

Philosophy and Progress

Volumes LXXIII-LXXIV, January-June, July-December, 2023

ISSN 1607-2278 (Print), DOI : <https://doi.org/10.3329/pp.v73i1-2.75226>

EDUCATION IN MEDIEVAL BENGAL: AN ACCOUNT OF TWO SYSTEMS

Mohammad Abul Kawser*

Abstract

In the medieval Bengal, Hindus and Muslims lived in a society where mainly the religion controlled foremost aspects of life. In this context, both the communities maintained two distinct educational systems in Bengal. This paper attempts to present the emergence of Islamic education in Bengal during Sultanate period and its development in relation to the indigenous education of the Hindus. It also examines interactions of Islamic education with its Hindu counterpart from Sultani to Nawabi period despite having clear distinctions across the communities in many respects. Analyzing the primary and secondary sources on education of Medieval Bengal, this paper shows how in a religiously polarized society, the Hindus and Muslims interacted in the field of education going beyond the existing hostility, mistrust and prejudices in many aspects of their distinctive life styles.

* Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.
E-mail: makawser@du.ac.bd

Key words: Medieval Bengal, Muslims, Hindus, Pathsala, Tol, Maktab, Madrasa

Introduction

In the medieval Bengal, Hindus and Muslims lived in a society where religion played an important role in the relationship between these two distinct communities. Some scholars argued that the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal was extremely hostile during medieval period. Famous Indologist Al-Biruni mentioned, Hindus, called Muslims ‘mlechchha’ (i e., impure) and abstained themselves from any connection with Muslims by way of inter-marriage, inter-dining and mixed social gatherings because they thought, they would consequently be polluted (Sachau, 1910). A famous traveler, explorer and scholar Ibn Battuta in his travel account during the 14th century informed about forced conversion, mass enslavement and lower status of the Hindus as *zimmis* and other types of oppressions. He also mentioned about frequent quarrels between Hindus and Muslims (Battuta, 1976). Majumdar (1966) stated that the Muslims considered it a pious duty for them to occupy Hindu Kingdom, break Hindu temples, images of deities and convert Hindus into Muslims. According to Gaborieau (1985), Hindus were not allowed by their own community to take food prepared by the Muslims, drink water served by the Muslims and they would as a rule outcaste their fellow Hindus if found to be in sexual relations with Muslims.

Apart from the above statements regarding Hindu-Muslim relations, many scholars have shed light on the fact that there was amicable relationship between them in various spheres of life. A document bearing the seal of the Mughal Emperor

Ahmad Shah (1748–54 AD) proves that some Muslim emperors gave donations for the maintenance of Hindu temples (Husain, 1939). Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, especially of lower strata lived in peace and harmony for centuries. As a consequence, assimilation of the two cultures and the fusion of the two religions started from the very beginning and continued up to the middle of the 18th century to reach its culminating point (Roy, 1983; Siddiq & Habib, 2017). In the 18th century Bengal, it was very common that Muslims offered *puja* at Hindu temple while Hindus offered *sinni* at Muslim shrines. Moreover, this fusion of religious ideas led both the communities to worship a common God, *Satyapir* (Sen, 1911). A Muslim poet Faizullah in his poem ‘*Satyapir*’ claimed that “what the Muslims call Allah is Hari to the Hindus” (Sharif, 1977, p. 423). After reading texts of Bengali literature from the 15th to the 18th century, Edward C. Dimmock, found a very little sign of any deep-rooted antagonism between the two communities. Numerous sufi orders, e. g. Chisti, Qalenderi, Qadiriya, Naqshbandi and Suhrawadi, had a significant influence on Bengali Hindus as well as on their Muslim followers (Chakravarty, 1992 in Chatterji, 2000-2001). It was sometimes difficult to distinguish between Hindu and Muslim religious activities in rural regions since they were so common in nature. The medieval Panchalis make reference to a variety of Muslim saints and “Pirs” who were revered by both Muslims and Hindus. The tomb of Shah Ismail Ghazi at Kantaduar in the Rangpur district and the shrine of Nur-Qutb-Alam in Pandua were revered by all irrespective of religious affiliations (Vipradasa, 1953).

