

**PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIM BACKWARDNESS:
BENGAL AND THE NORTH-WESTERN PROVINCES &
OUDH (1871-1900)**

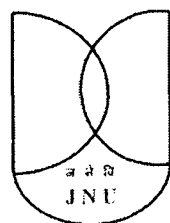
Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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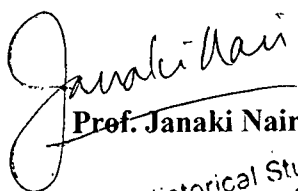
DECLARATION


This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "*PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIM BACKWARDNESS: BENGAL AND THE NORTH WESTERN PROVINCES & OUDH (1871-1900)*" submitted by **Abhay Kumar** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other University and is my own work.

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CERTIFICATE

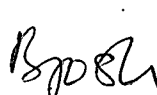
We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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TRANSLITERATION

In writing this dissertation, I have followed Jonh T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu Classical Hindi and English*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2006.

Besides, the translation of Urdu text into English in this work is mine, unless stated otherwise

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF MUSLIM BACKWARDNESS¹ IN BENGAL AND NORTH-WESTERN PROVINCES AND OUDH (1871-1900)

The Context of Study

India is a home of the third largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan, numbering 1,029 million, yet they are a minority group, constituting 13.5 per cent of the total population.² A section of them perceives itself as discriminated. A brief discussion of this was done by the government-appointed Sachar Committee Report (2006). The committee found, 'There was a sense of despair and suspicion as well [among Muslims].' The report further observed, 'In general, Muslims complained that they are constantly looked upon with a great degree of suspicion not only by certain sections of society but also by public institutions and governance structures....Some attributed it to historical reasons and referred to it as the usual developmental lag.'³ In other words, Muslims feel themselves discriminated by the state and society.

As a Muslim intellectual, commenting on the findings of the Sachar Committee Report, lamented, 'Under-representation of Muslims in the educational and employment sectors in the country has been as consistent all along as, indeed, the official inaction in the matter...Having inherited from the British this legacy of social injustice to the Muslims and official inaction in the matter, independent India seems to have maintained it till this day.'⁴ To substantiate his argument, he invoked the name of W.W. Hunter, who

¹ The term backwardness of Muslims in the late nineteenth century was interchangeably used with fall, decay, decline, depression, impoverishment *idbar* (decline of good fortune), *nakbat* (adversity), *badhali* (badness of condition), *iflas* (poverty), *jahalat* (ignorance), *zillat* (humiliation) and *tanazzuli* (wane, falling off, degradation) etc.

² This is according to the 2001 Census. The majority Hindu community is 828 million, which is 80.5 per cent. Accessed on 3 June 2013, URL, http://censusindia.gov.in/Ad_Campaign/drop_in_articles/04-Distribution_by_Religion.pdf.

³ *Social, Economic and Education Status of the Muslim Community in India: A Report*, Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, New Delhi, November 2006, pp. 9,10,11,23. For details, see the second chapter of the Report.

⁴ Syed Tahir Mahmood, 'From William Hunter to Rajinder Sachar Reports & Reports but no Results', *The Milli Gazette*, New Delhi, 19 November, 2006. Accessed 22 November 2012, URL: http://www.milligazette.com/dailyupdate/2006/200611195_condition_muslims_india.html.

was among the first British administrators and writers to argue that Muslims had become backward in Bengal after having been reduced to a “race ruined under British rule”.⁵

In short, such accounts are suggestive of deep-rooted perceptions among a section of Muslims that their backwardness is a result of historical and institutional discrimination started by the British government and followed by postcolonial Indian state as well. Contrary to this, Imtiaz Ahmad argued that there was no such deliberate discrimination practiced by the colonial state. Rather, he attributed the small size of the Muslim middle class--who were seriously inclined to education-- as the cause of Muslim backwardness in colonial and post-colonial India.⁶ But I express my dissent with Ahmad for overlooking colonialism as a factor. I shall later show how some of the colonial policies were detrimental to Indians, particularly Muslims at least in some regions, viz., Bengal. Even colonial administrators like W.W. Hunter conceded that some of the policies of British government led to the decline of Muslims in Bengal.

Hunter and Discourse on Muslim Backwardness (1871)

The genealogy of Muslim backwardness could be traced to Hunter, who published his *The Indian Musalmans* (1871). Needless to say, the work of Hunter had a huge impact on the public opinion and policy. It also worked as a catalyst to the rise of Muslim politics as the community leaders, armed themselves with Hunter’s documents, argued that the government should preferentially treat Muslims. The durability of the discourse can be gauged from the fact that even after the end of the British rule, Hunter continues to be widely-quoted and cited. His work sought ‘to inquire into the grievances of the Muhammadans under English rule; to point out their real wrongs, and the means of remedying them.’ The central thesis of Hunter was that Muslims were both a threat for the British rule and under its regime, they had also lagged behind. They were a threat

⁵ Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, Rupa and Co., New Delhi, 2002, p. 3.

⁶ Imtiaz Ahmad, ‘Muslim Educational Backwardness: Competing Pressures of Secular and Religious Learning,’ in Christine Sleeter, Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, Arvind K. Mishra, Sanjay Kumar, eds., *School Education, Pluralism and Marginality: Comparative Perspectives*, Oriental BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2012, p. 142. D.L. Sheth, too, denied the fact that the Muslims of India as a whole were victims of systematic and institutional discrimination by the Indian state. See, D L Sheth, ‘Minority Politics: the Shifting Terms of Policy Discourse’, *Seminar*, November 2009. Accessed 27 April 2013, URL: http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/602/602_d_l_sheth.htm.

because the radical Wahabi movements in Bengal were posing a serious challenge to the security and stability of British rule in the second half of the nineteenth century (for details, see chapter two). ‘The Musalmans of India are, and have been for many years, a source of *chronic danger* to the British Power in India. For some reason or other they have hold [held] *aloof* from our system, and the changes in which the more flexible Hindus have cheerfully acquiesced, are regarded by them as deep personal wrongs.’⁷

As stated above, Hunter was perhaps the most important writer who formulated the idea of Muslim backwardness and triggered off debates around it, but before him there were many others who reflected on the decline of Muslims. Over a century before Hunter, Shah Wali-ullah (1703-1762), the great Islamic thinker, also saw his period as a melancholic one: ‘In short, the Muslim community is in a pitiable condition. All control of the machinery of government is in the hands of Hindus, because they are the only people who are capable and industrious. Wealth and prosperity are concentrated in their hands, while *the share of Muslims is nothing but poverty and misery*.’⁸ The Urdu poets of the 18th century Delhi wailed the loss of Muslim power and ensuing political instability. Mirza Muhammad Rafi 'Sauda' (1713–1781) penned *Shahr-Ashob*, which was an exaggerated representation of the decline of Delhi.⁹ Another important poet of that period, Mir Taqi Mir (1723 1810), too, ‘captured a phase of the melancholy and the pathetic in a decaying society.’¹⁰ Mir tried to grapple with the changing times,

اس عہد کو نہ جانئے اگلا سا عہد میر

وہ دور اب نہیں وہ زمین آسمان نہیں

7 Hunter 2002, p. 3. (Emphasis added)

8 Khalid Ahmad Nizami, ed., *Shah Waliullah Ke Siyasi Maktuba*, Aligarh, 1951, as cited in Khalid B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1968. (Emphasis added). Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1913-1999), a noted Islamic and Arabic scholar, saw the decline of Indian Muslims as a part of 'Muslim decadence' at global level, which began in late seventh century when the period of the four Caliphs (AD 632-61) came to an end. For details, see Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Islam and the World*, Academy of Islamic research & Publications, Lucknow, 1966.

⁹ Satish Chandra, *Social Change And Development In Medieval Indian History*, Har-Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2008, pp. 68-69.

¹⁰ Ali Jawad Zaidi, *A History of Urdu Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1993, p. 99.

The age is not like that which went before it.

The times have changed, the earth and sky have changed.¹¹

The contemporary of Hunter, Rev. James Long also wrote a paper in 1869 on the social condition of Muslims to argue that under the British rule they [Muslims] had ‘Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen—Fallen from its high estate.’¹² Similarly, the principal of the Calcutta Madrassah W. Nassau Lees in 1871 lamented: ‘I sympathize with the Musalmans of India, who from being the proud rulers of the India Empire, I find now in danger of being reduced to the level of hewers of wood and drawers of water unless something is done for them.’¹³

In short, the discourse of Muslim backwardness may be stretched to the eighteenth century. However, there are some reasons why I picked up the late nineteenth century as a crucial period. I contend that the discourse emerging in the late nineteenth century on Muslims backwardness marked a qualitative shift from the earlier period. The huge production of statistics and data by the colonial state—comparing one religious community with another—along with the opening up of avenues for public employment and education was a new development (Appendix). This, in turn, provided a space for mobilisation around jobs and employment.

Connected to this was the emergence of “closed” religious community due to the processes of enumeration and census. This was the very context in which leaders arose to speak on the behalf of the whole community. Dipesh Chakrabarty hinted at the links among census, the construction of religious communities and subsequent mobilisation around jobs and education in the late nineteenth century British India. ‘By the 1890s, Hindu and Muslim leaders were quoting census figures at each other to prove whether or not they had received their legitimate share of benefits (such as employment and

¹¹ Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan*, George Aleen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1968, pp. 21-22. I have used Russell and Islam’s translation.

¹² Rev. James Long, ‘The Social Condition of the Muhammadans of Bengal’ in Bela Dutta Gupta, *Sociology in India: An Enquiry into Sociological Thinking and Empirical Social Research in the Nineteenth Century—with Special Reference to Bengal*, Center For Sociological Research, Calcutta, 1972, p. 131.

¹³ W. Nassau Lees, *Indian Musalmans: Being Three Letters Reprinted from the ‘Times’ and Four Articles on Education, reprinted from the ‘Calcutta Englishman’ with an Appendix Containing Lord Macaulay’s Minute*, Williams and Norgate, 14, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London; and 29, South Frederick Street, Edinburgh, 1871, p. 17.

education from British rule).¹⁴ Ayesha Jalal also demonstrated that Muslim identity based on religion was constructed through the process of colonial enumeration that overlooked the fact of ‘highly differentiated’ Muslim society.¹⁵

Apart from colonial census and enumeration, the development of print¹⁶ and poetry facilitated the process of making of the religious community. In the words of Jalal: ‘A scrutiny of the contents of the vernacular press interspersed with popular Urdu poetry composed in the late nineteenth century makes plain their very vital contribution in the construction of narratives of identity.’¹⁷

There can be no doubt that Chakrabarty and Jalal’s argument that the colonial census and print and poetry played a key role in constructing Muslim identity is an important insight. But what they had not dealt with is how the perceptions of Muslim decline or backwardness could contribute to identity formation and worked as a catalyst for mobilisation. Thus, chapter three will show the emergence of modern Muslim politics through a number of associations. These associations were able to mobilise Muslims around the issues of their backwardness and its amelioration.

But before I proceed further, it is pertinent to resolve an important question. The critics of my work may argue that my work has already presumed that Muslims were backward in the late nineteenth century. To my critics, I shall just clarify that Muslim were indeed backward in public employment and education than Hindus in some regions but not in others. In the last section, I shall give empirical examples to substantiate my argument. But this is not to say that Muslims as a whole faced decay under the colonial rule. I critique such historians who made a sweeping generalisation that the post-Mughal period witnessed “decay” and “chaos”. I also distanced myself from those works, which

¹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Modernity and Ethnicity in India: A History for the Present’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 52, December 30, 1995, p. 3377.

¹⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, Routledge, London, 2000, pp. 40-41.

¹⁶ On the importance of newspapers in shaping public opinions and bringing about change, 19th century famous Urdu poet Akbar Allahbadi said, “*Khincho na kmano ko na talwar nikalon / Jab top muqabil ho to akhbar nikalo*” (Do not draw a string of bow, do not draw a sword / When pitted against a cannon, print newspapers). Allahbadi—who was himself a contributor to *Awadh Punch*, Urdu weekly from Lucknow started in 1877—lived in a period when the newspapers had already taken deep root. For discussion on Urdu newspapers, see Jalal 2000.

¹⁷ See Jalal 2000, p. 55.

took a broad-brush approach to argue that the nineteenth century was the period of the decline of global Islam. However, recent works on Indian history have made an important intervention to problematize the earlier notion of decline and decay. The new historians rightly gave a complex picture of Indian polity, society and economy of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In my view, a detailed discussion of these two sets of historians will further clarify the issue under study.

Interrogating Muslim Backwardness

Francis Robinson argued that the nineteenth century was the period of Muslim decline at global level, which saw Islam and the Muslim world fall under ‘the Western dominance.’¹⁸ He added that it all started with Napoleon’s invading armies trampling Egypt in June 1798 but the erosion of the Muslim power may be dated back to the retreat of the Ottoman forces from Vienna on 12 September, 1683. This, he contended, marked the beginning of an era of the decline of the Ottoman power. Since then one after another various regions of the Muslim world became subject to western ascendancy and supremacy. For example, the Dutch made their inroads in the islands of South-East Asia; the English established its power in India; the Russians took over the Crimea; the Habsburgs intervened in the Balkans, the central Asian Islamic lands slipped under European influences; the region of the Gulf got dominated by the British who also occupied Egypt in 1882. Another imperialist force, France, too, scrambled for Muslim territories, imposing its power in Northern Africa, invading Algeria in 1830 and declaring protectorate in Tunisia and Morocco in 1881 and 1912 respectively.¹⁹ In short, the most parts of Muslim world, within a short span of 120 years, came under the European dominance and hegemony. Unlike earlier ones, the European conquests of the “Muslim societies”, noted Robinson, were transformative in nature. ‘This domination, moreover, was not just one of conquest and rule; there came with it economic, social, intellectual and political forces of great transformative power.’²⁰

¹⁸ Francis Robinson, ‘Introduction’ in Francis Robinson, ed., *The Islamic World in the Age of Western Dominance: The New Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 5, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 1.

In India, the cloud of political instability, some historians argued, gathered after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. Mohammad Noman, a historian of the Muslim League persuasion, mourned the decline: 'With the dawn of the eighteenth century, the seeds of disintegration and degeneration which were sown long in the body politic of the Moghul Empire had steadily sprouted. After the death of Aurangzeb a Moghul Emperor still ruled at Delhi, but in the words of Mill, "the forlorn Emperor, the nominal sovereign of so vast an empire, the representative of so illustrious a race who now possesses hardly a roof to protect him," neither possessed the glamour nor wielded the influence of his illustrious ancestors. The vigour and vitality of the Moghul rule had become a myth.'²¹ The decline of Muslim power in India was attributed to the betrayal of the British. According to Noman, the East India Company, which was granted permission to do trade and business by the Mughal Empire, finally overthrew it in collaboration with the natives.²²

It has been argued that whatever little hope of reclaiming the 'old regime' was flickering in the hearts of a large sections of Indians under the leadership of 'traditional elites' such as landlords, princes, soldiers, religious classes²³, was finally extinguished by the British repressions on the rebels of the 1857. Though a large section of Hindus and Muslims fought against the British, Muslims were a 'special target' as the British perceived them to be the engineers of the revolt.²⁴ As a result, said Ishtiaq Hussain

²¹ Mohammad Noman, *Muslim India: Rise and Growth of the All India Muslim League*, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1942, p. 13.

²² It has been noticed in a number of works of the historians, writing from Muslim perspectives that they saw the Hindus mainly as collaborators of the British against Muslims. 'The British people began to win over the Hindus to undermine the Muslim domination of the country, and the Hindus commercial classes supported them out of spite for the Muslims as well as out of hope of material gains. Economic exploitation of the country, political repression, missionary propaganda, and the educational policy of the English were all calculated to crush the power and undermine the influence and prestige of the Mussalmans in India. See, Noman 1942, p. 16.

²³ Bipan Chandra, Amalesh Tripathi and Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2001, p. 36. Tara Chand, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 2, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 43.

²⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*, Usha, New Delhi, 1979. Bipan Chandra, Amalesh Tripathi, Barun De 2001, Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in Indian Environment*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999. Bashir Ahmad Dhar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1957. Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988. Asoka Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle in India*, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1942. Humayun Kabir, *Muslim Politics 1906-47 and Other Essays*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1969.

Qureshi, the British inflicted 'ruthless punishment and merciless vengeance' on them.²⁵ The doors, as argued by some historians, were "shut" on Muslims in administration and employment as a part of the "hostile" British attitude towards Muslims. As Noman argued, 'The British people had decided that for the expansion of new power and its continuance, the only course was to crush the Mussalmans.'²⁶

Contrary to such bald generalisations, Muzaffar Alam, C.A. Bayly and Anand A Yong persuasively argued that the post-Mughal period was not a period of "decline." They showed the decline of the centre was coupled with the prosperity in regions. In his study of the eighteenth century Awadh region, Alam demonstrated "prosperity" in agriculture²⁷ underpinned by "brisk trade" and the growth of towns like Mirzapur and Banaras.

Similarly, Bayly in his richly-textured work²⁸ gave 'the detailed studies of towns, bazaars, merchants and service people against the background of crucial developments in the political economy of pre-colonial and early colonial north India.'²⁹ In his book, he showed the interaction between economy, trade, agriculture, politics, power, and society in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. The thrust of Bayly's work is to make an attempt to revise the earlier historians' view on the eighteenth century India who saw the post-Mughal period. He strongly challenged "the deeply-rooted view" that the eighteenth century period was that of "chaos" and "decline". With the help of evidence mostly from the north India, he concluded that the period was in fact one of "stability," "adaptability," and "reinvestment" and the emergence of money as an "essential feature" and even "growth". This happened, according to him, simultaneously with the consolidation of

²⁵ Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi 1988, p. 17.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 23.

²⁷ Alam said, 'That agriculture in the regions under study registered a marked development in the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is illustrated from a comparison of the available revenue figures of the early and mid-eighteenth century with those of the late sixteenth century as recorded by Abu'l Fazl in the *A'in-i-Akbari*. The rise in *jama'* since the time of the A'in (1595) was spectacular. In Awadh the *jama'* rose by over 85 per cent, in the Banaras region by over 107 per cent, while in the Moradaad-Bareilly region the rise, according to my figures, was almost incredibly over 247 per cent.' See, Muzaffar Alam, 'Aspects of Agrarian Uprisings in North India in the Early Eighteenth Century' in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Mughal State: 1526-1750*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, p. 467.

