

THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE SCIENTIFIC AWAKENING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIA

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The paper deliberates on the Muslim community response to the scientific awakening that took place in northern India, and Bengal in particular, during the nineteenth century. Whereas Syed Ahmed Khan and Abdul Latif Khan warmly advocated modern scientific education amongst the Muslims, their society at large was lukewarm vis-à-vis *natury* English education and co-ordination with the newly founded 'one nation' movement led by the Indian National Congress (1885). Muslim separatism had been fermented long ago (very early eighteenth century) through Wahhabi militant philosophy, and it was not caused by the Hindu revivalism which evolved much later, during the closing years of the nineteenth century. Regrettably, the famous historian Susobhan Sarkar inverted the cause-effect relationship in this regard.

Key words: Bengal Renaissance, Conceptual struggle, Jihād, Muslim response, Nineteenth century India, Scientific awakening, Suspicion against 'natury' or modern science, Two nations versus one, Wahhabi militant philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Professor Susobhan Sarkar, one of the ablest interpreters of the Bengal Renaissance, which led to the Indian awakening, pointed out 'three major limitations to the Bengal Renaissance'¹: (a) inadequate appreciation of the exploitation in the British rule, (b) elite remaining a gulf apart from the common masses and (c) 'the Hindu bias alienating the Muslim consciousness'. We are constrained to record our comments on the three cited criticisms.

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The Indian people, including the elites, were quite aware of the British exploitation, and resisted it on several occasions such as the Marhatta War, Indigo Movement, Black Act, the First War of Independence. Hindus such as Rammohun and Muslims like Syed Ahmed, Abdul Latif, Amir Ali etc felt that the Indians first needed national unity and modern Western education through the British Rule, before they could attempt the final onslaught for independence. Sarkar's second criticism (b) is justified, but he should have added that the 'gulf' created over centuries – the abominable casteist divisions within Hinduism, the Muslims treating the Hindus as *zimmis*, slaves, second-class citizens compelled to pay *jizia* taxes, the caste and class division even amongst the Muslims: *Āsrāf* elites and *Ātrāf* peasants – could not be bridged overnight. Sarkar's third criticism (c) echoed by many Muslim and even Hindu critics is plainly unacceptable, unless it is severely qualified as we intend to deliberate upon in this chapter.

Those who have talked about 'Hindu bias' in the Bengal Renaissance sadly reflected their own bias. The Renaissance in Bengal was not 'Hindu' in character. Jones, Colebrooke, Wilson, Prinsep, Hare, Derozio and later Rev. Long, Lafont etc were neither Hindu nor Bengali! Rammohun was almost murdered by conservative Hindus. Many Derozians hated conservative forms of Hinduism and even changed their religion. Vidyasagar and Akshay Kumar Datta were branded as atheists who wanted to reform Hinduism. If Muslims did not join such a reformist movement, it was probably because they were at that stage too conservative to reform themselves. They were misled by their own elites who would neither accept modern English education nor team up with the progressive minded Hindus. To cover up the intellectual failure of the Muslim elites and to accuse the Hindus for the Muslims' failure is atrocious.

Tariq Ali has described the Muslim psyche in India for the entire period 1757-1857 admirably well in a few sentences:

"The Muslims had arrived in India as conquerors. They saw their religion as infinitely superior to that of the idol worshipping Hindus and Buddhists. They had dominated for over five hundred years. Now they were merely a large religious minority. They were asked to wage a *jihād* against the infidel and to boycott everything he represented. In the 1870's, Sir Sayyid (Syed) Ahmed Khan (1817-98) warned Muslims against their self-imposed isolation"(Ali, 2005, p.227-228).

It is sad to reflect that Susobhan Sarkar, Tapan Raychaudhuri and many other scholars writing on Bengal Renaissance have glossed over the Indian histories of Muslim dominance (till 1757), decline (1757-1857) and revivalism / separatism (since 1857). They could have at least emulated Kaji Abdul Wadud (Odud), who has carefully chronicled the ‘Muslim Response’ to the Renaissance Movement, criticising the Hindu revivalists and the Muslim revivalists / separatists in equal measure (Wadud, 1956, pp. 112-135, 192-200).

Wadud pointedly observed (Wadud, 1956, p. 117) that the Muslim were far more conservative than the Hindus in accepting other cultures and languages, particularly because they had dominated over the Hindus for such a long period!

