv.
7 Kevin R. Downey, *Religious Revival and Peasant Activism in Bengal: Agrarian Society and the Trajectory of the Fara'zi Movement, 1820–1947* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), pp. 20–21.
8 Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha*, p.7.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., pp. 7–11.
11 Ibid., p. 21.
12 Abul Kalam Muhammad Abdullah, *Bangali Muslim Dharmiya O Samskritic Jibone Maulana Akram Kha'r Abodan* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2009), p. 4.
13 Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha*, p. 21.
14 Ibid.

15 Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 88–89.
16 See Fakir Mohammad Hossein Bikrampuri, *Kalema Samasya* (Dhaka: Munshi Khademol Khan, 1917).
17 Ibid., p. 8.
18 Ibid., p. 2.
19 Ibid., p. 3.
20 Ibid.
21 See *Desher Katha* (Murshidabad: Jalangi Raiyat Samiti, 1925).
22 P.K. Datta's study is exemplary in this regard. He considers *raiyat sabhas* to be secular organizations where mobilization occurred under the rubric of class.
23 See Abdul Bari*, Furfura Isal-i-Sawab Darshan* (Noakhali, 1924).
24 See Sachin Sen*, Banglar Raiyat O Zamindar* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1944).
25 Bipasha Raha, *The Plough and the Pen: Peasantry, Agriculture and the Literati in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), p. 220.
26 Sir John Kerr Committee's Report as published in *Calcutta Gazette*, Jan 10, 1923.
27 Ibid., p. 7.
28 See Abdul Samad, *Conference O Sabha Samiti-te Aloccho Bhishoy Prajasattva Nuton Ain O Praja'r Kartavya* (Dhaka: Satrauja Islamia Press, 1923).
29 Ibid.
30 John Kerr Committee's Report, p. 4–7.
31 Ibid.
32 See Abdul Samad, *Conference O Sabha Samiti-te Aloccho Bhishoy*, 1923.
33 Iftekhar Iqbal, "Return of the Bhadralok: Ecology and Agrarian Relations in Eastern Bengal", in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 6, pp. 1325–1353.
34 Iftekhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta*, p. 107.
35 *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, vol. XII, no. II, 1928. *The emphasis is my own*.
36 Ibid.
37 Loius Althusser, "The Object of Capital", in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 71–198.
38 See Nazi-uddin Ahmed, *Khola Chithi* (Calcutta: Gobardhan Press, 1921).
39 See Abdul Samad, *Conference O Sabha Samiti-te Aloccho Bhishoy*.
40 Khademol Islam, *Krishaker Unnati* (Maulana Mohammad Moyejjuddin Hamidi, 1929).
41 *The Calcutta Gazette*, no. 29 of 1926, part IV, July 22, 1926, p. 59.
42 See Abdul Samad, *Conference O Sabha Samiti-te Aloccho Bhishoy*.
43 Ibid. Also, Khademol Islam, *Krishaker Unnati*.
44 Provash Chandra Mitter as quoted in *The Statesman*, August 12, 1928.
45 See Khademol Islam, *Krishaker Unnati*.
46 Ibid.
47 Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims, 1871–1906: The Quest for Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
48 R. Carstairs, *Human Nature in Rural India* (Edinburg and London, 1876), pp. 64–65.
49 See Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims*.
50 Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947* (Dhaka: The University Press Ltd., 2003), p. 70.
51 *The Mussalman*, Sep 25, 1936, p. 15.
52 *Star of India*, July 21, 1936, p. 13. Khawa Nooruddin issued a statement to the press seeking all India Muslim unity, loyalty to Jinnah, and denouncing the provincialism of the Praja movement in
53 *Star of India*, Jan 13, 1937, p. 5.

54 Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 56.
55 Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha*, p. 127.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 124.
58 Ibid., pp. 126–129.
59 Rashid, Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 60.
60 Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha*, p. 128.
61 Ibid., p. 124.
62 *Star of India*, Nov 14, 1936, p. 9.
63 Ibid.
64 Suchetana Chattopadhyay, "War, Migration and Alienation in Colonial Calcutta: The Remaking of Muzaffar Ahmed", in *History Workshop*, no. 64, 2007, pp. 219–220.
65 See Abul Mansur Ahmed's, *Amar Dekha*, for details of Nawabzada Hasan Ali's election campaign in 1937, pp. 128–132.
66 Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 61.
67 See S. Wajed Ali, *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti Pancham Barshik Adhibeshan-e Sabhapatir Abhibhashan*, 1925.
68 Akram Khan, "Presidential Address of the Third Bengali Muslim Literary Conference", as reprinted in *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, no. 3 (Feb 12, 1919), p. 309.
69 Abul Mansur Ahmed, "Mul Sabhapatir Abhibhashan", as reproduced in Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.) *Pakistan Andolan O Muslim Sahitya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), pp. 137–152.
70 Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bochor*, pp. 242–243.
71 Ibid., p. 246.
72 See Faisal Devji's "The Minority as a Political Form", in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar & Andrew Sartori (eds.) *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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5 Imagining Pakistan

Islam, the Individual, and Egalitarianism in Bengali Muslim Literary Praxis

The Pakistan movement in Bengal has been typically understood in terms of the eventual outcome of the failure of class mobilization in the 1920s and the subsequent triumph of religious-communal consciousness among Bengali Muslims. Existing historical scholarship has often viewed the demand for Pakistan as a parochial and communal demand.[1] But archives bearing records of the literary-cultural activism of the movement for Pakistan bring to light a completely different picture – the demand for Pakistan was hailed as a revolutionary movement, a people's movement which, far from being parochial, sectional, or communal, was understood as a blow to imperialist tendencies that inhered within Indian anti-colonial nationalism. Indeed, for Bengali Muslim cultural activists and littérateurs, the idea of Pakistan implied a more robust variety of anti-colonial nationalism – one committed to diversity, redistributive justice, and conducive to the flowering of myriad forms of self-expression.

This chapter attempts to show how a subjectivity that could inhabit the Pakistan movement as a non-sectarian "people's movement" rooted in what was perceived by the movement's cultural activists as Islamic values was historically instantiated in the 1940s. A universalist vision anchored in the particularity of Islam, which was at the heart of the progressive politics of the Pakistan movement in Bengal, is best understood via a genealogy of two key forces that fused in the 1920s to legitimate the image of the individual as the fount of meaning, action, rationality, politics, and emotion. These two forces – Islamic reformist tendencies that aminated discussions of Bengali Muslim culture and socialist tendencies that pervaded Bengali Muslim literature instantiated an image of an individual abstracted from social hierarchies, anchored in putatively Islamic values, seeking to establish a more egalitarian and socialist-minded world. It is this image of the individual as an aspiring citizen of East Pakistan, that sought Pakistan as a separate space of cultural and political autonomy and a site where socialism, cultural difference, and individuality could flourish was put to the fore in the vision for an independent Pakistan. Recent historical scholarship has illuminated various dimensions of the congruence of leftist political tendencies and Muslims in Bengal, including how connections between

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egalitarianism and Islam were forged in the second decade of the twentieth century in the literary sphere.[2]

I continue on that track by focusing largely on the figure of Nazrul Islam, at once the most celebrated and reviled literary figure, whose works and journals made this connection prominent. But, via Nazrul, I also explore a historically understudied dimension: how the Muslim's individuality was legitimated through his writings and criticisms around it. This celebration of individuality, whose conduit was not just Nazrul's literary oeuvre and unorthodoxies but, indeed, strands of Islamic reformism, endured in the progressive cultural politics of the Pakistan movement in Bengal. It made possible the imagination of Pakistan, as a Muslim homeland, an autonomous (separate) space rooted in the putatively inherent modernity of Islam, where individuality, socialism, and multiculturalism could co-exist. To tell the story of how this imagination became possible, let's begin with why, through most of the early twentieth century, the need for a separate, autonomous literary-cultural space was seen by most Muslim intellectuals, across political stripes, as a necessity for training Bengali Muslims in modern ideas of popular sovereignty, individuality, and a redistributive ethic.

Literary Separatism and Non-sectarian Nationalism: A Paradox of Bengali Muslim Culture

The fifth meeting of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Sammelan (Bengali Muslim Literary Conference) was held in Albert Hall, Calcutta in 1932. It was a three-day long affair featuring most of the prominent Bengali Muslim litterateurs, journalists, and intellectuals, as well as aspiring writers and educationists from far-flung mofussil towns. In 1932, for the first time in the history of the Bangiya Muslim Sahitya Samity (henceforth BMSS), the presence of key members of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (Bengal's Literary Association, henceforth BSP) was noticeable. The 1932 meet took place in Calcutta, the home city of the Parishad, whereas earlier such meetings were held in places such as Chattagram in Eastern Bengal and Bashirhat in North 24 Parganas. Indeed, the BMSS, which was established in 1911 with the express purpose of "cultivating learning and debate about Bangla literature among the Muslims of Bengal," "translating important historical and religious texts from Arabic, Persian, and Urdu into Bengali," "recovering and archiving the history of literary production by Muslims in Bengal," "publishing periodicals suitable for Bengali Muslim society," "the fostering of communal amity between Hindus and Muslims in the sphere of literature," and "encouraging all the key literary figures of Bengal to become its members" was modelled along the lines of the BSP.[3] Just as the BSP, known in its early avatar as Bengali Academy of Literature which was instituted following a proposal by John Beams in the 1870s and later rechristened as the BSP in 1894, aimed to make Bengali language a proper "literary language" at par with "European languages" and tasked itself with recovering

a history of Bengali people through the recovery, archiving, and publishing of Bengali "literary" texts, the BMSS performed a similar function of constructing a tradition of Bengali Muslim literature and its history. And yet, at the 1932 conference, the BSP members, even as they lauded the efforts of the BMSS, expressed anxieties about what they perceived as separatist tendencies in Bengali literary sphere. And since the founding and functions of the BSP were, since its inception, tied to forging a coherent Bengali (literary) identity and a nationalist consciousness, the anxieties were rooted as much in politics as in literature.