²⁸ C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaar: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

²⁹ Ibid. p. vii.

new classes like merchants, gentry and service people. However, he also made a point that the British rule eroded old forms of government and redistribution without creating a new one in the nineteenth century. 'By 1850 the framework of institutions and moral ideas which had been the framework for the ideal Indo-Muslim city was widely in disarray. The *kotwal* had been reduced to an inferior officer of police; the *kazi* was little more than a glorified registrar, the religious sensibilities of learned Islam no longer bore on the officers of government through the *mufti*. The disgrace of many old families during the Rebellion itself further reduced their significance.'³⁰

On the Muslim question Bayly in passing discussed the religious policy of Aurangzeb and said that his period was marked by the departure from "the latitudinarian religious stance of his predecessors" in support of his vigorous Islamic policy. Thus, the post-Mughal period was the rise of successor states and "syncretic," "eclectic or even Hindu" culture. The main contention of Bayly is that the decline of the Mughal state was not the period of decline in general for the learned and clergy classes of Muslims who found their patrons in new sultans. He showed the process of "continuity"-- as the composition of the scholarly works in Persian continued and the gathering of people grew at places like the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi and the Taj Mahal. He called the bustling activities at mosques, tombs and shrines, pilgrimages as economic activities for urban Muslims. Here, the poor Muslim artisans found a new source of income after the decline of the Mughals, who earned their livelihood by making rosewater, caps, cheap prayer hats and mementos. Livelihood for other Muslims like service gentry was provided by *qasbah* (town) that grew during the same period. The Islamic service gentry, too, were moving to secure their place in these *qasbahs* in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. These *qasbahs* saw the growth of mosques, schools, Muslim tombs, and houses of gentry's class which played an important role in spreading Islamic learning as well as in providing a local Muslim leadership. In short, Bayly's formulation questioned the notion that Muslims as a whole became backward in the colonial period.

Anand A Yang, in his study of Patna, also dismissed the idea that post-Mughal period was a period of decline. He showed how the decline of Patna city in the nineteenth

³⁰ Ibid. p. 342.

century was followed by the subsequent rise of Bankipur in the western zone. As a result, the importance of Patna remained and it continued to serve as a political and administrative centre. 'Thus, the changing economic conditions that threatened the "city" and its prosperity as a center of retail and wholesale trade and banking—a situation that endangered the health of the entire city—were partly offset by the development of Bankipur as the civil station for the district and the region. Insurance against the economic slump was also provided by emergence of the westernmost zone in the twentieth century.'³¹

My study found the formulations of Alam, Bayly and Yang persuasive. It will be empirically shown in the next section that the social and economic conditions of Muslims were also varied in the different regions of India. In this study, a comparative analysis of social and economic condition of Muslims in Bengal and the North-West Provinces and Oudh will show how Muslims in the two provinces found themselves in two different conditions. For example, the Muslims of Bengal were more backward than Hindus but they were able to hold their own in upper India.

Regions and Muslim Backwardness (1871-1900)

As shown above, backwardness of Muslims was not an all-India phenomenon. The regions such as Bengal, Assam, Madras, Coorg, Mysore witnessed Muslims falling behind Hindus in availing themselves of higher education and employment. Even Hunter was categorical in his work that his formulation was only applicable to Bengal but Muslim leaders set up a discourse of Muslims being a backward community. Even the Muslim leaders of the NWP and Oudh increasingly perceived themselves to be backward and felt a threat from the Hindus. Peter Hardy stated that 'the caveat' in Hunter's was generally ignored and Hunter's study was applicable only to lower Bengal and not to other regions in British India. He rightly pointed out that there were mixed responses to the British rule as some regions were ruined while others prospered. For example, the British rule gradually 'ruined office-holding Muslim aristocracy' and manufactures, such as the Muslim weavers of Decca. It brought security for Punjabi Muslims, while those

³¹Anand A Yang, *Bazaar India: Market, Society, and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 110.

Muslims living in Bombay and engaged in shipping prospered. In the region of North Western provinces, the Muslims got land under the British rule.’³²

Historian B.B. Misra also showed the differentiated conditions of Muslims. For example, in Madras Muslims had 6.2% population in 1886 but they had only 0.4 per cent share of the total number of posts in judicial and executive services. While in Bombay, Muslims were 18.8 per cent but they held only 5.4 per cent of total jobs. But the condition of Muslims in Bengal was still worse, who formed 31.3 per cent, but they held only 8.5 per cent of jobs in judiciary and executive.³³

Mushirul Hasan, similarly, acknowledged the applicability of Hunter’s to a particular region only.³⁴ ‘W.W. Hunter’s magisterial generalizations hardly made sense in another area of British India- UP-where the Muslim service and processional classes were not so badly off...Muslims in Punjab for example, lagged far behind in western education.’³⁵ Bimal Prasad³⁶ also pointed out that the ‘Hunter’s testimony can be safely relied upon so far as it concerned the condition of Muslims in Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century.’³⁷ Jalal showed the reality of Bengal was applied to other regions such as the North Western Provinces and Punjab by the Muslim elites who were ‘agitating’ for education and employment³⁸ at colonial institutions. In other words, the Muslims of British India were a highly differentiated community. This has also been borne out by empirical data of the late nineteenth century.

According to the Census of 1881, Muslims were 50,121,585 or 19.7 per cent of total population in British India. They were mostly concentrated in Bengal (21,704,724 or 31.2 per cent) and Punjab (10,525,150 or 51 per cent). Another important region for Muslims was the NWP, where the Muslim population was just 13 per cent or 5,922,886 (Appendix).

³² Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, p. 31.

³³ For details, see B.B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, London and Bombay, 1961.

³⁴ Hunter himself clearly mentioned that his analysis was applicable to Bengal only. ‘I [Hunter] would further premise that my remarks apply only to Lower Bengal, the Provinces with which I am best acquainted, and in which, so far as I can learn, the Muhammadans have suffered most severely under British rule. I should be sorry to believe, or to convey to the reader the belief, that the following remarks were predicable of all the Muhammadans of India.’ See, Hunter 2000, p. 149.

³⁵ Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1991, p. 15&18.

³⁶ Bimal Prasad, ‘Introduction’, in Hunter 2002, p.xvi.

³⁷ Bimal Prasad, ‘Introduction’, in Hunter 2002, p.xvi.

³⁸ Jalal 2000, p. 88.

Muslims in regions such as Bengal³⁹, Assam, Madras, Mysore, Coorg, were more backward than Hindus but in the NWP and Oudh, Central Provinces, they were able to compete with Hindus in education and employment and went ahead in some indicators. The case of Panjab was a complex one and in some indicators like female education, Muslim women did better than the Hindu women, while in other areas Hindus had upper hand. The example of Central Provinces was also interesting where Muslims in some sectors of jobs held seats ten times more than their size of population.

Despite this complex picture, one may hazard a generalisation about the condition of Muslims that they were more backward than Hindus in English, technical, professional and higher education. In other words, the higher one went in the field of education, the less one found the presence of Muslims. 'It was however in the colleges, higher schools, and universities that the absence or backwardness of Muhammadans was most conspicuous. The reports all agree that the existing system had not attracted them to the higher ranges of the educational course, or induced them to persevere up to the point at which studies impress read culture fit young men for success in the services and open professions.'⁴⁰ Yet, it should not be assumed that their backwardness in higher and technical education was the same at-all India level.

But the backwardness of Muslims in higher education was arguably more in Bengal.⁴¹ The Muslims of Bengal were mostly "cultivating ryots" and "ordinary industrial classes".⁴² As they were slow to take to English education than (upper caste) Hindus for various reasons, Muslims lagged behind in education, particularly in colleges

³⁹ 'In their report (letter No. 2918, dated the 17th August 1872) to the Government of India, the Government of Bengal admitted "the Moslems have not been very fairly treated in regard to our educational machinery. Mr. Bernard's note shows that not a single member of the inspecting agency is a Moslem; there is scarcely, if at all, a Moslem in the ordinary ranks of school masters of Government schools.... This undoubtedly places the Moslems at some real disadvantage and certainly gives reasonable offence to their prejudice and sensibilities.'" For detail, see *Report of the Moslem Education Advisory Committee*, Government of Bengal, Alipore, 1934, p.8.

⁴⁰ 'True Extract', A. Mackenzie, Secretary of the Government of India, in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 378.

⁴¹ See also, *Report of the Moslem Education Advisory Committee*, Government of Bengal, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1934.

⁴² 'From C. Bernard, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, in the General Department, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --NO. 2918, dated Calcutta, the 17th August 1872' in *Correspondences of the Subject of the Education of the Muhammadan Community in British India and their Employment in the Public Service Generally, Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, Home Department No. CCV, Home Department Serial No. 2, Published by Authority Calcutta, Printed by the Superintendent of Government Printing India, 1886, p. 172.

and universities. In the early decade of 1870s, in Dacca College the number of Muslims was 2 against 108 Hindus, in Hooghly College, Muslims were 21 against 130 Hindus and in Patna College, Muslims seemed to have done better with 10 students against 70 Hindus.⁴³ However, things were not as worse in the lower schools for Muslims. 'In the aided lower vernacular schools of this Circle, the Mahomedan pupils are exactly one-third of the whole number. But in all the higher classes of schools the proportion is very much smaller.'⁴⁴

Unlike Muslims in Bengal, their co-religionists in the NWP and Oudh were able to hold their position in most of indicators. The report of the Director in the year of 1871-72 said that Muslims' presence in Department-recognised schools was 17.8 percent while their total population was just 13.5 per cent. In other words, Muslim students were overrepresented in schools. This achievement of Muslims was not a small thing, given the fact that the NWP as a province was not then counted as educationally advanced. However, Muslim students could not repeat their success of lower schools in higher education but they were also not very far behind Hindus. For example, in the Entrance Exam of 1870, 12 per cent (21 out of 175) were Muslims.⁴⁵ On 17th of October, 1871, C.A. Elliott, officiating secretary to the Government of the NWP informed E.C. Bayley, secretary to the Government about a "fair proportion" of the Muslims in NWP. They are, said Elliott, 'thus more than one-seventh of the whole body of students, while they number, according to the census of 1865, less than one-seventh of the entire population of the North-Western Provinces. Similarly out of 124 candidates for the Entrance Examination of 1869, Mahomedans were 10, or 8 per cent, and they were 21 out of 175, or 12 per cent in 1870.'⁴⁶

In Oudh, like the NWP, Muslims were in much better condition. H.B. Harington, an officiating secretary to the chief commissioner of Oudh claimed in 1872 that 'The comparative appreciation by Mahomedans of the existing method of instruction in this

⁴³ From C. Bernard, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, in the General Department, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --NO. 2918, dated Calcutta, the 17th August 1872., in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 180.

⁴⁴ From C. Bernard, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, in the General Department, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --NO. 2918, dated Calcutta, the 17th August 1872., in in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 180.

⁴⁵ *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 360.

⁴⁶From C.A. Elliott, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Government, North-Western Province, to E.C. Bayley, Esq., C.S.I., Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --No. 4559 A, dated Nynee Tal, the 17th October, 1871, in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 191.

province is attested by the fact that whilst the proportion borne by pupils undergoing instruction to boys of a school-going age is in the case of Hindus only 3.3 per cent., it reached in the case of Mahomedan a percentage of 8.1; and it would thus appear that in Oudh, as well as in the North-Western Province and the Punjab, the Mahomedans, at least proportionately, do avail themselves of the educational advantages that Government offers.⁴⁷ C.A.R. Browning, director of Public Instruction, Oudh also spoke about the better representation of Muslims students. 'The number of Hindu boys in Oudh able to go to school may be estimated at 833,500, and the number of Mahomedan boys at 100,000. The percentage, therefore, of Mahomedan boys under instruction is 8.1 and the percentage of Hindu boys only 3.3. In Oudh then, at least the Mahomedans avail themselves of the existing means of education much more than Hindus.'⁴⁸

In his study of the Indian middle classes, Misra showed the better condition of Muslims in the NWP and Oudh. According to him, Muslims in the NWP and Oudh were 'able to retain most of their traditional superiority in the higher ranks of the public service.'⁴⁹ The reason, said Misra, was non-extension of "the Bengal system" to the NWP and Oudh which continued to have "the indigenous pattern of Muslim administration" up to 1856. In other words, the cause behind the Muslims of Bengal not doing so well as their coreligionists in the NWP and Oudh was the fact that English became a qualification in Bengal, which a section of Muslims were not enthusiastic about it. While in the NWP and Oudh, such compulsion did not confront Muslims as Urdu-Persian was retained by the colonial state. It was because of the fact that the colonial rule first took root in Bengal. As a result, Bengal was the first region to open up universities and colleges, imparting modern and English education. But the Muslims of Bengal did not benefit so much as Hindus. On the other hand, in the NWP and Oudh, the spread of English education was slow with Urdu-Persian being the medium of instruction. This worked in

⁴⁷From H.B. Harington, Esq., M.A., Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Oudh, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --No. 1709, dated Lucknow, the 15th April 1872, in *Correspondences*, p. 212.

⁴⁸From C.A.R. Browning, Esq., M.A. Director of Public Instruction, Oudh, to the Officiating Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Oudh,-- No.1840, dated Lucknow, the 6th September 1871, in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 213.

⁴⁹B.B. Misra 1961, pp. 387-388.

favour of Muslims.⁵⁰ Thus, they were able to retain their hold even in higher posts. As a result, Muslims, who had 13.4 per cent population in the NWP in 1886, 'held 45.1 per cent. of the total number of posts in the judicial and executive service of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh.' Hindus (with 86.2 per cent population), on the other hand, had only 50.2 per cent. of these posts.⁵¹ Under the category of better-paid appointments, viz., deputy Collectors, the Muslims were "an actual majority", and always had got more than their population. For instance, 'in 1882 there were 95 Musalmans against 76 Hindu tahsildars, while of 84 Subordinate Judges and Munsiffs, 47 were Musalmans and only 37 Hindus.'⁵² In some sectors of the government, Muslims were over-represented. Replying to the Ameer Ali's memorial in which it was claimed that the Muslims had become backward, the officiating secretary to Government, the NWP and Oudh in 1883 said Muslims, contrary to such formulation, had been over-represented in jobs in some of the subordinate jobs: '...it appears that out of the 54,130 native officials holding appointments under this Government, 35,302 are Hindus and 18,828 Muhammadans, being 65.22 per cent, Hindus and 34.78 per cent. Muhammadans, as against 86.75 and 13.25 in the general population. It would thus appear that, not only as far as the proportion of Muhammadans in the general population is concerned, but also with reference to the proportion of literate persons among the Muhammadans, the allegation of the memorialists as to the exclusion of Muhammadans from a fair share of Government patronage, seems not to be applicable to these Provinces. On the contrary, the figures indicate that, compared with their number, Muhammadans have a large share of the appointments in the subordinate executive and judicial services, while an analysis of the return shows that of the better-paid among these appointments the distribution is equally favourable to the Muhammadans. In short, it may be unhesitatingly affirmed that

⁵⁰ 'From the Director of Public Instruction, Oudh, to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Oudh,-- No. 1921, dated Lucknow, the 22nd March 1870.' in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 218.

⁵¹ B.B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, London and Bombay, 1961, p. 388.

⁵² *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 369.

of the probable number of persons of all creeds fitted for service of the better sort under Government, the proportion of Muhammadans holding office is not unfair.’⁵³

The case of Panjab was a complex one. In many respects Muslims in some regions were far more advanced than Hindus. At the same time they were backward than Hindus in some other respects. But they were as per the population in vernacular schools. Yet, they had a low representation in English schools. Out of 102 students enrolled in Delhi and Lahore, only six were Muslims.⁵⁴ Moreover, Muslims were more backward than the Hindus in technical, higher education, middle and lower schools but in female education Muslims women did better than their Hindu counterparts. ‘...the case of the Punjab the number of the Muhammadans reading in superior, lower, and middle class schools is much inferior to that of the Hindus. As a proof that Muhammadans are deprived of higher education, it would appear that while in the lower schools the proportion of Muhammadans to the Hindu is 2 to 3, in superior schools it is 1 to 3, and in colleges as far low as 1 to 15. The case is not such with the normal and female schools; in the latter the proportion of Muhaddadans to the Hindus is 5 to 1, and in the former 1 ½ to 1. The reason of the increase of Muhammadans in this instance clearly is that in these schools vernacular subjects are treated on more liberal scale, and, as they are suited to Muhammadan taste, the proportion increases.’⁵⁵

The Muslims in Panjab were not proportionally represented in government jobs excepting the avenues in extra assistant commissionership.⁵⁶ They were behind Hindus in “special” and “technical” education. They were not successful in securing “high appointments” in the Education Department due to their “want” of English. But where such knowledge was not a qualification for the post of extra assistant commissioners,

⁵³ ‘From the Officiating Secretary to Government, North-Western Provinces and Oudh, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --No. 1401, dated Camp Lucknow, the 16th April 1883 in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 286.

⁵⁴ ‘From Lieutenant-Colonel W.R.M. Holroyd, Director Public Instruction, Punjab, to the Junior Secretary to Government, Punjab, --No. 1263, dated Lahore, the 28th September 1882’, in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 229.

⁵⁵ ‘Memorandum by Muhammad Latif, Editor, Journal of the Anjuman-i-Punjab, and Secretary of the Arabic Journal Nafa-ul-Azim, on Muhammadan education in India’, in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 311.

⁵⁶ ‘Memorandum by Muhammad Latif, Editor, Journal of the Anjuman-i-Punjab, and Secretary of the Arabic Journal Nafa-ul-Azim, on Muhammadan education in India’, in *Correspondences*, 1886, pp. 311-314.

Tahsildar, or Munsif, Muslims were able to get a fair share of jobs. For example, according to the Punjab Civil List, there were 168 Muslim higher-class officers against 272 Hindus.⁵⁷

In Central Provinces, the attendance of Muslims in schools was proportional to their population and they attended the government schools like other communities. Of the total of 46,993 students in Central Provinces' Government schools, the number of Muslims was 3,249, while they were 1,519 out of a total of 36,543 in private schools. The percentage of Muhammadan in the Province was mere 2.5 per cent, these figures were suggestive of the fact that Muslims were not aloof from the government education like other communities. In the higher schools, Muslims continued to do good.⁵⁸ '...it will be plain from the above figures that the Muhammadans of the Central Provinces have no reason whatever to complain of their share of office under Government. State patronage is certainly not unjustly exercised in favour of Hindus to the disadvantage of their Muhammadan fellow-subjects.'⁵⁹

The case of Bombay Presidency also evaded any simple generalisation as Muslims in Sindh region were more backward in education than other regions, yet they "retained a share of posts in employment". As far as the demography of Bombay Presidency is concerned, the ratio of Muslim was 1:12. Muslims "freely" attended the government schools than private schools because the latter had the "presence" of a large number of Christian missionaries. Muslim students were 1 in 10 in Gujarat, they were nearly 1 in 10 in Kahndeish. However, they were more backward in the region of Sindh where they were 1 to 3 in schools while their constituted around three-fourth of population. But as far as higher education was concerned Muslims lagged behind the Hindus. Nevertheless, Muslims in Sindh got the "a fair share of valuable appointments" in government employment. Except for judiciary, they were well represented.

⁵⁷ *Correspondences*, 1886, pp. 369-370.

⁵⁸ 'From J.W. Neill Esq., Assistant Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --No. 1502—81, dated Nagpore, the 23rd April 1872,' in *Correspondences*, 1886, pp. 220.

⁵⁹ 'From A.H.L. Fraser, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, -- 3438—186, dated Nagpur, the 4th September 1882' in *Correspondences*, 1882, p., 319.

Finally in the Madras Province, Muslims were not adequately represented in Judicial Department. In year 1871, for the post of Principal Sadar Ains on salaries of R. 500 there was no Muslim against 10 Hindus, while there were only 6 District Munsifs on salaries from R. 200 to R. 300 against 87 Hindus. Hindus of Madras Province had the lion's share of the jobs as they held 417 posts out of 485 in judiciary and revenue departments against just 19 Muslims.⁶⁰

In the above section, I have given a very brief summary of the conditions of Muslims in education and jobs viz., Hindus. Through this empirical analysis, I tried to show that Muslims backwardness was regional phenomenon. While historians generally agreed that Muslim backwardness was limited to Bengal but when it came to explanation of the causes of Muslims backwardness, they were sharply divided.

