

Muslim Prejudices in Bengal and Establishment of the University of Dhaka: A Study of Kazi Imdadul Haque's *Abdullah*

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Abstract

If we reflect on the history of the University of Dhaka, we come to know that it was not easy to establish the University. Battling with the dominance of the then Hindu political leaders, the Muslims of East Bengal finally achieved their long-cherished dream of educating themselves through a standard educational institution of their own. Kazi Imdadul Haque, one of the most prominent writers of Bangladesh, was a witness to those challenging times. His writings address history, politics, glorified past, and dreams of the future of Bengal. *Abdullah*, first published in 1932, his masterpiece, focuses on the educational stand of the Muslim community of Bengal before the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. The protagonist of the novel *Abdullah* mirrors the struggles of those who supported the establishment of the University of Dhaka. The obstacles he faces in order to educate and establish himself suggest the dire situation of the Muslims who were willing to work towards their betterment, but were helpless due to various pressures from the dominant community in power, and in many cases due to some prejudices of their own community. This paper, in light of the novel, addresses such issues and explores how the Muslims were able to break free of this vicious cycle of prejudice and ignorance through proper implementation of education.

Keywords: History, the dominance of the majority, Muslim prejudices, colonialism, deprivation, harmony

The author of the novel *Abdullah*, Kazi Imdadul Haque (1882-1926) was not only a prominent writer but also an underrated educationalist. It is possible that the dynamic mentality of the author himself is reflected in some of the characters of the novel. *Abdullah* was his one and only published novel. This celebrated novel was first published as a part of a series in a newspaper named *Moslem Bharat*. Unfortunately, this literary work remained unfinished due to the discontinuation of the newspaper and also because of the author's poor health conditions. Though he was able to complete more than 30 chapters, he could not live long to write the ending of the novel. Afterward, the responsibility of finishing the book came upon Kazi Anowarul Kadir, a then-contemporary Muslim intellectual from Bengal. According to Kadir, this book was published after seven years of the author's death in 1933 (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 10). But from the source of Bengal Library Catalogue (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 11), it is claimed that

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the novel was first published on February 1, 1932. This novel is a clear portrayal of the social viewpoint from the author's timeline. Also, the readers experience the intimate intricacies of the Muslim community through this novel. As no English translation of this book is available yet, we used our own translation of the original Bangla text throughout this paper.

Educating the different communities existing in Bengal had been a crying need at that time. Education is not only a part of self-development but it represents a nation, a community, relationships among different communities, and social status as well. It is essential to claim one's rights and to establish one's position in society. Unfortunately for a long time, a significant number of the Muslims of Bengal were absent from the professional and mercantile occupations. Ahmed (1981), in his book, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* noted, "[m]ore than 90 percent Muslims were returned in the census of 1881 as belonging to agricultural or lowly service groups" (p. 2). These Muslims were neglected by the dominant communities. Moreover, there were no standard educational institution for the Muslims of East Bengal which could fulfill the job market needs of that time. As a result, despite having sufficient financial aid in some cases, Muslims were unable to reach their full potential. That is why the establishment of the University of Dhaka is considered a huge success not only for Muslims but also for different communities residing in East Bengal.

How it started

The founding of the University of Dhaka was a combination of political, social, and economic compulsions that persuaded the British government in India to establish it "as a splendid imperial compensation to Muslims for the annulment of the partition of Bengal" (Mazid, 2012). The Partition of Bengal in 1905 provided the Muslim majority community of East Bengal and Assam with a sphere of influence of their own and made way for new hopes for the development of the region and the advancement of its people. Rahim (1981) in his book *The History of the University of Dacca* explained why the Partition of Bengal was welcomed by the Muslims of the sub-continent. Rahim (1981) stated in his book,

The Muslims of Eastern Bengal welcomed the partition of Bengal, 1905, hoping that the creation of a new province, in which the Muslims formed the majority, would facilitate their educational progress and material advancement. (p. 1)

But the annulment of the University of Dhaka on December 12, 1911, in the face of stiff opposition from the powerful Hindu leadership was viewed by Muslims as "a grievous wrong" (Mazid, 2012). Eventually, necessary steps were taken by concerned Muslim leaders like Nawab Sir Salimullah, Nabab Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, and Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq who appealed to the British government and reiterated the importance of educating the Muslims of East Bengal.