It is a glaring fact that during 1860-1880, the movements for Muslim *qaum* often preceded the movements for Hindu revivalism. None of these were the products of Bengal Renaissance, which authored Surendranath Banerjea’s *Indian Association* (1876), then *Indian National Congress* (1885), the symbols of national unity. Banerjea and many Hindu and Muslim patriots such as Badruddin Tyabji visualised ‘a nation in making’ (Banerjea, 1925, reprint 1963), but unfortunately two nations had been born conceptually much earlier, ever since 712 AD when Muhammad bin Qasim of Iraq conquered Sind and ‘declared it a Muslim state (it is so even to-day!) where Hindus became inferior in status and paid *jizya*, a poll-tax not levied on Muslims’. The Muslims lost their empire in 1757 or thereabout, making the Hindus jubilant, but regained a part of it in 1947. In the interregnum, the British ruled over the Indians, already divided, hopelessly divided.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF SOME RELEVANT CHRONOLOGICAL FACTS (1700-1900)

Before we present some relevant information regarding the Muslim response to the altered socio-political conditions in the sub-continent for the period 1700-1900 AD, we allude to some of our earlier writings (Biswas, 1998, pp.275-313) wherein we touched upon the decline of Islam (outside India) which affected subsequent events and science in India, the decadence during the Mughal Period upto 1700 AD, and the wishful thinking of Dharampal and Jawaharlal Nehru to the effect that everything was fine in

the Pre-British India: “Had the British not come to India”. We have been considerably benefited by the scholarly writings of Tariq Ali, Kazi Abdul, Wadua Muzaffar Alam, S.A.A Rizvi (1978), Irfan Habib (1986), O.P. Jaggi (1977), Irshad Manji (2005) etc.

The Hindu-Muslim animosity definitely continued throughout the 18th century, marked by communal riots during the rival processions of Muharrum and Durga Festival etc. S.A.A. Rizvi has written about the separatist philosophy of the ‘last great theologian of Islam’, Waliullah (1703-1764): “He did not want the Muslims to become part of the general milieu of the sub-continent”. Waliullah even invited an outsider, Ahmad Shah Abdali, to come to India and crush the Marhattas and then the Sikhs, the ‘*kāfirs*’ in India! Anil Chandra Bandyopadhyay has beautifully summed up how the Waliullah philosophy of the 18th century was continued in the 19th century Wahhabi Movement (Bandyopadhyay, 1986).

Tariq Ali has made a brief but lucid presentation of the ‘roots of Wahhabism’ (Ali 2005, pp. 73-78), and Kazi Abdul Wadud has discussed its pernicious influence in India during the first half of the nineteenth century (Wadud, 1956, pp.112-135 and 192-200).

From the 16th century onwards, the Arab countries were under the Ottoman empire of Turkey and its Caliph. A revivalist sect in Arab was instituted by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-92), the son of a local theologian in the oasis-town of Uyana. He invoked the entire Muslim community for ‘a return to the pure beliefs of olden times’, whatever it meant. Specifically, he opposed the worship of the Prophet and prayer at the shrines of holy men stressing the ‘unity of one God’, and denounced not only non-Muslims but also non-Sunnis like the Shia ‘heretics’ and liberal Sufis sympathetic to other religions. When Muhammed Ibn Saud the ruler of Deraiya of the province of Nejd joined hands with the charismatic Wahhab, the Saudi-Wahhabi forces assumed ‘the combination of religious fanaticism, military ruthlessness and political opportunism’, and wrested a large part of the Arab territory during the end of the 18th century to be eventually defeated by the Ottomans in 1811.

In the meantime, the Wahhabi militant philosophy spread deep into India. Waliullah and Wahhab were of the same age. Raja Rammohun came in contact with Muslims (at Patna and Rangpur) of both the hues: the liberals

who liked him, as well as the Wahhabis who detested him. Rammohun realized that the Muslim society can be reformed only from within, and not by an outsider like him. When he migrated to Calcutta and faced the anti-reform Hindu fanatics, his transit was literally from the 'frying pan to the fire'.

Waliullah's followers were dedicated Wahhabians inviting Afghans to come to India and crush the Marahattas and the Sikh infidels. The consolidation of the Sikh power had taken place under Ranjit Singh uring 1795-98. He was friendly with the emerging British power and successfully resisted the Afghan onslaughts. Kazi Abdul Wadud has described how the Muslims declared *jihād* against the Sikhs towards the end of 1826, how the *jihādi* movement was led by Shah Syed Ahmad, a Wahhabi of Rae Bareilly, and how the Muslim youth used to be recruited in large numbers from East Bengal.¹⁶ Hunter provided a graphic description of the way young gullible Muslims, often of age below 20, used to be smuggled from each district of East Bengal by Wahhabi preachers and sent to the war-fronts in N.W. India to die of illness, starvation or sword (Hunter, 1870 an 1908). That was during the years following 1826.

"Titu Mir of Barasat belonged to the Wahhabi sect of Muhammadan fanatics, excited to rebellion in 1831 against the Hindu landholders", wrote *Imperial Gazetter* as quoted by Wadud. After the demise of Ranjit Singh in 1839, the British army protected the Sikhs and resisted the Muslim *jihādi* mercenary onslaught in the North Western provinces till 1857. Wadud mentions that the *jihādi* war became the fiercest during 1851, some six years before the Mutiny.