Causes of Muslim Backwardness

Backwardness: Result of Discriminatory British Policy: While Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Bashir Ahmad Dar⁶¹, Bipan Chandra, Aziz Ahmad, Ashoka Mehra and Achyut Patwardhan recognized the anti-Muslim attitude of the British, Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi used stronger words to describe them. He attributed Muslim backwardness to British discriminatory policies and "ruthless punishment and merciless vengeance" to which Muslims were subjected after 1857 Revolt. 'The Muslims were hounded out of employment and opportunities...The British had always looked upon the Muslims as their adversaries because they had resented being ousted from power. With the rebellion of 1857 this feeling was intensified and every attempt was made to ruin and suppress the Muslims for ever.'⁶² According to Qureshi, the replacement of Persian with English as official language, the ruin of education for the Muslims by negligence, the introduction of English law which made *qazis* lose their jobs, confiscation of lands of Muslim gentry were some of British policies that accounted for their backwardness. Similarly, Ashok

⁶⁰ 'Extract from the Proceedings of the Government of Madras in Educational Department, No.—288, dated 7th October 1872' in *Correspondences of the Subject of the Education of the Muhammadan Community in British India and their Employment in the Public Service Generally, Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, Home Department No. CCV, Home Department Serial No. 2, Printed by the Superintendent of Government Printing India, 1886, p. 156.

⁶¹ See, Dar 1957.

⁶² Qureshi 1988, p. 18.

Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan argued that Muslims were “suppressed” by the British through ‘a policy of systematic suppression’.⁶³ Smith went back to 1857 Revolt and said that the Government of British India “singled out” the Muslim community and repressed Muslim middle classes and kept them out of administration, legal, medical and other professions, holding them “primarily responsible” for the 1857 who wanted to “rehabilitate” the Mughal empire⁶⁴. Bipan Chandra, too, shared this formulation that the British government was ‘hard’ on Muslims because the British came to conclude that the Muslims were “primarily responsible” for the 1857 Revolt.⁶⁵ The post-1857 British hostility towards Muslim, said Qureshi, petered out in the 1870s when Muslims began to recover ‘some of their lost political and intellectual influence’ under the leadership of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. The contribution of Sir Syed to “Muslim renaissance”, said Qureshi, was to inculcate “self-confidence” and provided “rudder” to Muslims, who were reluctant to learn ‘inferior’ western education and English⁶⁶.

Using less strong words than Qureshi, Aziz Ahmad, too, argued that the British policies were “more unsympathetic” towards Muslims than towards Hindus. Since political power was wrenched from Muslims in Bengal and Arcot, the administrative policies of the British created “a greater wedge” between themselves and Muslim subjects. He detailed some of British policies, which proved detrimental to Muslims. For example, the Permanent Settlement in Bengal produced “a class of Hindu middlemen” which exploited the Muslim peasantry. Besides, the post-1857 British policies destroyed Muslim aristocracy in Delhi and other regions as they were perceived to have led 1857 Revolt.⁶⁷ Like Qureshi, Ahmad noted the lack of Muslims’ receptivity for the western knowledge during the colonial period. However he gave an interesting formulation of the lack of zeal among Muslims to take to western knowledge and English. Since Hinduism encountered centuries of Muslim rule in India and it had to ‘shed its shell of insularity, and infused it with an apparatus of eclectic receptivity’, it was “comfortable” to adapt itself to western ideas and English education during the colonial period but such “eclectic

⁶³ Mehta and Patwardhan 1942, p. 82.

⁶⁴ Smith 1979, pp. 193-195.

⁶⁵ Chandra, Tripathi, De 2001, p. 97.

⁶⁶ Qureshi 1988, pp. 18-21.

⁶⁷ Ahmad 1999, pp. 263-264.

receptivity” was not found among Muslims in India because they did not encounter such challenge earlier. ‘Centuries of Muslim rule had helped Hinduism to shed its shell of insularity, and infused it with an apparatus of eclectic receptivity by which it could adapt itself to comfortable co-existence with the influx of Western ideas which education in English brought necessarily in its wake. Muslim India had passed through no similar process of immunization. For it [the Muslim community] the change meant secession from its own cultural heritage to adopt an alien one. It was unconscious of the revolutionary dynamism of Western civilization, and like the rest of the Muslim world slow in appreciating the economic advantages of the change.’⁶⁸

Backwardness: Denial of Deliberate British Discrimination: I discussed above, an important explanation for Muslim backwardness given by some historians was the discriminatory policies of the British which disempowered Muslims in the nineteenth century. Unlike historians such as Qureshi and others, Hardy did not think that Muslims became backward because of any deliberate policies of the British rule. Hardy argued that both Muslims and non-Muslims were treated equally in the British regime. ‘The only generalisation possible is that gradually the British changed the form and style of success in Indian society from the military to the commercial. In so far as Muslims were left by the decline of the Mughal empire in a position to become capitalists, they could prosper just as non-Muslims could prosper.’⁶⁹

Hardy substantiated his argument that the loss of sovereignty did not mean the loss of livelihood. ‘For the Muslim elite in northern India, British conquest meant the destruction of a way of life more than the destruction of a livelihood.’⁷⁰ He further said that Muslims lost power not employment and pointed out how Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781 to maintain the supply of qualified officers. However, he conceded that the requirement of English for judicial service as emphasised by the British in eighteenth century proved to attack the Muslim predominance. Yet, Hardy did not accept any deliberate attempt by the British to discriminate against Muslims.

⁶⁸ Ahmad 1999, p. 264.

⁶⁹ Hardy 1972, p. 31.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 34.

I would like to distance myself from both the positions. The first set of historians indulged in exaggerating the fact that the British were targeting Muslims. The older historiography was one in which nationalists, Marxists, those who believed in the two-nation theory, came together to attack the British. Usually there was a particular standpoint which they advanced. For example, the historians of the two-nation theory tried to portray the picture of victimhood. For them, the advent of British rule was a conspiracy against all Muslims. However, they forgot the fact that a large number of Muslims did collaborate with the British empire and they were hugely benefited by the advent of British rule. The formulation of deliberate state's discrimination against Muslims by nationalist and Marxist historians came from their anti-imperialist ideology. But at the same time, one must be wary of the apologist of empire such as Hardy who tried to water down the negative impact of the empire on Indians, especially the Muslims. As shown earlier, the British policies had an adverse impact on Muslims in many regions such as Bengal. The colonial policies and its political economy had its inherent limitation to do the welfare of all.

Backwardness: An Economic Explanation: W.C. Smith said the economic system 'benefited' Indians who were largely the Hindus than the Muslims.

'Economic development within the British imperialist system benefited a group of Indians of whom a far larger proportion were Hindus than Muslims. The Indian bourgeoisie still to-day is predominately composed of Hindus (and some others, e.g. Parsis); its Muslim members are relatively few, and, taken collectively, poor. This is sometimes stated in the form that the Muslim middle class is much weaker than its rival; or still less accurately, that the Muslim community is economically and culturally backward.

This last is quite misleading, because there is no evidence that the Muslim peasantry or proletariat is 'backward' compared to any other lower class. None the less, it is commonly believed that the one 'community' is poorer than the other. The fact behind this, that the share of Muslims in middle-class development is relatively weak, lies at the very heart of present day communal discord, as well as having contributed much to the rise of communalism in the nineteenth century. It is, therefore, of supreme importance.'⁷¹

⁷¹ Smith 1979, p. 195.

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Having dismissed the fact of the backwardness of Muslim community as a whole, Smith also traced the backwardness of large sections of low caste Muslim converts, who could not raise their economic status as they did their ideological level. 'Consequently the great bulk of their Muslims to-day are peasants and proletariat; while some of their landlords, and their mill-owners are Hindus.'⁷²

Ram Gopal also hinted at the lower caste background of the Muslim converts who were largely agricultural workers and labourers unlike the upper class Muslims who were in the administration of the Mughal period for the centuries. In other words, the Muslim masses, said Ram Gopal, remained at the lower strata of society despite six centuries of the Muslim rule.

But unlike Ram Gopal, Smith took an economic explanation. Instead of finding political and economic reasons of backwardness, rued Smith, the conservative elements in the Muslim community would tend to explain it through the lens of religion. For example, the Muslim masses were asked to remain aloof from English education and bureaucracy and any government profession. But Smith dismissed the view that the backwardness of Muslims were due to their religious conservatism as Islam did not prevent the emergence of a middle class in Egypt. According to him, Islam is as conservative a religion as Hinduism and unlike the Hindus, there could not emerge a middle class among the India Muslims. For Smith, a 'circumscribed' capitalist produces unemployment leading to communalism, group discords and Muslim communalism. 'It is observable all over the capitalist world that the capitalist economy system, particularly when it has reached (or as in India has had imposed upon it) the stage of not expanding rapidly, gives rise to fear, distrust, unbalanced emotionalism, aggressiveness, and the like, on the part of its middle-class participants. The reasons for this are not far to seek: the spectre of unemployment, the increasingly keen, even bitter, competition, the certainty that one man's gain is another's loss, the constantly increasing effort necessary for the same or to a smaller return- all these things, added to the usual amorality and aesthetic ugliness, the chaos and meaninglessness, of capitalism, are responsible. A

⁷²ibid. p. 196.

circumscribed capitalism produces the conditions under which communalism, or some parallel form of group discord, flourishes.’⁷³

Marxist scholar, Javeed Alam blamed feudalism and colonialism for Muslim backwardness: ‘Indian poverty, including among the Muslims, is a creation of a complex combination of feudalism and colonialism. Historically, the Muslim gentry and the section of the then ruling classes from among the Muslims never treated the Muslim masses any better or differently than the other subjects under them. All people were equally the beasts of burden under them and unworthy of respect or dignity in the eyes of the rulers. It is important to remember the limits to the brotherhood of faith in conditions of feudal rule.’⁷⁴

While agreeing with the Marxist scholars as far as they have shown the limitation of the colonial political economy, my discomfort with them is that they did not pay an adequate attention to the ideational factors. For example, a section of the Muslims did perceive a threat from the British rule and saw it as threat to their religion and culture. As a result, they for sometime remained aloof from western and English education. However, it is also not correct to blame Muslims alone for their backwardness because they were averse to western and English education. The problem with such formulation is that it tended to undermine the role of poverty of Muslims and the failure of state to reach out to Muslims that contributed to the social and educational backwardness of Muslims.

Backwardness: Result of Muslims' Shunning English and Western Knowledge: Unlike the hostility and more unsympathetic attitude of the British towards the Muslims as argued above by Qureshi and Ahmad respectively, R. C. Majumdar talked of the hostility of the Muslims towards the British and their ‘strong aversion’ to secular education was the force behind their aloofness to English education.⁷⁵ While the foundation of the Hindu College in 1817 in Bengal, said Majumdar, provided “a great impetus” for the promotion of English education among the Hindus, the Muslims made very ‘little progress’ in

⁷³ Smith 1979, p. 212.

⁷⁴ Javeed Alam, ‘The Contemporary Muslim Situation in India: A Long-Term View’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, No. 2, January 12 - 18, 2008, p. 49.

⁷⁵ R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 1, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1962, p. 465.

nineteenth century that resulted in a gulf between Hindus and Muslim'.⁷⁶ 'English education was the mainspring of all political evolutions of the Hindus; it is therefore hardly a matter of surprise that the Muslims, who lagged so far behind the Hindus in this respect, would fail to keep pace with them.'⁷⁷ But why were Hindus enthusiastic about English education while the Muslims were hostile to it? R.C. Majumdar gave a communal explanation to argue that "the reaction of British conquest" on the Hindus and the Muslims were "bound to be different" because the Muslims "naturally regarded" the British as "their bitterest foes" to whom they had lost political power.⁷⁸ Like Qureshi, Majumdar also noticed the change in attitude of the British towards Muslims. While Qureshi seemed to give Sir Syed credits for recovering the lost ground, for Majumdar, the change in British position was the result of "divide and rule" policy of imperial power as two generations of Hindus having imbibed western ideas through English education were emerging as a threat. Though Majumdar held the British responsible for divide and rule policy, the success of the British policy that could work, in his view, was because of the existing deep gulf between Hindus and Muslims. 'It must be frankly admitted that the roots of the cleavage lay deep in the soil, and it was already manifest even early in the nineteenth century. The British did not create it, but merely exploited the patent fact to serve their own interests.'⁷⁹ Majumdar's view on existing cleavages between Hindus and Muslims was shared, to some extent, by Qureshi who held that Muslims and Hindus remained distinct even though they lived like neighbours for centuries⁸⁰.

Chandra also acknowledged the role of education and trade and industry in keeping Muslims backward and the rise of communal consciousness. 'Because the upper class Muslims during the first 70 years of the 19th century were very anti-British, conservative and hostile to modern education, the number of educated Muslims in this country remained very small. Consequently, modern Western thought with its emphasis on science, democracy, and nationalism did not spread among Muslim intellectuals who

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 465.

⁷⁷ R. C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People: British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part II, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1965, p. 297

⁷⁸ Majumdar, *The History and Culture*. 1965, p. 295.

⁷⁹ Majumdar 1965, p. 325.

⁸⁰ Qureshi, 1988.

remained traditionally backward.’⁸¹ Ram Gopal similarly blamed the Muslim aristocracy for keeping itself aloof from the English education which gave passport to government employment. According to him, Muslims were wrong to fear English education as they believed that the introduction of English was aimed at converting people to Christianity. ‘That all those Hindus who went to English schools were not lost to Hinduism evidently proves that the Muslim fear was unwarranted. The Muslims denied themselves the opportunity of receiving English education and deprived themselves of the opportunity of employment under the Government. In 1844, the Government decided to prefer for public employment those who had been educated in Western science and were familiar with the English language. Many Hindus had already equipped themselves with these qualifications, and monopolised, in the course of time, all Government services. This development caused great distress to and aroused jealousies of Muslims.’⁸²

Ram Gopal argued that it was ‘the emphasis of at early stages on the religious policies’ that was the reason for ‘lack of preparedness for higher services’. That is why Muslims were nowhere near Hindus. While it seems that he gave a religious explanation of the aloofness of Muslims from the higher education and thus, their marginalisation in government jobs, at another place he held the nature of feudal social classes responsible for keeping away from English education. Here, Ram Gopal seemed to converge with Smith who lamented the lack of middle class among the Muslims but unlike Smith, who did not hold Islam responsible for this. ‘Most Muslims of these classes were landlords; most Hindus were businessmen, traders, contractors, etc. While the former imbibed the aristocracy of the Muslim rulers, the latter had no prejudices, social or religious and freely sent their boys for higher education...The sense of preservation of the respectability of their order kept Hindu landlords away from English education longer than it did the Muslim aristocracy.’⁸³ Yet, Ram Gopal seemed to contradict himself while implying that religion was not the primary factor but the landed social class had an aversion to English education. But unlike Ram Gopal, Smith gave an economic explanation of the backwardness.

⁸¹ Chandra, Tripathi and De 2001, p. 99.

⁸² Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims: A Political History (1858-1947)*, Asian Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, p. 20.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 35.

As shown above, while the historians explained the backwardness by highlighting one dimension prominently than others. That was the basis for classification of these historians under one category or another as just a heuristic device. The very purpose of this section is to argue that there is a serious limitation of such labels in a sense that most of the historians have given more than one explanation and thus they also tended to converge on many issues. For example, I. H. Qureshi and Bipan Chandra, Aziz Ahmad, Ashok Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan in their analysis accepted the anti-Muslim policies of the British while they had different ideological and methodological orientations. Similarly, R.C. Majumdar, Ram Gopal and Bipan Chandra noted that Muslims failed to take to English education for quite some time but they would explain it in different ways. For Majumdar, it is the hostility of Muslims towards the British, while Ram Gopal explained this through religious conservatism of Islam and the lack of middle classes among the Muslims. But when it comes to the Hindu-Muslim question, Ram Gopal, Bipan Chandra, Ashok Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan would highlight the syncretic culture of Hindus and Muslims while Majumdar would talk of pre-British religious fault-line between Hindus and Muslims which the British just took advantage of. In sum, the historians among themselves would tend to differ on their emphases but at the same time would also converge on many other issues.

Conclusion

So far I have shown that the Muslims of Bengal became backward under colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. Their representation in higher education and public employment was dismal. Though the Muslims of upper India were in much better condition but they also faced increasing competition from rising Hindu middle class. As a result, they began to perceive themselves as a backward community. My study, therefore, is less concerned about proving or disproving if Muslims were really backward but more about understanding how Muslim backwardness was perceived in late nineteenth century. The cardinal question is to understand the perceptions of Muslim backwardness from (1) religious, (2) colonial and (3) middle-class Muslims' perspectives. The selection of three perceptions is not arbitrary. The issue of the backwardness or decline of Muslims increasingly came to grip the minds of Muslim

intellectuals after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. My study found that from Shah Wali-ullah (1703-1762) to Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), the issue of the decline of Muslim community figured in Muslim political and social thought. It is to be borne in mind that the discourse of Muslim backwardness played a role in the consolidation of Muslim identity. It narrated the tale of a glorious past and then contrasted the glorious past with a ruined present. Even in many contemporary history writings on the Muslims of modern India and Pakistan, the same narrative of ebb and flow has been employed. Since my focus of attention is Bengal and the North-Western Provinces and Oudh in the late nineteenth century (1871-1900), I found it convenient to divide diverse trends under three categories, which, in my view, broadly represented the prominent voices of that period.

The first discussion on religious perception is all about how the backwardness was seen from the religious lens. The views of the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) of Deoband and Nadwa seminaries are primarily studied. For the *ulama*, the Muslim decline was mainly the result of their deviation from the true path of Islam. As the Quran proclaims that the faithful will be the successful and ruler on the earth, their decline, in turn, was seen as their deviation from the faith. Besides holding religion as a cause of decline, *ulama*'s narrative, unlike those of the middle class Muslims, took an anti-colonial position and created a fault-line between the Christian British versus Indians. For the *ulama*, the domination of the British rule was not only political but also cultural.

The colonial perception of Muslim backwardness contained the views of English administrators and intellectuals working in India who articulated the view that Muslims had become a backward community and for this, both the policies of colonial government and reluctance of Muslims to adjust to the new conditions were held responsible. The reason behind the interests of colonial state in Muslim backwardness was their realization that the stability of the Empire would be in danger if Muslim masses remained alienated from their system. The radical Wahabi movements had already sounded a warning bell to the colonial state to swing into action in the second half of nineteenth century in Bengal. As a result since 1871 there was a shift in the policy of British Indian state towards Muslims.