Bengali Muslims back then

An article published in a reputed national news portal, *Daily Bangladesh* (2019) refers to the damage caused by the dissolution of the Banga Bhanga [Partition of Bengal] due to which the Muslims of East Bengal demanded the establishment of a university in Dhaka. They elaborated that if the cancellation of the Partition of Bengal was not abolished, the

Muslims of East Bengal would be badly affected. Even before the Partition, this area could not flourish socially, economically, and culturally because a large portion of the population, especially the Muslims could not utilize the opportunity of educating themselves. The Muslim peasants were constantly being cornered by the zamindar class. McLane (2002) claimed in his book, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Bengal*,

Rather than owning a physical area of the earth's surface, they held rights over most of the inhabitants of the territory assigned to their management: rights to their deference, their labor, their crops, occasionally even their women. (p. 9)

By the inhabitants, McLane (2002) meant the peasants of Bengal who were unable to form any sort of resistance against the zamindars. The apparent class distinction was further bolstered through the acceptance of tertiary education on part of the Hindus, which the Muslims partly rejected. According to Ahmed (1981), as a result of this rejection,

The high-caste Bengalis had a long tradition of literary culture and under the British, this helped them acquire easy and absolute supremacy in the sphere of education and, in consequence, the literate professions. (p. 4)

For this reason, the Muslim peasants were oppressed by both Hindu and Muslim zamindars or members of the gentry. As Ahmed (1981) stated,

Yet communal antagonism was, in this situation, an ever-present possibility: the majority of the Hindu zamindars holding the bulk of the estates could easily be represented as the oppressors of Muslim peasantry for motives that went beyond simple greed. (p. 4).

It can be assumed that lack of leadership, as well as a strong voice from the Muslim community, were in fact the reasons behind their predicament.

A wind of change

In response, the Viceroy acknowledged that education was the true salvation of Muslims and that the government would recommend to the Secretary of State the constitution of a university in Dhaka. Indeed, the number of educational establishments in East Bengal was very few as “out of 45 colleges, 30 were in Western Bengal and only 15 were in the whole of Eastern Bengal, and Assam” (Rahim, 1981, p. 3). Furthermore, Rahim (1981) added to his statement that, “Most of the colleges in Eastern Bengal were dominated by the Hindus directly or indirectly and the poor Muslim students failed to get the benefit of higher education from these institutions” (p. 3). That is why the decision of the Viceroy was appreciated and confirmed in an official announcement on February 2, 1912. Many Hindu leaders were not happy with the government's intention to set up a university in Dhaka. On February 16, 1912, a delegation headed by advocate Dr. Rash Bihari Ghosh, along with the Hindu zamindars of Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Faridpur, and Mymensingh, met the Viceroy and expressed the apprehension that the establishment of a separate university in Dhaka would promote “an internal partition of Bengal” (Mazid, 2012). They also contended, as was recorded in the Calcutta University Commission report later, that “Muslims of Eastern Bengal were in large majority cultivators and they would benefit in no way by the foundation of a university” (Mazid, 2012). The opposition from the Hindu intelligentsia was not the only obstacle towards the implementation of the

plan for the new university. Many complex legal and material issues were to be examined. After obtaining the approval of the Secretary of State, in a letter on April 4, 1912, the government of India invited the government of Bengal to submit a complete scheme for the university, along with a financial estimate. Accordingly, through a resolution of May 27, 1912, the government of Bengal appointed a committee of 13 members headed by Robert Nathan, a barrister from London, to draw up a scheme for Dhaka University. The committee acted immediately. With the thoroughness and wisdom of 25 special sub-committees, the committee submitted its report on December 24 which was circulated the next day to the relevant quarters for comments. The Nathan Committee Report published in 1913 received its final approval from the Secretary of State in December 1913. Eventually, after overcoming a long list of hurdles, including the financial stringencies due to the First World War, the University of Dhaka was established in 1921 under the Dacca University Act 1920 of the Indian Legislative Council. The establishment of Dhaka University was only a stepping stone for a change for the better on part of the Muslims. According to Ahmed (1981), “. . . the majority of Bengal Muslims had little to do with the predominantly urban and sophisticated world of colonial politics in which the leaders of the community were involved” (p. 1). This explains that the Muslims were not exactly at the forefront when it came to policy-making, meaning they had nominal say about the goings-on in the country.