To return to the year 1932, the day after the fifth meet of Bengali Muslim Literary Conference ended. Its chairs and organizers were invited by the Parishad members to visit the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Bhavan, which they did, and were warmly greeted. Abul Kalam Shamshuddin, a journalist, recounts how they were escorted to the hall on the second floor of the Bhavan along a staircase on both sides of which hung large, impressive oil paintings of writers and poets from the past and present who were supposed to have shaped the course of Bengali literature. Shamshuddin recounts the pain of having noticed only one Muslim litterateur displayed in the Parishad's stairway gallery – that of Mir Mosharaff Hossain, the author of the novel *Bishad Sindhu* (*Sea of Sorrows*). He narrates how the Parishad members began with showering great praise for Bengali Muslim Literary Conference and then, ultimately, pleaded the conference organizers and members to co-operate with the endeavors of the BSP (Bangiya Sahitya Parisad) and join the institution, at which point Abul Hussain – a professor of Dhaka University, a founder of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj, (Muslim Literary Society) a prolific writer, polemicist, and public intellectual of sorts – made a speech in response, defending the need for a separate space for the development of Bengali Muslim literature.[4] The text of this speech was published in the journal *Navya Bharat* in 1933 under the heading "*Sahitye Swatantro*" or "Autonomy in Literature."

The proposal to merge with the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad was first raised in the BSP by the chemist, academic, and entrepreneur, P.C. Ray, and later seconded by other Parishad members. Responding to implicit charges of separatism in the sphere of literary activities, couched though they were in the language of invitation and harmony, Abul Hussain furnished several arguments for Bengali Muslim community's need to maintain a separate space for the development of Bengali literature. What made this defense of Bengali Muslim autonomy, or "separatism," in the sphere of literary or broadly cultural productions striking was that Hussain had, in the previous year (1931), forcefully argued against the institution of separate electorates (self-contained electoral constituencies) for Muslims in the political sphere. At a gathering of Bengali Muslim intellectuals at Dhaka University's Muslim Sahitya Samaj, Abul Hussain denounced the protectionism inherent in separate electorates as essentially enervating the Muslim community, making it dependent on institutional concessions won

from the British. He allayed fears of Hindu majoritarianism at an all-India level by stating that the power to govern was not a function of numbers, but a matter of intellect, knowledge, and strength of character by which one could govern oneself. According to him, since modernity privileged *ganashakti* or "people's power" as the life of the state, sovereignty had been parceled out to individuals. He wrote:

> The state is an expression of *the people*, and thus government is accountable to them and has to heed their advice on how to govern, and in this regime of power, since the people are participants in their own governance, the 'greater personality of the individual' (*brihattara bektitva*) is realized.[5]

Joint electorates, he argued, would routinely create situations where candidates would have to seek votes from the people, not from Muslims or Hindus, and the voter would learn to exercise his judgment on what is good or bad and in so doing he would train and develop his own intellect and personality. This development of the voter's individuality, he claimed, "is the most instructive part of elections."[6] And yet, if joint electorates were, in Hussain's assessment, desirable and worthy of welcome, why was he so quick to decline the Parishad's overtures of a shared literary institution? According to him:

> There are some community-specific problems, for instance, the state of madrasa education, the mode of transmitting Koran and Hadith, as well as sundry other social problems. Hindus would not venture to take a public stand on these matters. Our young (Muslim) writers are engaged in vigorous discussions on the issue. … Literature is a matter of feelings. In a specific kind of environment feelings (*anubhuti*) can be concentrated. By channelizing those feelings, our community's problems could be solved. So we need a specific kind of environment, a separate institution. If we merge with you, our feelings will not be activated.[7]

What we see emerging is a vision of the individual as a locus of feelings (*anubhuti*), in that sense, for Abul Hussain, the argument for separateness in literary activity was an argument in favor of training individuality, just as voting in joint electorates was. But this individuality, as an active literary cultivation of the self, required a specific environment – a sense of being embedded in a culture. Where *ganashakti* or "people's power" was the touchstone of political sovereignty, "people" was defined by the ineffable and abstractly equal capacity of each individual for autonomy or free choice. The "people" thus represented an ideal, a vision of individual autonomy, rationality, and choice that stood apart from the social bonds that constituted "society." In this scheme of things, separate electorates as

state-given concessions marked precisely those social bonds that prevented the exercise of autonomy, rationality, and free choice. But the real training ground for the enchanted self – the fount of rationality, autonomy, and free choice – was seen to be in the cultivation of literature and culture, or more precisely it was in forging a subjectivity that inhabited "Muslim culture" in the best sense of the phrase, as he understood it.

Hussain wrote several treatises on Muslim culture – notable among these were essays titled "*Muslim Kalcar*" (Muslim Culure), "*Muslim Kalcar'er Dhara*" (The Path of Muslim Kalcar), and "*Muslim Kalcar O Tar Darshanic Bhitti*" (The Philosophical Foundation of Muslim Culture). In "*Muslim Kalcar*" he writes, "modern Europe is indebted to Islam for its cultural achievements. Enlightened Europe did not gain much from the church. In the hands of the church, the learned were oppressed, tortured, and burnt at the stakes." Also, for him it is telling that:

> Western nations expanded their mental horizons by divorcing themselves from religion. But for the Muslims, the reverse is true. In shunning religion they became blind and superstitious. The truth is that prior to the advent of Islam, openness (*oaudarjo*) was never preached as an essential part of religion.[8]

In the manner of Hussain, several Bengali Muslim writers from the 1920s onward tried to forge a representation of Muslim culture that was inherently rational, open, and devoted to redistributive justice.

Interestingly, while in the sphere of political and social activism figures such as Akram Khan, Muzaffar Ahmed, Nazrul Islam, Abul Hussain were of differing stripes ranging from the religious reformist-Muslim Leaguer, Akram Khan, to the avowed communist and Communist Party of India founder member, Muzaffar Ahmed, with varying and often conflicting views on social and political questions, all of them converged on the need for a separate literary space (in terms of associations and institutions) for Bengali Muslims. And collectively they redefined Muslim culture in ways that could be made congruous with current ideas about political sovereignty whose source was the "people."

This is not insignificant, particularly in the context of growing resentment among sections of Bengal's Hindus against C.R Das's proposed Bengal Pact in 1923, whose terms included that representation in the Bengal Legislative Council would be on the basis of numbers of Hindus and Muslims, with the existing provisions for separate electorates for Muslims. The Pact included other key ways of improving the terms of political-power sharing among the two communities and improving employment opportunities for the Muslims. These were correctives to the fact that although in Bengal the Muslims were a numerical majority, they lagged woefully behind economically and educationally. Despite their numerical majority, Muslims held no more than 33 percent of government jobs and were not

adequately represented in the Bengal Legislative Council and other local bodies.[9] In a reactionary response to the Bengal Pact, Bengali Hindu bhadralok's self-perception of being an educated and cultured elite acquired new significance.[10] As Joya Chatterjee notes, putative cultural superiority, the primary expression of *bhadralok* communalism and classism, was constantly used to justify the demands of a minority elite for political power in a measure disproportionately large vis-à-vis their numbers. Not only was this argument of the political unfitness of the "backward" Muslims an explicit rejection of democratic principles, it bore a striking resemblance to British legitimations of colonialism which argued that racial inferiority made Indians unfit to rule themselves.[11] As the Hindu bhadralok sought to retain the lion's share of political power in ways that veered away from ideas of popular sovereignty, people's mandate, and democratic principles and turned to arguments in favor of making political power a function of superiority in the sphere of culture, intellect, and acumen for commercial activity, among Bengali Muslims such presuppositions about political representation were becoming increasingly untenable.

Bengali Muslim literary production, from the 1920s onwards, increasingly enabled the creation of subjectivities that could inhabit the enchanted idea of "the people" with great vigor. The idea of the "people" as it came to be instantiated in Bengali Muslim imagination can be seen as an effect of two broadly defined strands of thought operating within society. The Ahl-i Hadis style normative reformist tradition, exemplified by influential figures such as Akram Khan who emphasized going back to the Koran and the hadith – the "original texts" – and doing away with mediation and hierarchies implicit in traditions of commentaries, exegesis, and hand-holding *pirs* (spiritual guides). In his essay "Back to the Koran," Akram Khan stated in no uncertain terms that it was heart-rending that to become a religious scholar (*maulavi*) did not require a thorough study of the Koran, and even those who considered themselves learned in Islamic theology, were more familiar with texts such as *Jaygun Hanifa* (an eighteenth-century Bengali romance) than with the Koran. "In our society" he asked, "how many *maulavis* are able to say with sincerity that their study of the Koran is a tenth of their study of jurisprudence… and the principles of the jurisprudence?"[12] Cutting out mediation (of *pirs* or *fiqh*) presupposed an individual with the capacity to read and understand, thereby extricating the individual from the social hierarchies within which he/she was embedded, and empowering the individual with an ineffable essence via which one could get to the truth by protecting reason from the corrupting influence of "society." The other strand was relatively novel, that of apocalyptic poetry and prose combining the trope of revolution with unfettered individualism in Nazrul Islam's avant-garde literary experiments of the early 1920s. This image of revolution was inspired by socialism, emerging hot on the heels of the Bolshevik revolution, but it also pointed, no less fundamentally, to a personal liberation of the individual.

In some ways, Nazrul remained a liminal figure around whom contrary camps formed among Bengali Muslim literati and reading public. Yet, the debates which took place about the value of Nazrul's work can be read for the visions of "Muslim culture" that were at stake. I will discuss his works, the debates they spawned, and his dwellings on the fringes of leftist politics as well as Muslim society in the subsequent section to trace a long history of subjectivity that materialized as the effect of his kind of literary practice. Nazrul's literary practice inaugurated a subjectivity among Bengali Muslim literati that could inhabit the idea of Pakistan as a revolutionary movement, a people's movement, and thus combat allegations of communalism, parochialism, and separatism. In effect, left-minded intellectuals were drawn to the movement and spoke in its favor. What made this possible was the specific way in which Islam, individualism, and communism/socialism/egalitarianism were conjoined in Nazrul's literary oeuvre, which spanned the two decades that preceded the Pakistan movement.

