

**‘INDO-ISLAMIC LEARNING’
AND THE COLONIAL STATE
‘BENGAL PRESIDENCY’ UNDER
EAST INDIA COMPANY**

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The upper Gangetic valley of the Indian sub-continent emerged as centre of ‘Indo-Islamic culture’ due to the efforts of ‘migrant elite’ from west and central Asia; they were liberally supported by the State and the civil society through the cash and land grants during the successive pre-colonial régimes. However, the officials of the East India Company considered such concessions as ‘charitable’ and put numerous riders on their continuations. The status of the grantees was eroded in a settled manner. This paved the way for effective administrative intervention in matters of Sufi *khanqah*, *awqaf* and institutions of learning in Bengal presidency. The vast geographical region soon after the grant of *diwani* to the British in AD 1765 became the earliest laboratory for various ‘colonial experimentation’ for the so-called maximization of revenue. Committees and commissions were formed to ‘develop the colonial’ understanding of the subjugated land and the people. However, the (in) famous Inam Commission (1828-1846), was the most devastating measure for the migrant elites and the members of the intelligentsia. This single measure of East India Company practically destroyed the ‘Muslim *ashrafiya*’ of the huge Bengal Presidency and also sealed the fate of the Muslim institutions of higher learning. This marginalization and economic deprivation of the Muslims ultimately resulted in the erasure of ‘Islamic past’ from the region with a rich heritage of its pre-colonial times.

Key Words: Land Grants, Awqaf, Diwani, East India Company

The Historical Context

‘Colonization brought about not only political subjugation and economic exploitation, but also intellectual and cultural erasure. The colonizers imposed ‘their cultural and philosophical values’ on the colonized, instilling in them *a sense of inferiority about everything ‘native and indigenous’*. The heritage of native literature and art was denigrated and dismissed by the colonizing masters. As a consequence the *‘colonized nations have gone through a period of cultural amnesia’*.

Every political order presupposes a class of ideologues to push forward the agenda of the ruling elite. It is often through the support of a ‘microscopic minority’ and the collaboration of the earlier privileged class, that a newly established dispensation establishes its sway. The members of the previous bureaucracy, when accommodated in the new set-up, invariably assume the role of ‘an apologist’ for the new rulers. Depending on the stability of the regime and the effectiveness of its armed power, the earlier landed and literary elite tried to adjust with the changed circumstances. Instances for such an adjustment from India’s pre-colonial past are too numerous to be cited. However, there are always important exclusions and exceptions. Such groups are soon excluded and marginalized from the newly established bureaucratic set-up and, ultimately deprived of the State’s other favors, especially financial concessions and other avenues of patronage.

We come across instances during India’s medieval past when Arab, Turk, Afghan and Mughul dynasties had carefully nurtured a class of the people who provided ideological and administrative support. This class of the ‘natural apologists’ was at the forefront of literary activities. They developed bureaucratic terminologies and also fashioned a ‘new’ ideological support base for the emerging state apparatus. Revenue, judicial and administrative terms were evolved to meet the growing needs of the emerging administrative apparatus: and the experiences of the migrant families from Central Asia and Khurasan were of a great help at the initial stages. Side by side local terms and concepts were also incorporated into the chancellery practices of the emerging State. The State always acknowledged the efforts of this class. A structure of patronage, financial concessions and means for providing them remuneration were devised. Thus, a bond was established between the State and new civil society, which included the migrants as well as the older members of this class.

The South Asian subcontinent had a substantial number of migrant families since early medieval times. They were traders, merchants, artisans,

soldiers, scholars and mystics. They developed a system of education to meet the requirements of their settlements, and at the later stages, to participate in the administrative functions of the governments. The system of education so evolved was comprehensive enough to include the Arabico-Persian elements along with the Indic studies. Apart from promoting the Muslim theological sciences they translated the Sanskrit classics into Arabic and Persian and also promoted the local dialects helping them to emerge as full-fledged literary languages. Ismaili *da'is*, Chishti and Shattari Sufis wrote extensively in the local languages, created new literary genres and promoted spoken dialects to the status of full-fledged literary languages. 'Indo-Islamic' scholarship soon made its mark in the Islamic East: the Indian branches of knowledge like, *Ilm al-Hindsa*, the stories of *Panchtantra*, the *Yog Vashishth* and *Charak Samhita*, the theories and the treatises on Astronomy and Astrology were made popular in the Arab World [later in Europe in their Arabic garbs). Abu Rehan Al-Beruni's *Kitab ul Tahqiq le ma'l Hind* (1030s) was in fact, recognition, at the highest level, of the Indian achievements in the fields of pure sciences, mathematics, literature, philosophy and other branches of knowledge. This tradition continued uninterruptedly under the Sultans of Delhi and Mughul emperors with individual efforts as well as under State patronage.