Muslim prejudices in *Abdullah*

Haque's *Abdullah* successfully depicts the desperation of the novel's main character who was also a victim of a similar situation. Then again, the author shows in the novel that in some cases, Muslims themselves were staunch opponents of their empowerment. Many of them considered western education a taboo though pursuing such education to get good jobs during that time was an important issue. The British colonized the Indian subcontinent for almost two hundred years and to succeed in this mission, British colonists used many policies. One of their policies was to establish English as the official language of Bengal. As the British began to gain more power, their language became the dominating language. By establishing English as the official language, British people created a barrier between the Hindus and the Muslims. Through learning English and having higher education, the Hindus believed that they were better than the Muslims. Hindus considered themselves closer to the British as they spoke the same language. This is how the British government used another policy to rule India, the “divide-and-rule” policy. Throwing light on this issue through his novel, Haque explained to the readers that opposing higher education or neglecting the English language was never a solution for the Muslims.

Sadly, there were many Muslims who were reluctant to pursue western education. In the novel *Abdullah*, Haque depicted some of the representatives of the Muslim community of then Bengal who were extremely prejudiced and who used to think that Muslims should not perceive higher education as they solely believed that modern education is against their religion. These Muslims were the ones who were reluctant to utilize general education for their own benefit. Many just depended on fate without trying to achieve anything and blamed everyone and everything for it. Haque not

only criticized the prejudiced Muslim community but also exposed the real faces of some Hindus who could never accept Muslims as their competitors in the fields of education and respectful jobs. In this novel, Haque explained some reasons behind the illiteracy of the Muslims of this region back then, specifically their lack of English language competence. He portrayed the character of Abdullah as a ray of hope who tried to remove the darkness of superstition from those prejudiced Muslims.

Misconceptions about western education

The novel *Abdullah* starts with the death of the protagonist's father; in other words, it starts with Abdullah's struggle for survival. After the death of his father, Abdullah sought financial aid from his wealthy father-in-law, Syed Abdul Quddus, in order to complete his Bachelor degree. But he was denied any help because his father-in-law was building a mosque, where he had invested a lot of money. Abdul Quddus miserably failed to understand the importance of proper education. He preferred spiritual salvation and showed complete disregard for the worldly problems at hand. Later, in the novel, we see him jeopardizing his son's future by his obsessive sale of lands in order to complete his mosque building project. Then again he was also dismissive of his younger son, Abdul Qadir's, decision of pursuing higher education in English. Not surprisingly, he advised the same thing to Abdullah, closing the doors of hope for him. As in the novel Abdullah's wife, daughter of Abdul Quddus sharing her father's view on learning English says, "*Ingreji pora, ki chakri korte jawa oshob dunyadari kaje Imaan dorosto thakena bole tini motei pochondo koren na.*" [Be it learning English, or getting a job, earthly indulgences like these are disliked by father as they tend to pollute our faith] (Haque, 2018, p. 27). Abdul Quddus is a representation of those kinds of Muslims who thought that success would come overnight only through divine intervention. This kind of mentality was a crucial reason why the Muslims were lagging behind in every aspect.

Religious malpractices

The gradual loss of identity among the Muslims was one of the reasons for their apparent fallout. Although there was a certain level of hostility between the Hindus and the Muslims before the Partition, it cannot be ignored how many Muslims adopted certain traits from the Hindus and to some level improvised them. First of all, similar to the favoured Brahmins in the Hindu community, there was something in practice which was referred to as "Khandokari" where a Muslim sage or "Pir" earns a living by conducting religious speeches to his followers. A similar portrayal can be found in Syed Waliullah's much-revered work, *Lalshalu [Tree Without Roots]*, where the protagonist Majid completely depends on his followers. Although Abdullah had all the opportunities of living off the followers his father had left, his father being the Khandokar in the village, Abdullah refused to do so. He wanted to finish his studies and live his life with dignity by getting a job rather than depending on others. He refused to become complacent with the easy way out, in other words, he was reluctant to practice his ancestral business suggested by his mother and father-in-law. Here Haque interprets the fact that some of the Muslims preached Islam just for the sake of making a living, nothing more. It can be assumed, Abdullah was suggested by others to take over the practices of his ancestors because of the victim mentality of the Muslims, especially after the 1911 *Banga Bhanga* annulment.

In the novel, Abdullah's mother in support of the ancestral family business said, "*Tara khushi hoye salami dey. Ote kono dosh nei, baba! Shob deshe, shokol jaatei e rokom dostur ache;- keno, hinduder moddhe ki nei!*" [They pay us out of respect, there is nothing wrong with that. Every country has customs like these. Haven't you seen the Hindus!] (Haque, 2018, p. 4). This statement of Abdullah's mother shows how common this practice was for both the Muslims and the Hindus at that time. This practice also encouraged Muslims to ignore worldly education for job opportunities. Shalaby (1954) quotes Von Kramer's view in his book *History of Muslim Education*,

The progress and diffusion of knowledge created a body of men who found it difficult to make a decent living [only] through their [religious] learning. It was to promote further study and to provide sufficient stipends for such men that the *Madrasahs* were really established. (p. 55)

Some Muslims chose this as an easy method of earning and avoided learning other skills for a vocation.