In 1943, Abul Mansur Ahmed, the *praja* (tenant movement) activist, writer, and at the time a Muslim Leaguer, a key spokesperson of the Pakistan demand in the 1940s published an essay titled "*Pakistan-er Biplobi Bhumika*" or "Pakistan's Revolutionary Role" in the journal *Mohammadi*. This essay is telling in the way in which communism and individualism were made reconcilable, a maneuver that was key to articulating claims of Pakistan as a revolutionary, anti-imperialist movement, but a revolution compatible with a liberal democracy style popular mandate. Abul Mansur is a particularly interesting character because for a long time he remained skeptical of the Pakistan movement, viewing it as communal, and was suspicious of the Muslim League and especially of Jinnah. This in spite of the fact that the leftist M.N. Roy, Lenin's ally entrusted to prepare the "East" for communism, had already expressed his sympathy for the cause of Pakistan, visited the gatherings of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society (EPRS), an organization set up as a cultural wing of the Pakistan movement in Bengal. And other non-Muslim communists such as Bankim Mukherjee, Somnath Sarkar, Gopal Halder, and Anil Kanjilal followed suit in establishing relationships of camaraderie with the EPRS.[13] When two founder members of the EPRS, Mujibur Rahman and Abul Kalam Shamshuddin, visited Abul Mansur in his Calcutta residence to discuss the possibility of his joining the EPRS, he politely turned them away. But soon enough he was there at the EPRS office.[14] Abul Mansur's essay "Pakistan's Revolutionary Role" is possibly a good entry point into working out the reason for this change of heart, as it were.

In the essay Abul Mansur made an important analytical distinction between the *origins* of the Pakistan movement and its *potential*. The origin, he averred, was from "a clash of *bhadralok* Hindus and *bhadralok* Muslims" that stemmed from their inability to agree on a satisfactory power-sharing arrangement. In that sense, the origin was "reactionary," lowly – essentially a "conflict of ruling interests." Yet notwithstanding the

origins, he emphasized, the conflict had the potential to unsettle the status quo and "lead us (*sic*) along the revolutionary road." According to him, socialist elements within the Congress Party had completely failed to challenge the imperialist-fascist tendencies that inhered within the idea of "*Akhanda Bharat*" or "Undivided India" which the Congress bandied about as synonymous with "nationalism." Only the idea of Pakistan had successfully shaken up the foundations of that imperialism. The idea of "*Akhanda Bharat*" was fascist in the same way that the colonizers and dictators were, in that it demanded the creation of individuals who were uniform, not individuals who were *equal but different*. To quote him:

> Are the expressions of individuality uniform or multiform? That is the conflict between fascism and democracy. This is also the difference between the all-powerful Allah and the all-powerful dictator. Allah has not created uniformity, but a strange, beautiful world and variegated humankind (*adam jati*). The dictator wants to break this multiformness and cast the world in monochrome. The dictator wants to recast the world in his own image, in the image of his liking. Thus, this uniformity is only external, a superficial thing. The difference is between "like me" and "equal to me" – there's a big difference between the two. The aim of the dictator is not equality but uniformity – in short, an institution of copies, which is another name for an institution of *ghulami* (slavery).
>
> Like the creation of Allah, democracy allows multiform individualism to flourish. In this variety, it seeks to build unity, equality, and brotherhood. Lack of democracy has affected both the material and spiritual dimensions of humanity. So we see that the dictator or the imperialists have not merely seized the lands of people, but also tried to destroy the homes of their minds. They steal material goods and thought commodities (*bhav panno*) brought on the ship called "civilization" and sold as "education". This process has ensured that imperialism has not only destroyed artisanal skills but also destroyed culture or *tamaddun*. The greater the spread of imperialism, the more it destroys the multiform, the heterogeneous, and the varied forms of Khuda's creations. Possibilities of self-creation and self-expression have been constricted.[15]

For Abul Mansur, the idea of Pakistan was a challenge to the fascist drive toward uniformity that killed self-expression and individual fulfillment. According to him, the idea of Pakistan not only had the potential to restore the natural order of variegated splendor with which Allah had endowed the world, it also resembled the ultimate aim of communism, which contrary to what its detractors believed, was actually the flowering of multiform and variegated self-expressions by ensuring that the pre-requisite for self-fulfillment was the equality of wealth. He insisted that Marxists such as

Lenin and Stalin had made the concept of patriotism – a Congress boogie – useless. Stalin, who Mansur Ahmed addressed as "comrade" had, in his opinion, build a huge conglomerate comprising parts of both Asia and Europe within which every culture had a right to self-expression. The Pakistan movement, he declared, was revolutionary in that it was a hammer that struck hard at the heart of imperialist tendencies inherent within the idea of "*Akhanda Bharat*" (Undivided India) and would ensure that *Bharatvarsha* emerged as a federated socialist conglomerate. In his own words:

> It (Pakistan) *is not a communal demand* of 10 crore Muslims – it is a national demand of religious, cultural, and geographical minorities (a minority co-operative). It has raised hopes of self-determination in the hearts of the neglected and the oppressed, by giving them the slogan of *azadi*. In relation to revolution, this is Pakistan – it is not a revolutionary state, but a revolution in thought. The outcome of this revolution has to be beautiful. On the remains of Akhanda Bharat, will be born a Bharat of new aspirations and heterogeneity. In this bouquet will thrive many- colored cultures, civilizations, and literatures.[16]

Well before Abul Mansur had joined the EPRS, the Society's manifesto had declared that one of its primary aims was to counter "reactionary, and fascist anti-Pakistan trends in literature." In addition, the manifesto mentioned the need to create literature that could bring about Hindu-Muslim harmony via an internationalist perspective, even though the precise meaning and context of that internationalism remained unexplained.[17] EPRS spoke in a language that was "progressive" and "non-sectarian," and in its second major conference hosted at Islamia College Hall, Calcutta, in 1944, the sessions on Political Science and Folk Literature were chaired by non-Muslims, Professors Sushobhan Sarkar and Manoranjan Bhattacharya, respectively. For the cultural program of the conference, the organizers toured remote villages in the districts of Sylhet, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Comilla, and Chattagram scouting for folk performers who could showcase their talent through performances of *jari gan*, *shari gan, bhatiyali*, *bhavaiyya*, *marfati,* and *punthi path*.[18] The literary-cultural energies for East Pakistan would not be marshaled from the city-based literati alone, but also from the myriad folk-oral traditions that were well and alive in the countryside, or so was the claim.

In every way "*tamaddun*" (an Urdu word which the EPRS and Abul Mansur consciously employed to designate "culture") was made congruous with the idea of "the people," with "democracy" and "*samyavad*" (used loosely and interchangeably to designate egalitarianism, communism, and socialism). Individuals who were committed to the ideology of Pakistanism – whether Muslim or not – were welcome to associate and exchange views. In a crucial sense, their individuality was abstracted from social groups, as it were, of "caste," "religion," "village," etc., that

the British saw as the organizing principles of Indian polity. Very importantly, this association of individuals coming together as a "people" was made to closely approximate the natural order decreed by Allah. Thus the literati's demand for Pakistan as "*tamadduni azadi*" or "cultural freedom" was put forth as a universal vision, not a sectional, particular, or narrowly partisan one.

What was unique, though, about this strand of literary-cultural activism devoted to the ideology of Pakistanism in Bengal was that this universal vision was arrived at through a dialectical process, at the interplay of two quite distinct understandings of the universal. The first where individuals abstracted from their moorings in social particularities could come together as a nation through their commitment to an idea – namely, Pakistan. And the second, where a commitment to universality – a vision of Pakistan where members of all communities would be accorded equal dignity and rights – was rooted in the particularity of the "spirit of Islam," and did not, in principal, require the erasure of this particularity but a realization of its supposedly true nature. Abul Mansur, in a widely publicized address, delivered in the EPRS in 1944, stated in no uncertain terms that the spirit of Islam was "*Huq-Insaf*" (truth and justice), "*adhikar o samya*" (rights and equality).[19] Thus for him, "(Pakistan) *(was) not a communal demand* of 10 crore Muslims – it (was) a national demand of religious, cultural, and geographical minorities (a minority co-operative)."

At the peak of the Pakistan movement, the EPRS declared Nazrul Islam as its cultural icon, the "national poet" of the soon-to-be-attained East Pakistan, and the first modern poet whose works, in capturing this distinctive Islamic sensibility oriented to rights and redistributive justice, resonated with the Muslims of Bengal in a way the "highly developed literature" of Tagore could not.[20] According to the literary figures associated with the EPRS, Tagore's vision was essentially other-worldly, devotional, and renunciatory, born as it were from the "essence" of Hindu dharma which valued "*bairagya*," "*tyaga*," and "*bhaktivad*," while the "spirit of Islam" was this-worldly, action-oriented, and committed to social justice. The credo "art for art's sake" was firmly rejected by the EPRS; art, it was asserted, was for society. To explain what society and justice-oriented literature precisely meant, the figure of the woman was taken up as an instructive example. Bengali Hindu literature, it was claimed, was populated with images of women who were either celebrated as exemplary devotees (for instance, the figure of Radha) or imagined as mysterious cities (*rahasyapuri*) whose ways and wiles the poet could never discover. Bengali literature, driven as it was by a Hindu aesthetic impulse, it was said, worshipped the widow as a *sati* (as chaste) and a *devi* (a goddess). But in the literature of East Pakistan, the EPRS members stated, the woman would not be worshipped as a *devi* (goddess) but represented as a *manabi* (a female human), the widow would not be revered as a *sati,* but respected as a human being whose property rights had to be secured,

and the woman's heart (*nari mon*) was not to be won by navigating her wily and mysterious ways but by ensuring equality that was rightfully due to her.[21]

Although Nazrul Islam was held up as the literary icon of cultural autonomy (*tamadduni azadi*), which was the key demand of the literary-cultural politics of the Pakistan movement, in the 1920s when the maverick author-poet-singer shot to fame and notoriety, he was a deeply divisive figure. He evoked vastly contradictory responses from Bengali Muslim literati and reading public – embraced as a "Mussalman" (Muslim) by some and denounced as a *"Shaitan"* (Satan) by others. He was known as the rebel poet and the iconoclast and remained the object of suspicion for the British government. As late as 1941, a secret file of the Government of Bengal noted that his book *Yugavani*,

> Breathes bitter racial hatred directly against the British, preaches revolt against the existing administration in the country and abuses in very strong language 'the slave-minded Indians' who uphold the administration. Three articles – "Memorial to Dyer", "Who was responsible for the massacre?" and "Shooting the Black Men" are especially objectionable. I don't think it would be advisable to remove the ban on this book in the present crisis. On the whole it is a dangerous book, forceful and vindictive.[22]

But in 1942, the year when the EPRS was established, Nazrul was suffering from severe physical and mental afflictions – he had lost his voice, his mental stability, and was fast slipping into amnesia.[23] Henceforth, he would completely disappear from public life, languishing in an asylum, forgotten and unattended when the Pakistan movement peaked in Bengal.