The controversies over various aspects of Hindu-Muslim relations also include the field of education. According to Mehta

(1990), Muslim monarchs during the Sultanate period had a hostile attitude toward the Hindu educational system because they saw it as a tool for promoting idolatry and infidelity in the territories they controlled. As a result, numerous indigenous educational institutions had to suffer devastation during Muslim military expeditions. Mehta (1990), however, stated about the changes in this situation over time. As he continued, that the ancient Hindu system of education persisted outside the sultanate's borders and continued to thrive as previously because, in the thirteenth century, a sizable portion of the land was free from Turkish rule. By the time the Khaljis brought Islam into the south as a political force, much of the Muslim conquerors' rage against the Hindu educational institutions had subsided. As a result, the two educational systems - one indigenous and the other foreign in both content and goals became operational side by side, even though they were largely mutually exclusive. This study presents an account of the emergence of Islamic educational system in Medieval Bengal and its development along with existing education system of Hindus. It examines how the educational system of Muslims interacted with its Hindu counterpart despite having distinctions across the communities in many respects. The study focuses on Medieval Bengal extending from the Sultanate to the Nawabi period which covered about five centuries from 13th to 18 centuries CE.

Introduction of Islamic education and its development alongside with Hindu education

The introduction of Muslim rule in Bengal created an opportunity for the spread of Islamic education in the region. As a consequence, the Islamic education in Medieval Bengal evolved

along with indigenous educational system of Hindus. Before coming of the Muslims to Bengal, the traditional Hindu system of education formed the foremost part of the indigenous educational system. The Vedic system of education is the name given to the educational system that developed in India circa 1200 B.C. The four Vedas - *Rigveda*, *Samveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Atharvaveda* - which are regarded as God's language in human speech - were the foundation of education, as their namesake suggests. "To liberate the soul from worldly bondages" was the stated purpose of Vedic education. The education of Vedic period had distinct aspects and characteristics. Only members of the upper castes, such as Brahmins and Kshatriyas, as well as Brahmcharis, had access to education. (Goyal & Aggarwal, 2015: 61) Islam came to the region when such an educational system existed in India.

The acquisition of knowledge is given foremost consideration in Islam. According to the first Quranic revelation "Proclaim! (or Read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created - Created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And thy Lord Is Most Bountiful, - He Who taught (The use of) the Pen,-Taught man that Which he knew not." (The Holy Qur'an, Al-Alaq, 1-5). Another verse of Quran states that "Nor should the believers All go forth together: If a contingent from every expedition remained behind, They could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, - That thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil)" (The Holy Qur'an, Tawba, 122). A good number of Hadiths also emphasized the importance of education in Islam. According to AL-Tirmidhi, Whoever goes out in search of knowledge until he returns home, he is considered to be on the path of Allah (Tirmidhi Hadith Number: 2647)

The reflection of these Islamic concepts of education was clearly noticeable in the newly established state and society in Medina. The Muslim conquerors carried forward this tradition of Islamic education to the occupied countries and Bengal was not an exception in this respect. (Ali, 1985) Bengali Muslims valued education as a part of their religious duty and an act of devotion, a way to please Allah and obtain salvation as its reward. In addition, they regarded education as a means of material progress and social status. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 1) A 17th century Muslim poet Alaol wrote, “If the teacher teaches Bismillah to the child, the door of heaven is opened to the teacher, parents and child.” (Majumdar, 1966) During the period of Muslim rule in Bengal, Muslims had greater opportunities to be employed in the government service. It inspired Muslim youths to acquire education that would help them in getting into jobs in the government. Poet Alaol also stated, “A father considered himself a respectable person, if his son was distinguished in learning.” (Majumdar, 1966: 279) Affluent economic condition of Muslim families allowed them to send their children to the educational institutions. All these factors facilitated the growth of Muslim education in Bengal. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 1)