The above details clearly show that the Sikh revivalism came much earlier, and the Muslim *qaum*, extremism of the Wahhabi variety, appeared much much before there was anything like militant Hindu revivalism in India!

It is true that during the advent of the British rule the Muslim elites suffered from the loss of power and landed poperty, and the Hindu zamindars gained; but the Hindus had suffered earlier on the same counts for centuries. It is true that the Muslim peasants suffered from the upper class *bhadraloks*; but so did the lower caste Hindus as well. During the Indigo Movement, the Hindu and Muslim peasants received strong moral and political support

from the Hindus such as Dinabandhu Mitra, Harish Chandra Mukherjee, Kristodas Pal and Christians like Reverend Long, Michael Madhusudan Datta.

Additionally, the Muslim peasants of several districts such as Jessore, Nadia, Faridpu, Pabna etc were supported by the Wahhabi leaders. One of them, Amiruddin was imprisoned in 1871. On 20 September 1871, the Chief Justice of Kolkata was assassinated by B. Abdullah, a prominent Wahhabi. Lord Mayo the Viceroy of India was murdered in Andaman by a Wahhabi on 24 January, 1872, when there was no trace of Hindu revivalism or militancy in the political scenario. These facts clearly show that 'Hindu revivalism' could not be the cause of 'Muslim Separatism'; ever since 712 AD it has been the other way round.

ON SAYYID (SYED) AHMED KHAN (1817-98)

There are several biographical accounts (Graham, 1985, Malik, 1980, Gandhi, 1987, pp. 19-45) on Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), a name abbreviated in this section as SAK for convenience. He was the first notable Muslim intellectual in modern India comparable to Raja Rammohun Roy in a limited sense. We would follow the impartial and dispassionate account of SAK's life and works presented by Rajmohan Gandhi, since that also provides a fair idea of the Muslim response to the Indian awakening for the decades since our First War of Independence.

Akbar Shah II was the Mughal 'emperor' in 1817 when SAK was born in an aristocratic family of Delhi very close to the emperor. SAK learnt some mathematics, medicine and Arabic but not English, since *ulemā* at that time called English schools as 'abodes of ignorance'. SAK grew up with a sense of disdain against the English education provided at the Delhi College despite his friend Mirza Ghalib's endorsement in poetry: "Open thine eyes, and examine the Englishman".

After the Mutiny of 1857, SAK's 'eyes were opened', and he realized the strength of the English army, culture and education.

During the Mutiny and the accompanying riots, SAK assisted the British as the 'foremost loyal Mohammedan' and became one of the Raj's 'subordinate judges'. The scholars who have criticised the Bengal Renaissance stalwarts for not being sufficiently severe against the British Rāj, have

remained strangely silent about SAK and his associates and their collaboration with the Rāj!

SAK pleaded friendship between the *qaum* and the British. During his visit to Calcutta in 1863, SAK advised a Muslim audience: “The student will discover that the world is a good deal wider than his own sect”. Three decades ago he, as a young person, met Rammohun visiting Delhi, but did not imbibe his liberalism at that time; the experience of the Mutiny and the terrible massacre of the *qaum* made him wiser. In 1864, SAK founded the *Translation Society* renamed as the *Scientific Society* for large scale translation of the Western scientific literature into Urdu.

In 1866, SAK emulated the Calcuttan tradition in starting the *British India Association* at Aligarh for ‘voicing grievances respectfully’. Maulana Imdad Ali founded the *Bihar Scientific Society* in 1868 for the purpose of spreading modern scientific knowledge through Indian languages particularly Urdu. An ambitious translation programme was undertaken. When SAK and Imdad Ali agitated in favour of a university for education through the medium of Urdu, Rajendralala Mitra and other intellectuals of Calcutta and the members of the British Raj advised that English should be the only medium for higher education in India. The Varanasi members of SAK’s Society urged the use of Hindi instead of Urdu for scientific education and publications, and this severely disconcerted SAK, who always felt that ‘Urdu is the memento of the Muslim rule in this country’. His Muslim bias could not be hidden for long. In his letter dated 29th April 1870, he commented that the proposal of the Hindu members of the *Scientific Society* wanting to replace Urdu in the Society’s publications by Hindi, ‘will make Hindu-Muslim unity impossible’. He wrote: “I am convinced that both these communities will not join whole-heartedly in anything. The hostility between the two communities will increase immensely in the future”.²

During the 1860’s SAK did not mind ‘the word Hindu designating all those living in India’, but in the 1870’s his Aligarh project, heavily patronized by the British Rāj and even several Hindu rulers, led to the establishment of MAO: Mohammedan Anglo–Oriental college. It may be noted that earlier in 1855. The ‘Hindu College’ was converted to Presidency College at the request of Nawab Abdul Latif and other Muslim intellectuals. SAK’s concept of the *qaum* was complex; at times it meant Hindu-Muslim united nation, and later it meant the Muslim community alone.