Later in post-colonial East Pakistan, during the dictator Ayub Khan's regime, the government set up a Nazrul Academy in Dhaka in an effort to repackage Nazrul as a "Muslim nationalist" who had worked to promote the culture and integrity of Pakistan in consonance with Islamic traditions and heritage. In 1970, when Ayub Khan's successor, Yahya Khan was invited by the Academy to preside over Nazrul's birth anniversary with the express purpose of canonizing Nazrul as the father of Pakistani nationalism in the eastern wing of Pakistan, Bengali Marxists under the leadership of the communist, Badruddin Umar, vehemently protested the appropriation of Nazrul to such state-sponsored narrow ends.[24] Much in the manner in which intellectuals like Abul Mansur opposed the ban on the broadcast of Tagore's songs from Radio Pakistan that followed in the wake of the Indo-Pak war of 1965.[25]

It is not that Nazrul – an iconoclast, whose very self-fashioning was a rebellion (*bidhroho*) against bigotry and political orthodoxies of all sorts – was the literary progenitor of the Pakistan movement in some narrow sectarian sense. Far from it, his poetry gave expression to an energetic, unfettered

individualism that refused to be bound up under neat little labels. In his own words:

> New troops of "non-violents", "non-cos" are cross with me
> "Violin of violence" – its radical they feel.
> "Moderate" - extremists say the *charkha* song give it away
> The pious find me agnostic, Confucian rest decree!
> Swarajis feel I oppose them, the others too feel uneasy!
> Men believe I close on women, women accuse of misogyny!
> "Been to *billet*? Never?" the friend abroad is aghast with me!
> New Age Rabi, devotees say!
> Age or rage, poet of the day
> I stretch my lungs and think, well,
> That sure becomes me!
> Slept with my glasses on, much longer, more soundly.[26]

He pioneered and *made available* a literary sensibility that combined individualism with socialism, personal liberation with an egalitarian ethos, which in *effect* created a subjectivity, a mode of being that could be inhabited by cultural activists and writers who were prominent cultural spokespersons of the Pakistan demand in Bengal. And this sensibility, in turn, was crucial to making the claim that Pakistan – far from being sectarian, communal, or separatist – was indeed a universalist "people's" movement.

The Poetics of Egalitarianism and the Politics of Self-expression

Nazrul's short story "*Byathar Daan*" ("The Gift of Pain"), published in the tri-monthly periodical *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika* in 1919, was most likely his first piece of writing to appear in print. At the time of its publication, Nazrul, a *havildar* in the 49th Bengal Regiment was posted in Karachi, where his life in the army lasted roughly a year and a half – from the end of 1917 to March 1920. All the way from Karachi, he had mailed a short story he had authored to Muzaffar Ahmed, the assistant editor of the *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika* (Bengali Muslim Literary Magazine) who would later, upon Nazrul's return to Calcutta after the disbanding of the regiment, become his close friend, roommate, co-editor, and interlocutor.

Although the manuscript of "*Byathar Daan*" reached the periodical's office in 1918, the story would not see the light of day in print until the following year. Since the periodical did not have a fixed press, the editorial board decided that it would print the December issue (in which Nazrul's short story was to be carried) from India Press located in Middle Road, Entally, which also printed a journal titled *Grihasta* run by the well-known Indian nationalist, Benoy Kumar Sarkar. With the manuscript of the issue, Muzaffar Ahmed met with Ramrakhal Ghose, the owner of India Press.

At the time, it was customary for a press to minutely scrutinize the contents of the entire manuscript before agreeing to print it, primarily to ensure that the press was not endangering its own existence in any way by printing what in government parlance would be classified "seditious material." After combing the contents of the manuscript, which Ahmed had submitted for printing, the owner of the press politely returned it, congratulating the young assistant editor of the *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika* (BMSP) on the energetic patriotism of the short story "*Byathar Daan*" but declining the request to print it on the pretext of police surveillance on his press for its association with the revolutionary terrorist, Benoy Kumar Sarkar's journal. Yet Ahmed, convinced of the merit of Nazrul's writing, persevered in his efforts at getting it published.[27]

Ahmed's persistence was finally rewarded, but not before he had made a critical editorial decision, imposed a censorship of sorts, and made an elision that would stick stubbornly to "*Byathar Daan*" through its life in many reprints – in anthologies and collected works. After more than four decades from the time *Byathar Daan* first appeared in print, Ahmed in his book *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smritikatha* (1965) – part reminiscence of his friendship with Nazrul, and in part, his own assessment of the socio-historical import of the poet's life and works – made clean breast of the editorial censorship he had imposed upon the story. He urged subsequent editors and publishers to return to "*Byathar Daan*" the two words from Nazrul's original manuscript that he had made disappear with a proverbial scratch of the editorial pen. The words were "Lal Fauj" or "Red Army." In the story, Ahmed had changed Lal Fauj to Mukti Sevak Sainna Dal (Army in Service of Freedom).

Yet the work is not centrally about the Red Army or incitement to revolutionary activity; far from it, "*Byathar Daan*" is ostensibly a love story with a pair of pining lovers, circumstances that tear them apart, their all-consuming desire to be reunited, the pain of separation, the heroine's self-perceived sense of moral failing at having cheated on her lover, lyrical laments bordering on the maudlin, and the failure of the union when the opportunity presents itself. It is a collage of first-person narratives from three different voices – the protagonist Dara, who wanders half-crazed across Balochistan and Afghanistan looking for his lost lover; his ladylove Bedaura, who in waiting for Dara falters, as it were, and overtaken by sexual urges succumbs to the advances of one Saiful Mulk; and finally, Saiful who on witnessing the sufferings and moral dilemmas he has inflicted on the lovers, upon Dara's return, is struck with great remorse and regret. Pangs of conscience lead Saiful to wander off to a far off place where he joins the Mukti Sevak Sainna Dal (The Army in Service of Freedom; the Red Army/Lal Fauj in Nazrul's original manuscript). He is at once amazed by how they embrace a foreigner like him and filled with admiration at the ways in which "their great selfless desire is shoring up strength in the recesses of the universe."[28] In recognizing the army's unbeatable will "to

fight for the oppressed," he becomes "one in a great collective of individuals (*byektisangha*)" – an act which assuages his personal guilt.[29] Soon he discovers that Dara, pained by the Bedaura's inconstancy, has also driven himself to this distant land and joined the Mukti Sevaks. He has been fighting courageously, if somewhat recklessly, with guns, grenades, and bombs, without sparing a thought for his own safety. His recklessness, ultimately, results in blindness when splinters from a grenade enter his eyes. Finally, he has to retire from the army. In bidding farewell to the valiant Dara, the commander-in-chief of the Mukti Sevaks says, "Khuda is great and good deeds shall be rewarded!" – this is a saying from your very own Koran. O valiant soldier, perhaps in the depth of your physical blindness sleeps a restful peace. May peace be upon you!"[30] The blind Dara returns to Gulistan where Bedaura still awaits him. In his blindness, he has achieved the gift of forgiveness – toward both Saiful Mulk and Bedaura. In his loss of sight, Dara has achieved a vision – a vision of love that is unselfish, beyond the body. Unsurprisingly, he expresses this newfound vision in the text with song lines of Tagore's composition:

> If you love another, if you do not return,
> Still, may all you desire be granted to you,
> May a world of sorrows be granted to me!
> For you are who I desire, you are all I have in this world.[31]

He returns to Gulistan to tell Bedaura that he is convinced of the purity of her love – a purity untouched by all outward action – but refuses union with her, choosing to retire to the other side of the waterfall by which she lives. On another side, Bedaura carries on with her life, bearing their separation as a gift of pain (*byathar daan*) from Dara.

"*Byathar Daan*" was a particularly significant work of Bengali Muslim literary modernity primarily because it inaugurated the practice of effecting abstraction in a manner that would transmit itself into a distinctly new mode of politics, and become the hallmark of the literary-cultural politics of Bengali Pakistanism as espoused by institutions such as the East Pakistan Literary Society in the 1940s. In "*Byathar Daan,*" at the heart of Dara's judgment of the purity of Bedaura's love, despite her outward actions, lay a conceptualization of personhood whose meaning and worth derived from intentions and feelings located firmly in the internal realm, and abstracted, as it were, from the social in which she/he operates. In being represented thus, that this interiority gave the woman a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis society was not unimportant. Its legacy would impact the literary-cultural activism of the Pakistan movement in Bengal by creating the conditions of possibility for upholding the "*manabi*" (the female human) as an equal claimant to the nation of East Pakistan.

Now to return to the curious life of *Byathar Daan* in print: though the appearance of the Mukti Sevaks occurs somewhat briefly in the story and

features in rather general terms without specifying where the battle is happening or against what kind of oppressors, it is hardly surprising that Muzaffar Ahmed would anticipate the extent of alarm which a mention of "*Lal Fauj*" (Red Army) in print would raise in government circles. In the colonial Indian state, anti-Bolshevik surveillance networks, whose beginnings can be traced back to the final years of WWI, were well in place by 1919, even though it was not until a couple of years later that the Bolsheviks were actually trying to send back ex-*muhajirs* and other emissaries into India to recruit and establish contacts with networks of people sympathetic to communist ideas. To counter this so-called "Bolshevik menace," which was grossly exaggerated in colonial imagination, the British government in India set up high-powered inter-departmental committees and appointed provincial-level Anti-Bolshevik Officers for the surveillance of suspicious goings-on. Churchill was especially proactive in mobilizing significant resources for such activities. Bengal's Anti-Bolshevik Officer, P.C Bramford, for example, ordered a keen watch on the industrial areas of Calcutta suburbs in an effort to prevent "Bolshevik" ideas from spreading among unions and the working poor.[32] Muzaffar Ahmed, an early Indian communist, was obviously aware of these developments:

> After the October Revolution, the Indian government revamped its intelligence departments. The provincial branches became more active in acting according to the orders of the Central Intelligence Department. They did not want any news of the October Revolution to reach India. Yet we know that news of the October Revolution and the Red Army had reached the army camps in Karachi.
>
> During the publication of "*Byathar Daan*", I made the editorial decision of replacing the words "Red Army" with "Mukti Sevak Sainna Dal". The police of our country, even in fiction, would not tolerate the idea of an Indian joining the Red Army. Moreover, Nazrul was then a soldier in the 49th Bengali Regiment; the army would not tolerate it either.[33]

As mentioned before, at the time of publication and for a long period of time thereafter, Nazrul's mention of the Bolshevik revolution in "*Byathar Daan*" remained unknown to his readers. But it is interesting to note that in the author's own imagination, as the story reveals, there was no contradiction between the principles of Islam and the practitioners of communism. Thus the commander-in-chief of the Red Army, to his mind, could credibly bid farewell to Dara by iterating sayings from the Koran.