The untold stories

The true identity of the Muslims was unknown to the world because they did not have literature of their own. This novel reveals to the readers the unrecorded or perhaps ignored history of the pre-partition Muslim middle class, given that most of the dominant writers at that time were Hindus. Acknowledging this issue, Rabindranath Tagore shared his views about this novel,

Abdullah boikhani pore ami khushi hoyechi. Bishesh karon ei boi theke Musolmander ghorer khobor jana gelo. E desher shamajik abhawaghotito ekta kotha ei boi amake bhabiyeche. Dekhlum ghorotoro buddhir ondhota Hindur achare Hinduke pode pode badhagrostto koreche shei ondhotai dhuti chador tyag kore lungi o fez pore musolmaner ghore Mollahr onno jogacche. Eki maatir gun? Ei rog bishe borborotar hawa edeshe ar kotodin boibe. Amra dui pokkho theke ki binasher shesh muhurto porjonto poroshpor poroshporke aghat o opoman kore cholbo. Lekhoker lekhnir udarota boikhanike bishesh mullo diyechi. [I was pleased after reading *Abdullah*. Especially because I came to know about the intricacies of a Muslim household through this book. It made me think about a certain aspect of our society. I saw that the same prejudices and superstitions which were halting the progress of the Hindus, were the ones, of course improvised, that were bringing food to the table of the Muslims. Is this something geographical? How long will the country endure such a diseased mindset? Will we keep fighting till we destroy ourselves? The generosity of the writer of this book in case of narration has added more value to it]. (Iqbal, 2011, p. 61)

As mentioned by Iqbal (2011) in his book *Rabindranath o Musolman Shomaj [Rabindranath and Muslim Society]*, Tagore's views on the Muslim community of the then Bengal implies that since the actual condition and customs of the Muslims were not depicted by any Muslim, the practices of the Muslims were often misinterpreted as they were portrayed through the eyes of the western and the Hindu community. This problem with being misinterpreted can be understood in the light of Said's theory of orientalism. In *Orientalism* (1978), he discusses the inaccurate portrayal of the orient according to western perspective. Said points out the flaws of the orient that they were not serious enough to represent their real culture and customs through any literary works which would reach the international community. In the same way, the Muslims of the then

Bengal were often misrepresented as outsiders, barbaric as they were mostly non-vegetarian, illiterate, and only fit for fieldwork. Deliberating about the condition of Muslims in oriental countries, Said wrote in his book,

The Orient and Islam have a kind of extrareal, phenomenologically reduced status that puts them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert. From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the orient could not do was to represent itself. (cited in Heathcote, 2012, para. 4)

Based on Said's theory, it can be presumed that this misrepresentation of the Muslim community is the reason behind the unfriendly attitude of the Hindus towards their Muslim neighbours and vice versa. That is why the educated Hindus had opposed the establishment of a university in East Bengal as they perceived the Muslims to be savages not needing education.

The more equal Muslims

Judging by the powerful patriarch Abdul Quddus's mentality, readers might think that religious education had always guaranteed a respectable position in society. But that was surely not the case in *Abdullah*. In the novel, we see Abdul Quddus clinging on to his feudal mentality, taking pride in his clan, when he mercilessly embarrassed the Imam in front of everyone just because he was from a lower clan. His disgraceful behaviour portrays his depths of ignorance about the characteristics of a true Muslim. We also get to know about the societal divisions regarding clans in that period. Referring to Ahmed's (1981) observation, "Many amongst the upper-class Muslims were reluctant to accept the indigenous Muslims as 'real' Muslims." (p. 7). Also, Abdul Quddus was reluctant to rent Mr. Munshi's house for his daughter-in-law's treatment, as he was a "Chotolok", a term used to signify a person hailing from a lower clan. Even in his in-house Maktab, the Mullah or teacher was instructed to discriminate between the students according to their social and economic status. "In general, it may be said that some of the Muslim 'castes' [which is not an Islamic concept at all] were as rigid in their observance of taboos as their Hindu counterparts" (Ahmed, 1981, p. 20). The poor were not allowed to learn more than the rich. All of these practices are contrary to the true teachings of Islam. Such a mentality is a clear imitation of the Hindu leaders who thought that the construction of Dhaka University would curb the financing of Calcutta University.