In Bengal, *maktabs* and *madrasas* were established by rulers, Sufis and upper class people of the society. The early conquerors of Bengal considered education as an instrument for stabilizing their military occupation. This consideration might lead Bakhtiyar Khalaji and his Khalaji maliks to establish mosques, madrasas and khanqahs (seats of religious divines) in the capital and other strategic places of their conquered territories. (Ali, 1985) According to *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, the later cities, like Gaur, Pandua, Ikdalah, Satgaon, Sunargaon and

Chatgaon (Chattagram) also seemed to have such educational institutions. (Umar-i-Usman, 1881) Apart from military purpose, the Muslim rulers also used their own education system to regulate intellectual and cultural life of the people. (Mehta, 1990) As the founder of Mughal Empire Zahir-U-Din Babar considered education as the responsibility of the state, various sorts of educational institutions were established with official assistance throughout Babar's reign. (Ikram,1964) His son Emperor Humayun also shared similar broad perspectives and a propensity to favor both Islam and Hinduism. (Mohiuddin, 1987) Considering education as the basic right of each citizen, Emperor Akbar created a state department with the purpose of supporting Muslim and Hindu educational institutions with public funds. (Ikram, 1964) Regardless of their religion, it was his policy to educate the subjects of the state. He also established Madrasahs where Hindu and Muslim children studied modern courses in the same class. Classes for religious instruction in such Madrasahs were separate for Muslims and Hindus. (Law,1916) Surprisingly, modern research has shown that even Aurangzeb gave jagirs to numerous temples. (Mohiuddin, 1987)

Mughal annexation of Bengal added new acquisitions from the prosperous learning and culture of North India, Persia and central Asia to existing cultural tradition and intellectual legacy of Bengal. This intellectual atmosphere extended to the provinces of the empire. The subahdars, diwans, qadis, faujdars and other officials who came to Bengal were the admirers and patrons of learning and talents. It also opened the door of Bengal to the teachers, physicians and other professionals of North India. This new phenomenon created momentous impact on intellectual life of Bengal and stimulated the progress of learning and education of

Bengal. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) This tradition of learning continued during the period of the Nawabs. All the Nawabs of Bengal were men of learning and they extended liberal patronage to education. Political turmoil in Iran after the assassination of Nadir Shah led many learned people and their families to leave home for shelter. Shiah Nawabs of Bengal who also needed learned and talented people in their court and administration welcomed their brethren of same faith to Bengal. As a consequence, Bengal witnessed a remarkable development in the Islamic and other branches of learning. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2)

As mentioned earlier, prior to Islam, education in India was mostly confined among Brahmins and the higher class people of Hindu society. The lower class Hindus were not allowed to acquire any kind of knowledge because they had no access to the existing learning centers. (Long, 1868; Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) Islam entered into Bengal with its simple social and religious rule which attracted even several prominent Hindus to the extent of undermining the glory of Brahmanism. (Chowhan, 2022) Muslim rule in Bengal opened the door of equal education to all classes of people irrespective of their religious beliefs and social classes. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) A transformation occurred in Hindu society at the same time as the educational system in Muslim society was developing alongside. Over time, Pathshala, a primary educational institution that evolved in Hindu society, opened its doors to both boys and girls, regardless of caste (Long, 1868). According to Chowhan (2022), Islam was not the only factor contributing to the decline of Brahmanism; the introduction of Nava Vaishnavism also had much to do with it. When Chaitanya Dev led a kirtan party through the streets of Navadwipa, his initial response to the caste system was evident.