The third view on Muslim backwardness was that of middle-class Muslims, who were first generation students of universities and employees of colonial administration and their concern was to secure their (dominant) share in higher education and public employment threatened by emergent Hindu upper castes. As it has been shown that the social and economic conditions of Muslims were regionally differentiated in India, yet these middle-class intellectuals gave an impression that Muslims as a whole had been elbowed out by Hindus. While they were very backward in Bengal against Hindus, the regions of the NWP and Oudh saw Muslims retain their hold under the new regime. But interestingly, Muslims in upper India were also perceived as falling behind due to the danger posed by the rising Hindu middle classes. Thus, the views of middle-class Muslims on their backwardness were articulated from the anxieties to secure their position in secular domain, viz., higher education and employment. But let me begin with perception of the *ulama*.

CHAPTER ONE: THE *ULAMA* AND MUSLIM BACKWARDNESS

The Ulama

Almost all the historical works on the Muslims of modern India had a discussion on their backwardness or decline in the late nineteenth century. As discussed in the last chapter, the historians generally agreed that Muslims in some regions like Bengal lagged behind Hindus in higher education and employment but they were divided over the magnitude and causes of backwardness.⁸⁴ This study, however, looks at Muslim backwardness but it tries to pose a different question. Instead of focusing on how far Muslims were backward or how far the statistical representation of decline actually corresponded to their real condition, I am attempting to understand how Muslim backwardness was perceived. This chapter is about the religious perception of Muslim backwardness in the late nineteenth century. The key protagonists of this chapter are the *ulama*⁸⁵ (Muslim scholars trained in Islam and Islamic law) as a social group. I shall mainly deal with the views of the *ulama* of the Deoband and Nadwa seminaries. In the account of these *ulama*, religion was the main cause for the decline of Muslims.

According to historian W. C. Smith, the *ulama* as a ‘formal and constituted class’ emerged ‘only in the modern period.’ They were ‘an eventual product of the transitional movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.’ In other words, the *ulama* as a social group “crystallized out” after the Mughal empire was “shattered” in the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ With the decline of Muslim power, the *ulama* entrusted themselves with the responsibility of guiding the community. Though the establishment of the Deoband

⁸⁴ While the historians of the Cambridge school would deny the fact that the British government deliberately discriminated Muslims, others would argue that Muslims, who were seen as the discontented rebels of the 1857, were “systematically suppressed”. Nationalist, Marxist, the *ulama* and two-nation theory schools generally agreed that the British followed a policy to exclude the Muslims. But it was in the writings of the *ulama* and historians working within Muslim nationalism framework who most lamented the decline of Muslims under the British rule as shown in the previous chapter.

⁸⁵ The word *ulama* is the plural of *alim*, which means one who ‘possesses *ilm* or learning. See Hardy, ‘The *Ulama* in British India’ in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Islam in South Asia: The Realm of the Tradition*, Vol. III, Manohar, New Delhi, 2008, p. 11.

⁸⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, ‘The *Ulama* in Indian Politics’ in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Islam in South Asia: The Realm of the Tradition*, Vol. III, Manohar, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 38, 42.

seminary was the first of the major efforts in this direction, the *ulama* started grappling with the Muslim backwardness since the eighteenth century. Shah Wali-ullah (1703-1762) was among the first *alim* who reflected on the decline of Muslim. His suggestion to overcome the crisis was to weed out the un-Islamic practices and turn back to the true path of Islam. Smith called Shah Wali-ullah's movement "purificatoinist" and "revivalist" in nature.⁸⁷ After him, a chain of his followers carried forward his mission. Abd al-Aziz (1746-1824), the leading religious scholar of Delhi and son of Shah Wali-ullah, declared the areas of northern India as *dar-al-harb* (abode of war), protesting against the East India Company's rule for its "interference" with the Islamic holy laws. The emergence of the Deoband Movement was the continuation of the legacy of Shah Wali-ullah and Abd al-Aziz.⁸⁸

An important feature of *ulama*'s account is their anti-colonial position and their criticism of western civilization. Unlike the middle-class Muslims, to be discussed in the third chapter, who favoured cooperation with the British rule, *ulama* narratives created the fault-line between the "Christian" and "foreign" British versus the *ulama*-led Muslims of India. The British empire, argued an official historian of the Deoband seminary, posed a threat to their religion.⁸⁹ The British not only snatched power from Muslim rulers but they also ushered in an era of domination, particularly of 'English culture, religion and western arts and sciences.' The *ulama* claimed that the introduction of new system by British rule in the field of modern arts and sciences replaced the old system in India, causing a "great upheaval".

There was no aspect of the Muslims' life which must not have been affected by the buffets of fierce and furious winds of opposition. The decline of the Mughal empire in India and the resulting anarchy had shaken, along with their political position, the very foundations of the Muslims' beliefs, thoughts and views.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Smith, 'The *Ulama*' in Hasan, ed., 2008, p. 43.

⁸⁸ The founder of Deoband was Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi who traced his intellectual heritage from Shah Wali Allah. For details, Hakim al-Islam Hazrat Maulana Qari Muhammad Tayyib, 'Introduction' in *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoban*, Vol. 1., Compiled by Sayyid Mohboob Rizvi, Translated into English by Prof. Murtaz Hussain F Quraisi, Idara-e-Ihtemam, Dar Al-ulum Deoband, 1980, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁹ Mohboob Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Deoband*, Idarah-yi Tarikh-i Deoband, 1952.

⁹⁰ *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoban*, 1980, p. 104.

According to *ulama*'s account, Hindus and Muslims waged a war against the British government in the 1857 to overcome the looming danger from the British rule. However, it was Muslims (the *ulama*) who provided the leadership in the 1857 Uprising, said Islamic scholar Abul Hsan Ali Nadwi.⁹¹ For example, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi, the founder of the Deoband seminary, took an "active part" at Shamli town in 1857 revolt. Qasim was the commander of the forces that 'took it from the retreating British troops.' Soon the British were able to restore its rule in Delhi and the little Nanautavi ran away to Mecca via Karachi in order to evade his arrest. However, he returned to India when Queen Victoria gave general amnesty to all those who took part in the 1857.⁹²

One could notice a similarity between the narratives of the old historiography (discussed in the introduction) and that of the *ulama*. Both presented the post-Mughal period as that of "Muslim decay". Moreover, the narrative of *ulama* projected themselves as uncompromising anti-imperialist. Therefore, the event of 1857 figured prominently in their account. However, historian Peter Hardy problematized *ulama*'s narrative. He argued that the anti-colonial posture of the *ulama* was built up in the post-Independent India. This was deliberately done to construct the image of "nationalist" *ulama* opposed to the British rule. However, the reality, in Hardy's view, was that they were more concerned about religious issues than waging a fight against the British rule. 'A survey of some of the many collections of *fatawa* by leading *ulama* in the nineteenth century shows that it was Islamic religious issues rather than the British presence which engrossed the attention of the *ulama*'⁹³ Similarly, historian Mushir U. Haq, questioning the claim of the *ulama* to have participated in 1857, said that the *ulama* as a class joined politics only after 1919. 'Upto the second decade of the 20th century no one cared to find out whether the *ulama* as a group had taken any part in the upheaval of 1857. Even *ulama* themselves did not claim that they had participated in the struggle. It was 1919 before the *ulama* as a class entered Indian politics, founding a politico-religious organization known as the

⁹¹ S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Muslims in India*, translated from Urdu by Mohammad Asif Kidwai, Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Nadwatul *Ulama*, Lucknow, n.d., pp. 108-109.

⁹² S. Abid Husain, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Asian Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p. 42-43. See also Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964*, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p. 28.

⁹³ Hardy, 'The *Ulama*' in Hasan, ed., *Islam in South Asia*, 2008, p. 23.

Jamiyat-i-Ulama-i-Hind (The Party of the Indian *Ulama*). Partly to prove that they were following the tradition of those *ulama* of the 19th century who, according to their understanding, participated in political activities and had organized and led political agitation for freedom from the British.’⁹⁴, Barbara Daly Metcalf, a historian of Islam in South Asian, too called the 1857 account of the *ulama* exaggerated.⁹⁵

But let me clarify that the main concern of this chapter is not to carry out an enquiry into their position viz-a-viz the British rule and their involvement in the 1857. Rather, I am attempting to understand how they themselves understood the decline.

The *Ulama* after the 1857

In the section above, I discussed the *ulama* as a social group, which emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the wake of the decline of Mughal state and domination by the British rule and a looming threat to their culture from western civilization, the *ulama* as a class came out to lead the Muslim community. But the defeat at the hands of the British rule in the 1857 put a serious question over their strategy.⁹⁶ The post-1857 period saw *ulama* leaving for *qasba* from the seat of power, viz., Delhi with a view to the preservation and spread of Islamic teachings. On May 30 in 1866 the Dar al-Ulum, Deoband in Saharanpur District was established. Deoband, thus, became the new centre for learning that replaced the Delhi School of Shah Abdul Aziz, which was closed down during the 1857.⁹⁷ The Deoband movement was mainly concerned about the preservation of “Muslim culture” by producing an army of the *ulama* who would be guiding the society in the light of the Quran.⁹⁸ Thus, the syllabus of Deoband seminary exclusively focused on the Islamic teachings and it did not include modern education because the *ulama* held that there were many institutions established by the

⁹⁴ Mushir U. Haq *Muslim Politics in Modern India 1857: 1947*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, India, 1970, p. 4.

⁹⁵ Metcalf argues that ‘As does any crisis, the Munity throws the pattern of social relations into high relief. It clearly illustrates, for example, the limits of the influence of the *‘ulama*. In certain regions, such as Oudh, their role was minor compared to that of the landlords, who could mobilize money and troops.’ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, p 81.

⁹⁶ One group of the *ulama* preferred to go into exile to Mecca with Haji Imdadullah, and the other group under the leadership of Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi decided to set up a madrasa at Deoband in Saharanpur District. See, Husain 1965, p. 42.

⁹⁷ Ibid..

⁹⁸ Metcalf 1982, p. 86.

British rule which were imparting modern education but no provision for imparting Islamic education had been made. Therefore, the Deoband seminary focused on the Islamic and traditional knowledge. Thus, the aims and objectives of Dar al-Ulum Deoband stated '[1] To Teach the Holy Quran, the Quranic exegesis, the Hadith, the Islamic beliefs and their dialectical interpretation, and all the necessary and useful allied subjects: to provide complete Islamic information to the Muslims; and to render service to Islam through spiritual instruction, guidance and preaching. [2] To give training in Islamic actions and morals and to infuse the Islamic spirit in the lives of the students. [3] To preach and disseminate Islam and to preserve and defend the religion; to propagate Islam through writing and speech; and to cultivate in the Muslims, through education and preaching the morals, actions and sentiments as those of "the best of decades" (khayr al-qarun) and the pious ancestors. [4] To keep off and avoid the influence of the government and to maintain the freedom of thought and knowledge. [5] To establish Arabic schools at different places for the dissemination of the religious sciences and to affiliate them to the Dar al-Ulum.'

⁹⁹

With passing of the time, the Deoband movement achieved a considerable success and came to become one of the prominent voices of the Muslims of India. Dar al-Ulum began 'so humbly, with utter lack of equipment[s]', became an important learning centre of Islamic sciences such as the Shari'ah and the *Tariqa* (Spiritual path), attracting students from all Asia and Africa, viz., Afghanistan, Iran, Bukhara, and Samarqand, Burma (Myanmar), Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey.¹⁰⁰

However, the Deoband seminary did not remain for long free of criticism. A new group of the *ulama* emerged who began to show their differences with the Deoband, despite the fact that they also appreciated its role.¹⁰¹ This resulted in the foundation of the Darul-uloom Nadwatul *Ulama* in Lucknow in 1894. While Nadwa shared much of the

⁹⁹ *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband* 1980, p. 108.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 41.

¹⁰¹ S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, who was director of Nadwatul *Ulama*, praised the Deoband school. 'Beneficial efforts of the reformist endeavors of the Ulema emerging from Deoband are evident in the religious life of Indian Muslims. Their efforts have been particularly praiseworthy in the branches of conceptual rectification, the weeding out of innovation from the faith, religious preaching and propagation and the rebuttal of charges leveled against Islam by malicious critics through discussion and debate. A number of Deoband men have made their mark in politics. They were in the vanguard of the struggle for freedom also.' See, S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Muslims in India*, translated from Urdu by Mohammad Asif Kidwai, Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Nadwatul *Ulama*, Lucknow, 1972. 89.

narrative of the *ulama* of Deoband, yet the *ulama* of Nadwa indirectly criticized the Deoband Seminary for being averse to change. Instead, Nadwa from the very beginning was in favour of pursuing ‘balanced and moderate course.’

Explaining the difference with the old *madrassa*, Abul Hasan Nadwi said. ‘Ignoring with equal severity the view of the older *madrassas* [the Deoband seminary] that to depart in the smallest degree from ancient learning was a transgression and sin, and of the modern universities that, apart from modern knowledge, everything in the domain of knowing and learning was absurd and worthless, the Nadwa was planned from the earliest to pursue a balanced and moderate course. Its founders were suspicious of extremism, both ancient and modern, and considered the mental and social exclusiveness and rigidity of the Ulema and their juristic dissensions and fine disputations as highly detrimental to Islam and the Muslims.’¹⁰² In other words, the Nadwa claimed to reach a “synthesis” between the old and new schools.¹⁰³ That is why the *ulama* of Nadwa were in favour of working with “broadmindedness” and “tolerance” to iron out difference and disputations over the *fiqh*. Nadwa also worked to bring together the different factions of the Muslims in order to forge a unity. However, when it came to the faith, the *ulama* of the Nadwa called it “eternal” and “absolute”. The syllabus of the Nadwa gave primary attention to the teachings of the Quran ‘as an eternal programme of life.’ That is why, the teaching of Arabic language was stressed and attempts were made to treat it as a “living language”. These lines of the poem by the nineteenth century famous Urdu poet Akbar Allahbadi (1846-1921) too acknowledged the service of the Nadwa for the [Arabic] language.

An illuminated heart is Deoband;
And Nadwah is a clear tongue;¹⁰⁴

Besides, the major objective of the Nadwa was ‘to produce preachers and interpreters of Islam who could present the faith to the present-day world in a striking

¹⁰² Nadwi, *Muslims in India*, p. 93.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 93.

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Metcalf, 1982, p. 315. The author did not mention the original poem in Urdu.

manner and in a form and language it could understand.¹⁰⁵ One could see here how the Nadwa, like the Deoband, stressed the importance of preaching and spread of Islam by the *ulama*. This response was precisely to the threat posed by the British rule and western civilisation that became acute in nineteenth century.

The Decline

As stated above, in the narratives of the *ulama*, religion was held as the primary cause of the decline of Muslims, yet the British rule and western civilization also came in for sharp criticism for posing a threat to Muslim identity and Islam. According to writings of the *ulama* of the Nadwa, since the beginning of modern period (from the second half of fifteenth century), the west was on the rise (*'uruq*), while the east was in decline.¹⁰⁶ The British, who sought permission to trade in India from the Mughal Emperor in the seventeenth century, began to interfere in domestic politics. The British did not miss the opportunity to grab power after the void created by the decline of the Mughal Empire in the early eighteenth century. Their explanation of the reason behind the rise of the British power in India was linked to the decline of morality among Muslims.

As the *ulama* stated, it was the period of advancement for Europe. Unfortunately, the successors of Aurangzeb were “incapable” (*naahl*), “low-minded” or “mean-spirited” (*past himmat*) and “pleasure-seekers” (*'aish parast*). Not to speak of fighting against the danger posed by Europe, even post-Aurangzeb Mughal rulers were not able to protect their empire. And their incapability, weakness and [mutual] differences were causes of the establishment of the British empire in India, the accumulation of British wealth, and industrial revolution. This also indirectly resulted in the slavery of the Muslim countries.¹⁰⁷ The first major success for the British was the Battle of Plassey (1757) when the Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah was defeated. Thus began the process of carrying the spoil (*mal-e-ganimat*) of Bengal to England. The result of this plunder was the Industrial Revolution whose impact was felt in every part of the world.¹⁰⁸ In the realm of culture too, it, said the *ulama*, was a critical moment when the western culture (*tahzib*) was

¹⁰⁵ S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi 1966, p. 94.

¹⁰⁶ Nadwi, *Tarikh-e- Nadwatul Ulama*, 2011, p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Nadwi 2011, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 22.

eroding old tradition (*purani riwayat*). The Christian Missionaries were attacking Islam.¹⁰⁹ The Christian missionaries were allowed to enter India during the period of Clive and Hastings. Their entries increased after the fall of Bengal and Madras. The padre got involved in preaching with a desire to see churches thronged with Indians.¹¹⁰ Besides, the centres of arts and sciences were crumbling. Libraries were eaten up by worms. As a result of western education that brainwashed the minds of people, the grip of traditional education over Muslim society got loosened.¹¹¹

The *ulama* would have us believe that the British intensified their hostility to Muslims with each passing day. This led to migration of some of the *ulama* such as Hazrat Shah Muhammad Isahq Dehelvi to Mecca in 1841 and Hazrat Shah Abd al-Ghani to Madina in 1857. Meanwhile, the *ulama* said, the reputation of Delhi being ‘the centre of arts and sciences for six hundred years lost its glory and the garden of the science of Hadith that Hazrat Shah Wali Allah had laid out in its last epoch wilted under the simoom of vicissitude.’¹¹²

The state of the depression of Muslims was contrasted with the relatively better position of the Hindus. The *ulama* of Deoband argued that Hindus were promoted by the British because they wanted to set them against Muslims. ‘A dangerous conspiracy hatched by the English government was that it set the Hindus against the Muslims. The Muslims had once [had] political importance and supremacy in India. The English, now, under their policy, pushed up the Hindus and brought down the Muslims. When the Hindus advanced in the economic and political fields, the English prompted them towards the path of religious superiority and prepared them to break lance with the Muslims, and also provided the opportunities for this that the Hindus polemicise with the Muslims openly.’¹¹³ The *ulama* of Nadwa, similarly, argued that the British favoured Hindus and were harsh on Muslims. An account by a scholar associated with the Nadwa:

When the foreigners [the British] came to India and snatched power from the Muslim rulers. It was natural then that the Muslims should have come forward to take on the British as Islam did

¹⁰⁹ S Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, ‘Pesh-e-Lafz’ in Nadwi, 2011, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Nadwi 2011, p. 40.

¹¹¹ S Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, ‘Pesh-e-Lafz’ in Nadwi, 2011, p. 9.

¹¹² *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband*, 1980, p. 105.