The western hysteria

This hostility towards general education had severe consequences. We see that the then Muslim community was unaware and somewhat skeptical towards the advancements in medical science. They thought it to be another unholy scheme of the British. Expressing his disgust towards such education when Abdullah wanted to take his sister to a better hospital in the town, Abdul Quddus told him, "*Ota Ingreji porari dosh*" [That's all because of learning English] (Haque, 2018, p. 118). Abdul Quddus thought that, English education was a breach of 'purdah', an etiquette relating to dress code and mannerisms for Muslim women. Moreover, Abdullah's wife's tragic demise took place because she was barred from going to Rasulpur, where Abdullah was appointed Headmaster, due to similar prejudices. According to Abdul Quddus,

Ta baba shobi bolte paro, kintu amader khandane kono janana kokhono e porjonto rail e choreni, ar ami jotodin beche achi totodin chorte debar o amar iccha nai. She hobena baba, hajar lok station e, tar moddhe diye rail e choriye amar meyeke niye jabe? E kotha mukhe antei je amar badhe. Tomra ingreji shikhecho, ingrejder chal-cholon onukoron korte chao. [Whatever you say, no woman in the history of our family has got on a train, and I won't allow it as long as I am alive. There will be thousands of people in the station, I cannot imagine my daughter being there among all those people. You have learned English, that is why you want to imitate the British]. (Haque, 2018, p. 167)

It was due to Abdul Quddus' fondness towards ancient methods like reliance on amulets, blessed waters, and sacrificial meat from Makkah, that his daughter was deprived of proper treatment and had died later. Many of the rural population, especially the women had to die untimely deaths because of such prejudices during that time.

Reluctance about education and its repercussions

This attitude of Abdullah's father-in-law was not uncommon in that society. But because of this kind of behaviour, Muslims like Abdullah often failed to prosper. Abdullah had great potential but he could not get a good job at first because he was unable to finish his studies. On the other hand, the sons of Bholanath whose ancestors used to be the servants of the Syed family had secure jobs. Moreover, we see that Muslims were very dependent on the Hindus for financial bookkeeping. Ahmed (1981, p. 4) observes that “[m]uslims continued to employ Hindus as naibs (managers of estates), qanungos (revenue record-keepers) and revenue collectors”. This dependency was one of the reasons for their financial downfall, thanks to the scheming bookkeeper Shibnath, because of whom, Abdul Quddus's ancestors had lost all their properties. As the Muslims were uneducated, they were unable to protect what was theirs. Moreover, self-destructiveness and negativity had seeped into the Muslim mind due to the lack of unity. Muslims were supposed to look after each other, but we see in the novel that Abdul Quddus would rather sell his lands to the Hindus than to his relatives, in fear of making the latter richer and more respectable in the process. At times, he is also seen favouring the Hindus and punishing the Muslims unlawfully, regarding financial issues solely for the sake of social status.

These reveal some of the prejudices infecting many Muslim minds back then. Kazi Imdadul Haque's *Abdullah* successfully paints this picture through the behaviour of Abdul Quddus with the Imam mentioned earlier. In addition to that, we see that during the milad after the construction of the mosque, women from the supposed lower classes were not served the food with the others. Although, there is no class distinction in Islam, a lot of Muslims practiced it nevertheless. This clearly paints the picture of the derailed Muslims who were suffering in every aspect due to a lack of unity. Proper education could have been the tool to overcome such behavioural shortcomings because education is supposed to equip a man to think and do better for the sake of a particular society as a whole.

Nonetheless, the struggle of the Muslims to pursue general education and to realize their worth was not new. They had been suffering for a while to establish a commanding position in society. After the introduction of British India, the Muslims had faced several obstacles. To mitigate their sufferings, they took part in the Indian

Rebellion of 1857. As a result, the British enforced cruel policies against the Muslims. Their job opportunities were reduced and as a result, their economic condition worsened. The Muslim identity was challenged by the British as well as the Hindus. In addition, the British replaced Persian with English as the official language. A lot of Muslims did not welcome this decision. Many Muslims refused to develop their English language skills as they believed it to be contrary to their religion. According to Rahim (1981),

One of the primary causes of the backwardness of the Muslims was that the system of western education that was obtained in the country did not meet the religious requirements of the community. (p. 2)

Thus, it can be assumed that a lot of Muslims willingly deprived themselves of the benefits of tertiary education.