Elsewhere, however, the assertion that Islam had no conflict with socialist principles had to be defended with arguments and could not simply be assumed or stated. In dispelling the idea that socialism was atheistic and an enemy of Islam, an idea that seemed to have currency among some Muslims, *Langal* (*The Plough*), the journal co-edited by Nazrul and

Muzaffar Ahmed, reprinted a summary of the speech made by the poet and journalist Hazrat Mohani at a conference on socialism.[34] In his speech, Hazrat Mohani set out to debunk three myths about socialism – first, that the path to socialism was always a violent one; second, that socialists were against personal property, and, finally, that socialism or *samyavad* was the enemy of Islam. He countered allegations that violence necessarily preceded a socialist revolution by stating that the path to socialism was not always a violent one, although according to communist understandings, Gandhian non-violence was not the only legitimate path either. In dispelling fears of the abolition of personal property, he made a distinction between "personal" and "private," arguing that communists and socialists were against "private" property, not "personal" property, thus they are against the private ownership of everything that was a *daan* (gift) from God – air, water, and most significantly, land. With regard to the alleged contradiction between Islam and Communism, Mohani remarked:

> Some Muslim leaders have alleged that *Samyavad* is the enemy of Islam. Quiet to the contrary, it is only Islam that is a greater oppositional force to *dhaniktantra* (Plutocracy) than *samyavad*…According to Islam, even if a single soul remains hungry, the wealthy have no right to accumulate wealth. This is the reason *zakat* has been made mandatory. In the Koran, *zakat* occupies a position second only to the duty of *namaz*. The first Caliph declared *jihad* against those that refused to give *zakat*.[35]

Islam was posited squarely as the religion of redistributive justice – not merely compatible with socialism (*samyavad*), but indeed as a greater and older force for the destruction of plutocracy in the world.

In Nazrul's poem *Samyavadi*, first published in 1925, the rich were shown to be indebted to the poor – indebted to their labor, which build mansions and roads, ran trains and steamships; the rich had to repay their debt through the realization of an apocalyptic vision of the universality of man. This apocalyptic vision was artistically conveyed in imageries of excess – of an energetic unhinging of doors of the heart, of ripping off blindfold and outward skin, of exposing oneself to unruly winds from the sky:

> Tell, whose gift this is! Your mansion/is brick-red with whose blood? Tear off that blindfold and read their names scripted on the bricks/You still do not know, but every speck of dust on the streets do/the meaning of these highways, the ships, the trains, the mansions.
>
> The big day is fast approaching/by the day your debt increases, you'll have to repay!…You sleep upstairs as we toil downstairs/and still call you the "Lord", that's a false trust you keep/Those whose minds and bodies are moist with affections of the earth/this world-boat's ors shall remain with them/…Break open the rusty-hinged doors of your heart/take off that dress of painted skin!/the winds from the sky that have

> coagulated into a thick blue/let them in as they rush pell-mell through the unhinged doors of your heart/…Stand in this estuary and listen to that song of union/the humiliation of one man/is shame brought upon universal man and mankind!/the universal man rises/as God smiles from above and the *shaitan* trembles beneath![36]

Interestingly, Nazrul's revolutionary vision was all encompassing – it included the awakening of the consciousness in the builder of mansions and steam-ships to the worth of their labor, but equally included the realization of the worth of labor in the usurper's being. Since both the haves and the have-nots were agentive (in terms of an awakening of consciousness) in Nazrul's artistic universe, the vision was not sectional, but universal. Socialism was imagined as a post-apocalyptic moment steeped in an egalitarian ethos arrived at through the vision of the rise of "universal man." But socialism, in Nazrul's poetic universe, was also an un-secularized moment invoking the Islamic imagery of the trembling "*shaitan*" (Satan).

In *Dhumketu*, the journal Nazrul edited in the early 1920s, he wrote fiery editorials, which appeared as clarion calls for class revolution. In the third issue of *Dhumketu* (The Comet), his editorial titled "*Rudra Mangal*" (Song of Destruction) was addressed to what he saw as the productive force of the nation – namely, workers and peasants. He advocated a vision of national liberation through the uprising of this productive force. He urged them to bring down the palaces of the oppressors, to strike at oppression with their hammers and plows. But very importantly, this apocalyptic vision of revolutionary tumult conflated class revolution with national liberation, the violent upsurge of workers and peasants with the tour de force of anti-colonial struggle. The iconography of the nation as a mother, encapsulated in the slogan "*Bande Mataram*" (worship the mother) and made popular by the Swadeshi movement at the turn of the twentieth century, was invoked by Nazrul to channelize affect. Class revolution and national liberation were posited as matters of saving the honor of Mother India. To quote from this editorial:

> Look at a population of 33 crores Indian languishing in deep darkness while their mother, naked and helpless, is being dragged through the streets and whipped. Rise O People (*jago janashakti*)! O my neglected, and walked-on peasant, O laboring brothers, may the plough in your hand shine with rage and blaze in the sky. Let it upturn this world of oppression! Bring your hammer – break down the palace of the oppressor! Let the head of the bloodsucker roll in dust! Strike the hammer and move the plough! Raise high the red flag that has been reddened with the blood of your breast! Those that have forced you under their feet, bring them under yours! Drown their arrogance in their tears. Bring them to your feet. Drag them down by their hair. Their walls are made of the blood, flesh and marrow of your ancestors; their grace comes

from the tears of your *grihalakshmi* (wife) and wringing at the heart of your infant. Burn down their graces and appearances with the poison of your curse. My oppressed brothers and sisters, say:

Jai Vaibhav, jai shankar
jai jai pralayankar.[37]

Nazrul's editorial was audacious not only in calling for a class/anti-colonial revolution but also in the Hindu imagery and Sanskritized words he used without regard for the ways in which Bengali language had become politicized during this time. Nazrul indiscriminately used Sanskritized words and Hindu imagery – "Shankar" is another name for the Hindu god Shiva, "Vaibhav" a Sanskrit word for prosperity, and "*pralanyankar,*" a Sankritized form meaning the god of destruction.

This at a time when noted reformers such as Akram Khan and sections of the Muslim clergy wrote treatises and issued *fatwas* about words and ideas that they deemed un-Islamic and advocated that such words be shunned from Bengali Muslim literary corpus and, even, political sloganeering. Anxieties about language were curiously at their peak among the *ulema* (clergy) in the early 1920s when Hindu-Muslim unity was both a political necessity and a political reality in Bengal during the Khilafat movement, and political action spilled over from the realm of formal politics to the level of a mass movement engulfing *moffusil* towns and distant villages alike. Gandhi's support of the cause of the Khilafat had, in part, made this unity possible. *Khilafat Andolan Paddhati* (The Procedures of the Khilafat Movement, 1921) by Emdad Ali, an *alem* (cleric) from the a Barisal *madarsa*, was professedly a compilation of the views of Abu Bakr Siddiqui of Furfura, an influential Muslim preacher in Bengal, and Maulana Shah Sufi Haji Nesaruddin Ahmad of Barisal (in eastern Bengal) on the *jaiz* (permissible) methods of conducting the Khilafat movement. The text written in the form typical of *fatwas* was in a question–and-answer format. One of the questions asked of the *ulema* is strikingly revealing of the anxieties concerning the use of language for Muslims partaking in the Khilafat movement, since the issue of language was also related to if a practice (in this case the practice of specific kinds of sloganeering) was Islamic or not:[38]

Q: Hajur! In seeking to protect the Caliphate, many Muslims chant *Gandhiji ki jai* and *Mohammed Ali ki jai* after chanting the *Bande Mataram*. Is this *jaiz* (permissible)?

A: Son! "*Bande Mataram,*" means worship (*Bande*) the Mother (*Mataram*). To utter this is *shirk* (unlawful innovation) and *kaferi* (behavior of the infidels). In the Koran, Allah has instructed, "Worship me, do not include any other. To include another in worship is *gunaah* (sin)." Thus Muslims should never say *Bande Mataram*. During the (Khilafat) movement, while uniting with Hindus, they should say "*Allah hu Akbar.*"[39]

In light of such widespread anxieties among Bengali Muslims about the use of vocabulary in forging a Bengali language they could call their own mother tongue, the self-assured quality of Nazrul's fiery prose and his indiscriminate use of Hindu imagery and Sanskrit words appeared all the more striking.

Although Akram Khan vehemently opposed the style of Nazrul's writings, in the conviction that literary endeavor should be married to aspirations of redistributive justice, figures as divergent as Khan and Nazrul, in fact, converged. Khan stated the overall aim of the kind of literature the *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti* (Bengali Muslim Literary Society) attempted to forge in non-sectarian, universal terms. In the presidential address of the 1918 conference, he said:

> "*Samyavad* (egalitarianism) and the redistribution of wealth are inextricably linked to Islam. To secure the right of every individual in this world is the Islamic way of running society (*samajtantravad*). Service to humanity is the removal of all oppressive forces from the minds and bodies of universal man (*vishwamanab*). This is the kind of literature we want – one attentive to patriotism and the story of the service to universal man."[40]

Not only was Islam equated with redistributive justice, in Khan's formulation, a truly Islamic way of ordering society entailed the "securing the rights of every individual in this world," and literature directed to the building of such society was deemed to be the aim of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti. Here again the vision was universal, not sectional/communitarian. But the universality was rooted in the particularity of Islam, in the realization of its redistributive ethic.

Khan was not alone in denouncing Nazrul's poetry. Among Bengali Muslims, Nazrul's literary style had as many detractors as it had admirers. There were vigorous debates about the implications of his writings on religious identity, literary merit, and the art of criticism in several Bengali Muslim journals. *Mohammadi* (edited by Akram Khan), *Islam Darshan,* and *Moslem Darpan* carried the most inflammatory articles against Nazrul, where he was labeled an infidel and a *shaitan* (devil). In an issue of *Islam Darshan*, an editorial dated 1925, Sheik Mohammad Idris Ali, a well-regarded writer who wrote under the pen name Abu Nur, expressed outrage at Nazrul's audacity in comparing the politician C.R Das with Hazrat Ibrahim, and Bibi Maryam with prostitutes in the poem "*Indrapatan.*"[41] Referring to another image from the poem, the writer of the editorial, which appeared in *Moslem Darpan* in August 1925, noted how blasphemous Nazrul's writing was

> Allah's holy light, which even Hazard Musa could not bear to look at, according to the poet, is being reflected in the eyes of C.R. Das. Who can be so blind to religion?