Syed Ahmed Khan was a rational reformist at heart, and if he so desired, could develop himself as a Renaissance man, as the counterpart of Rammohun. On his return from England in 1870, he published a journal *Tahdhib-al-Akhlaq* or *Mohammedan Social Reformer* or simply *Reformer* to air his progressive reformist views. The journal raised a storm, for Syed Ahmed Khan was saying in it:

“that the slavery practised by the Muslims in the past was forbidden by the Quran; polygamy was permissible under only very special circumstances; interest on Government Promissory Notes and loans was perfectly in order; dressing like non-Muslims and eating like them was not forbidden; modern Muslims could practise *ijtihad* or independent judgment on modern questions not covered by Quran; some of the traditional stories about the Prophet were not correct; *taqlid* or acceptance of the old interpretations was not binding; some *hadith* or traditions can be questioned and re-interpreted; a modern Muslim should have philosophy in his right hand and natural science in the left; what is not (scientifically) true is not Islamic ; to suppress or fight shy of the truth, and still to expect that virtue will flourish, is like sowing barley and expecting wheat to grow, and so on” (Gandhi, 1987, pp. 30-32, 42-44).

Quite naturally, Syed Ahmed Khan was condemned by orthodox *ulemā* for his *natury* philosophy or the espousal of ‘anti-religion natural science’. He was variously labeled as *kāfir* (infidel), atheist or *kristan* (Christian). In 1889 Maulana Rashid Ahmed commented: “Sayyid Ahmed administers sweet poison that is fatal; therefore do not join him”.

SAK made tactical retreats to maintain peace with his (Muslim) *qaum*. He handed over the subject of religious education in his College (MAO) to the orthodox Muslims, who in return forgave him for his heterodox views. Thus his journal continued to be reformist but his Mohammedan College (later University) at Aligarh was never so, SAK backtracked also on the issue of vernacular languages. He admitted in 1876 that his idea of providing higher education in the medium of Urdu had been ‘fallacious’. The worst retrogression was in the domain of the ideal of Hindu-Muslim national unity. People gradually forgot what he had said /written earlier:

“The word Hindu could designate all those living in India India is a beautiful bride, and Hindus and Muslims are her two eyes.... Remember that Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians who live in this country all constitute one nation”.

When Surendranath Banerjea founded *Indian Association* on 26 July 1876 (one of the most fragrant flowers of Bengal Renaissance) which was later transformed into *Indian National Congress* in 1885, thus heralding a modern nation in making, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan offered cold shoulder to this wonderful project, clearly indicating that he had two nations in mind!

Nearly three years before the establishment of the *Indian National Congress* (INC) Lord Ripon was toying with the Local Self-Government Bill on the principle of ‘one man one vote’. Sir Syed opposed this principle and pleaded for separate nomination of Muslims. He said in his speech delivered in January 1883:

“Now suppose that all the English were to leave India. Then who would be the rulers of India? Is it possible that two *qaums* – the Muslim and Hindu — could sit on the same throne? Most certainly not. It is necessary that one of them will conquer the other and thrust it down.The larger community would totally override the interests of the smaller community And the measures might make the differences of race and creed more violent than ever.”³

Few years later, INC was constituted; when a Muslim, Badruddin Tyabji was named as the Congress President, Sir Syed accused the INC ‘a Hindu organisation clearly bidding for Muslim support’! In 1888, SAK constituted the rival UIPA: United Indian Patriotic Association and denounced INC from its platform ; five years later UIPA was converted by Theodore Beck, the Principal of MAO, himself a Cambridge graduate, into MDA: Mohammedan Defence Association. Before his death on March 27, 1898 Sir Syed Ahmed Khan used to hear the slogan of his college: “*qaum khuda ki, college sir syed kā, hukm beck bāhadur kā*”. Half a century later, two nations came into existence.

Kazi Abdul Wadud expressed his admiration for the wonderful patriotic move taken by Surendranath Banerjee towards forging one nation in making⁴ and wondered, failed to understand, what made Sir Syed Ahmed Khan not support but resist that golden move or movement (Wadud, 1956, pp. 130-132). We understand, but Wadud strangely ‘failed to understand’! Wadud recorded⁴ that Rajnarayan Bose proposed in 1881 the constitution of a *Mahā Hindu Samiti* (nothing like this had existed) for the Hindu Society in imitation of *National Mohammedan Association* which had been organised earlier by Justice Syed Amir Ali. Do the facts at all indicate that Hindu

revivalism came before, and caused Muslim revivalism and separatism ? Why blame the Hindus for what the Muslims did or did not?

Muslims in Bengal

During the period 1820-1860, there were many Muslims in Bengal (as a matter of fact their numbers exceeded the numbers of the Hindus), but there were not many *Bengali* Muslims committed to the language of the province. The educated Muslims cultivated Arabic, Persian, Urdu but not Bengali and very little of English! This is another reason why the Renaissance in Bengal, boycotted by the majority (Muslim) community, could not be called a 'Bengali' renaissance, We have explained that the movement could not be termed as Hindu Revivalism either.

Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-93), a friend of Michael Madhusudan Datta, hailed from Faridpur, became a Deputy Magistrate in 1849, founded the *Muhammadan Literary Society* (1863), gathered and guided all the upper- and middle-class Muslims of Calcutta there for two decades. In his Autobiography, Abdul Latif stated:

“When I began my public life (1849), the Muhammadan community did not evince any cordial desire to seek intercourse with the Europeans or with the Hindoo fellow-countrymen (there was no Hindu Revivalism in sight at that time – author), and it was with much difficulty and great perseverance, that I succeeded in bringing about a favourable change in their feeling”.

“It is no wonder that Muhammadans of all ranks and degrees have ever turned to the Madrassa with an affectionate and reverent fervour and may I never live to see the day when whatever revolution betide the old College, the Muhammadans of Bengal shall have come to view it differently”.

“I beg most respectfully to suggest the establishment of a purely Arabic Institution or rather the retention of the existing one (in Calcutta) upon an improved basis for the benefit of those members of the learned class who are undesirous of acquiring an English education, and of an Anglo-Persian school offering extra-ordinary advantages for the education of the rest of the Muslim community.”⁵

Abdul Latif was himself a product of Arabic/Persian/Urdu Muslim elitism, refusing to accept Bengali as his mother tongue, when he tendered evidence before the Hunter Education Commission during the 1880's. He

submitted that Urdu was the language of the upper caste or elite Muslims (*Āsrāf*) like him, and *Eslāmi Bānglā*, a hybrid language ‘written from right to left’ (like Urdu) suited the lower class Muslims (*ātrāf*).

Gradually, syncretic Sufi culture and the strength of Bengali literature prevailed, and there emerged within the Muslim community the Renaissance stalwarts like Kazi Nazrul Islam composing poetries and songs on Hindu gods and goddesses. The fanatics did not like him, just as they had detested Bankim Chandra. It has been an irony of fate that during 1947-1971, the non-Muslims were shown the door, and thereafter, the Urdu-speaking Army was given the same treatment, and thus the Muslims in liberated Bangladesh became truly Bengali, their language finding a place of pride in the corridor of the United Nations. That in 1971 became a triumph of Renaissance over communalism (Sengupta, 2007). Abdul Latif however brought to the Muslim community in Bengal the scientific consciousness when in 1863, he founded the *Mohammedan Literary Society* (MLS) several years before Syed Ahmed Khan’s efforts in Aligarh. The Society propounded that ‘British rule was too powerful to be resisted and too useful to be ignored’

In the beginning, the monthly meetings of the Society were held in Abdul Latif’s house. In 1863 he arranged an essay competition on the following topic: “How far would the inculcation of European sciences through the medium of the English language, benefit the Muhammadan students in the present circumstances of India, and what are the most practicable and unobjectionable means of imparting such instruction?” Of course the essay was to be written in Persian, but the preferences for the European sciences and the English language was unmistakable. The present author has researched, collected and published⁶⁻⁸ some valuable information about the scientific activities of the MLS and the contributions made by Abdul Latif which may be presented below.

Abdul Latif arranged scientific lectures for his Society’s monthly meetings and invited as speakers many stalwarts such as Dr Mahendralal Sircar, Reverend Father Eugene Lafont of St.Xavier’s College etc. At a very early date (10 September, 1870) the Catholic forum *Indo-European Correspondence* reported that three days ago (7th evening) Father Lafont had delivered a lecture on the ‘Main Properties of Fluids’ and ‘Moulvie Abdool Luteef Khan acted as an interpreter to the elite of the Society’.

Father Lafont delivered many demonstrated lectures in the MLS gatherings for more than two decades. Two years before Abdul Latif's death, the MLS organised its 27th Annual Conversazione at the Town Hall, Calcutta on 6th of March 1891. 'A very large gathering of both sections of the native community, the Mahomedan element predominating, was graced by the presence of the Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governor'. The report published in *The Statesman* (7th March 1891) went on:

"Father Lafont, who was always surrounded by a large and wondering crowd, exhibited the new perfect *phonograph* of Thomas Edison, which was made to speak, to play a number of musical instruments, to imitate birds, to whistle. Mr Jagadischandra Bose (not yet world-famous) showed how easy it was to write by electricity, and Baboo Chandra Bhusan Bhaduri showed how it was possible to produce fire under water by chemical means".⁷