A silver lining

When the Muslims were barricading themselves, the Hindus were gradually superseding the Muslims in the field of general education. But exceptional figures like Sir Syed (1817-1898) awakened the Muslims of the sub-continent and guided them to enjoy the fruits of being educated in English. Hailing from a noble family, he was educated in the Holy Quran, Arabic, and Persian literature. Sir Syed always desired to see the Muslims in a respectable position in society and decided to guide them in their struggle. The Muslims of this sub-continent had always perceived the British as their enemies and for this they kept their interaction with the British to a bare minimum. This created a great deal of misunderstanding on the part of the British towards the Muslims. Sir Syed knew that this condition of Muslims would not change unless they changed their mindset. The hatred of the Muslims for the British was only beneficial for the Hindus who were getting close to the British. He wanted to change that attitude. Haque (2017) mentioned in a chapter of the book *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Muslim Renaissance Man of India, a Bicentenary Commemorative Volume*, that Sir Syed “was the first Muslim who positively responded to the call of western modernity and became the catalyst for the transformation of [the] Muslims [of British India]” (p. 38). In 1877 Sir Syed established Mohamman Anglo-Oriental College which was transformed into the Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. This is considered the first university for Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. It was clearly recognized that people like Sir Syed were the need of the hour at that time for the Muslims to realize their potentials. Haque portrayed such characters in this novel with commendable mastery.

In *Abdullah*, Mir Hossain Ali can be viewed as Haque’s representation of a Muslim man in favour of an outstanding leap towards educating and fortifying themselves. Though not someone who religiously abided by the rulings of Islam, Mir Hossain was rather portrayed in a more positive light by Haque. In case of mentality and behaviour, he is completely opposite to the prejudiced nature of Abdul Quddus. Contrary to the typical nature of a rural lender, he is extremely lenient in dealing with his clients. Readers see him being generous towards the poor villagers who were unable to repay him on time. In fact, he aids a poor family who was the victim of another merciless lender. Despite his generous nature, he fails to enlist himself in the good books of the then “Ashraf” (Higher class) Muslim society. His good deeds were ignored because he was in

the banking business which was considered as taboo because dealing in interest is forbidden in Islam. Even Abdullah's mother, who is Mir Hossain's sister, was reluctant to send Abdullah to him for financial assistance because of the same reason. Even though Mir Hossain helps Altaf by bearing his educational expenses and managing a respectable job for him, Altaf betrayed him by not marrying Maleka, who was chosen by Mir Hossain for him. The society was so protective that it started doubting Mir Hossain's selfless deeds. In the novel, Mir Hossain said:

Kono shomaj jokhon odhopate jay tokhon shei shomaje je dui ekti bhalo lok nissharthobhabe porer upokar kore tader moner kotha bichar koribar shomoy odhopatito jon nijer moner protibimbo vinno ar kichui dekhite pay na. Kritoggota jinishtir odhopatito shomaje kono sthan nei. [In a downtrodden society, where a few good men who believe in good and want to do good, are judged ironically by the men who represent the downtrodden society itself. There is no place for gratefulness in a fallen society]. (Haque, 2018, p. 182)

Mir Hossain intercepted the negativity evident in many Muslim minds due the pervasive superstitions. He realized that the Muslims were lagging behind in society in every other aspect. That is why he patronized students who opted for tertiary education. Moreover, he was a promoter of widow marriage which is recommended in Islam. Ironically, the Muslim society in the novel, being ignorant about their own religion, failed to understand that. Consequently, the feudal mindset of the upper-class Muslims did not approve of his altruistic ideas and he was forced to be an outcast in the society. Nonetheless, his direct and indirect non-conformity towards the society which insisted on maintaining the class differences and other un-Islamic practices was depicted by Haque as a ray of hope among the evident darkness of ignorance.