> These insults to religion mean that Nazrul Islam is guilty in the eyes of the entire Muslim community. It is the duty of society to warn him to rein in his writings and refrain from insulting Islam. It would not be inappropriate to mention here that if he does not mend his ways, it will be necessary to take him to the court of law. We hope that Nazrul will educate himself in the basic principles of Islam and work within the confines of the boundaries set forth by religion, and thereby establish his reputation as a poet and bring glory to the community.[42]

Another piece by Munshi Mohammad Reyazzudin Ahmad, which appeared in *Islam Darshan* in 1922, expressed regret that although Nazrul appeared "like a comet in the sky of the Muslim world," it soon became apparent that the poet's sensibility was thoroughly Hinduized and he was an utter disgrace to the community. He alleged that Nazrul's writings often evinced an un-Islamic belief in rebirth and his poetry described Allah in anthropomorphic terms, thus compromising the basic tenets of Islam.[43]

Nazrul's admirers, on the other hand, never failed to put up a spirited defense. Writing in *Saugat,* in 1926, Abul Mansur, the left-minded intellectual writer and *praja* (tenant-peasant) movement activist who would later emphasize the revolutionary dimensions of the demand for Pakistan and join the EPRS at the behest of Abul Kalam Shamshuddin, unequivocally celebrated the appearance of Nazrul on the Bengali literary stage. He wrote

> Not too many Muslims have been practitioners of Bengali literature. Only very recently has Nazrul appeared on the literary stage. When Bengal's lyric poetry had almost died from the fatigue of celebrating alcohol, women and paradise, just then Nazrul arrived with his musical instruments to shake up the hearts of the Bengalis. Their languor of love has left them. New doors have opened up for Bengali lyric poetry.[44]

Abul Kalam Shamshuddin, a well-regarded literary critic, who was a founding member of the EPRS, described Nazrul as an epoch-making poet in a *Saugat* issue of 1927, and hailed him as the national poet of Bengal. Shamshuddin sought to silence Nazrul's critics by pointing out that:

> Most Muslim littérateurs do not have the ability to evaluate where the greatness of good literature lies. Even today, most critics are of the opinion that kavya (poetry) is a bunch of religious sayings in rhyme. They do not realize that the objective of poetry is autonomous from instruction. If we do not understand this, we won't develop the ability to be critics. Without understanding that the principal aim of poetry is the creation of beauty, we appraise bad poetry as good, and good poetry as bad. Most evaluate poetry in terms of religion. They have no concern for the poeticity of poetry.[45]

The premise of Shamshuddin's dismissal of the detractors of Nazrul's works is surprisingly similar to Abul Hussain's argument against separate electorates in the sphere of politics mentioned earlier in this chapter. In the manner in which Hussain argued that separate Muslim electorates hindered the development of the "greater personality of the individual" because in such electorates choices were constrained by social bonds (of religious community), which prevented the flowering of individual autonomy and personality, Shamshuddin argued that literary criticism when constrained by social strictures (of religious community) prevented the flowering of the critic's ability to judge literature on its own terms, and therefore hindered aesthetic education. Yet both Abul Hussain and Abul Kalam Shamshuddin spoke as Muslims to a Muslim audience. Both emphasized the need for the development of individuality (premised on autonomy from society) as the path to the Muslim community's progress. Nazrul's literary practice was exemplary of such individualism, marked, as it were, by a lack of regard for societal norms in any conventional sense. In Abul Mansur's evaluation, Nazrul's literary tour de force not only put Bengali Muslim litterateur on the map but rejuvenated Bengali poetry as a whole.

It was not the detractors of Nazrul, but his admirers who would go on to become key cultural activists in the movement demanding Pakistan that gained intensity in the early 1940s. Both Abul Mansur and Abul Kalam Shamshuddin were important figures in the EPRS. For Abul Mansur, as I have mentioned earlier, the idea of Pakistan was a challenge to the fascist drive of Indian nationalism toward uniformity, a drive that killed self-expression and individual fulfillment. Nazrul was a figure whose literary style resisted sameness – he resisted the dominant Hindu literary mode of writing and disregarded the strictures placed on the use of literary language placed by his own community. As Ahmed Kamruddin wrote in 1924:

> I believe that Nazrul who can break the bones and ribs of the Bengali language that have stilted and ossified with time. He can give the Bengali language new appearance, life, and body. Most Bengalis are Musalmans. But the *sadhu (sanskritized)* Bengali is not conducive to the expression of the thought-world of the Muslims. Thus it was needed for a man of great daring to appear on the literary stage with a hammer. Kazi showed the promise of being such a figure of daring.[46]

This "figure of daring" expressed his distinctive individualism not only in stylistics and use of language, but also in content. In the first issue of the journal *Dhumketu* (August 11, 1922), which he edited, his very first editorial was a clarion call to reject blind obedience to religion, custom, and society's good and the great. He equated unquestioning obedience with slavery. He

declared that the day "people" broke away from all relationships of dependency would be the day when Bharat would be truly free:

> I am the oarsman of myself. My truth will show me the way. The fear of the state, the fear of society cannot misdirect me. I believe if you know yourself, you can know others. This knowing oneself, privileging one's own truth, directing oneself, this is not neither empty pride nor arrogance. Even so, pride is better than fake humility…If passivity and earnest reverence for the great could save the country, then a country of 33 crore deities would not be *paradhin* (unfree) for so long… Dhumketu seeks to wipe out the enemies of the country – the liar, the fraudulent, the artificial…Dhumketu has no *guru* (spritual guide) or *devata* (lord). Dhumketu will not take anyone's words as *Vedavakya*, unless they resonate with in his heart. Dhumketu is completely free from slavery. This is not a communal (*sampradayik*) paper. Humanism is the greatest religion of all.[47]

Even though he spoke of revolution, his writings never addressed the issue of how to organize a class-for-itself. Every call to revolution was, ultimately, a call for self-expression, a celebration of individualism. Muzaffar Ahmed, a founding member of the Communist Party of India and a long-time friend of Nazrul, speaks in his memoir about the late November night in 1921 when the decision to found the CPI was taken in a rented house at Taratolla Lane, Calcutta, where he and Nazrul lived as roommates. But as Ahmed mentions, though the poet remained sympathetic to the organization, he never became a member of the party.[48]

Yet the 1920s was an intensely political period of the Nazrul's life. He was arrested in November 1922 from Comilla and imprisoned for a year for publishing two articles – "*AnandamayeerAgamane*" and "*Bidrohir Kaifiyat*" – which the colonial government had proscribed as "seditious matter."[49] While doing time in jail, he started a hunger strike against the ill treatment of political prisoners. Morhul Mohammad Moddabber mentions how in 1926, in a secret meeting in J.C Gupta's house in Park Circus in Calcutta, Subhash Bose and Nazrul Islam arrived with the proposal of creating an all-India level revolutionary party, called the Hindustan Republican Army. At the meeting, Bose and Nazrul expressed dissatisfaction with the Congress, which according to them "could not bring freedom to our (sic) country."[50] They produced a manifesto of the new party, composed by Nazrul and read out to the gathering by Bose. Moddabber described the manner in which Nazrul elicited each member's pledge to the manifesto and the party: "The poet insisted that we sign the manifesto with our blood, by making a cut on our fingers. Bose and Nazrul were among the first to sign on – with their own blood."[51]

This gesture of signing a political manifesto with one's own blood signaled the arrival of a specifically modern mode of politics – where politics

was seen as the expression of some "authentic," "inner" self, a matter of an individual's inner conviction and commitment. Marcus Daeschel has termed this mode of conducting politics the "politics of self-expression."[52] This "politics of self-expression," which emerged in the first half of the twentieth century in colonial India, was in sharp contradistinction to the "politics of interest," which was essentially about managing social relationships, negotiating hierarchies, navigating patronage networks, and not centrally about the expression of an "inner self."[53] Nazrul's literary and political praxis exemplified the "politics of self-expression." Debates that raged in Bengali Muslim public domain about his literary works and occasionally his life choices (such as his decision of marrying a Hindu woman) publicized a new mode of being political, which was essentially about the integrity of the self, interiority, about "inner" convictions, and individual choice whose exercise was predicated on maintaining a degree of autonomy from "society."

Ironically, for a man so vigorously committed to the politics of self-expression, when he contested elections from the eastern part of Bengal for the upper house of the Central Legislative Council in 1926, on an independent ticket, Badshah Pir an influential religious leader, grandson and spiritual successor of the 19th century Faraizi leader, Dudu Miya, canvassed on behalf of Nazrul urging his disciples (*muridan*) to vote for the poet.[54] Tapping into Faraizi constituency via a decree of its highest spiritual leader entailed being "sullied" by that very "politics of interest" which Nazrul sought to constantly escape.

The Faraizis were Muslim religious reformists who lay great emphasis on the proper practices of Islam. Muslim cultivators in eastern Bengal comprised the overwhelming bulk of this community of believers. Their community was organized in a rigidly hierarchical structure with the chief spiritual leader (ustad) at the apex, his deputies on the next rung, followed by the *gird khalifas* who were in charge of a group of villages, and the village-level khalifas who looked after the political *(siyasi)* and religious *(dini)* well-being of a single village. The village khalifa's typically collected 1/40th of a peasant's income – the rate of tax laid by the *sharia* – to meet the expenses of his religious activities, which entailed imparting Islamic education to men, maintaining guesthouses for prayers and Sufi mediation. The *khalifa's* trainined clubmen to guard the village and maintained an intelligence network to identify the enemies of Faraizis.[55] Both these political functions were intimately linked to the fact that Faraizi cultivators generally tended to settle on *khas* lands, under direct government control, thereby circumventing landlords or big tenants to whom they would have had to pay rents. The khalifa's trained clubmen were often used to push back the men sent by neighboring landlords *(zamindars)* or big tenants *(jotedars)* in hand-to-hand combat, thus protecting the cultivators.[56] Politics here was a politics of protection in return for the religious allegiances of the cultivators to a Faraidi way of life. Often Muslim *jotedars*

(large tenants) entered into relationships with the Faraidis by exchanging promises of reduced rent in exchange for Faraidi protection.[57] It was a mutually beneficial relationship where *jotedars* gained experienced Faraidi cultivators to work their lands, and the Faraidis gained patronage and reduced rent. Badshah Pir, in canvassing to his constituency of disciples on behalf of Nazrul, was exploiting such socially embedded relationships of spiritual and social hierarchies of Faraidi patronage networks.