People from all walks of life were drawn to him because of his amazing devotion in Nam-Kirtan and his unique personality. Caste differentiation was not a barrier to their spontaneous mixing. The orthodox community fiercely objected to it, claiming that Chaitanya had destroyed the long-standing caste system. “Even though one is chandal by birth, he is superior to all brahmins if he is pious and has love for god,” said the Master boldly. He would embrace anyone who said, “Thou, O Krishna, art my life,” regardless of caste. Even as a young child, he declared, “If anyone eats food from the same plate with a sweeper , he becomes entitled to receive God’s favor.” These statements from a brahmin sounded strangely brazen in a community where the brahman was revered and a sweeper was regarded as worse than an animal. (Bhagawat , 1941 in Chatterji, 2000-2001: 219)

Chaitanya challenged monopoly of education by introducing the idea of equal opportunities to knowledge for all castes. As stated earlier, pre-Muslim Bengal was a Brahmin-dominated society, with lower class Hindus being denied access to any schooling at all. The *sastras* (religious texts) were exclusively controlled by the Brahmins. As a result, when Chaitanya brought caste equality and equal access to education for all, Brahmins were furiously offended and complained to Muslim rulers. They claimed that this was an irrational act and claimed that Chaitanya was undermining Hinduism by inciting heretical individuals. The lower class people are singing the name of Krishna (God) over and over. Navadvip will be destroyed by this sin (of doing unreligious work). God’s name is a powerful incantation according to Hindu sastras, but its effectiveness is diminished if everyone hears it. Despite severe protest by the Brahmins,

these underprivileged Hindus were freed from the control of the wealthy class and their intellectual servitude. By enrolling in schools run by Muslims, which had given all classes of people, Muslims and non-Muslims, equal possibilities for advancement in spiritual, material, and intellectual spheres, they no longer had to worry about the wrath of Brahmins. Thus, during the Muslim era, education pervaded even the lower strata of Hindu society, and these individuals who had previously been dejected and denied opportunities to learn, could now improve their lives. The Hindus attitude toward education underwent a radical shift as a result of Muslim immigrants receiving general education, (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) Moreover, Sufism, the emergence of goddess cults and Sahajiya Tantrism all significantly contributed to the downfall of traditional Brahmanism. Additionally, during Hussain Shah's reign in Bengal, these religious sects established novel socio-religious doctrines and practices. Even if Vaishnavism persisted before Chaitanya, Tantrism or the Sahajiya cult had a significant impact on it. (Chowhan, 2022) With this background about introduction of Islamic education in Bengal and its development along with existing education of Hindus, the texts that follow will focus on the educational institutions of both Muslims and Hindus.

Primary education System

Pathsala

The primary education for Hindu children was imparted in the *pathsalas* located usually in the premises of Brahmanic or Jain temples. The priests of the temples or sometimes the hired pundits or Jain scholars taught the children of the locality free of charge. These educational institutions were maintained either by the grants received from the state or by the public endowments

and charity. Apart from these *pathsalas* housed into the temples and shrines, there were *pathsalas* in the big villages and towns where caste Hindus formed the majority of the population. The latter kinds of *pathsalas* were maintained by the Hindus through public charity. (Mehta, 1990)

Hindu boys and girls were sent to *pathsalas* at around the age of five with a special ceremony called *upanayana* at an auspicious time determined by the astrologers. The medium of instructions in *pathsalas* was Sanskrit. Religious texts along with simplified version of *Purana*, stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were introduced in this elementary level of education. (Mehta, 1990) There was co-education in *pathsalas* and students studied there for six years. Boys and girls had to bring their own mats to sit in the *pathsalas* whereas teachers sit on a footstool. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2)