On another occasion, it was noticed that Mir Hossain questioned the practice of 'Khutba' (religious sermon) being conducted in Arabic, which was ever foreign to the Bengali ears. Most of the Muslims had a tendency to recite the Quran in Arabic and not to follow the meanings of the verses. As many religious Muslims merely memorized the verses of the Holy Quran, they were unable to understand the meaning of it. This was why some acts of Abdullah's father-in-law were contradictory to Islamic norms though he claimed himself to be a 'real' Muslim. Those acts included class distinction, prohibiting worldly education, limiting female education to the recitation of the Holy Quran only, spending excessive amounts of money to build a mosque, etc. From Abdullah's dialogue, the readers come to know that according to Islam there is no need to build another mosque if 'Azan' (call for prayer) can be heard from a nearby mosque. Also spending a huge amount of money unnecessarily to decorate the mosque is also not encouraged in Islam. In one instance, Abdul Quddus spent the money he acquired from Abdullah as 'denmohor' (dower) on needless feasts for the sake of keeping up with family traditions. Another act of hypocrisy was seen when Abdul Quddus took money from Bholanath in exchange for mortgaging his lands. Though taking and paying off interest both are forbidden in Islam, Abdul Quddus agreed to pay off monthly interest on the money he borrowed. Eventually, he completed the construction of the mosque with the lent money, which is considered Haram. This act was ironic as well as hypocritical. In fact, not only Abdul Quddus but also many Muslims did not prefer taking money from

Mir Hossain who also used to take interest in lent money; instead they borrowed money from the Hindus with higher interest because they believed that,

Musolman hoiya je byakti shud khay, she jahannami ebong she jahannamir shonge Musolman hoiya je karbar kore sheo jahanname jay.....kintu Hinduder jokhon dhorme badhe na, tokhon shud khaile tahader kono pap nai.....[... a muslim who takes interest is going to rot in hell and any muslim who does business with him will face the same consequences....But borrowing money from Hindus with interest does no harm as they do not have any religious restrictions!]. (Haque, 2018, p. 35)

This shows the extreme ignorance of Muslims about the teachings of Islam despite their apparent insistence on them.

The imminent spring

Like Mir Hossain, there were some other characters who Haque portrayed as the representatives of the Muslims who craved knowledge. Abdul Kadir, Abdullah's brother-in-law, had left home because he had an urge to gain knowledge. In fact, he went against his father's will to fulfill his own dream of educating himself. He was Abdullah's moral companion in case of breaking the stereotypes. Where Abdullah had to fight with financial shortcomings, he had to battle his way through the mental ones. Although Kadir's father did not support western education, Kadir never gave up on his dreams. After leaving behind his family he had to struggle a lot to get a job but he succeeded after all. Kazi Imdadul Haque portrays these characters to represent the dynamic Muslim community. Personalities such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the leading light of the Aligarh Movement, and Nawab Salimullah, the pioneer behind the establishment of the University of Dhaka, are reflected through some characters of Haque's novel. They support education for Muslims and they show that Muslims can also compete in the job market along with the Hindus if they are guided properly. Thus, it is clear that in order to unite the Muslims of East Bengal and to dispel certain biases successfully, the need for tertiary education was more than necessary. The Muslims needed to assert their worth and identity and tertiary education was a necessary means for that purpose. That is why the University of Dhaka is a milestone for Muslims as it opened the door towards global education.

Inclusive education

Abdullah was aware of the fact that sole emphasis on tertiary education could prove arbitrary. For example, we see him petitioning the Sahib of the Barihati district for the appointment of a Maulavi so that the students could learn Persian. He also mentioned that the introduction of Persian would attract more Muslim students. It is redundant to mention that the majority of Muslims in East Bengal were used to learning these languages thanks to the long years of Muslim ruling in the region. Shalaby (1954) explains the reason behind the schools being mostly devoted to religious studies and says, "Indeed the activity of Muslims was absorbed, to a great extent, in promoting religious studies in most of these schools instead of continuing to encourage various branches of secular learning." (p. 56). It is needless to say that along with western studies, religious studies were important to the Muslims. Abandoning religious views and solely

encouraging secular learning could prove to be a movement against people's faith. That is why Abdullah tried to maintain a balance between religious and modern education systems for that society. Abdullah's attitude was similar to Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893) who had set up the Muhammadan Literary Society in Calcutta in 1863 in order to promote an English-oriented system of education that would run parallel to the then popular madrasa one. He was a promoter of western education and a man who argued for intellectual development for the globalized world and against retreat from general education. Such mixing up of the two learning mediums was much needed and we see that, as a result, Dhaka University was established as an excellent institution. It is pertinent to point out here that the university paid attention to the demographic characteristic of a Muslim majority society such as eastern Bengal when it made sure that Arabic and Islamic Studies and Persian and Urdu were among the first twelve Departments that the University originally opened with. It can also be pointed out that at present the university has departments for Islamic Studies, Islamic History and Culture, as well as departments of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, that is to say, four out of seventeen departments of the Arts Faculty. According to Rahim (1981), the Muslims were encouraged by the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam through certain measures such as the introduction of Urdu in primary level education, reservation of scholarships, provision for extended hostel accommodation, the appointment of Muslim teachers, and many more. Undoubtedly, these measures played a vital role in the large number of Muslim student enrollments at the educational institutions.