¹¹³ *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband*, 1980, p. 89.

not permit slavery. The *ulama*, therefore, thought it necessary to fight imperialism (*smrajiyat*). On this basis, the *ulama* had led the Muslim masses at every stage of freedom struggle and offered them a wise leadership. The *ulama* continued to fight against the British and did not leave them remain secured...On the other hand, the British never felt any threat from the Hindus (*biradaran-i-watan*) and rather they [the British] considered them [the Hindus] as well-wishers (*khair khwah*) and offered them concession. But the Muslims always considered the British as their enemy and at one point of time the Muslims and the traitor (*ghaddar*) to the British rule was synonymous. This is the very basis of the British fight (*aawezish*) against the Muslims.¹¹⁴

However, if one tries to read the account of Hindu nationalists in the late nineteenth century one would find a similar narrative. While the *ulama* believed that the British did not perceive any threat from Hindus, the Hindu nationalists welcomed the British as “liberators” from the “tyranny” of the Muslims. Sudhir Chandra showed such an anti-Muslim consciousness in the late nineteenth century Hindi literature.¹¹⁵

As the writings of the *ulama* pointed the finger at the British rule and its anti-Muslim policies, one may get the impression that they seemed to externalize the cause of the Muslim backwardness. But in my reading, the *ulama* primarily held the deviation from the true path of Islam as the cause of Muslim backwardness. For example, in the account of the *ulama* of Deoband, the post-Mughal period saw the erosion of the morality. The *ulama* detailed the deviation from the faith of Islam: ‘along with the decline of the Mughal Empire in India, the values of Islamic life too had been impaired. Polytheism, heretical innovations, customs and usages had displaced the simple and natural principles of Islam. The pure belief of Divine Unity (monotheism) which is the very core, the very soul, of the Islamic belief had become languorous due to the incessant open and insidious inroads of polytheism and heresy.’¹¹⁶ The *ulama* seemed to contrast the decayed social order to the earlier period when people faithfully observed the principles of religion.¹¹⁷ Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi rued the loss of piety among the Muslims.

¹¹⁴ Faisal Ahmad Nadvi Bhatkali, *Tahrik-i-Aazadi main Ulama ka Kirdar*, Majlis-i-Tahqiqat-o-Nashryat-i-Islam, Lucknow, 2006, pp. 51-52.

¹¹⁵ Sudhir Chandra, ‘Communal Consciousness’ in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1985.

¹¹⁶ *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband*, 1980, p. 107.

¹¹⁷ Nadwi 2011, p. 41.

مسلمانوں کی اخلاقی حالت اتنی گرچی تھی کہ فسق و معصیت کی بہت سی باتیں آداب و تہذیب میں داخل ہو گئی تھیں، اربابِ نشاط کا ہر طرف دور دورہ تھا، امراء اور متوسط طبقہ سے لے کر غرباء تک اسی معاشرت کا شکار تھے، احکامِ شریعت کو بالائے طاق پر رکھ کر خود ساختہ رسوم اور بدعات کو دین کا جز بنا یا گیا تھا، قرآن مجید چیتاں سمجھا جانے لگا، جس کا سمجھنا اور سمجھانا، اس پر غور و تدبر کرنا غیر علماء کی لئے ناممکن اور شجر ممنوع قرار دے دیا گیا تھا، شجاعت و دلیری، حوصلہ مندی، غیرت و حمیت، اور دوسری اعلیٰ صفات حقیر مقاصد میں صرف ہو رہی تھی۔

The elements of vicious and immoral conduct (*fisq*) and disobedience infested the good manners and culture of Muslims. Pleasure-seekers (*arbab-e-nishat*) were found everywhere. From the rich (*umra*), middle classes (*mutawassit tabqa*) to the poor all fell prey to this [decayed] social order. The decrees (*ahkam*) of Islamic laws were not followed. Self-invented (*khud sakhta*) rituals, and innovations (*bidyat*) were made the components (*juz*) of Islam. The Quran was perceived to be a puzzle and those who were not religious scholars, were forbidden to study it. Courage, bravery, honour and other good qualities were lost on useless purposes.¹¹⁸

In other words, the decline in morality led to the political decline of Muslims. Thus, the Nadwa did not believe, like the Aligarth movement, that the advancement in higher education and jobs by learning English education and western knowledge was the correct remedy for overcoming this crisis. Rather, the Nadwa movement like the Deoband stressed the religious cause for the Muslim decline.

اس تحریک کی اساس علی گڑھ کی تعلیم جدید اور تہذیب مغربی کی دعوت اور ملک کی دوسری تحریکوں کے برخلاف خالص دینی تھی، یعنی اس میں مسلمانوں کے تنزل کا اصلی سبب دین سے انحراف اور صحیح دینی تعلیم سے محرومی کو قرار دیا گیا ہے۔

As opposed to Aligarh Movement's education and its promotion of western civilisation and many other movements, the base of Nadwa was purely religious. In Nadwa's view, the primary cause of decline of Muslim was their deviation from religion and deprivation from true Islamic teachings.¹¹⁹

The reason behind the *ulama* holding deviation from Islam as the main cause of Muslim decline was the proclamation by the Quran that those who would be faithful will

¹¹⁸ S Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, cited in Nadwi, 2011 pp. 25-26.

¹¹⁹ Nadwi 2011, p. 45.

also succeed on earth. ‘Allah has promised those among you who believe, and do righteous good deeds, that He will certainly grant them succession to (the present rulers) in the earth, as He granted it to those before them, and that He will grant them the authority to practise their religion, that which He has chosen for them (i.e. Islam). And He will surely give them in exchange a safe security after their fear (provided) they (believers) worship Me and do not associate anything (in worship) with Me. But whoever disbelieved after this, they are the Fasiqun (rebellious, disobedient to Allah).’¹²⁰ Thus the decline in the worldly-life was the result of the decline in morality. According to Hardy, this was the very reason that the *ulama* since the eighteenth century stressed the need to become virtuous for regaining the lost position. The decline of the Mughal empire and subsequent rise of the non-Muslims like the Maratha and the Sikhs was the moment when the cry for ‘more purist Islam’ began because the decline was seen as the result of the failure to hold on to the principle of religion. Hardy explained it, ‘The Quran proclaimed that God confided the world to his righteous servants; the eighteenth-century scene suggested that Muslims were losing command of the world: therefore, the religiously-inspired logic ran, they were doing so because they were no longer righteous’.¹²¹ In the view of Nadwa, the *ulama* who had to provide the leadership in society, should have the knowledge of religious teachings but they should also be familiar with the modern education as well. As a result, Nadwa incorporated some of the elements of modern education in its syllabus and tried to become a bridge between the traditional and modern schools. It is to be noted that the *ulama* also showed its differences with the modernist Aligarh movement for its failure to teach students Islamic values.¹²² They established an Islamic seminary and focused on traditional learning. The Muslim society went for the Islamic revivalism when new challenges were posed by colonialism and western science and English education. This resulted in Muslims turning inward-looking. *Ulama* also came to privilege “scriptualist” notion of the religion over local or syncretic ones. Noted

¹²⁰ Surah 24 An-Nur, verse 55, *The Noble Quran*, translated into English by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, King Fahad Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, Madinah, K.S.A., n.d., p. 400.

¹²¹ Hardy 1972, p. 28.

¹²² Nadwi 2011.

anthropologist Clifford Geertz¹²³ in his study of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia, showed how under the threat from colonialism the Muslim society became inward-looking and scripturalist in its approach to religion. Barbara Daly Metcalf in her important work on the Deoband movement provided some insights to understand Islamic revivalism in India. Metcalf said that the Muslim states earlier worked as protectors of Muslim interest but once the political power was snatched by the British, the serious question before Muslims was who would lead them now. As stated above, the Islamic scholars saw this period of decline as a result of “individual moral corruption”. And therefore, the remedy was to overcome such moral weakness and become a true Muslim. Thus, a Muslim had to fight against his/her moral corruption at an individual level.¹²⁴ Metcalf elaborated on this,

...in seeking to define individual morality on the basis of a return of true Islam, the movements have eschewed customary practices, tending to be “scripturalist” in returning to the written records of the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet.¹²⁵

Another important scholar of Islam in South Asia, Francis Robinson, offered an interesting formulation to understand this whole process. For him, the concern of the *ulama* of Deoband to focus on moral correction at individual level was linked to ‘a shift in the focus of Muslim piety from the next world to this one’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹²⁶ ‘Operating at the heart of this process of religious change was the increasing assumption by individual Muslims of responsibility for creating Muslim society on earth—a great and heavy responsibility.’¹²⁷

In short, the *ulama* of Deoband decided to migrate to *qasba* and their main concern was to protect “Muslim culture” and produce an army of *ulama* who would be guiding the society in the light of the Quran.¹²⁸ That is why the syllabus of Deoband seminary exclusively focused on Islamic teachings and did not include modern education because it held that there were many institutions established by the British rule which

¹²³ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1968.

¹²⁴ Metcalf 1982, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Metcalf 1982, pp. 5-6.

¹²⁶ Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p. 105.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 106.

¹²⁸ Metcalf 1982, p. 86.

were imparting such western education while the British state had made no provision for imparting Islamic education. Therefore, the Deoband seminary focused on Islamic and traditional knowledge.

Women and Backwardness

The *ulama* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries wrote a lot on the need to educate women in order to address the backward condition of Muslim society. One of them was Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanvi (1863 –1943). He was born in an Ashraf Muslim family in Muzaffarnagar and became a prominent Deobandi scholar of the Quran and the Hadith. But he is best known for his work the *Bihishti Zevar* (the Ornaments of Paradise published in 1905).

Thanvi's work is a 'compendium of useful knowledge for women, a guide not only to learning but to the pious life.'¹²⁹ What was the need to write such book for women? Thanvi himself answered this,

For many years, I watched the ruination of the religion of the women of Hindustan and was heartsick because of it. I struggled to find a cure, worried because that ruin was not limited to religion but had spread to everyday matters as well. It went beyond the women to their children and in many respects even had its effects on their husbands. To judge from the speed with which it progressed, it seemed that if reform did not come soon, the disease would be nearly incurable. . . [T]he cause of this ruination is nothing other than women's ignorance of the religious sciences. This lack corrupts their beliefs, their deeds, their dealing with other people, their character, and the whole manner of their social life. . . I have for some time, therefore, realized that in order to manage women, it is absolutely necessary to teach them the science of religion—even if it must be through the medium of Urdu.¹³⁰

What worried Thanvi was women's ignorance about Islam and he considered it a major social problem for Muslim society. Thanvi held that ignorant women were likely to have an adverse impact on their husbands and children. In other words, the book was aimed at disciplining and controlling the women. In short, the religious scholars and Muslim intellectuals also saw the link between the backwardness of Muslim community and the ignorance of women about religious knowledge. Thus, education for women within the framework of Islam was one of the remedies for overcoming the condition of decline.

¹²⁹ Minault 1998, pp. 62.

¹³⁰ Ibid. pp. 62-63.

As discussed above, the remedies offered by the *ulama* to Muslims masses was to hold on to true path of Islam and remain a pious Muslim at an individual level. Such a course of action was taken by the *ulama* of Deoband seminary after the British crushed 1857 rebels. The *ulama* thought that the best possible course of action under the foreign rule was to maintain their Muslim identity and culture. In other words, the *ulama* of Deoband seminary remained aloof from the colonial institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the religious perceptions of Muslim backwardness through the writings of the *ulama*. They blamed the loss of individual piety for the decline of Muslims. Besides, they also saw the British empire as a threat to Muslim culture and religion. The next chapter will discuss how the colonial state understood backwardness and how the writings of colonial administrators and intellectuals shaped the discourse. As argued above, it was colonial administrator W. W. Hunter who first argued that Muslims in Bengal had become backward. Hunter along with other English writers was responsible for influencing the public opinion around the idea of Muslim backwardness. The Muslim middle-classes drew heavily on the writings of colonial intellectuals to contend that Muslims had got ruined under the British rule, a point to which I shall come in chapter three. But before that I shall discuss the reflections of colonial administrators and intellectuals on Muslim backwardness.

CHAPTER TWO

COLONIAL PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIM BACKWARDNESS

Muslims a 'Ruined Race'

The discussion of Muslim backwardness would not be complete unless the perceptions of the colonial administrators and intellectuals are taken into account. Lord Mayo's Resolution¹³¹ of 1871 officially said that Muslims had become backward in many provinces of British India. It just repeated the views of colonial administrators and intellectuals, who had already sparked off a discourse on Muslim backwardness. One should not forget that W.W. Hunter, the key architect of this discourse, was asked by Mayo himself to write a book on the condition of Muslims. This clearly indicated the connection between the view of Hunter and government's new policy towards Muslims initiated in 1871. Put differently, what Hunter wrote was broadly within the framework of the government and the new policy of government, in turn, got justified by writings of Hunter and others. As for the motive behind such a policy, a number of reasons were given. For example, historian Tazeen M. Murshid rejected the view of "nationalist Hindu historians" that post-1871 British policy was somehow unconditionally more favourable to Muslims than towards Hindus. Instead, he contended that the British policy was interested in 'creating a counter-intelligentsia to increasingly nationalistic Hindu *bhadralok*, it made sure that this intelligentsia remained a weaker one so that it could be placated and protected.'¹³²

¹³¹ 'From statistics recently submitted to the Governor General in Council, it is evident that in no part of the country, except perhaps the North-Western Provinces and the Punjab, do the Mahomedans adequately, or in proportion to the rest of the community, avail themselves of the educational advantages that the Government offers. It is much to be regretted that so large and important a class, possessing a classical literature replete with works of profound learning and great value, and counting among its members a section specially devoted to the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge, should stand aloof from active co-operation with our educated system and should lose the advantages, both material and social, which others enjoy.' See 'Extract from the Proceedings of the Government of India in the Home Department (Education), -- No. 300 under date Simla, the 7th August 1871' in *Correspondences*, 1886, p. 152.

¹³² Tazeen M. Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslims Discourses, 1871-1977*, 1995, Oxford University Press, p. 26.

Rafiuddin Ahmed, on the other hand, rightly called the Mayo Resolution as a beginning of a “new phase” in British policy which was prepared to act as a balm to “profound disaffection” among Muslims noticed during the Wahabi Trials (1870-71).¹³³

In 1869, much before Hunter and Mayo, Rev. James Long,¹³⁴ who worked in Bengal under the Church Missionary Society for the promotion of vernacular languages and inculcating scientific spirit, said Muslims in Bengal had become backward. Presenting a paper on ‘The Social Condition of the Muhammadans of Bengal’ before The Bengal Social Science Association on 21st January 1869, he stated,

‘...it is evident that all over Bengal the Mussalmans are gradually deteriorating.

The finger of decay appears on the relating to Muhammadanism in India, whether we look at their crumbling palaces or debased social condition; their nobility are vanishing like the old French *noblesse*, while the descendants of the once mighty rulers of the land eke out a miserable pittance, living in the light of other days.¹³⁵

In short, Muslims in Bengal, in Rev. Long’s view, were

Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen—

Fallen from its high estate.¹³⁶

One of the manifestation of Muslim backwardness, according to Rev. Long, was that ‘the Mussalmans have lost the employments they held as conquerors of the empire.’¹³⁷ Besides, he stressed the need to collect statistical figures on the backwardness: ‘We are greatly in need of statistics in reference to the social condition of

¹³³ Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 51, 147.

¹³⁴ Rev. James Long also worked with The Bengal Social Science Association (1867-1878), which was affiliated to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences in Great Britain. His intellectual pursuit was aimed at the promotion of vernacular education in India and ‘stimulating social science consciousness among Bengali youth in Calcutta. Nawab Abdul Latif, one of the most important Muslim intellectual who would figure in chapter three, too was involved in the Bengal Social Science Association. For details see, Bela Dutta Gupta, *Sociology in India: An Enquiry into Sociological Thinking and Empirical Social Research in the Nineteenth Century—with Special Reference to Bengal*, Center For Sociological Research, Calcutta, 1972.

¹³⁵ Long, ‘The Social’ in Gupta, *Sociology in India*, 1972, p. 130.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 131.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 131.

the Muhammadans in Bengal; one fact is patent — they have degenerated, are degenerating, and will sink to a still lower depth, unless steps are taken to remedy what must be an evil attended with serious consequences.’¹³⁸

Like Rev. Long, Hunter mourned that ‘in all other respects they [the Muslims of Bengal] are a race ruined under British rule’¹³⁹ and a ‘chronic sense of wrong which has grown up in the hearts of the Musalmans under British rule.’¹⁴⁰

Nature of Backwardness

Hunter said that the Muslims were able to retain the lion’s share of “state patronage” some fifty years back (until 1820s) but then their condition deteriorated. For Hunter, it was the Cornwallis Code that was responsible for ending ‘this monopoly less violently in the Judicial than in the Revenue departments.’¹⁴¹ That space was, in turn, “filled” by the Hindus, who came to swamp “every grade of official life”.¹⁴² ‘Even in the District Collectorate of Lower Bengal, where it is still possible to give appointments in the old-fashioned friendly way, there are very few Musalman officials.’¹⁴³

Apart from arguing that Muslims were negligible in government employment, Hunter also narrated the condition of “decaying aristocracy” of Muslims. He claimed to “personally” know several such “ancient” families who were now in ruins and debts. Hunter bemoaned that it was almost impossible for a well-born Muslim to become poor a hundred years back but they had later become impoverished. Moreover, he detailed the nature of Muslim backwardness.

If ever a people stood in need of a career, it is the Musalman aristocracy of Lower Bengal. Their old sources of wealth have run dry. They can no longer sack the stronghold of a neighbouring Hindu nobleman, send out a score of troopers to pillage the peasantry; leave tolls upon travelling merchants; purchase exemption through a friend at Court from their land-tax; raise a revenue by local cesses on marriages, births, harvest-homes, and every other incident of rural life; collect the excise on their own behoof, with further gratifications for winking at the

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 137.

¹³⁹ Hunter 2002, p. 144.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 140.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 158.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid. pp.158-159.

sale of forbidden liquors during the sacred month of Ramazan. The administration of the Imperial Taxes was the first great source of income in Bengal, and the Musalman aristocracy monopolized it. The Police was another great source of income, and the Police was officered by Muhammadans. The Courts of Law were a third great source of income, and the Musalmans monopolized them. Above all, there was the army, an army not officered by gentlemen who make little more than bank interest on the price of their commissions, but a great confederation of conquerors who enrolled their peasantry into troops and drew pay from the State for them as soldiers. A hundred and seventy years ago it was almost impossible for a well-born Musalman in Bengal to become poor, at present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich.¹⁴⁴

In other words, he explained that Muslim aristocracy had earlier enjoyed monopoly in employment in areas of military command, the collection of revenue, and judiciary.¹⁴⁵ But things had become unfavorable for Muslims. First, the army had been “completely closed”. Second, the British Land Revenue system, which was initiated by the policies of Lord Cornwallis and John Shore and which resulted in the Permanent Settlement in 1793, gave a blow to the Muslim aristocracy.

By it we [the British rule] usurped the functions of those higher Musalman Officers who had formerly subsisted between the actual Collector and the Government, and whose dragoons were the recognised machinery for enforcing the Land Tax.¹⁴⁶

The introduction of English collectors replaced Musalman Revenue-farmers with their troops and spearmen, ‘we [the British rule] placed an English Collector in each district.’ The Settlement also led to the elevation of the Hindu collectors. Apart from that, the system of the Permanent Settlement proved beneficial to the ‘land-holders the subordinated Hindu officers who dealt directly with the husbandmen.’¹⁴⁷

The third area in which Muslim aristocracy, in Hunter’s view, had “monopoly” was judiciary. ‘The third source of their greatness was their monopoly of Judicial, Political, or in brief Civil Employ. It would be unfair to lay much stress on the circumstances, but it is nevertheless a significant fact, that none of the native gentlemen who have won their way into the Covenanted Civil Service, or up to the bench of the High Court, are Musalmans. Yet for some time after the country passed under our care, the Musalmans retained all the functions of Government in their own hands.’¹⁴⁸ In short,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 149-150.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. 150-151.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. 153-154.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 154.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 157-158.

both Long and Hunter showed how the Muslims had fallen behind in employment and higher education and their dominant position had become a thing of past. Now the next question before Long and Hunter was to identify the sources of problem. In other words, who was to blame for the decline?