Conclusion

Of course, I do not wish to suggest that a certain kind of Bengali Muslim literary activity that combined egalitarianism with individualism, as exemplified by Nazrul, completely displaced the "politics of interest" with the "politics of self-expression." As the Badshah Pir episode illustrates, this was far from the case – realpolitik still very much involved exploiting patronage networks and managing social relationships and hierarchies.[58] But when the literary praxis of figures as different as Nazrul and Akram Khan converged on creating an emphasis on the individual as the fount of meaningful action, this curious convergence in Bengali Muslim literary culture helped engender the politics of self-expression that would become the hallmark of the cultural activists of the Pakistan movement in Bengal.

Nazrul's unfettered individualism, without regard for societal mores, reveling in an apocalyptic revolutionary moment and bringing down the existing status-quo was one expression of this political mode. Akram Khan's reformist vision which placed premium on the capacity for individual judgment, separated from the spiritual-material hierarchies of society (in which the likes of Pir Badshah Mia were engaged), and rooted in an internal realm, influenced by scriptures, validated a less flamboyant, but equally individuated and interiorized mode of being.[59] This figure of the enchanted individual as the fount of political and religious meaning, the source of commitment and judgment, endowed with an interiority and abstracted from society, that was produced in Bengali Muslim literary domain in the two decades preceding the Pakistan movement would deeply impact the cultural politics of the Pakistan movement in Bengal.

For the cultural activists of the EPRS, the idea of the "people" as the touchstone of political sovereignty was envisaged as a collective formed by the abstractly equal capacity of each individual for autonomy and free choice. Thus the EPRS was welcoming of all members irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. Counter-intuitively so, when we recall that organizations like the EPRS were key cultural advocates demanding Pakistan, which would become the first nation-state in the world created on the basis of a religious communitarian identity. Yet for the leaders of the EPRS, membership to it, and in a larger sense, investment in the Pakistan movement, were understood as matters of inner commitment and autonomous choice, abstracted from society and its constraints.

Again, both Nazrul and Khan, as figures at two ends of the literary spectrum, stressed egalitarianism, and in their writings, forged relationships of affinity between Islam and the politics of redistributive justice. It was this heady mix of Islam, individualism, and egalitarianism forged, as it were, in the literary crucible during the early decades of the twentieth century that made possible an assessment of the Pakistan movement as a revolutionary one. Thus Abul Mansur in his address to the EPRS, not only proposed an understanding of the Pakistan movement in terms of its potential to restore the natural order of variegated splendor with which Allah had endowed the world; he simultaneously equated the aim of the movement with the ultimate aim of communism which was, according to him, the flowering of variegated self-expressions by ensuring that the pre-requisite for self-fulfillment was the equality of wealth. The unique cultural politics of the Bengali movement espousing the demand for Pakistan cannot be adequately understood without attending to the emergence of the figure of the individual in Bengali Muslim literary culture. It also cannot be understood without attending to the connection between egalitarianism and Islam that had been forged by Bengali Muslim litterateurs over the two decades that preceded the movement demanding Pakistan.

Notes

1 See the scholarship of Taj-ul Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia*, and the final chapter of Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims*.
2 See Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta, 1913–1929* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2011). Focusing on Muzaffar Ahmed, Chattopadhyay draws out the communist networks, both at the internationalist and local levels in which Bengal's Muslims were involved in the early twentieth century. See Neilesh Bose, "Muslim Modernism and Transregional Consciousness in Bengal, 1911–1925: The Wide World of *Samyavadi*", *South Asia Research*, vol. 31 no. 3 (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC: Sage Publications, 2011), pp. 231–248. Through a thorough study of the Calcutta-based journal *Samyavadi* that appeared from 1922 to 1925, Bose delineates the way in which Bengali Muslim identity was articulated in the literary sphere by equating Islam with left-oriented politics. See Andrew Sartori, "Abul Mansur Ahmad and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism", in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar and Andrew Sartori (eds.) *From Colonial to the Postcolonial*. Sartori's essay shows how the idea of Muslim culture was foregrounded by Abul Mansur Ahmed during the 1940s in leftist/progressive terms.
3 See S. Wajed Ali, *Sabhapatir Abhibhasana* (Presidential Address at the fifth annual meeting of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti), 1925.
4 Mohammed Mehfuzullah (ed.) *Abul Kalam Shamshuddin Rachanabali*, vol. 2 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), pp. 113–120.
5 Abul Hussain, "Amader Rajniti", in Abdul Quadir (ed.) *Abul Hussain-er Rachanabali*, vol. 1 (Dhaka: Tajul Islam, Barnamicchil, 1979), p. 180. *All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.*
6 Ibid., p. 187.

7 Abul Hussain, "Shahitye Swatantro", in Abdul Quadir (ed.) *Abul Hussain-er Rachanabali*, vol. 1, p. 320.
8 Abul Hussain, *Muslim Kalcar* (Dhaka: Modern Library, 1928), p. 70.
9 Manju Gopal Mukherjee, "CR Das and the Bengal Pact", in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Millenium (61st) Session, Kolkata, 2000–2001, vol. 1, p. 739.
10 Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
11 Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 18–54.
12 Akram Khan, "Back to the Koran" (1929), as quoted in Sufia M. Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 109.
13 Mohammed Mehfuzullah (ed.) *Abul Kalam Shamshuddin Rachanabali*, vol. 2 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), p. 364.
14 Ibid., p. 364. Mansur Ahmed's meeting with Mujobur Rahman and Abul Kalam Shamshuddin are described from pp. 368–377.
15 Abul Mansur Ahmed, "Pakistan-er Biplobi Bhumika" (Pakistan's Revolutionary Role) in Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.), *Pakistan Andolan O Muslim Sahitya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), pp. 72–73.
16 Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.) *Pakistan Andolan O Muslim Sahitya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), p. 78.
17 Mohammed Mehfuzullah (ed.) *Abul Kalam Shamshuddin Rachanabali*, Vol. 2 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), p. 363.
18 Ibid., p. 373.
19 Abul Mansur Ahmed, "Mul Sabhapatir Abhibhashan" delivered in 1944 as reproduced in Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.) *Pakistan Andolan O Muslim Sahitya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), p. 147.
20 See Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.) *Pakistan Andolan O Muslim Sahitya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968).
21 Ibid., pp.147–148.
22 As cited in Arun Kumar Basu's *Nazrul Jeevani* (Calcutta: 2000), p. 437.
23 Ibid., pp. 522–523.
24 Sajal Nag, "Two Nations and a Dead Body: Mortuarial Rights and Postcolonial Modes of Nation-Making in South Asia", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 50 (Dec 16–22, 2006), p. 5188.
25 See Andrew Sartori's, "Abul Mansur Ahmad and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism", in Chakrabarty, Majumdar and Sartori (eds.) *From Colonial to the Postcolonial.*
26 Nazrul as translated by Rajarshee Dasgupta in "Rhyming Revolution: Marxism and Culture in Colonial Bengal", *Studies in History*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Jan-June2005), pp. 83–84.
27 See Muzaffar Ahmed, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smritikatha*.
28 *Kazi Nazrul Islam Rachanasamagra*, vol. 1 (Kolkata: Pashchimbanga Bangla Academy, 2005), p. 258.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 259.
31 Ibid., p. 260.
32 Suchetana Chattopadhyay, "The Bolshevik Menace: Colonial Surveillance and the Origins of Socialist Politics in Calcutta", *South Asia Research*, vol. 26, no. 2 (New Delhi: Sage, 2006), pp. 165–179.
33 See Muzaffar Ahmed, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smritikatha* (Calcutta, 1965).
34 Hazrat Mohani, "Samyavad ki", *Langal*, vol. 1, no. 5 (Jan 26, 1926), as reproduced in Sunil Kanti De (ed.) *Nazruler 'Langal' Patrika-e Krishak Sramik Prasanga* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2010), pp. 90–92.

35 Ibid., pp. 91–92.
36 See Kazi Nazrul Islam, *Samyavadi* (Kolkata: Bengal Publishing House, 1925). *My translation*.
37 See *Dhumketu*, issue 3 (August 18, 1922), as reproduced in S.M. Lutfur Rahman (ed.) *Dhumketu O Tar Sharathi* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2005). *My translation*.
38 See Emdad Ali, *Khilafat Andolan Paddhati* (Barisal: 1921).
39 Ibid. *My translation*.
40 See Akram Khan, "Presidential Address of the Third Bengali Muslim Literary Conference" delivered in 1918 and published in *Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Patrika*, issue 3, (February 12, 1919).
41 See Abu Nur, "Bangiya Musalman Shaittyo O Shahittik", *Islam Darshan* (1925).
42 See "Islam Boiri Muslim Kabi" in *Moslem Darpan*, 1925.
43 See Munshi Mohammad Reyazzudin Ahmad, "Lok-ta Muslaman na Shaitan?", *Islam Darshan*, 1922.
44 See Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Saugat*, 1926.
45 See Abul Kalam Shamshuddin, *Saugat*, 1927.
46 See A.D. Kamruddin, "Kabi Nazrul Islam", *Soltan*, April 11, 1921.
47 See Nazrul Islam, *Dhumketu*, August 11, 1922.
48 See Muzaffar Ahmed, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smritikatha* (Calcutta: 1965).
49 As reported in *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, January 17, 1923.
50 Morhul Mohammad Moddabber's account of this meeting with Nazrul appeared in *Dainik Bangla*, September 5, 1976; as quoted in *Dhumketu O tar Sharathi*, pp. 157–158.
51 Ibid.
52 Marcus Daeschel, *Politics of Self Expression: The Urdu Middle Class Milieu in Mid-Twentieth Century India and Pakistan* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 18–58.
53 Ibid. Daeschel's work shows how the political culture of "self-expression" assumed prominence among middle class activists in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in the 1930s and 1950s. But as this chapter reveals, such self-expressionist modes enter Bengal Muslim politics earlier via the literary praxis and popularity of Nazrul Islam, and is ultimately, taken up by the cultural activists of the Pakistan movement in Bengal.
54 "The message of Badsah Pir" as reproduced in Mustafa Nurul Islam's *Smakale Nazrul Islam* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, 1983), p. 72.
55 Kevin R. Downey, *Religious Revival and Peasant Acitivism in Bengal: Agrarian Society and the trajectory of the Faraizi Movement, 1820–1947* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), pp. 103–110.
56 Ibid., p. 107.
57 Nurul Hasan Chowdhury, *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Faraizis, Indigo and Pabna Movements* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2001), p. 69.
58 Of course, *Pir-muridi* networks continued to remain extremely vital during the Pakistan movement. A year before the 1946 elections, Suhrawardy and others of the Muslim League were focused on exploiting such networks that emanated from Furfura.
59 In his influential work *Moslem Bangla'r Samajik Itihash*, Akram Khan attributed the degeneration of Muslim society in Bengal to the corrupting influence of *pirism*. In my chapter on debt, I have already mentioned how Akram Khan emphasized the tradition of *ijtihad* or independent judgment.