Enlightenment and unity

Although the University of Dhaka successfully preserved the rights of the Muslim students of East Bengal, it was meant to be an institution where students from all walks of life would engage in dialogues about various aspects of the knowledge and develop themselves. The establishment of departments like the Department of Sanskrit and the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies can suggest so. This was indeed a suitable answer for the then-existing tensions evident between the Hindus and the Muslims. Back in February 22, 1923, during a speech in the inaugural convocation of the University of Dhaka, Lord Lytton, the institution's Vice-Chancellor and also the governor of then Bengal said that any student who is trained here would be a "superior man" (Alam, 2017). He also added that the Dhaka University-trained students will be conspicuous both in learning and in politics. The University did indeed excel in terms of research and learning facilities and a remarkable thing was that Hindu students—constituting a majority till 1947, lived side by side with the Muslim ones on/off-campus. The establishment of Dhaka University was a promising attempt of establishing harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims. Thus, the University of Dhaka was a necessity for improving the Hindu-Muslim relations through creating an environment where they could familiarize themselves with each other. Even after the establishment of the university, there still remained a certain level of distance between the Hindus and the Muslims. However, in the later years Hindus and Muslims worked hand in hand against all forms of oppression.

Haque seems to be portraying this changing relationship between the Muslims and the Hindus in *Abdullah*. Though the readers find that the Hindus in Calcutta were very reluctant to rent houses to the Muslims, which paints a sad picture of the situation of the Muslims in West Bengal, Dr. Debnah Sarker was the one who unlike other Hindus helped Abdullah's family. When Abdullah and Abdul Kadir gave up hope of the treatment of Halima, Dr. Sarkar came forward and offered his help. He wanted to provide the best treatment for Halima and that is why he convinced Abdullah not to abide by the blind restrictions of his father-in-law. Dr. Sarkar also helped them with shelter when no Hindu agreed to rent their houses to a Muslim. Haque portrayed such a character in his novel to remind us about the goodness evident in some Hindus who wanted to build harmony in society. Like Dr. Sarkar, there were progressive Hindus who came forward to help the Muslims. The harmonious relationship between Dr. Sarkar and Abdullah's family was beautifully presented when Haque narrates the festive mood of Eid-ul-Fitr, a religious celebration of the Muslims, where Dr. Sarkar gladly accepted Abdullah's invitation and shared a meal together. Thus, Haque made the readers realize that the togetherness of the Hindu and the Muslim communities is the future of Bengal. Along with the helpfulness of the Hindus, Haque addresses the British Sahib of Barihati who came to inspect Barihati School where Abdullah worked as a teacher. The sahib was very cooperative with Abdullah. He listened to Abdullah, considering his demands. Because of the sahib's recommendation, Abdullah got a promotion and was appointed as the headmaster of Rasulpur school. The sahib also appointed a maulvi for Barihati School granting Abdullah's request. The sahib, despite being a British, helped Abdullah and admired Abdullah's intelligence. The helpfulness of the sahib can be referred to the supportive British Viceroy of India who considered the proposal of the foundation of the University of Dhaka. This harmonious relationship among the Hindu, the Muslim, and the British resulted in the establishment of the University of Dhaka as this was the first university of East Bengal which promoted that students regardless of their religious beliefs can get admitted and gain knowledge. Even today, students from all communities and different economic backgrounds receive education here, regardless of their varying faiths.

Conclusion

It is needless to say how Muslims have benefited from educating themselves and how the University of Dhaka is still serving as one of the best educational institutions in the country. Ending with a resolution, Haque discusses the way education equips Abdullah with the necessary power to fight the shortcomings of a society that was afflicted with numerous prejudices. By unlearning all the misconceptions of Islam, Abdullah welcomes the new era of progress. The way he pushed his vehicle through the muddy roads of Rasulpur, landing in the dirt himself along with others, symbolizes the power of unity and his passion for a change for the better. Because of his open-mindedness his sister was saved, he married a widow in distress and was able to finish his studies. At the ending of the novel, his humility impressed Hornath, and he was excused from the debts. It all points to the fact that his positive mindset was the driving force towards his salvation. Like Abdullah, the dynamic Muslims along with other well-wishers contributed to the establishment of the University of Dhaka and still, there are exceptional alumni of this

esteemed educational institution who are working relentlessly towards making a difference.

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