Due to the marriageable age being decreased to eight or nine, the cause of female education suffered greatly; it was a fatal blow to any education that was to be given to them. Even then, mentioning of girls receiving primary education in *Pathsala* can be seen in modern writing. Mukundaram lists Lahana, Khullana, and Lilabati as former letter-writers and readers. (Chakravarti, 1992 cited in Chatterji, 2000-2001) The notion that there was female education in the primary levels is further supported by Dayaram's *Sardamangal*, a book written in the 17th century where the poet mentioned five princesses attending *Pathsala*. Princess Vidya was so well-educated, according to Bharat Chandra's *Vidysundar*, that she even won literary debates against several academics. According to the literature of the time, girls from middle class households as well as daughters of rajas and zamindars were educated at the *Pathsala* alongside the males. (Chatterji, 2000-2001)

Maktabs

The primary education of Muslim children was started with the courses of *maktabs* which were generally attached to the mosques. (Ali, 1985) Sometimes *maktabs* were also run by the wealthy people in their houses for the tuition of their own children as well as the children of their poor neighbours who otherwise could not afford education for their children (Long, 1868). As mentioned earlier, *pathsalas* were also located in the house of rich people or under some trees of the gurus' (teachers) house. Sometimes the same place was used both for *maktab* and *pathsala*, former in the morning and the latter in the afternoon. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) This shows that there was a kind of social interaction and peaceful coexistence between the Hindus and the Muslims regarding education.

The primary objective of the *maktabs* was to prepare Muslim children for prayers. Generally, it requires at least two years to acquire knowledge of the prayers and other related rituals. As Muslim children are expected to start saying prayers at the age of seven, it is assumed that the parents sent their children to *maktabs* at the age of five. It was customary, especially for the upper and middle classes, to start with a *Bismillah Khani* ceremony at the age of four years, four months and four days. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 1) So the age of attending *maktabs* for primary education was in between four and five years. In some unusual cases early start and late beginning were also found. There was co-education in *maktabs*, both boys and girls attended the same *maktab*. (Bahram, 1957) This shows the reflection of religious guidance in the education system of Muslims as Prophet Muhammad designated him as the teacher of whole mankind and said "seeking knowledge is obligatory for every believing man and woman." (Ibn Majah, n.d.)

The primary education imparted in *maktabs* seemed to be based on religious instructions. Imams of the mosques taught Muslim children about ablution and prayer in the *maktabs*. (Vipradasa, 1953, Chakravarti, 1952 Cited in Ali, 1985) They also taught Quran and Hadith to make pupils understand the fundamentals of Islam and other rituals at this stage of primary education. Fiqh or elementary knowledge of jurisprudence was also taught in *maktabs* as it was necessary for performing obligatory duties of Islam. So, the contents of study in the *maktabs* were consisted of Quran, Hadith and Fiqh. (Ali, 1985) In addition, Muslim students were required to learn Arabic and Persian in *maktabs* besides their mother tongue Bengali. Arabic should have been learnt by students as the language of the Quran while Persian was learnt as the language of the court. Students also learnt Persian to get access to religious text books written in Persian. (Ali, 1985)

Bengali became the medium of instructions and it was taught in *maktabs* because it was the mother-tongue of many Muslims and Hindus. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) As Persian was the language of the court, some Hindu Kayastha families often sent their children to the *maktabs* aspiring for employment in the government. They even followed Muslims by observing *Bismillah Khani* ceremony at the time of commencing their boys to education. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 1) In course of time, *maktabs* were classified into two categories according to their emphasis on Quran and Islamic religious practices on the one hand and emphasis on Persian and other subjects on the other hand. Later category of *maktabs* was termed as “Arabic and Persian Schools” by Adam who found a total of 786 Muslim boys and 784 Hindu boys in such schools in Murshidabad, Burdwan and Birbhum districts of Bengal.