The pre-colonial Indian State was conscious of these efforts and supported them fully. Initially these benefits were bestowed on individuals in recognition of their background and past familial connections; their individual merits and the recognition of the fact that they had large families/establishments/students to support. The grantees also treated such awards as 'concession by the State and used the substantial portion of the income for dissemination of knowledge, running of free kitchens, sharing their experiences & skills. Except some examples of State run institutions, we find that education was largely promoted through individual efforts. No doubt the State sponsored their activities through *inam a'imma*, *suyurghal* and *madad-e ma'ash* grants.

These concessions were invariably, renewed by successive regimes, hence continuity was ensured; though always under the custodianship of the families/extended families. Whenever the state during the pre-colonial times refused the renewal of such benefits, the scholarly class was always affected. We have numerous instances, when due to financial constraints or simply on sectarian grounds, the State withheld the renewal of such grants, leading to hardship for the scholastic classes and also the eventual decline of the intellectual tradition in the particular regions.

However, there are examples from the pre-colonial times as well when these grants were not renewed or selectively released or stringent conditions were put on them. For example, Mulla ‘Abdul Qadir Badauni (A.D. 1601) condemns the working of Mughul emperor Akbar’s *Sadar us Sudur* Sheikh ‘Abdul Nabi for misusing his authority and thus, putting the grantees at a huge disadvantage. Similarly, the Nawab-Wazirs of Awadh kingdom during the mid-eighteenth century by withdrawing/ selectively, and reluctantly renewing the familial grants ‘of the old establishment ‘created hardship for the class of the grantees, forcing them to shift ‘from scholarly pursuits to the military’ says Ghulam ‘Ali Azad Bilgrami (A.D. 1761) a curious statement, linking the two professions. Also we notice that a small grant of the family of noted theologian and scholar of Delhi, namely Shah Abdul ‘Aziz [d.1824] was resumed, possibly on sectarian grounds. It was restored much later by the officials of East India Company after they established control over Delhi in A.D. 1803.

There are some instances from pre-colonial days, which sustain the argument that scholastic tradition has always suffered whenever such patronage was withdrawn. Thus, intellectual tradition was heavily dependent on official patronage; it had yet to evolve an independent basis for itself. There was no permanent alienation in favor of the grantees; hence no *waqf* could emerge in the strictly legal terms. However, it needs to be pointed out that although *Shi’te fiqh* has a provision for *Sahem-i-Imam* [share of the *Imam*; out of the income from every *Shi’a* Muslim], which was exclusively appropriated by the theologians, Yet, in spite of having this independent base for themselves, the *Shi’a* theologians could hardly develop any stable institutions of higher religious learning anywhere in the South Asian sub-continent. Incidentally, the *Shi’a* seminaries of higher religious leaning at Qom, Karbala, Mashhad and Najaf have sustained themselves mainly out of the resources from *Sahem-i-Imam*.

Colonial Administration, *Ma’afi* Grants and *Ina‘amdars*

With the establishment of British Colonial rule in the upper Gangetic valley, there was a drastic change in the official policies, regarding such grants. The colonial vocabulary described these grants as *ma’afi* and the grantees as *ma’afidars* or the *In’am* holders. The colonial administration was often quite reluctant to renew such grants: they insisted on seeing the original deeds of grant, irrespective of its antiquity or the fact of

continuous possession for a long time, of such grants. It needs to be highlighted that apparently a mere procedural change was something against the basic framework of the pre-existing judicial system, which invariably accepted certified copies, with the seal and certification of *Qazi* as good as the original deed, hence, the certified copies were treated as valid and legally admissible evidence / documents in the pre-colonial judicial system .