Abdul Latif was the pioneer, even before Syed Ahmed Khan, in promoting liberalism and science consciousness amongst the Muslims, and yet his contributions have been sadly ignored. He founded his MLS in 1863 when Syed Ahmed Khan visited Calcutta; SAK's *Scientific/Translation Society* was founded next year in 1864. Four years later (1868) Maulana Imdad Ali founded the *Bihar Scientific Society*. The same year Abdul Latif Khan addressed the *Bengal Social Science Association* and narrated how the Muslim society was committing the error of ignoring the Western sciences. The said meeting was well-attended even by eminent Hindus like Pearychand Mitra who was told that the Muslim community could not at that time emulate the Hindus in sending their women to schools for education.⁹

We cannot be too harsh on Abdul Latif Khan for his sectarian interests since the concept of 'nation' itself was in a rudimentary stage in India. Rajnarayan Bose wanted to organize the Hindus towards self-dependence in 1866, three years after Abdul Latif's MLS came into existence, and Nabagopal Mitra's 'Hindu Melā' was inaugurated in 1867 with the warm support of the members of the Tagore family. Mahendralal Sircar wrote in his epoch-making article of 1869 in favour of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS):

"India is properly speaking Hindustan – the land of the Hindus".

Abdul Latif was very sympathetic to the IACS Project of Mahendralal. He was a member in its Board of Trustees. He made monetary contribution

to it on 5th April 1875 and played a prominent role in the inaugural meetings during 1875-76. Substantial donations were made by several other prominent Muslim personalities as well: Nawab Mir Mahomed Ali (1st September 1875), Nizam of Hyderabad and Nawab Salar Jung (25th February 1885), Moulavi Mahomed Yusoo Khan (20th March 1890) etc.⁸

In Mahendralal's diary of 2nd February 1882 we find a note of nostalgic flavour: "Went to the Mahometan Conversazione in the evening to show / perform experiments. (Then) the Vice Roy (Lord Ripon) was brought to our place (IACS premises) by Nawab Abdul Lateef. H.E. patiently and attentively observed all the experiments that were performed". Amritalal recorded on 10 July 1893: "Nawab Abdul Lateef died to-day at about 2 p.m." ⁶²⁹ Sengupta recorded this date wrongly and inadvertently. ¹⁰ Moulvi Mahmud Yusuf succeeded Abdul Latif in the Board of Trustees of the IACS.

Politics Overpowering Culture

Sane politics does not overpower intellectual efforts, science and culture. But Abdul Latif was wrestling with militant conservatism, the Wahhabi variety of theocracy defined as 'politics or state governed through a sacerdotal or priestly class'. We have already paraphrased Kazi Abdul Wadud's masterly presentation (Wadud, 1956) of the Wahhabi Movement in the nineteenth century, which not only declared *jihād* against the British government but also labelled India as *dar-ul-harb*, a non-Muslim state against which the Muslims must struggle till victory is attained. This approach alienated the non-Muslims including the Hindus. Abdul Latif persuaded Maulana Keramat Ali, an influential Maulavee, to issue a counter *fatwā* declaring that India was indeed *dar-ul-islam* that is a state friendly to Islam, at least not unfriendly. Keramat Ali issued the *fatwā* and yet pursued the Wahhabi approach of counter-reformation.

Over the previous centuries, Bengal had been altered demographically into a Muslim-majority province, mainly through the inducements and coercions perpetrated by the Pathan and Mughal rulers, the benevolence of the Sufi saints who proselytized low caste Hindus and neo-Buddhists on a large scale, and the indifference of the upper caste Hindus who would not forsake their divisive tradition of casteism (Sengupta, 2008). Sufism itself represented a composite, liberal and tolerant culture. The neo-converts

worshipped not only Āllāh and the Prophet, but also the innumerable Pirs, the Sufi saints and even the Hindu and Buddhist Gods and Goddesses. Pursuing the Wahhabi line, Keramat Ali wanted to change all that, to reform or rather to counter-reform. The 'revisionist heretics' were brought back to original Arabic Islam (*ādim islām*) by severe coercion (*ḥor jabardastī*) (Wadud, 1956, pp. 124-125, 128-130).

Differing from the cultural MLS, there was considerable political orientation in the next Muslim body, *National Muhammadan Association* (NMA) founded in 1878 under the leadership of Justice Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928), barrister, honorary magistrate and author of the celebrated book *The Spirit of Islam*. Syed Amir Ali's NMA came into existence two years after Surendranath Banerjee's *Indian Association* (1876), and claimed itself to be 'a bonafide political body to represent to government, from a loyal but independent standpoint, the legitimate wants and requirements of the Mussalman community'. NMA had the support of the Hindu elite, and many Hindu stalwarts such as Surendranath Banarjee, Kristo Das Pal, Jatindro Mohan Tagore etc were its members and even served in its management committee. Unfortunately, this healthy trend of Hindu-Muslim unity was later eroded and very soon.¹¹ It is very significant, and Wadud has pointedly drawn our attention to the fact, that Rajnarayan Bose pleaded in 1881 that emulating Syed Amir Ali's *National Muhammadan Association*, the Hindus should organize themselves into a political front named '*Maha Hindu Samiti*'. The *Samiti* should take care of the Hindu society only, 'just as a tiller cultivates a specific portion of the land'. Such a *Samiti* or Hindu Society did not come into existence at that time.¹²

During 1881-82 Syed Jamaluddin Afghani came to Calcutta and spread Pan-Islamism which was a modernist and pro-science version of Wahhabism. Syed Amir Ali argued for rationalism and scientific education amongst the Muslim students using English literature. NMA under his leadership organised Muslim Ānjumans or solidarity centres in different districts of Bengal. During 1882-1885, Lord Ripon and Lord Dufferin were persuaded to consider special measures for education and employment of the backward Muslim community.