(Long, 1868: 30-33) Professor Blochmanns' statement also supported what Adams wrote in his report. In an article published in *Calcutta Review* in 1871, Blochmann stated that beginning with the Mughal era, Hindu clerks who were fluent in Persian were in charge of the court's revenue collection, accounting, and official correspondence. "The Hindus from the 16th century took so ardently to Persian education, that, before another century had passed, they had entirely caught up to the Muhammadans in terms of intellectual acquirements." (Bernier, 1916, p. 131)

Higher education System

Tol

Higher education was given to Hindu children in the *chatuspathis* or *tols* where medium of instruction was Sanskrit. Scholars from outside Bengal also assembled in these *tols*. The *kavyas* (poetry) of the Sanskrit literature and logic were taught at the initial stage. In later stages more advanced level studies such as the science of astrology, philosophy including the Vedanta and Vedic prosody were introduced in the *tols*. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) Moreover, *vyakaran* (grammar), *nirukta* (lexicon), *kavya* and *chanda* (rhetoric) from Sanskrit literature were taught. There were also *vyatikram* (astronomy and astrology), *chikitsa* (medicine), theology and history in the syllabus of *tols*. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) In some of the *tols* Bengali and Persian were also taught. Education in *tols*, however, was exclusively meant for the Brahmin students. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 1)

In pre-Muslim period, there were several centers of Sanskrit learning in Bengal. These centers of higher learning continued to flourish during Muslim period. Navadvip (Nadia) was the most

prominent center of learning that developed into a New School of Philosophy (Navya Nyaya) during Muslim period. There were many *tols* and thousands of renowned pundits, scholars and professors were devoted to impart knowledge in Navadvip. It attracted students from all parts of the subcontinent. In the time of the nawabs, Zaminder of Nadia, Maharaja Krisnachandra extended liberal patronage to a large number of pundits proficient in different branches of knowledge. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) The village home of famous poet Vijaygupta in Barisal was known as a notable place of learning from sixteenth century. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) Several other centers of Sanskrit learning were in Noakhali, Burdwan and other districts of Bengal. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2)

Hindu boys educated from these *tols* could engage them in varieties of vocational professions. Vaidya or Kaviraj was the most important of them. Brahmins who studied medicine and acquired art of healing took the profession of physicians. Those who studied astronomy and astrology became Daivagya. They were able to draw the figure of the planet, forecast the almanac (*panjika*) of the new year, draw the horoscope, and examine palms of the barren women. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 1) The education in *tols* was free of charge. The teachers (*gurus*) of the *tols* maintained themselves from the income of the lands granted by the state, zaminders or wealthy persons. In addition, they received voluntary labour of students in their works and gifts from the students after completion of their education. (Rahim, 1963, vol. 2) Students had to experience various types of corporal punishment for irregular attendance, negligence in studies, wickedness etc. (Long, 1868)

Madrasah

After completing primary education in *maktabs* students would proceed to *madrasahs* for higher education. The Quran and Hadith were also taught in *madrasahs* but the approach was different from that of the primary education. Here analytical study of the Qur'an (tafsir) and Hadith (Tashrih) formed the principal part of the learning. Advance study of Fiqh was also one of the principal areas of study in *madrasahs* in Bengal. *Madrasahs* built by the Sultans of Bengal, offered courses of four schools of Islamic jurisprudence though mostly attended by the *Hanafites*¹ being predominant in the population. (Ali, 1985)

Apart from the above subjects, other sciences such as logic, arithmetic, medicine, chemistry, geometry, astronomy and others were also taught in *madrasahs*. Abul Fazal stated that every student ought to read books on agriculture, morals, mensuration, physiognomy, household matters, rules of government, medicine, higher mathematics and history gradually. It is assumed that the *madrasahs* kept provisions for all these subjects but students were not required to study them all. (Allami, 1873) They were given choice in the selection of the subjects. Among these subjects, history and politics were given emphasis in the *madrasha* curriculum during the Mughal period. (Bernier 1916) Like *maktabs*, many Hindu students, especially from the *kayasthas*² at the initial stage, also studied in the *madrasahs* to secure their position in the government jobs. Hindu students who studied in the *maktabs* and *madrasahs* were exempt from the participation in Muslim prayers and other religious ceremonies. Muslim

¹ One of the four Sunni Islamic schools of jurisprudence (fiqh).