Therefore, most of the grantees, due to wear and tear of the original document, had the certified copies of the original grant deeds; now these certified copies were declared simply inadmissible as per the new law of evidence under the rule of the East India Company. This single measure created a havoc and had quite a devastating impact on the fortunes of the class of grantees. Thousands of *ma'afi* holders lost their claim, especially, during the [in] famous *In'am* Commission of Bengal (1828-1846). To quote no less a person than W.W. Hunter, who has summed up the disastrous impact and the horrifying results thus:

‘Hundreds of ancient families were ruined, and the educational system of the Musalmans which was almost entirely maintained by rent-free grants received its death blow. The scholastic classes of Muhammadans emerged from the eighteen years of harrying, absolutely ruined...

This paper focuses on a study of the colonial policies on the fortunes of the *ma'afi* holders during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the study is confined to the Bengal presidency, the areas which came under the administrative control of the East India Company from late eighteenth century onwards. The study is based on English archival records, the files of civil and revenue litigation and the administrative reports from various offices.

It is argued that the British intervention during the colonial administration had a devastating impact on the long standing institutions of learning; migrant families of the scholastic and Sufi background were thoroughly marginalized. Not only the discipline of Indo-Islamic studies, but also the Arabico-Persian literary elite lost its relevance and it could survive only as an appendage to the English maintained institutions and colleges. The institutions of the *waqf* suffered immeasurably as the new legal system encouraged and entailed disputes among various branches of a family, thus providing a basis for an unending process of litigation. Another measure, with equally devastating impact was that now, the

new British legal system seldom honored the arrangements and agreements formalized during the time of the earlier regimes; this policy also resulted in the opening of a Pandora box by providing/encouraging new wave of civil disputes within families.

The Presidency of Bengal during the 18th Century

The geographical limits of 'Bengal presidency' included much a larger area than the present day Bangladesh and West Bengal put together. It included the Mughul provinces of Bihar, Orissa and the parts of Assam and north-east as well. After Turkish rule was extended in this region during the Thirteenth Century, the major parts of the area were fully adjusted and well incorporated in the administrative set-up of the Delhi Sultanate. Historians of Delhi Sultanate like Minhaj-al Siraj Juzjani, Amir Khusru, and Ibn-e Batuta have visited the area, and have provided important first hand information about the land and the people. Numerous families of migrants from Central Asia and Khurasan had also settled in the region in spite of supposedly inhospitable 'ecological condition'. These families of the migrants had introduced the elements of 'Islamic culture' and had also established the centers for the dissemination of 'Islamic knowledge'. Going by the details provided by Muhammad Mohar Ali in, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*,¹ we come across numerous works of theology; law and literature which were compiled in Arabic by some of these migrant members of the newly settled families.

It seems that the region has imbibed the elements of Islamic culture very swiftly in every manner. It is interesting to see that Sultans of Bengal, often acknowledged the supremacy of the Abbasid Caliphs of Baghdad by adopting the titles as *Yameen khalifat-ullah* and *Nasir ul Amir ul Mominin*.² Similarly, we notice that some names of the old administrative units/divisions and even the cities have undergone a total change now these units and cities were re-Christened with new Arabic and Persian names. Whether, these new names found local acceptability over the period of time is a different matter, but in the official documentation, including in the village papers prepared by the hereditary local revenue officials, some of these names survived well till the present times³

As, the *suba* of Bengal was not under the *zabt* (measurement) during the 16th century hence, there is no statistic as to the area under cultivation or under the *Suyurgal* (revenue free grants). However, one can very well assume that large classes of the grantees have settled in

almost all the regions of Bengal during the pre-colonial times. At least, simply by a look at the nomenclatures and the place names of the administrative and geographical units, this becomes quite clear. Apart from these aspects of political and administrative integration of the region in the new system of governance, we notice that the region was a home for the large section of the migrants' literary elites. We notice that the majority of inscriptions are found from the pre-colonial time in the region are either in pure Arabic or mixed-Persian.⁴

The Colonial intervention and the Intellectual tradition of Bengal

Bengal was the first region to have experienced the coming of the Europeans, in the sixteenth century itself; in fact Abul Fazl takes a note of their presence in the port towns of Chittagong, Satgaon and Hoogly. Following the battle of Buxar in A.D. 1764, the English East India Company also acquired the *diwani* rights over the Mughul provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. In this way the revenue administration of the region passed on to them. After the 'infamous' Plassey plunder and Murshidabad 'loot', a new system of revenue administration was devised by the Company officials. Now, they worked for the 'maximization' of the land revenue demand and to ensure its continuous 'collection'. It became a corner stone of their policy. Hence, they completely altered the earlier agrarian structure. In this scheme, the earlier revenue free grants were to become totally redundant.