Backwardness: Whom to Blame?

Rev. Long and Hunter, in my reading, held both British government and Muslims responsible for this. In the writings of Long and Hunter a difference of stress can be observed. While in Hunter's writing British government and Muslims came under attack, the target of Long was to a very large extent confined to the British government. Long's criticism of Muslims was that they indulged in 'a style of luxury and living quite incompatible with their means.'¹⁴⁹ Hunter also made a similar attack. The basic argument of Rev. Long was that the British rule would not be able to secure peace and security if Muslims continued to remain in a state of despair. Thus, the British, in Rev. Long's view, should have taken ameliorative measures and remedies as to win over Muslims. Some of the key suggestions of Long were as follows.

First, he criticised a centralised or universal approach in all matters, given the vastness of India. Instead, he advocated some special measures, what we call today differentiated rights, for Muslims as they had a distinct history and culture.

The great question is---Is India to be regarded as one country to which you can apply one great system of centralization, or is it to be regarded as a collection of nationalities, like Europe, to be treated on the Federal principle? The former had been applied to the Muhammadans, and hence no regard had been paid to their specialities.

...Moore, the historian, remarks of the Irish Celts, as a remarkable result, "that after many successful invasions by foreign tribes, the great bulk of the nation itself—its language, character, and institutions—should have remained so free from change, that even the conquering tribes themselves should have been mingled with the general mass."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Long, 'The Social' in Gupta, 1972, p. 131.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. pp.138-139.

Rev. Long asked the British government to take measures for ameliorating the conditions of the Muslims. In support of his demand, he referred to the “reversal of policy” of Aurangzeb that “incensed” Hindus and resulted in the formation of the Mahratta power that toppled the mighty Mughal Empire.¹⁵¹ The “anti-Hindu” policy of Aurungzeb was a cautionary tale for the government that they should not keep Muslim alienated and antagonized otherwise they might become a devastating “hurricane”. ‘A socially degraded people cannot be a contented one they may appear so, but it is only the temporary repose of the volcano—the lull indicative of the approaching hurricane.’¹⁵² He dismissed the idea that discontented Muslims might be suppressed by brute force.¹⁵³ Long cautioned the government against repeating the blunder of remaining ignorant about the Muslims in Bengal who appeared “weak and without energy” because ‘they are connected by descent, religion, and trade, and above all, by a common misfortune of being equally under the Kafir yoke [British government], with the hardy races of other parts of India.’¹⁵⁴ In other words, he categorically stated that the Muslims felt bitter about the British.

Thus he asked government to swing into action as the sense of despair of Muslims might compel them to join the array of the Ferazis and Wahabis.¹⁵⁵

Long favoured imparting education in Arabic, Persian and English. On this, Long said:

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 133.

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 133.

¹⁵³ Long said: ‘Of course, to some it appears a solution of the present policy to say, “Keep down the Muhammadans by the sword.” Or as Alfred St. Clare says in the “Uncle Tom” of the American slaves, “Of course they must be kept down steadily, consistently.” You cannot repress 30,000,000—a population ten times as numerous as that of Scotland. You cannot oppose the great law, that force without enlightenment is the mother of rebellion. You cannot treat this immense number, equal to the population of France, as Helots or Pariahs. One of the greatest writers of the day has said “There is no sure foundation set on blood.”’ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵⁵ Long argued: ‘The history of the Ferazis and Wahabis clearly shows that Muhammadalism is not dead, but sleeping.

The Wahabis sprung (sic) from that remarkable association founded in the deserts of Arabia a century ago by Abdul Wahib—a species of Moslem Puritanism which has since spread along the Persian Gulf to India, and even to Bengal. In Bengal, like other sect, they are chiefly composed of the middle classes—of the sons of tailors, butchers, hide merchants, petty traders, shopkeepers and ryotss. There are few of the upper classes belonging to them, excepting the Begum of Bhopal and the Nawab of Tonk.’ Ibid. p. 135.

‘Surely, without depreciating the English, the Persian and Arabic have their claim also, as well as the Sanskrit. They are not only brought into the staple of the Hindustani, the lingua franca of India, but they form the key for communication with the majority of natives in North India and Central Asia.’¹⁵⁶

He was critical of the fact that English was imposed on the natives, particularly Muslims who believed that it was their “religious duty” to study Arabic and Persian. Such language policy was working as an impediment in the path of the natives to get public employment. Long then asked, ‘Are we, for the sake of swelling our lists, and gratifying the pride of pedagogues, to enforce the English Test Act, and thus to violate one of the essential principles on which we hold India—giving the natives a large share in the administration of their own country, and thus creating a joint interest with us in the land, identifying their interests with ours?’¹⁵⁷

Long was in support of giving encouragement to Arabic and Persian among Europeans.¹⁵⁸ He dissuaded the government from suppressing the languages of Muslims in India as it had done in Ireland. He was very critical of the “worst” policy of Britain in Ireland where it had founded chairs in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, German and French but it did not have a chair of the Celtic language, the language of Ireland.¹⁵⁹ However, he expressed his happiness that the government was ‘encouraging the combined study of Persian and English.’¹⁶⁰

He supported imparting education through Muslim vernacular. Besides, he also spoke in favour of compensating the Muslims in education and employment for their “inferiority” in “pronunciation and composition” in English because they, unlike Bengali Hindus, had to learn Persian and Arabic in addition.¹⁶¹ He even quoted Nawab Abdul Latif to support his views that Persian and Arabic were very dear to Muslims. He demanded that Muslims should be given scholarships as “abundantly” as given to

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 140.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 137.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 138.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 139.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p. 142.

Hindus.¹⁶² However, he was optimistic that things were improving and Muslims were coming out of their days of stagnation.

Like Rev. Long, Hunter bore witness to the simmering discontent among Muslims about the policies of the British government. Hunter also detailed “a list of charges” of Muslims against the government viz., closing the doors in ‘every honourable walk of life to professors of their creed’, imposition of an education system that Muslims did not approve, thrusting thousands of Muslim families into “misery” by doing away with the posts of law officers, failing to give them complete latitude to perform “the duties of their faith”, religious freedom, misappropriating educational funds, showing no sympathy with their ‘master’ Muslims who gave the British permission to collect revenues in Bengal etc.¹⁶³ He accepted that they had been “gradually excluded” from state institutions. Hunter also blamed government policies for the aloofness of the Muslims from the government schools. His critique was based on three issues. (1) British imposed Bengali, a Hindu language, along with Hindu teachers on Muslims; (2) Sacred languages of Muslims like Persian and Arabic were not imparted to Muslims; and (3) Government did not provide religious instructions to Muslim youth. He also criticised the British government for not being culturally sensitive towards Muslims as it did not declare holidays on Muslim festivals, which created anger in their hearts against the rulers.

Like Long, Hunter showed sympathy with Muslims and put the government in the dock on many occasions. While blaming the government on one occasion, he also defended it by saying that the British government did not discriminate anyone on the basis of colour and creed; and thus Muslims ‘must take their chance under the Government’. He even denied the fact that the Muslims did not enjoy any state patronage. In other words, he implied that British government alone was not responsible for the plight of the Muslims. He also did not miss the chance to take potshots at Muslims to show a contrast between the old [Muslim] and new [British] regime. He even accused Muslims rulers of being “haughty and careless” who kept all the high posts for Muslims

¹⁶² Ibid. pp. 145-146.

¹⁶³ Hunter 2002, pp. 140-141.

while Hindus could only get contented with posts in “subordinate administration”.¹⁶⁴ But it seemed “unreasonable” to Hunter that Muslims were now demanding their earlier monopoly under the British regime which, in his view, was not a rule for Muslims only. Moreover, Hunter attacked Muhammadans rulers in Bengal, whose system was meant for enriching a few [Muslims]. He pointed out that it was the British policy that put an end to such plunders of Muslim aristocracy. Hunter also said that the Muslims were conservative. For example, Hunter said he had ‘never met a single Muslim doctor’ in Bengal, which showed how Muslims were aloof from modern Education. Muslims were not so adaptive. Hindus were able to learn Persian during Muslim rule and English during the British rule and thus were adapted.¹⁶⁵ Hunter also said that Muslims remained aloof from English Schools.

The more zealous Muhammadans, however, have never quite accepted the lawfulness of an education in our State Schools. While the worldly-minded among them made advances towards our system, the fanatical section shrunk still further back from it. During the last forty years they have separated themselves from the Hindus by differences of dress, of salutations, and other exterior distinctions, such as they never deemed necessary in the days of their supremacy. Even as late 1860-62 there was only one Musalman to ten Hindus in our schools, and although the proportion has increased since then, the increase is due to the additional Aided Institutions, and not to the District Government Schools. The attendance at the English Schools has not increased; and the officer in charge of the Wahabi prosecutions, on whose authority I make these statements, and who is intimately acquainted with Eastern Bengal, declares that the number of Muhammadan students bears no fair ratio to the Muhammadan population.¹⁶⁶

As discussed above, Hunter was critical of the Muslims too. But sometimes when he seemed to be openly attacking British government, he designed his argument in such a way that Muslims were also dragged into the dock. Let me give one such example.

Hunter criticised the government for compelling Muslims to learn Sanskritized Bengali, which in his view was the language of Hindus. He then went on to say that if the British government had offered English to Muslims instead of Bengali, Muslims would have been less incensed because Islam was closer to Christianity than Hinduism, a religion of “pagans”. But in the next line, Hunter disowned this view, citing the views of “some uninterested Christians”. He then criticised Muslims for keeping such ignorance and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 144.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 169.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 172-173.

sense of contempt for Hinduism. In other words, what he wanted to say was that the Muslims did not learn about the religion of Hindus who constituted the majority of their subjects and thus, Hindus were looked down upon as inferior pagans. Such criticism of the Muslims “mistreating” Hindus or “disrespecting” Hinduism through their “bigoted” religious policies, particularly during the reign of Aurangzeb, had been made quite often by the English historians to justify “enlightened” and “neutral” colonial rule. As we discussed earlier James Long said that it was the bigoted policies of Aurangzeb which alienated the Hindus and this finally resulted the fall of the Mughal empire.

Conclusion

Thus, both Long and Hunter had shown how the British government neglected Muslim issues. At the same time, they also invoked “bigoted” regimes of Muslims which benefited the few among Muslims, resulting in alienation of others, particularly the Hindus. It should be kept in mind that invocation of Muslim rule was aimed at serving two purposes. First, it was to show the period of Muslim rule in a dark light and interpret the history of India from the standpoint of Hindu-Muslim communal problem. Second, it was also to alert the British state that if Muslims were discontent, the stability of the Raj would be threatened. This reflected in the formation of new British policy that tried to accommodate a section of middle-class Muslims in jobs and education. The next chapter would attempt to understand perceptions of Muslim middle-classes, which were created by the educational institutional of British government.

CHAPTER THREE: MIDDLE-CLASS MUSLIMS' VIEWS ON MUSLIM BACKWARDNESS

Muslim Backwardness in Higher Education and Jobs

The emergence of Muslim middle class was a slow process. Historian Tazeem Murshid claimed that till the end of nineteenth century there was 'hardly a Muslim middle class that could politically assert itself.'¹⁶⁷ But this study holds this formulation untenable in the light of the success of middle class Muslims who played an important role in setting up a discourse on Muslim backwardness and then mobilizing their co-religionists around the issues of education and public employment. This chapter would discuss middle-class Muslim intellectuals' perception of Muslim backwardness in the late nineteenth century. I will show that *middle-class Muslims defined their backwardness in terms of higher education and public employment*. Unlike the religious perception that held deviation from the true path of Islam as the cause of the backwardness, middle-class Muslims gave a *secular explanation*. For them, the decline of Muslim was the result of the policies of British government, particularly those of the second half of nineteenth century, and Muslims' religious conservatism and aloofness from English education. My selection of middle-class Muslim intellectuals from the late nineteenth century comprises Nawab Abdul Lalif, Syed Ameer Ali, both from Bengal, and Syed Ahmed Khan from North-Western Province and Oudh.

Nawab Abdul Latif (1828–1893) was perhaps the first Muslim to take up the issue of the Muslim backwardness and work for its removal for about four decades. He was in public service with the government of Bengal, was nominated to Bengal Council, and

¹⁶⁷ Murshid 1995, p. 26.

honoured with the title of 'Khan Bahadoor' and 'Nawab'. Enamul Haque called Latif "a pioneer of the Muslim modernism in India and Pakistan."¹⁶⁸

Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928), a contemporary of Latif and also from Bengal, was another prominent leader of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who reflected on Muslim backwardness and launched a campaign to remove it in close cooperation with the British government.

Ali¹⁶⁹ was born on 6 April 1849 at Chinsura, Hooghly, in Bengal in a noble Muslim family.¹⁷⁰ He was the first to hold Master's degree at the Hooghly College in 1867 and the following year went to the Inner Temple, England, for higher education. After completing education in England, he came back to India and got enrolled as an advocate at the Calcutta high court.¹⁷¹ Ali was best known for establishing of the National Muhammadan Association in 1877 for removing the backwardness of the Muslims and promoting Muslims' interests. It was during his college days in England that the Marquess of Salisbury asked Ali if the Queen's proclamation had resulted in the improvement of the Muslims. Ali's reply was 'qualified' and he apprised him of certain policies of the British government in India which were detrimental to the Muslims' interests, which he subsequently elaborated in his writings.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Enamul Haque, ed., *Nawab Abdul Latif: His Writings & Related Documents*, Samudra Prokashani, Dacca, 1968, p. ix.

¹⁶⁹ In the field of scholarship, his work was not less important as he authored a number of books such as *Personal Law of the Muhammadans*, *Short History of the Saracens* and often-cited *The Spirit of Islam*. After retirement from the Bengal high court in 1904, he settled in England and devoted his life to 'fighting for the cause of Indian Muslim, for the integrity of Turkey, the dignity of the Khalifa and the future of Islamic lands on this earth. He also got associated with the (London) Muslim League and founded 'The British Red Crescent Society' to help the wounded and the sick in Turkish provinces. As far as his relation with the colonial government is concerned, he was a 'loyal' Muslim and his taste was very much English and thus married an English lady, Isabelle. His illustrious life came to an end on 3 August, 1928 from heart attack at his home Pollinfol Manor, England.

¹⁷⁰ K. K. Aziz, *Ameer Ali: His Life and Work*, Publishers United Ltd, Lahore, 1968, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.

¹⁷² See Ali's 'Memorial of the National Muhammadan Association, Calcutta, to His Excellency The Most Hon'ble The Marquis of Ripon, K.G., P.C., G.C.S.I., Viceroy and Governor-General of India, dated February 1882' and 'A Cry from the Indian Mahommedan' published in *The Nineteenth Century*, August 1882, pp. 193-215. Both have been reproduced in Aziz, 1968. It should be kept in mind that the contents and arguments of these articles are the same.

Like Latif, Ali was concerned with ‘the present impoverished condition of the Muhammadans of India.’¹⁷³

The depressed and desperate condition of the Muhammadans at the present moment deserves every commiseration. Whilst every community has thrived and flourished under British rule, the Muhammadans alone have declined and decayed. Every day their position is becoming worse and the call for urgent measures on their behalf more pressing.¹⁷⁴

One could see here how Ali would have us believe that the whole of Muslims were backward.¹⁷⁵ With the use of exaggerated language, he gave the impression that other communities, chiefly the Hindus, were in prosperity. He did not recognise the limitation of the colonial economy in carrying out welfare measures. On the other hand, he degraded his own community too much. While Latif and Syed Ahmed Khan would concede that the conditions of Muslims had improved of late and the community was not as averse to English education as earlier, Ali asserted that the Muslims were becoming ‘worse’ with each passing day. Perhaps, his language of desperation was aimed at quickly drawing the British attention towards his co-religionists.

Another important Muslim intellectual of the period was Syed Ahmed Khan. He was a social reformer, scholar, thinker, and founder of Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College. He was born on 17 October 1817 in Delhi, two years after his father, Mian Muhammad Muttaqi, was appointed as the prime minister by Mughal Emperor Akbar II. His maternal and paternal ancestors were ‘men of mark’¹⁷⁶ under the Mughals. The young Syed Ahmed had an opportunity to ‘mix up’ and ‘play’ with princes of the Royal family as he stayed with his grandfather Khwaja Fareeduddin Ahmad, known for his ‘diplomatic services.’¹⁷⁷ His education was largely in Arabic, Persian, mathematics, logic and Urdu. He was said to have had a “receptive mind”.¹⁷⁸ In 1850, Syed Ahmed was

¹⁷³ Ali, ‘Memorial’ in Aziz, 1968, p. 23.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁷⁵ Ali mentioned once the condition of the Muslims in the NWP and said that the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims were not so big as in Bengal. Ibid. p. 32.

¹⁷⁶ Lieut. Colonel G.F.I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i Delhi, Delhi, 1974, p. 1. Graham was a contemporary British officer of Syed Ahmed and his biography, written in 1885, remains one of the important source for knowing the life of Sir Syed Ahmed.

¹⁷⁷ Graham said, ‘His [Syed Ahmed Khan] paternal and maternal ancestors were men of mark under the Mogul Empire’, said his contemporary Lieut Colonel G.F.I. Graham, 1974, p.1.

¹⁷⁸ Shan Muhammad, ‘Introduction’, in Shan Muhammad, ed., *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, Nachiketa Publications, Bombay, 1972, p. 1.

appointed as Rohtak subordinate judge and was transferred to Bijnore in 1855. It was during his stay in Bijnore that the 1857 revolt broke out in May 1857 when he staked his life to save some British and won the sympathy of the English government.¹⁷⁹ 'No man', said John Strachey, the Lieutenant-Governor of the NWP, 'ever gave nobler proofs of conspicuous courage and loyalty to the British Government than were given by him in 1857: no language that I could use would be worthy of the devotion he showed.'¹⁸⁰

Syed Ahmed Khan explained Muslim backwardness in terms of higher education and public employment. Before the Education Commission (1882), he detailed the causes of Muslim backwardness for which Muslims themselves were to blame. He gave internal reasons 'that prevented our [Muslim] community from taking advantage of the system established by Government' and thus, they remained "aloof" from English education.

Elaborating on the political causes, Syed Ahmed said the English rule brought about stability in the country and the "whole Natives" including the Muslims saw it with "feelings of satisfactions". 'But the subordinate political change which this transition naturally involved as a consequence, and which proved a great and unexpected blow to the condition of the Muhammadans, engendered in them a feeling of aversion against the British, and against all things [including English education and western science] relating to the British nation.'¹⁸¹

Complaining Loyalists

For such decline of the Muslim community, the middle-class Muslims also criticized the policies of the British government. But unlike the *ulama*, they did not see the British rule as a threat to the Muslim culture and religion. For example, Latif¹⁸² mentioned that how the changes in administration at a later period of the Company rule were detrimental to

¹⁷⁹ Graham 1974, p. 18.

¹⁸⁰ The Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, John Strachey, recognised Syed Ahmed's role in a speech at Aligarh on 11 December 1880. Cited in Graham 1974, p. 19.