² Kayasths belong to one of the profession-castes of Hindus.

rulers also came forward to encourage them by translating the indigenous literature into Persian with the help of Hindu scholars. (Mehta, 1990: 162-63) After successful completion of the course graduates of Islamic higher educational institutions had been conferred *dastar* or *turban* through a *dastarband* ceremony. It can be compared with today's certificate giving ceremony or convocation. Graduates receiving such *turban* from their teachers or institutions were entitled to wear it irrespective of the professions they have chosen in the later life. (Karim, 1983)

Conclusion

In the Medieval Bengal, education system of Hindus differed from the education system of Muslims in many aspects. But a substantial number of similarities were also found across the systems. The Muslims and the Hindus considered education as important as their religious belief. In both the systems there was co-education at the primary level. Both communities performed some rituals e.g., Hindus celebrated *Upanayana* and Muslims celebrated *Bismillah Khani* when sending their children to the education for the first time and the school-going age was the same, usually between four and five years. Apart from the religious education both systems provided students with some practical education. Education system of Muslims was financed by the rulers and high officials of the government whereas education system of Hindus was mostly financed by local Zaminders and wealthy people of the community. Sometimes Muslim rulers also supported educational institutions of Hindus by granting them financial assistance. In addition to these similarities, Hindus and Muslims influenced each other in their educational practices and traditions. For example, before

coming of the Muslims, Brahmins and upper class Hindus were the only ones with access to education. Islam arrived in Bengal with its straightforward social and theological principles of equality. Irrespective of their social status or religious affiliation, Bengal under Muslim control allowed all classes of people to have access to equal education. Moreover, Chaitanya Devs' Nava Vaishnavism helped diminishing the prominence of Brahmanism. As a consequence, during the Muslim era, education spread across the castes reaching many who had previously been denied the advantage to learn and to advance in life. It is very interesting to see that despite overwhelming separatism in almost every aspect of life both the communities found education as a common ground for mutual benefit. Inter institutional roaming of students e.g., Hindus enrolling in Maktabs and Madrasas, could use of the same place for teaching-learning e.g., Maktabs in the morning and Pathshalas in the afternoon. These are the signs of such mutual benefits in this sector. They established such practices by going beyond the existing hostility, mistrust and prejudices; and maintained peaceful co-existence in the education sector of medieval Bengal in a religiously polarized society.

References

- Ali, A. K. M. Yakub. (1985). Education For Muslims Under the Bengal Sultanate. *Islamic Studies* Vol. 24, No. 4, 421-443.
- Allama, Abul Fadol (1873). *Ain-i-Akbari*. Vol. I, Tr. H. Blochmann, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal
- Bahram, Dawlat Wazir. (1957). Laila Majnun, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, p. 19. Cited in A Rahim (1963). *Social and Cultural History*, Vol. I.