At the time Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, the bulk of the Muslim psyche was co-ordinated to be against it and pre-disposed for a separate *qaum*. In 1883, in the Bengal council, Mohammad Yusuf had

demanded reservation of seats for Muslims. The liberal Hindu-loving Amir Ali was afraid of being 'submerged in the rising tide of the new nationalism'. Even the sagacious Abdul Latif regretted, on behalf of the Muhammadan Literary Society, their inability to join the Indian National Congress since 'they did not anticipate any benefit to be derived from the deliberations of the INC in the Calcutta session of 1886'. Most of the Muslim leaders followed Syed Ahmed's approach of remaining loyal to the British and opposing Hindu majority in all walks of life.¹³ Poor Surendranath Banarjee's *A Nation in Making* was a non-starter; national unity was a still-born child!

It is beyond the scope of our present deliberations to discuss the 'Muslim Response to the Indian Awakening' in the twentieth century. Firstly, India geographically and culturally, did not remain the same after 1947. Even between 1885 and 1947, the happenings followed the well-known pattern or debate of 'one nation' versus two, or may be three or more, a debate which had started long before 1885. In this paper, we have recorded the 'Muslim Response' closely and chronologically up to 1886, in order to establish that the theory of 'Hindu Revivalism' triggering 'Muslim Separatism' is plain nonsense. We would be near the truth if we recognize with great dismay that the two aforesaid phenomena, Muslim Separatism and Hindu Revivalism, augmented each other for eleven centuries since 712 AD in an endless cycle of hatred and distrust, finally resulting in the catastrophe of 1947 AD.

The partition of the Indian sub-continent did not solve any problem and merely highlighted the oddity of the 'national' (?) scenario which has been beautifully captured by the eminent historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar:

"The great national leader Lajpat Rai said that the Hindus and Muslims have coalesced into an Indian people. This view was further elaborated when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru announced that there is no such thing as Hindu or Muslim culture but only one Indian community and culture".

"Of course, the Muslims of Pakistan and India (Majumdar could have added Bangladesh and Kashmir) still regard themselves as Muslims, and believe that they form a separate community and cultural unit. So, the net result is that there is a Muslim culture as well as Indian culture and people, but no Hindu culture and people in India. The word 'Hindu' must be effaced from the political and cultural dictionary of free India. To

speak of one-self as Hindu is now looked upon as a sign of communalism by the powers that be. Comment is needless on such absurdities”.

“Rajendralal Mitra would have turned in his grave (if he were buried) to find the total elimination of Hindu as a cultural or political unit, while the Islamic State of Pakistan (and Bangladesh) and the Islamic culture in the whole of geographical ‘India’ triumph in their glory.”¹⁴

Spiritual Syncretism Transcending Separatism

The last word on the Muslim Response to the Indian Awakening is yet to be recorded; it is optimistic. Let us forget about the other Renaissance scholars; Kazi Abdul Wadud at least has not disheartened us. He has indicated that the humanist culture in the Bengal Renaissance did find an echo amongst a section of the Muslim intellectuals in Bengal (Wadud, 1956, pp. 139-200). Wadud wondered how the intellectual desert in the 19th century community of Bengali Muslims produced beautiful blossoms during the first decade of the 20th century; how could those wonderful neo-humanist Muslims overcome and by-pass the earlier Wahhabi influence (*keman kare Wahhabitver pās kātāte perechilen tā jānā jāy ni*). He could not give us a clue, but we surmise that the grand liberal Sufism never disappeared in India, never died in Bengal.

The Sufi tradition had been essentially mystic and spiritual with strong, earlier inputs from Buddhism, neo-Platonic Hellenism, Vedanta and Zoroastrian thoughts. This tradition produced many saints outside and within India, and provided spiritual solace to the vanquished people clinging to the *bhakti* cult of worship.