Having examined some data on the colonial policies vis-a-vis the Sufi *khanqah* of Awadh⁵ and other institutions of higher learning in eastern India, including the Bengal Presidency, gave me an opportunity to study the mindset of the colonial officials much prior to the witch hunt, which became a hallmark and the corner stone of the British policies towards the Muslims, especially after the Uprising of 1857⁶. The data provided by W.W. Hunter is especially important to point out the early measures of the colonial officials, intended to exterminate the class of the *ma'afidars* during the infamous *In'am* Commission (1828-1846). This had ultimately reduced not only an important class of the Muslim elite, solely dependents on revenue free grants, but also a class of the professional bureaucrats (mainly *kayasths*), who had developed their expertise in Persian, especially in the work of accountancy, correspondence (*insha'*) and maintaining of official records. At least the legacy of this class still continues to survive in family surnames like Majumdar, Qanungo, Muqqadam [Mukadam] and Chaudhary etc., which

points to the fact that their ancestors were once professional title holders of bureaucratic positions during the pre-colonial regimes.

The other important and equally scandalous aspect which has been documented by W.W. Hunter relates to the 'embezzlement from the trust funds created by the Muslim elite for specific religious purposes', for which they had appointed the colonial administration as their trustee, to ensure the upkeep and maintenance of these institutions in changed political circumstances. The case of Hugli Trust (as *waqf* of Haji Mohammad Mohsin was popularly known) was not an isolated event but we notice exactly the same policies being pursued by the colonial authorities in Delhi. There is the case of one Syed Fazl Ali (d. 1829), who created a huge trust for the promotion of 'theological sciences and the promotion of Arabic- Persian based studies' at the newly established 'Dehli College' (as the *Madrassa* Ghaziuddin was renamed by the Company officials) The trustee died within a year of putting an amount of rupees one lakh and seventy thousand [Rs 1, 70,000/-] for the purpose. We find, soon after, Syed Hamid 'Ali, son-in-law and the then trustee criticising the British administration for the misuse of the funds, and spending the proceeds of the funds for purposes, other than the one for which the trust was created⁷.

This is an interesting aspect, and needs to be highlighted to show that when some philanthropic persons created endowments for specific purposes and placed them under the custodianship of the English administration for better management, like the Hugli trust in Bengal and *Madrassa* Ghaziuddin at Delhi, often the very purpose was defeated. In both the cases, we find that the colonial administrators had blatantly belied the spirit of the trust. There have been complaints of misappropriation of the funds, breach of trust and a total diversion of the funds for the purposes other than the one indicated in the deed of the trust. The British administrators successfully blocked all the efforts of the descendants of the original donors to set the things right. This was a part of a deliberate policy to make the older institutions of welfare redundant, perhaps to popularize such new institutions, which had come up, under British patronage.

It appears that the British colonial authorities were quite conscious of the far reaching impact of their policies on the fortunes of the erstwhile elite. Therefore, except perhaps for some references in W.W. Hunter, we seldom come across any records or files related to the massive exercise undertaken by the *In'am* Commission. Therefore, one does not come across any work in the recent past,⁸ taking any cognizance of this

period which has been described by Hunter as the one which destroyed the entire Muslim *ashrafiya* [Muslim upper middle class] of the Bengal Presidency in the first half of the 19th century and sounded the death-knell for their educational set-up.

Based on the limited data surviving in the official publications, one can undertake a study of some aspects of the cultural and intellectual life of the Muslims in pre-colonial Bengal. The massive collection of the manuscripts, the Buhar collection at the National Library Calcutta provides a glimpse into the type of institutions maintained in such a remote part of the then Burdwan district⁹. Similarly, the *Baees Hazari* (of twenty-two thousand) and *Shash Hazair* (of six thousand) trusts at Pandua in the Malda division provide an idea of some of the vast *awqaf*/trusts that existed during the pre-colonial times. It should be readily acknowledged that these comments and observations are based on the limited data coming mainly from the 2-3 districts of a vast region like Bengal. But the trends are quite obvious and point out the shift from pre-colonial to colonial times for the maintenance of Sufi shrines of famous Chishti Sufi Shaikh Noor Qutb Alam (d.1410 A.D.), and the *chillagah* of equally famous and illustrious Shaikh Jalal uddin Tabrizi (d.AD 1225), both the shrines are located in the close vicinity to each other at Pandua, the present district of Malda in west Bengal.