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Conclusion

In Bengal, the idea of Pakistan did not appear to the Muslim masses as something entirely new. A mass understanding of a moral Muslim community could converge with that of the progressive intellectual elite, whether religious or secular. No matter how much activists such as Abul Mansur Ahmed emphasized Muslim identity as a secular, social, and radical one, the radical messages of the Pakistan movement (such as "Abolition of zamindari without compensation," "Pakistan for peasants and workers," "The worker is the master," etc.) were successful precisely because they were popularized through religious spaces such as the Friday prayers, *waz mehfils* (forms of religious sermons popular in the Bengali countryside), *maulud sharifs*, and Eid prayers.[1] Traditional forms and venues of sociability were key to the formation of the imagination of a new nation. Demands of putting an end to moneylending on interest in a future Pakistan were not seen purely in economic terms, but also converged with a grassroots vision of a moral/ethical community and everyday agrarian religiosity.[2] Several of the *ulema* such as Akram Khan and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi were nodal figures who connected different networks and institutions such as the *anjumans* (such as the Anjuman-e-Ulema-e-Bangla spreading visions of a more democratic and reformed Islam), literary institutions (such as the Bangiya Musalman Shahitya Samity devoted to forging to a distinctive regional Bengali Muslim literary identity), the rural *praja* movement (advocating greater rights for tenants), and the domain of formal party politics.

According to David Gilmartin, in 1947, the Muslim League and its vision of Islam rode on the rubble of a regional, rural Punjabi identity that rested on local and tribal networks and associations. The Muslim League's vision of Islam was not only oppositional to Punjabi agrarian Islam but the regional/rural versions were totally discredited.[3] In Bengal, this was far from the case. This book demonstrates that the vision of Islam upon which the Muslim League foisted the idea of Pakistan was more organic. The idea drew its political energies from religious norms, associational forms, and movements that were operational in the Bengali countryside at least since the 1920s. Pakistanism in Bengal never cut its cord with a distinctively regional articulation of Islam. This is why the idea could, at the mass level,

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find a home in Bengal earlier than it did in Punjab. This is, in part, also why large numbers of non-Muslim Dalit peasants and laborers could throw in their lot with the idea of Pakistan.[4] The *praja* movement led by the Bengali Muslims had already opened up a space for a pro-peasant politics that was rooted in a regional Bengali identity addressing all, even as it was founded on the experience of Muslim discrimination and anchored in histories of the nineteenth-century rural Islamic reform movements. Many Hindu communists from eastern Bengal stayed back in what became East Pakistan after 1947 and continued to organize.[5] Their attachment to place, to region, was not immediately undone by the making of new territory (a new territorial nation-state) on the basis of religion. This was possible because communist politics converged with the agrarian radicalism of the Muslim masses who they organized. Communist ideas did not appear totally alien to the Muslim peasantry, nor did the peasantry overnight appear alien to the Hindu Communist leaders of the newly created East Pakistan. The moral frame within which the Muslim peasantry understood self and community overlapped with their more educated, ideologically self-aware, staunchly secular communist organizers and leaders just as beautifully as it dovetailed with the socialism of the progressive Muslim intelligentsia advocating Pakistanism. The peasantry forged their politics through the ethics of redistributive justice that they believed was at the heart of the Islamic moral community. Their labor was the source of their claim to redistributive justice; it was also their claim to the region of Bengal.

The historical emergence of the idea of labor as the fount of moral, social, political, and economic value is the subject of this book. It forms an important chapter in the history of Muslim politics in Bengal because this entanglement of popular labor politics, egalitarianism, and Islam would continue to have an active life in the postcolonial period. It would emerge as a force in shaping the map of modern South Asia as it exists today. Maulana Bhashani (1880–1976) – a *sufi*, a champion of the oppressed, an internationalist, and a proponent of Islamic socialism, whose life and career spanned British India, the Pakistan period, and the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 – was a key figure who organized the mass uprising in East Pakistan in 1969 against the dictatorship of Ayub Khan. He was a vital force in the movement for the independence of Bangladesh. The memory of the Maulana continues to live among the peasantry and laboring classes in Bangladesh and among the left-leaning members of the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK.[6] A long history of how Islam and socialism became compatible can help explain why a historical figure like the Maulana continues to endure in collective memory in agrarian Bangladesh as well as among struggling immigrants abroad.

Historical research on early Muslim communists who were radicalized at the intersection of the forces of anti-colonialism, Pan-Islamism, and Bolshevism in the early 1920s has been productive.[7] In-depth research on major Muslim communists, such as Muzaffar Ahmed who founded the

Communist Party of India in the early 1920s, also illuminates the involvement of Muslims in radical politics.[8] My book traces the history of an indigenous politics and morality that redefined Islam at the grassroots level and made it congruent with socialist or communist thought. This politics predicated on the imagination of an egalitarian Islamic moral community had a strong regional flavor. On the eve of decolonization, egalitarian politics did not draw its popular energies from communism; however, it did so from a redefinition of Islam that had occurred in late colonial Bengal.[9]

Notes

1 Ahmad Kamal, *State against the Nation: The Decline of the Muslim League in Pre-independence Bangladesh, 1947–1954* (Dhaka: The University Press Ltd, 2009), p 34.
2 Ahmad Kamal notes that in addition to that of land to the tiller, the end of moneylending on interest was a millenarian theme used to popularize the Pakistan movement.
3 David Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Nov 1998), p. 1087.
4 Dwaipayan Sen, "'No Matter how Jogendranath has to be Defeated': The Scheduled Castes Federation and the Making of the Partition of Bengal", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 46 (2012), p. 322.
5 Marcus Franda, "Communism and Regional Politics in East Pakistan", *Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 7 (June 1970), p. 594.
6 See Layli Uddin, *In the Land of Eternal Eid: Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilization of Peasants and Lower Class Workers in East Pakistan, c 1930s–1971* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2016).
7 See Khizar Humayun Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims (1917–1947)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 12–105.
8 See Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta, 1913–1929* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2011).
9 Marcus Franda notes that the Communist Party of India in Bengal came to be dominated by Hindus soon after the party began to expand in the 1930s. By 1947, less than 5 per cent of the membership of the CPI was Muslim and only a handful of Muslim leaders existed among it ranks at the state and national party committees. See Franda, "Communism and Regional Politics in East Pakistan", p. 591.

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Glossary

ABWAB: traditional arbitrary exaction in addition to formal rent levied by zamindars and other public officers
ADHIAR: a person sharing half the crop with the landlord
ALIM: man trained in religious sciences
AMLA: a petty official
ANJUMAN: society, committee, association
ASHRAF: a Muslim of respectable status
AZADI: freedom
BAHAS: religious debate
BANDOBAST: settlement
BARGA: sharecropping
BHADRALOK: literally "respectable" but used in historical discourse as an analytical category to imply a status group in Bengal who came from the upper caste; were economically dependent on landed rents and professional and clerical employment and kept a distance from the masses
BHAG-CHASHI: sharecropper
BIDAT: innovation that goes against the Koran and the hadith
BIGHA: a measure of land, 1/3 of an acre
BIRADARI: brotherhood, a community based on the model of common descent
CHAR: alleviated land, typically alluvial deposits created by the fluvial action of rivers
CHAUKIDAR: guard; village police
KUTCHERRY: office of a zamindar
DAROGA: chief policeman
DIN/DEEN: faith, the Islamic religion
DUNIYA: world
FATWA: generally written opinion on a point of Islamic law given by theologians or religious leaders
GOSHOL: ablutions
GUNAH: sin
HADIS: traditions of the prophet
HAJJ: pilgrimage to Mecca
HALAL: lawful, with religious sanction; (an animal) slaughtered as prescribed by Islamic law

IBADAT: worship
IMAM: leader in prayers
IMAN: faith
JIHAD: striving; an Islamic war against unbelief, whether external or internal
KAFIR: unbeliever, non-Muslim
KHAS MAHAL: personal demesne land
KHET MAJUR: agricultural landless labor
KHUDA: God
MADARSA: a higher school or college teaching Islamic laws and jurisprudence as primary subjects
MAHAJAN: moneylender
MAULAVI: a Muslim doctor of law or a Muslim learned man
MOFUSSIL: interior of a district, away from the town or city
MURID: disciple of a *pir*
NAIB: a senior official in a zamindar's estate office
NAWAB: a title or rank conferred like peerage on Muslim gentlemen of distinction and good service
NAZR: present/tribute
PAIK: armed retainer
PIR: sufi guide
PRAJA: tenant
QAZI: Islamic judge
RAIYAT: peasant, cultivator, tenant
RAIYATI: belonging to a tenant
SABHA: association
SAJJADA NISHIN: literally one who sits on the prayer carpet; successor to the authority of a sufi saint at his shrine, usually a lineal descendant of the saint
SANYASI: ascetic
SALAMI: traditional fee paid to the landlord on purchase of land or on obtaining tenancy
SHARIAT: Islamic law
SHIRK: associating false gods with the one, true God
SUFI: Muslim mystic, one connected to the sufi orders
SWAVARNA: high caste
TABLIGH: proselytization
TAMMADUNI: cultural
TAUHID: unity of God
ULEMA: plural of *alim*
URS: celebration of the death day of a sufi saint; major annual festival at many sufi shrines
ZAKAT: compulsory Islamic charity
ZAMINDAR: holder of a property in land who paid revenue to the government under the Permanent Settlement of 1793
ZILLA: district

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