In India the Sufi movement was institutionalized into different *śilsilās* (orders). Whereas the *Qadiri* order believed in *wahdat al wujūd* cult of ‘unity of all beings and faiths’, the Naqshbandi Sufis propagated *wahdat al shuhūd* or the superiority of Islam over other faiths. Thus the Sufi movement in India was far from being monolithic. Muzaffar Alam has given many examples as to how some of the Sufi orders and leaders of the movement engaged themselves in Islamization of the sub-continent and collaborating with the conservative *ulemā* and autocratic rulers.¹⁵ A Rahman, the famous historian of science, had to conclude with deep regret: “The pluralistic tradition of Hinduism and the pluralistic ethos created by Sufism led to the co-existence of the two streams ...It appears that the two different processes remained at work during the period, one towards integration of the two

traditions and the other keeping them apart. The counter to the process of integration was led by conservative *ulemās* who endeavoured to convert India into an Islamic state. They were opposed to the Sufi pluralistic and liberal tradition.”¹⁶

Fortunately, the forces of liberal humanism though down were never out. The growth of the Muslim population in East Bengal had been due not so much to ‘conversion’ as to ‘seepage’. The local population adopted Āllāh among the other local gods they worshipped. Kabir (1440-1518) had tried his best to unite the Hindus and Muslims spiritually (Westcott, 1986, original 1907). Dārā Shikūh (1611-1656) articulated his grand vision of ‘the mingling of the two oceans’, (Mahfuj-ul-Haq, 2007, original 1929) Hinduism and Islam someday, which was considered to be an ‘apostasy from Islam’. Dārā Shikūh was put to death by his younger brother, Aurangzeb, whose court historian wrote: “The Emperor, both out of necessity to protect the Holy law, and also for reasons of State, considered it unlawful to allow Dārā to remain alive any longer as a destroyer of public peace” Mahfuz ul Haq wrote courageously in 1929:

“The above indictment is too meagre to need any comment. Anyone can choose to be the Champion of Islam and remove all those who stand in the way of realization of his political ambitions.....Like Dārā, Mansur was crucified, Suhrawardi executed and Sarmad put to death, but time has vindicated their honour. They are now hailed as martyrs” (Mahfuj-ul-Haq, 2007). Like Mahfuz ul Haq, there were many other courageous, patriotic and secular Muslims during the first quarter of the 20th century. Kazi Abdul Wadud not only described this era (Wadud 1956, 193-200), he was himself a part of it inspired by Rabindranath Tagore’s Nobel winning literature, his humanism, universalism and compassion for the struggling Muslim world. Kazi Nazrul Islam (born 1899) was a radical, a freedom fighter, worked with the Hindu patriots languishing in the British jail at times. He was hailed as one of the greatest poets Bengal had produced, next to Tagore. The two poets cemented the ties of the two Bengals which has not been broken by communal animosities. The leaders of the *Muslim Sāhitya Samāj* founded in Dhaka in 1926, fought for ‘a change of direction in the social and intellectual life of the Muslim society’, opposed the separate educational stream of Madrassas, advocated a common educational stream for both the communities and formed a ‘League against Mullahism’ (Sengupta, 2007, pp. 45-47, 52-53).

Quite naturally, the liberal, humanist and secular Muslims of Bengal were branded as traitors and persecuted by the orthodox Mullahs. The

formation of the eastern wing of Pakistan in 1947 could not be prevented; but within the next quarter of the century, the Muslims of the independent Bangladesh proved that they would not surrender their secular linguistic culture at the altar of religious conservatism. Kazi Abdul Wadud delivered at Viswa Bharati, Santiniketan, the invited series of lectures on Bengal Renaissance in 1956. There he categorically stated that Pakistan had not developed as a true Islamic State, let alone blossoming as an ideal State.¹⁷ The prosperity of the Indian sub-continent during the 21st century would very much depend upon the pursuit of the 19th century Renaissance ideals of love, compassion, rationality, humanism and universalism. The two oceans must mingle some day!

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sarkar, 1979, (reprint of 1985, supplementary notes), p.165.
2. Regrettably, SAK's linguistic preference was tinged with communalism. Many Hindus in the Aligarh-Delhi area preferred Urdu, whereas in the eastern part of U.P., Hindi was preferred. A century later, the imposition of the military rule by the Urdu speaking Army led to the ascendancy of the Bengali language and the birth of Bangladesh!
3. Gandhi, 1987, p.36.
4. Wadud, 1956, p.127.
5. Wadud, 1956, pp.120-121 and 125. Wadud has quoted Abdul Latif's statements made in 1868.
6. Biswas, 2000, p. 83, 105,126,153.
7. Biswas, 2001, p. 53-54, 231, 266-267.
8. Biswas, 2003, p. 156, 214-215,355
9. Wadud, 1956, p.122
10. Sengupta, 2007, p.13
11. Sengupta, 2007, p.14
12. Wadud, 1956, p. 127
13. Sengupta, 2007, p.15
14. Majumdar & Mitra, 1978, p. 10-11.
15. Alam, 2004, p. 161 and 169
16. Rahman, 1998. The quotation is from Rahman's own article: "A Perspective of Indian Science of 10th- 18th Centuries", pp.28-29
17. Wadud, 1956, p.196 footnote.

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