¹⁸¹ Shan Muhammad, ed., 1972, p. 95.

¹⁸² To learn of Latif's perception of backwardness, one has to read his speeches and the 'resume' of his Muhammadan Literary Society, particularly one read out at 1890 on the occasion of its quarter century of establishment.

the Muslims. At the early stage of the Company rule, “our English masters,” said Latif, were involved in commercial activities and thus they little interfered with the existing conditions. As a result, Muslims continued to find their employment at courts as they had the knowledge of Arabic and Persian. With introduction of the knowledge of English as a necessary qualification for public employments, it became a disadvantage for Muslims as they lost jobs to Hindus. According to Latif, another big blow to the interests of Muslims was the removal of Persian as a court language in 1836. Yet another detrimental policy from the perspective of Muslim was the introduction of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), replacing Mohammedan Criminal Law. This also badly affected the Muslims who were employed in legal services.¹⁸³

Though he did blame the later policies of the British but he remained loyal to British rule. He was a dynamic Muslim public personality and a loyal subject to the British government, and worked as a bridge between his community and the government. In 1870, he persuaded Maulvie Karamut Ali of Jounpore to issue a *fatwa* that India under the ‘Christian’ British rule is not *dar-ul harab* (abode of war) at a time when the Wahabis, having confronted the British empire several times, appealed to Muslims to rise against “infidel” British rule. The Maulvie Ali addressed a gathering at the Muhammadan Literary Society in November 1870 to persuade the Muslims that the British India was not *darul harab*. Later, five thousand copies of the proceedings were distributed among the Muslims to ‘allay agitation amongst the more ignorant and misinformed’ Muslims against the British rule.¹⁸⁴ Unlike the “radical” Wahabis, Latif strongly believed that the development of the Muslims could be secured under the British rule by acquiring modern education and English, which were at the centre of his modernising and reforming agendas.

For Syed Ameer Ali, as he was a loyalist, the colonial government was not only “the lawful Sovereign of India” but also “the Protector of all that is most valued by Islam”.¹⁸⁵ Ali’s diagnosis of the decline of Muslim did not stop him from criticising the

¹⁸³ ‘A Quarter Century of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta. A Resume of its work from 1863 to 1889’, cited in Latif and Ali 2011, pp. 51-57.

¹⁸⁴ Latif and Ali 2011, p. 9.

¹⁸⁵ Ali, ‘Memorial’ in Aziz. 1986, p. 24.

policies of the British rule. His analysis was similar to that of Latif. Ali said that the change of rule from the Mughals to the British did not affect the condition of the Muslims as they continued to enjoy 'monopoly of power and wealth in their hands'. 'It was,' argued Ali, 'not until Lord William Bentinck's administration that Mussulman decadence really commenced.'¹⁸⁶

Detailing such detrimental policies, Ali first mentioned the change of language from Persian to the English in 1837 that was, for him, the beginning of the 'actual impoverishment of the middle class of Muhammadans.'¹⁸⁷ He then lamented that the Hindus got ahead of the Muslims because they, unlike the Muslims, had no prejudices against the missionaries and acquired English education. W.W. Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans* was already in circulation and Ali referred to Hunter in order to substantiate his argument that 'there is now scarcely a Government office in which a Muhammadan can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of ink-pots, and mender of pens.'¹⁸⁸

Among other impediments, Ali blamed poverty and lack of capital, which were preventing the rise of industrial and commercial classes among Muslims. He said that the attitude of Muslims had undergone a change of late and they would like to send their children for English education but their poverty was coming in the way. The commercialization of education by the British government also made it inaccessible for the poor Muslims in Bengal. The poor classes could only hope to reach vernacular schools.¹⁸⁹

The loss of their educational funds and the support system previously available to scholars, the decline of the aristocracy, the absence of a substantial middle class, the sudden slide into illiteracy caused by a regime seeking a new class of allies and a clerical support base, the privatization of education and introduction of a curriculum that was not user-friendly were key factors that hampered Muslim education, limited their access to the professions and hindered other intellectual pursuits. The Hindu community was able to withstand these changes and benefited from them, largely because it was more willing to participate in the new system and partly because it had the financial capacity to sustain itself.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 25.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. pp. 26-27.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 27.

¹⁸⁹ Murshid, 1995, p. 57.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 59.

Other harmful British policies, said Ali, were 'the confiscation of their scholastic foundations', 'ruin and waste of their charitable endowments', and Resumption Proceedings which started in 1828, according to which a large number of Muslims lost their lands which were in their control for generations.¹⁹¹ He also lamented that the entry of Muslims to the public offices were blocked by those who [Hindus] were already placed there and who did everything to ensure that Hindus were recruited. To substantiate his argument, Ali, unlike his predecessor Latif, used statistics and figures. His data were primarily taken from Bengal but he did not stop himself from generalising the Muslims backwardness at the all India level. For example, the list of gazetted officers undoubtedly showed a relative backwardness of Muslims against Hindus, as the Hindus officers, out of 2007 posts, numbered 850 against 77 Muslim officers. In fact, it was both the Hindus and the Christian officers who took the large chunk of jobs, numbering a thousand (1080), but in Ali's perceptions the threat was seen mostly from the Hindus.¹⁹²

Continuing with his perception of the threat from the Hindus, Ali appealed to the British to take notice of the failure of the Hindu judges to deliver justice in the wake of their "insufficient" knowledge of the Muhammadan Laws. Instead, the British government, Ali wished, should prefer the Muslims. Moreover, he asked for the government to intervene so that 'the balance of State patronage should be restored between the Hindus and the Muhammadans.' To achieve this, he asked the government (a) to remove the Nagri character in Bihar, (b) to set up a 'Commission' to examine the condition of Muslim education, (c) to relax the criterion of graduation degree for public employment, and (d) to ensure that the income of *waqf* properties including the Mohsin Foundation, should not go waste and it should be preserved and utilised for the development of the Muslim community.¹⁹³

Writing on the causes of the Revolt of 1857, Syed Ahmed Khan identified, among others, the negative British policies leading to Muslims' decline from the state of a ruling race. Yet he also cooperated closely with the colonial state and got their patronage to check the 'threat' from the Hindu majority.

¹⁹¹ Tazeem said the loss of grants of revenue free lands in Bengal under Resumption proceedings from 1793 onwards "hurt Muslim education". Ibid. p. 57.

¹⁹² See statistics on page 29-31 in Ali, 'Memorial' in Aziz 1968.

¹⁹³ Ali, 'Memorial', in Aziz 1968, pp. 34-40.

Syed Ahmed wrote a treatise *Asbāb-i- Bagāwat-i-Hind* or causes of the revolt, published in 1858.¹⁹⁴ Among other things, *Asbab* also talked about the causes of Muslim dissatisfaction with the British rule, however the main aim of the book was to brush aside the charge of disloyalty to the British rule.¹⁹⁵ Instead, he argued that the Revolt (*sarkashī*) could have been averted if the British government, despite its good intention, had avoided some of its policies, ‘obnoxious to the dispositions, aims, habits, and views of those by whom the rebellion is brought about.’¹⁹⁶

In the beginning of *Asbāb*, Syed Ahmed gave a number of causes for the Revolt. Prominent among them were (a) the lack of participation of Indians in the Legislative Council, (b) the failure of the government to seek the knowledge of the circumstances and needs of the subjects, (c) the inability of the government to translate its good intentions into action, which were misunderstood by the Indians, (d) the promulgation of ‘objectionable’ laws and codes which were not suited to the manners, religious beliefs and customs of the Indians, (e) the lack of the operation of such affairs which the government of India should necessarily have performed, (f) the actions of the Christian missionaries under the British government, creating fear and threat among the Indians about losing their religions, and (f) the contempt shown by the British officers towards the natives.¹⁹⁷ Of the above causes, I would mainly discuss those which, in Syed Ahmed’s views, negatively impacted the Muslims.

First, the resumption of revenue free-land had a harmful effect on the masses, particularly the Muslims.¹⁹⁸ Second, the loss of property was effected by ‘the public sales

¹⁹⁴ Syed Ahmed Khan also critiqued Hunter’s *The Indian Musalmans* in his review and completely refuted the argument of Hunter that the Muslims, particularly the Wahabis, had conspired and attacked the British. This has been discussed in Graham 1974 and Shan Muhammad, ed. 1972.

¹⁹⁵ In an important pamphlet *The Loyal Muhammadans of India* (1860), Syed Ahmed strongly argued that the general Muslims were not involved in 1857 Revolt. ‘Certainly, good and bad are to be found in every class and creed; but the proverb that “a fish pollutes all water” has reference especially to a season of distress—for it is a peculiarity of the time, that if even one man has done ill, the entire class to which, he belongs is held up to execration; and although a large number of that class may have done right well, nobody thinks of their good deeds, and they get no credit for them. Now the season of dire extremity to which I allude is that which befell the Mohammedans in 1857-58. There was no atrocity committed then of which the blame was not imputed to the Mohammedans, although the parties really guilty may have been Ramdin and Matadin.’ Cited in Graham 1974, p. 59.

¹⁹⁶ Syed Ahmed Khan, cited in Graham 1974, p. 33.

¹⁹⁷ Syed Ahmed Khan, *Asbāb-i- Bagāwat-i-Hind*, Kutabkhana Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu, Jama Masjid, Delhi, (n.d.), p. 83-105.

¹⁹⁸ *Asbāb*, p. 115.

of zamindari rights'¹⁹⁹ which saw the replacement of old zamindars (a sizable section of them were Muslims) by bankers and money-lenders who were mostly Hindus. Third, the high rate of land settlements similarly 'ruined' old landlords.²⁰⁰ Fourth, he regretted the withdrawal of the stipends and pensions to people. Fifth, he mentioned government advertisements that imposed the condition of passing English test on the Madrassa pass-out. While both Latif and Ali, highlighted the introduction of English education as unfavourable to the Muslims, Syed Ahmed linked the deprivation to the people's fear of conversion: 'People came to believe that India was being deprived so that people would slowly become helpless to get converted.'²⁰¹ In his work, the masses, fearing the loss of their religion, took much of his attention. A section of *ulama*, who had differences with Syed Ahmed, too stressed the dimension of the missionaries. Sixth, he accepted, unlike Latif and Ali, the state of distress and poverty of the subjects under the British rule, due to less openings in services. Syed Ahmed said it hit Muslims more than Hindus. He explained this using a historical-sociological approach. Muslims were not natives of this country and who, having conquered India, settled here, were largely dependent on the services required by the state. On the contrary, the Hindus, except for the Kayasthas, historically did not prefer taking up services. Muslims, therefore, were likely to be more angry with such British rule, which did not offer them opportunities in services.

Modernisation and Reforms

The middle-class Muslims were also great champions of modernisation and reforms in their society. They were in favour of interpreting Islam to suit the requirements of the modern times. While the thrust of the *ulama*, unlike the middle-class Muslims, was to weed out all un-Islamic elements and give privilege to scripture than the local traditions. Middle-class Muslims were more concerned about why their co-religionists were backward than other communities in education and employment. One such cause, in the middle-class Muslims' view, was their aloofness from Western learning and English

¹⁹⁹ Appendix, 'A' ('The Causes of the Indian Revolt), *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's History of the Bijnor Rebellion*, Translated with notes and introductions by Hafeez Malik and Morris Dembo, Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i Delhi, Delhi, 2009, p. 170.

²⁰⁰ Appendix, 2009, pp. 171-173.

²⁰¹ *Asbāb*, pp. 127-128. Appendix, 'A'. 2009, pp. 177-178.

education. Thus, they tried to seek the answer to the question --- what prevented the Muslims from accepting Western knowledge and English education?

Latif would answer that the Muslims were proud of their 'glorious traditions of the past' and they did not avail themselves of new opportunities. Since the Muslims 'valued' religion more than the Hindus, it was easy for the latter to take to secular education. As a result, the Muslims were reluctant to enter into competition and became disadvantaged. Unfortunately, the education department was occupied by non-Muslims who did not work to remove the disadvantages under which the Muslims had fallen. Latif lamented that his co-religionists had not availed themselves of the opportunities provided by the British rule by remaining aloof from English education and Western sciences, resulting in their decline, unlike the Hindus who had no such prejudices and gone far ahead. The aloofness of the Muslims reached to such an extent that they even did not show any desire to interact with the Europeans and the Hindus. His cure for removing such state of decay and depression was the spread of English and Western education but he never advocated the overthrow of Arabic and Persian.

It would be beneficial alike to the Mahomedans and to the Government, if the former could be induced to learn English. Under the British Government, English is the language of Commerce, and is fast becoming the language of the Courts. If any language in India could lead to the advancement in life of the learner, it is the English. At the same time, the political benefits of the education of the Mahomedans in English, both to themselves and to the Government, are many and apparent. The Mahomedan, who has been educated in English can understand the good motives of the Government. He knows the power, intelligence, perseverance and resources of the British nation. His attachment to the Government rests on a firm basis. He cannot be misled, and no one will attempt to mislead him. He knows that the safety of life and property depends upon the stability of the British rule, and will naturally resent any attempts by his ignorant and misguided countrymen against the stability.²⁰²

It should be noted that the middle-class Muslims were in favour of English education. Even a number of the *ulama* and Muslims with religious outlook like Syed favored English education. For example, the *ulama* of Nadwa argued that they did not oppose the study of English.²⁰³

²⁰² Nawab Abdul Latif, 'The Hooghly Mudrasah' in Haque, ed., 1968, p. 22.

²⁰³ Nadwi, 2011, p. 48.

Syed Ahmed Khan, too, diagnosed Muslims' social and economic backwardness. Referring to the social customs, Syed Ahmed said that since the Muslims were proud of 'their socio-political position' and they did not go to school as 'they did not think it worth their while to associate with persons whom they considered inferior to themselves in social position.'²⁰⁴ These lines of Syed Ahmed are a reflection of his class prejudice. For example, in order to rescue Muslims community from the charge of conspiring the 1857, he attributed it to lower caste Muslims weavers and used derogatory language against them. On the religious beliefs, Syed Ahmed said that the European sciences were seen by the Muslims as opposed to their religion and they believed that western learning would bring them close to embracing Christianity. This might have impelled Ahmed Khan to look at theology and science afresh and he came to refute any charges that there was any contradiction between religion and science, and word of God and world of God.²⁰⁵ His cure for removing such state of decay and depression was the spread of English and Western education but he never advocated the overthrow of Arabic and Persian. He pointed to Muslims the benefits of English education.

Before the Education Commission too, Syed Ahmed reiterated the relative deprivation of the Muslims, even quoting the Census of British India 1871-72. He claimed that there were just 57 Muslim graduates out of 3,155, and the number of the Muslims who passed Upper Subordinate Class Examination --for which the knowledge of English was needed— were just 11 out of 707 from 1848 to 1876.²⁰⁶ He argues that, 'Of all the sections of the Indian community, the Muhammadans have derived the least benefit from European sciences and literature. It is evident from the annual reports on public instruction that in Government and missionary schools and colleges, which may be regarded as the only means of disseminating Western science and literature in this country, the number of Muhammadans is extremely limited.'²⁰⁷

After presenting the backward state of the Muslims, he then elaborated its causes. But there was a marked difference from the language in *Asbāb*, written twenty-four year

²⁰⁴ Shan Muhammad, ed. 1972, p. 96.

²⁰⁵ For details, Ahmad, 1967.

²⁰⁶ Shan Muhammad, ed., 1972, p. 91.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 90.

earlier. Unlike the external explanation of the backwardness and blaming the harmful policies of the British government earlier, Syed Ahmed before the Commission, included internal reasons which 'prevented our [Muslim] community from taking advantage of the system established by Government' and remaining 'aloof' from English education. He gave three causes for this -- (a) their political traditions, (b) social customs and (c) religious beliefs.²⁰⁸

To sum up the ideas of Syed Ahmed, the causes of the Muslims backwardness were the result of both the British policies and conservatism and elitism of the Muslims. The aim of Syed Ahmed was to regenerate the Muslim community and to bring it to the level of the Hindus and make the Muslim masses come to terms with the British rule.

Association and Mobilisation

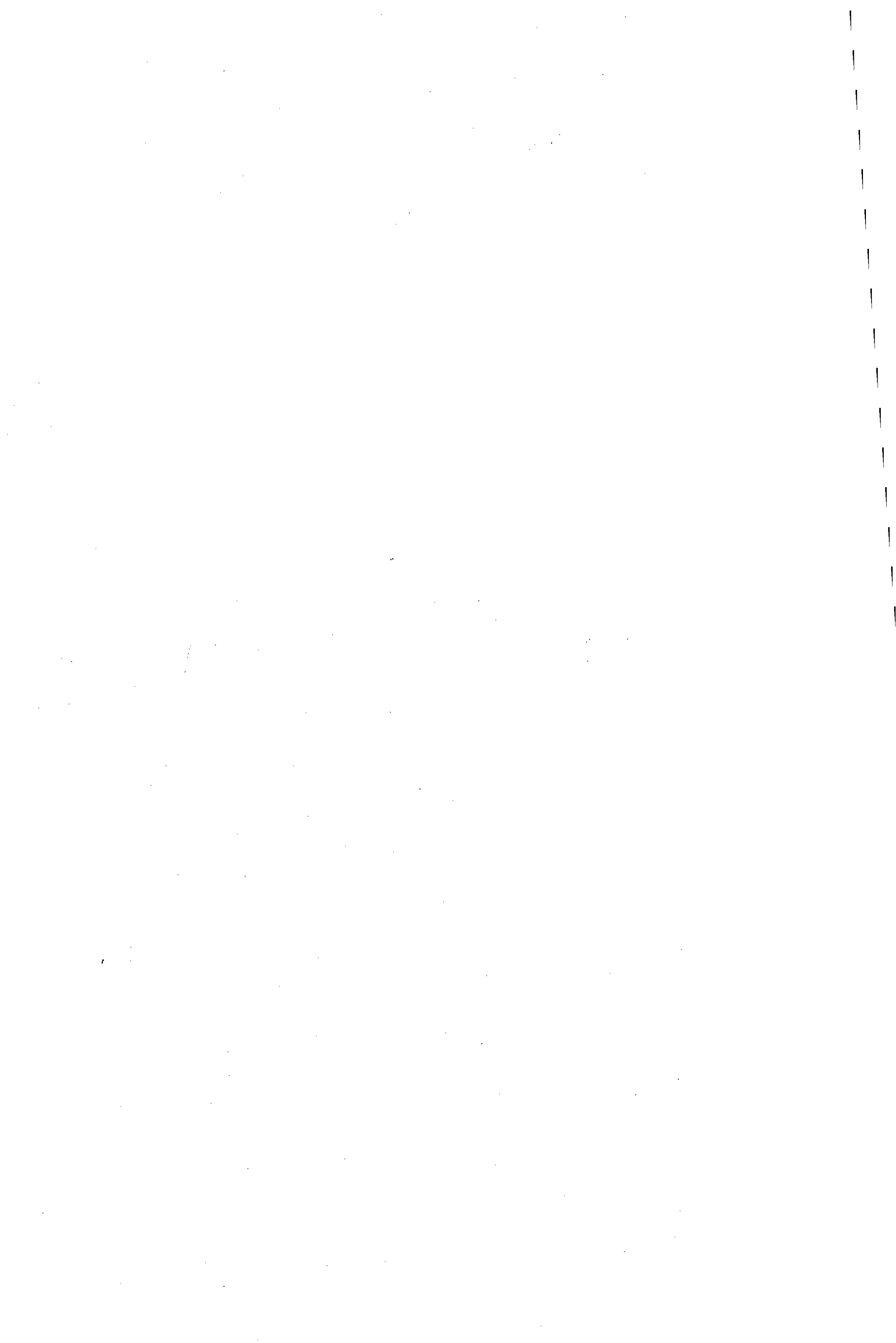
To ameliorate the conditions of Muslims and to modernise their society, these middle class intellectuals also floated a number of associations which mobilised them around higher education and employment. Latif founded the Mahomedan Literary Society in April 1863, which provided a platform for spreading English, Western and scientific education among his co-religionists and drawing the state's attention to the backwardness of the community for its amelioration. To remove Muslims' prejudice against western education and science and English language, Latif, as a founder secretary to the Society, worked till his death. The Society held regular meetings, had over 500 members and invited distinguished scholars to deliver lectures on various topics including those on literary and scientific subjects such as 'uses of history', 'origin of newspapers', 'commerce', 'geography', 'arts', 'agriculture' etc. The society was a pioneer and many such associations came to be modelled on this. Syed Amir Ali's National Muhammadan Association could be seen as a continuation of this legacy.