- Bhagawat, Chaitanya (Bengali). (1941). *Adi*, Chapter 5-6. ed. S.C. Majumdar, Calcutta. Cited in Anjali Chatterji (2000-2001), pp. 196-241.
- Battuta, Ibn. (1976). *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta: India, Maldive Islands and Ceylon* (Mahdi Husain trans.). Baroda: Oriental Institute.
- Bernier, Francois. (1916). *Travels in the Mogul Empire A. D. 1656-1668* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Chakravarti, Mukundarama. (1952). Kavi Kahkan Chandi, ed. Sri Kumar Bandhopadhyaya Calcutta: Calcutta University. In Ali, A. K. M. Yakub. (1985). Education For Muslims Under the Bengal Sultanate. *Islamic Studies*. Vol. 24, No. 4, Winter: 421-443.
- Chakravarty, Mukundaram. (1992). *Chandimangal*. (ed). Srikumar Bandopadhyaya and Vishwapati Choudhary. Calcutta, Vol. II. In Chatterji, Anjali (2000-2001), 196-241.
- Chatterji, Anjali. (2000-2001). Aspects of Medieval Indian Society: Gleanings from Contemporary Literature. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*. Vol. 61, Part One: Millennium, 196-241.
- Chowhan, Lalita. (2022). Socio-Religious Beliefs and Practices in Bengal during the time of Allauddin Hussain Shah. *Journal of Historical Studies and Research* Volume 2, Number 1, 231-240.
- Gaborieau, Marc. (1985). From Al-Beruni to Jinnah: Idiom, Ritual and Ideology of the Hindu-Muslim Confrontation in South Asia, *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 7-14.
- Goyal, Shuchi & Aggarwal, Pragya (2015). Indian Education System: From Ancient Period to Present Era. *Shikshan Anveshika*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 61-67.
- Husain, Mahdi. (1939). The Hindus in Medieval India. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*. Vol. 3, 712-724.
- Ibn Majah. Muhammad Ibn Yazid. *As-Sunan*, Istanbul: Maktabah

Islamiyyah. S.B.T.B. Chapter on the Dignity of the Wise and Encouraging the Pursuit of Knowledge. Hadith No. 220.

Ikram, S. (1964). *Muslim Civilization in India*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Karim, Abdul. (1983). The Sadat, Ulama and Mashaikh in the pre Mughal Muslim Society. In Bengal in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.). *Islam in Bangladesh: Society Culture and Politics*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Itihas Samiti.

Law, N. N. (1916). *Promotion of Learning in India during Muhammadan Rule by Muhammadans*. London: Longman's Green.

Long, Rev. James. (1868). *Adam's Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Behar 1835-1838*, Calcutta: The Home Secretariat Press.

Mohiuddin, M. (1987). The Elements of Composite Culture. In R Khan (ed.). *Composite Culture of India and National Integration*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies.

Majumdar, R. C. (1966). *Kamala Baktritamala* (Kamala Lectures). Calcutta: Calcutta University.

Mehta, J. L. (1990). *Advanced Study in the History of Medieval India: Medieval Indian Society and Culture*. Vol. III, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Rahim, Muhammad Abdur. (1963). *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*. (Vol. 1), Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society.

Rahim, Muhammad Abdur (1963). *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*. (Vol. 2), Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society.

Roy, A. (1983). *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.

Sachau, Edward C. (Ed.), (1910). *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about AD 1030*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd.

- SEN, D. C. (1911). *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, Calcutta: Calcutta University.
- Sharif, A. (1977). *Madhyajuger Sahitye Samaj O Sanskritir Rup* [Forms of Society and Culture in Medieval Literature]. Dhaka: Muktaadhara.
- Siddiq, A. B., & Habib, A. (2017). The formation of Bengal civilization: A glimpse on the socio-cultural assimilations through political progressions in Bengal Delta. *Artuklu Human and Social Science Journal*, 2(2), 1–12.
- The Holy Qur'an (A. Yusuf Ali, Trans.). (1983). Maryland: Amana Corp. Surah Al-Alaq, 1-5.
- The Holy Qur'an (A. Yusuf Ali, Trans.). (2004). Maryland: Amana Corp. Surah Tawba, 122.
- Tirmidhi, Hadith Number: 2647. Retrieved from <https://www.hadithbd.com/hadith/detail/?book=11§ion=401>
- Umar-i-Usman, The Maulana Minhaj-ud-Din, Abu (1881) *Tabakt-I-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia, Including Hindustan; from A.H. 194 (810 A.D.) To A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) And the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals Into Islam Vol. I* (Major H G Raverty, Trans.), London: Gilbert & Rivington
- Vipradasa (1953), Manasavijaya ed. Sukumar sen, Calcutta: Asiatic Society. Cited in Chatterji, Anjali (2000-2001), 196-241.