Besides, Latif was nominated to the Bengal Council in January 1862 during the reign of Lord Canning. He had the distinction of being the first Muslim to be ever appointed at that time, the only one in any of the Legislatures, local and imperial.

²⁰⁸ Syed Ahmed for knowing the causes Muslims' 'antagonism' to Government education invited essays from the educated Muslims. For details see, Shan Muhammad, ed. 1972 and Graham 1974

Conclusion:

To sum up, unlike the religious perceptions of backwardness, the middle-class Muslim understood Muslim backwardness in terms of their lagging behind Hindus in higher education and employment. The social and economic conditions of Muslims were not the same everywhere, yet there emerged a discourse on Muslim backwardness. Their politics was also successful because their claim was supported by data and statistics produced by the colonial administrators and intellectuals. In other words, the colonial government provided a framework to these middle class intellectuals who creatively used it. The colonial government was also willing to lend a patient hearing to these middle-class intellectuals in order to win them over to their side as a countervailing force against both 'orthodox' Muslims and the Congress, which claimed to be the voice of Indians.



CONCLUSION

PROBLEMATIZING PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIM

BACKWARDNESS

Though the death of Aurangzeb quickened the process of the decline of the Mughal Empire, the final blow came in the 1857 when the British took over the reign of India from the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. During the centuries of Muslim rule, the laboring classes constituted majority of both Muslim and Hindus while the ruling classes comprised an elite section of both Muslims and Hindus. In other words, the Muslim rulers, argued Marxist scholar Javeed Alam, did not ever treat the Muslim masses any better than the Hindus. 'All people were equally the beasts of burden'.²⁰⁹ Under the new system established by the British a huge section of the old elites of Muslims perished while new social classes of elites emerged. As discussed in the previous chapters, the changes²¹⁰ brought about by the British rule—English replacing Persian as official language in 1837, the new land and educational policies, the introduction of English law that rendered *qazis* jobless, confiscations of lands of Muslim gentry etc—had hampered the interests of the Muslim aristocracy in some parts of India, particularly in Bengal. In the words of colonial administrator W.W. Hunter²¹¹, the Muslims of Bengal became a "ruined race", and they found themselves lagging behind Hindus in higher and professional education as well as in public employment. By the late nineteenth century, the increased production of official statistics and data through the process of enumeration and census brought to light the fact of comparative backwardness of Muslim community in some areas such as Bengal, Assam, Madras etc. Hunter's book *The Indian Musalmans* published in 1871 was perhaps the most important work which articulated the idea of Muslim backwardness, triggering off debates around it. Armed with Hunter's work and other official documents, Muslim leaders and intellectuals began to see themselves backward at the national level. It should be kept in mind that Hunter himself wrote that his work was applicable only to Bengal. Contrary to this, his work was

²⁰⁹ Alam 2008, p. 49.

²¹⁰ Qureshi 1988.

²¹¹ Hunter 2002.

cited by Muslim leaders in other provinces to support their claim of backwardness. As this study has shown the community leaders of both Bengal and the NWP spoke about their backwardness, however the reality was that the social and economic conditions of Muslims in these two provinces were not the same. While the Muslims of Bengal were far behind Hindus, particularly the upper classes and castes, their condition was not so bad in the NWP and Oudh where they retained their hold on positions of higher education and public jobs. Moreover, the British policies varied in different parts of India. For example, English was imposed on the Muslims of Bengal in 1837 while Persian and Urdu were retained for a long time in the NWP. As I have expressed my reservations with the old historiography, which often tended to indulge in bald generalisation and approaching history from a teleological point of view. As I have shown in the historiography section in the introductory chapter, the social and economic conditions of Muslims varied from region to region. Thus, the discourse of Muslim backwardness in the late nineteenth century was *applicable only to some regions* such as Bengal and it was *not an all-India phenomenon*.

If Muslim backwardness was confined to some regions, the question arises, why did it become such a powerful discourse that Muslims intellectuals from Shah Wali-ullah (1703-1762) to Syed Ahmed Khan grappled with the question of decline of Muslim? As I have studied only a limited number of Muslim intellectuals and covered a small period, it was difficult for me to give a comprehensive answer to this important question. But I can say this much that the reality of threat and perception of threat are not always the same thing and it is possible that one may perceive oneself in a position of decline even if that was not the case. In my view, Muslims perceptions of backwardness in the late nineteenth century also fall in to this category. However, I do not mean that perceptions of Muslim had no concrete basis. Rather, I argue that the radical changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth century under the British rule along with the rise of Hindu middle classes brought about a sense of depression among the elite sections of Muslims. The introduction of electoral politics and social mobilisation was an indication that since they were numerically small and power was likely to be captured by Hindus. For example, as Francis Robinson has pointed out, the rising tension in the NWP after Hindus, having

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won a number of municipal seats, issued orders against cow slaughter.²¹² This was the very reason why Sayed Ahmed Khan, who spoke a lot about Hindu-Muslim unity, later turned a bitter critic of the Congress and got involved in safeguarding the interests of Muslims. In my reading, the perceptions of Muslim backwardness were also *the result of the fear from the possible end of Muslim domination*.

My discussion on perceptions of Muslim backwardness was divided into three chapters. Each chapter was about a particular social group. I began my discussion with *ulama's* account of Muslim backwardness. In their writings, deviation from faith was held as the main cause of Muslim backwardness. Besides, the *ulama* also attacked the British rule and western civilization and saw them as threat to Muslim identity and Islam. For understanding the views of the *ulama* I basically focused on the Deoband and Nadwa seminaries. As the Quran proclaimed that the faithful would be made rulers of the earth, the decline of Muslim power was interpreted by the *ulama* as the loss of piety among Muslims. In other words, the *ulama* blamed deviation from Islam as the main cause of Muslim backwardness. To remedy this, they carried out social reforms and asked people to turn back to the scripture. Thus the Deoband and Nadwa seminaries produced a social group of the *ulama* who were supposed to master the Quran and the Hadith and dedicate their lives to studying and preaching Islamic teachings. Along with discussing the deviation from Islam as the main cause of backwardness, the *ulama* also criticised the British rule for plundering the wealth of India, promoting Christian missionaries and finally snatching power from the Muslim rulers. But more than that the English rule was attacked for its promotion of western education and civilisation--based on materialism—which, in *ulama's* view, aimed at alienating Muslims from their religion.

After discussing *ulama's* view, the second chapter dealt with the writings of colonial administrators and intellectuals, who reflected on the Muslim backwardness. The narratives of colonial administrators and intellectuals—such as Hunter and Rev. James Long-- stressed the backwardness of Muslims in higher education and jobs. The statistics and data produced by colonial rule shaped the debate towards relative backwardness of

²¹² Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923.*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1974.

Muslims in jobs and employment. While the *ulama* blamed the British rule for the plunder of the wealth of India and attempting to convert Muslims to Christianity, the colonial intellectuals confined the backwardness to a community's share of education and employments at government institutions. This is not to say that in the writings of Hunter and Long the British government was not blamed for the fall of Muslims. While the *ulama* saw a deliberate conspiracy by the British rule to ruin the Muslims, the colonial intellectuals blamed some of the policies of the British government for decline. In other words, the colonial intellectuals denied the deliberate discrimination. However, the colonial intellectuals did not miss an opportunity to criticise Muslims for being slow to learn English language and taking benefits from the colonial rule.

Chapter three has dealt with the loyal groups of Muslims. Most of the middle-class Muslims were a product of the colonial educational institutions. After the shift in policies from 1871, the British government initiated special programmes for ameliorating the backward conditions of Muslims. The middle-class Muslims also operated within the same framework of the colonial masters and they too confined the scope of Muslim backwardness to higher education and public jobs. As a result, they found Hindu middle classes as their competitors, who were fast to grab the opportunities of the colonial institutions in Bengal. As a result, Muslim middle class sought patronage from the colonial state. Besides, these middle class Muslims floated a number of associations to press their demands. Nawab Abdul Lateef, Syed Ameer Ali and Syed Ahmed Khan headed such associations with a view to safeguarding the interests of Muslims.

Another important feature of these middle class Muslims, which separated them from the *ulama*, was their reception or advocacy of western modernity and reforms in Islam. They all, unlike the *ulama*, supported new interpretations of Islam, keeping in mind the needs of the modern times.

Despite their differences, the *ulama* and the middle-class Muslims broadly shared some views. On the question of women, the positions of the *ulama* and the middle-class Muslims were not radically different. While the *ulama* favoured education for women only to the extent that they [women] could run the family in the light of Islam, the

middle-class Muslims were also reluctant to provide equal rights to women. Syed Ahmed Khan, who favoured acquiring western knowledge, was not a supporter of school education for women. Though his mother Azizunnissa Begma (1780?-1857) got educated at home,²¹³ Sir Syed Ahmed did not favour schools for girls and instead he believed in “trickle-down” approach that meant he considered boy’s education most important. Before the Indian Education Commission (1882), Syed Ahmed said,

[The question of women] much resembles the question of the oriental philosopher who asked whether the egg or the hen were first created. Those who hold that women should be educated and civilised prior to the men are greatly mistaken. The fact is that no satisfactory education can be provided for Muhammadan females until a large number of Muhammadan males receive a sound education. The present state of education among Muhammadan females is, in my opinion, enough for domestic happiness, considering the present social and economic condition of the life of the Muhammadans of India.²¹⁴

According to Gail Minault, Syed Ahmed believed that women were ‘inherently inferior to men, physically and intellectually.’²¹⁵

Syed Ameer Ali too did not show much radicalism on the women issue. In one of his pieces on Islam and women, Ali spent much of his energy on defending Islam through generalities --that Islam was the first religion to recognise the rights of women-- rather than talking about the contemporary problems faced by Muslims women.

In conclusion, the perceptions of Muslim backwardness understood through the writings of the *ulama*, the middle class Muslims and colonial intellectuals showed their biases in favour of the elite. Their discourse had little time to talk about the conditions of subaltern classes. Though the writings of the *ulama*, unlike the middle-class Muslims, did talk about the plunder of wealth from India to London but they also operated in a meta narrative of the Muslim-led Indians versus foreign British rule. The colonial discourse, on the other hand, was also confined to middle class discourse. It, too, had little to say about the impact of the British rule on lower classes and castes. These are some of the limitations of these perceptions of Muslim backwardness in late nineteenth century.

²¹³ Minault 1998, p. 12.

²¹⁴ *Report of the Indian Education Commission, Appendix Vol.: Report for the North-Western Provinces and Oudh and Testimony*, p. 300. Cited in Gail Minault, *ibid*, pp. 18-19.

²¹⁵ Minault, *ibid*, p. 30.

While concluding, I would like to add that further research work, which investigates subaltern voices, might bring to light some more dimensions to the topic of perceptions of Muslim backwardness.

APPENDIXES

Table 1: Muslim Population in British India (1881)

Province	Muslims	Hindus
Bengal	21,704,724 (31.2%)	45,452,806 (65.4%)
Bombay	3,021,131 (18.4%)	12,308,582 (74.8%)
Madras	1,933,561 (6.2%)	28,497,678 (91.4%)
North-Western Provinces and Oudh	5,922,886 (13.4%)	38,053,394 (86.3%)
Punjab	10,525,150 (51.4%)	7,130,528 (40.7%)
Central Provinces	275,773 (2.5%)	7,317,830 (75.4%)
Assam	1,317,022 (27.0%)	3,062,148 (62.7%)
All India (including native states)	50,121,585 (19.7%)	187,937,450 (74.0%)
Total		

(Sources: Census of India, 1881, as cited in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, p. 26.)

Table: 2 Showing the Proportion of Mahomedans Employed in Upper Grades of Civil Services (Judicial Department, Madras)

Designation of Appointment	Hindoo	Mahomedans	Other s	Total
Principal Sadar Amins on salaries of R. 500.	10	None.	2	12
District Munsifs on salaries from R. 200 to R. 300	87	6	17	110
Total	97	6	19	122

(Sources: 'Extract from the Proceedings of the Government of Madras in Educational Department, No.—288, dated 7th October 1872', *Correspondences of the Subject of the Education of the Muhammadan Community in British India and their Employment in the Public Service Generally, Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, Home Department No. CCV, Home Department Serial No. 2, Published by Authority Calcutta, Printed by the Superintendent of Government Printing India, 1886, p. 156.)

Table 3: Statistics from Education Report 1869-70 on Muslims studying in schools and colleges in the NWP

	Pupils	Muslims
Colleges	1,423	169
High Schools	1,750	293
Middle Class Schools	1,088	184
Tehseelee Schools	15,954	2,628
Hulkabundee Schools	102,490	15,049
Female Schools	7,031	1,228
Private Colleges	1,234	199
Higher Aided Private Schools	1,908	276
Middle Schools	6,958	1,200
Aided Private Girls' Schools	709	210
Anglo-Vernacular Schools	11,603	2,420
Total	152,148	23,862

(Sources: From C.A. Elliott, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Government, North-Western Province, to E.C. Bayley, Esq., C.S.I., Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, --No. 4559 A, dated Nynce Tal, the 17th October, 1871, in *Correspondences*, 1886,p. 191.)

Table 4: Muslims Officers in Central Provinces

	Hindus	Muslims	Muslims %
Total Population of the Province	7,971,254	2,75,773	3.46
Government Officials monthly pay exceeds R_200	34	9	26.47
Government Officials monthly pay exceeds R_100	107	28	21.49
Government Officials monthly pay exceeds R_50	303	78	25.74
Government Officials monthly pay exceeds R_10	2442	763	31.21
Government Officials monthly pay does not exceeds R_10	11,038	4,238	38.34
Total Number of Officials employed in Central Provinces	13,924	5,111	36.70

(Sources: 'From A.H.L. Fraser, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of India, House Department, -- 3438—186, dated the 4th September 1882', *Correspondences*, 1886, p., 319.

Table: 6 The Number of the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal in the Medical Colleges since its establishment

Year	Hindus	Muslims
1835	56	0
1836	44	0
1837	60	0
1838	59	0
1839	51	2
1840	51	2
1841	60	2
1842	57	3
1843	42	3
1844	50	3
1845		
1846	32	--
1847		
1848		
1849	59	5
1850	80	9
1851	78	6
1852	105 (66 in English and 39 in Bengali class)	4
1853		
1854	114 (52 in English and 62 in Bengal classes)	4
1855	127 (64 in English and 63 in Bengali classes)	2 (1 in English and 1 in Bengali classes)

(Sources: *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Province of the Bengal Presidency and Bengal Public Instruction Reports: 1844-45 to 1855-56*, cited in Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 1974, p. 107.)

Table 7: Hindus and Muslims in the Gazetted jobs in Bengal in April 1971

Posts	Hindus	Muslims
Extra Assistant Commissioners	7	0
Deputy-Magistrates and Deputy Collectors	113	30
Income Tax Assessors	43	6
Registration Department	25	2
Judges of Small Court and Subordinate Judges	25	8
Munsifs	178	37
Police Department, Gazetted Officers of all grades	3	0
Public Works Department, Engineer Establishment	19	0
Public Works Department, Subordinate Establishment	125	4
Public Works Department, Account Establishment	54	0
Medical Department, Officers attached to College, Jail, Charitable Dispensaries, Sanitation, and Vaccination Establishments, and Medical officers in charge of Districts, etc.	65	4
Department of Public Instruction	14	1
Other Departments, such as Customs, Marine, Survey, Opium, etc.	10	0

(Sources: W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, Rupa, New Delhi, 2002, p. 161.)

Table 8: Muslim Education in Bengal Proper (1874-1875)

Division	% Muslim in Population	% at School	% Hindus in Population	% at School
Burdwan	12.8	6.0	85.3	93.5
Presidency	48.2	24.0	50.9	75.0
Rajshahi	61.0	45.0	38.5	54.5
Dacca	59.1	27.0	40.4	73.0
Chittagong	67.4	43.0	29.7	54.5
Total for Bengal Proper	48.8	29.0	50.1	70.1

(Source: *Census of Bengal 1972*, General Statement IB., pp. xxxii-xxxiii, cited in Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 134-135)

Table 9: Knowledge of English in relation to total Literates, Muslims and Hindus in Bengal Proper, 1891

Regions	Muslims (% of English knowing to the total literates)	Hindus (% of English knowing to the total literates)
N. Bengal	0.69	3.40
E. Bengal	0.92	3.08
W. Bengal	3.89	5.40

(Source: *Census of India 1891*, iii, p. 229, cited in Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 136.)

Table 9: Progress of Muslim Education in Bengal, 1882.

	Total Pupils	Muslim Pupils	% of Muslims
Arts College	2,900	115	3.9
Professional Colleges	856	19	2.2
High Schools	50,606	4,464	8.8
Middle Schools	43,810	5,766	13.1
Middle Vernacular	59,967	8,208	13.6
Primary	1,118,623	334,831	23.3
Total	1,276,762	353,403	27.6

(Source: *GRPI 1882-1883*, p. 5, cited in Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 150.)

Table 10: Number of Muslims and Hindus in government employment and other literate profession

Official Class	Muslims	Hindus
Officers of Central Government	3,351	7,590
Officers of Municipal, Local and Village Government	35,177	59,124
Officers of Independent Government and Native States	--	11
Total of Official Class	38,528	66,725
Defence Services		
Army	3,828	2,465
Navy	8	--
Total of Defence Services	3,836	2,465
Literate Professions		
Lawyers, Law stationers, Law stamp dealers	1,600	5,445
Physician, Surgeons, Druggist etc.	8,324	25,210
Teachers	5,939	16,261
Authors and Literary persons	422	2,394
Scientific Persons	191	1,643
Total of Literate Professions	16,476	50,953
Grand Total	58,840	120,143

(Source: Calculated from the Census of Bengal 1881, cited in Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, Oxford University Press, 1996, New Delhi, p. 154.)

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