British Rule and the Muslims of Bengal

A larger question, which might be of some interest to us, is related to the immediate impact of British rule in Bengal and for whom it was beneficial and on whose behalf W.W. Hunter accused the colonial administration for the misappropriation of scholastic funds etc. He has cited the examples from the various districts of Bengal showing the casual manner in which the English colonial officers treated such noble acts of the Bengal Muhammadans¹⁰. The example of Haji Mohammad Mohsin Trust is quoted by him with all necessary details. To quote him:

‘In the district of Hughli way back in AD 1806 a wealthy Shia gentleman left a huge estate for the pious uses. These uses were specified in the will he left which were related to the maintenance of certain religious rites and ceremonies, repair and maintenance of the *Imambara*, and the family graveyard (the burial ground), pensions for the specific beneficiaries and some religious establishments. As a result of the litigation between the two branches of the family, the

government assumed the management of the estate appointing itself as a trustee. Huge amount of money was wasted in the process and adding insult to injury, was the attempt by the government to divert these funds for the establishment of an English college (while the will was quite specific for the college for the poor Muslims)...¹¹

Hunter graphically describes further

‘at the moment (i.e. 1871) the head of the college is an English gentleman ignorant of a single word of Persian and Arabic who draws £1500 a year from Muhammadan religious endowment for teaching things hateful to every Musalman. It is not, of course, his fault, but the fault of government which placed him there, and which for thirty-five years has been deliberately misappropriating this great educational fund. In vain, it attempted to cloak so gross a breach of trust, by attaching a small Muhammadan school to the English college. Besides the misappropriation of the accumulated fund in building the College, it annually diverted £5000 to its maintenance. That is to say, out of an income of £5260, it devoted only £250 to the little Muhammadan school which alone remained to bear witness to the original character of the Trust...’¹²

Such and several other examples can be gleaned from the different districts of Bengal. In the other regions of the Upper Gangetic valley, during the colonial times, the scenario was not very different.

W.W. Hunter in a detailed chapter titled: Wrongs of the Muhammadans under British Rule, has given a graphic description of the manner in which the colonial administration had wreaked havoc on the fortunes of the Muslim elite in Bengal and the manner in which the institutions imparting indigenous education were systematically made redundant. He says:

‘a hundred and seventy years ago it was almost impossible for a well-born Musalman in Bengal to become poor; at present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich...’ for the ‘army is now completely closed. No Muhammadan gentleman of birth can enter our regiments...’ ‘Our action has brought ruin upon Muhammadan houses of Bengal. We shut the Musalman aristocracy out of the army because we believe that their exclusion was necessary to our safety...their monopoly of judicial, political or in brief civil employ...’

But as a result of the policies of the government a situation arose where:

‘There is now scarcely a govt. office in Calcutta in which a Muhammadan can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of the inkpots and mender of pens...’¹³

In fact Hunter has given complete statistics of the major departments of the government in Bengal for AD 1871 and has shown the negligible number of Muslim employees as against the European and Hindu employees. Similar was the situation in other secular professions like law where the numbers of pleaders of the High court and the attorneys had declined over a period of time. Medicine was never considered as a profession worthy of consideration by a high born Muslim, but even in that profession Muslims were to be found very rarely.¹⁴ It has been pointed out by Hunter that such exclusion had partially resulted due to the policy of discrimination practiced by the government against the Muslims. He quoted from a Gazette (the office of the Commissioner Sunderbans) which clearly stated that: ‘the appointment would be given to none but the Hindus...’ the situation has turned so grim for the Muslim elite of the province that Hunter finally says that:

‘The Muhammadans have now sunk so low that even when qualified for government employ, they are studiously kept out of it by govt. notifications. Nobody takes any notice of their helpless condition, and the higher authorities deign even to acknowledge their existence...’¹⁵

Commenting on the intellectual condition of the country prior to colonial intervention, Hunter quotes E. C. Bayley to the effect that:

‘(the Musalmans) ...possessed a system of education which however inferior to that which we have established was, yet by no means to be despised; was capable of affording a high degree of intellectual training and polish, was founded on principle not wholly unsound, though presented in an antiquated form; and which was infinitely superior to any other system of education then existing in India- a system which secured to them an intellectual as well as a material supremacy, and through the medium of which alone the Hindus could hope to fit themselves for the smallest share of authority in their native country’.¹⁶

Hunter goes on to argue that for the first seventy five years of colonial rule the previous system was allowed to continue but afterwards a new system of Public Instruction was enforced which :

‘Flung aside the old Muhammadan system, and the Musalman youth found every avenue of public life closed in their faces...’¹⁷

He is quite frank in admitting that the system of public instructions created by the British was quite unsuited to the Muslims and:

‘We have also denuded their own system (of public instruction) of the funds by which it was formerly supported. Every great Musalman house in Bengal maintained a scholastic establishment in which its sons and its poorer neighbors received an education free of expense. As the Muhammadan families of the province declined, such private institutions dwindled in numbers and in efficiency...’¹⁸

The *ma‘afis* and *ma‘afidars* under the colonial regime

The Bengal Presidency at the time of colonial takeover had huge *ma‘afi* grants, meant to support religious institutions like the *Sufi khanqahs* as well as the institutions of indigenous learning. From the time of Warren Hastings in A.D. 1772 till A.D. 1828, it was deliberated in official circles to start the resumption proceedings and finally in 1828 the

‘lands held free by Musalmans or by Muhammadan foundations, special courts were created, and during the next 18 years the whole province was overrun with informers, false witnesses, and stern pale faced Resumption Officials...’ As a result of this gigantic exercise ‘an outlay of £ 800,000 upon resumption proceedings, additional revenue of £ 300,000 a year was permanently gained by the state... a large part...’¹⁹

The result of such policies was on the expected lines:

‘Hundreds of ancient families were ruined, and the educational system of the Musalmans which was almost entirely maintained by rent-free grants received its death blow. The scholastic classes of the Muhammadans emerged from the 18 years of harrying, absolutely ruined...’

The resumption proceedings were fiercest at the beginning and after languishing for some years were officially terminated by the government. But after a quarter century, Hunter recalls:

‘The panic of those days is still remembered, and it has left to us a bitter legacy of hatred. Since then a profession of man of learning, a dignified and lucrative calling under the native rulers has ceased to exist in Bengal...’²⁰

He further observed that from the days of *In'am* commission, and consequent...

‘Resumptions the decay of Muhammadan system of education dates. The officers now in charge of the Wahabi prosecutions cite them as the second cause of the alienation of the Musalman community in Bengal...’

The foregoing discussion is intended for imparting the idea that the impact of the British rule in Bengal Presidency was definitely disastrous for the earlier ruling elite/class. They were thoroughly marginalized in every field of public life due to the massive resumptions of the *ma'afi* grants. By and large the Muslim *ashrafia* has lost the opportunity for education. An expertise in the traditional subjects was becoming quite redundant as far as the job prospects were concerned. The newly established educational institutions were offering possibilities and newer opportunities in the new setup. But unfortunately the erstwhile Muslim elite was quite slow in availing these opportunities, an aspect on which much has been written and perhaps the debate is still going on.²¹

Case Studies of some *ma'afi* establishments of Bengal

A general deterioration/decline in the fortunes of the Muslim landed elite and *ma'afidars* under the British rule has been discussed by modern scholars. Still, one needs to examine the impact of some of the colonial policies and the actual administrative measures of the authorities, in relation to certain institutions to understand the scale at which these policies were successful in rendering these institutions obsolete.

Let us examine the fortune of some of the large establishments, which existed since pre-colonial times and continued into the colonial period. This will give us an idea of the intellectual milieu existing of this

region. I am conscious of the fact that the data base for this section is rather limited, as I have yet to lay my hands on the original records and family documents (one is not sure whether they still exist and can be accessed?). I must admit the limitation of such a study, but even from the official data comprising of the English records, report of settlement officer and Abid Ali's *Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua*, (1931), one can very well see the dominant trends in relation to the colonial policies and these institutions as being symptomatic of the larger colonial attitude towards the Muslims of Bengal.

Buhar Family

In the National Library of Calcutta, a huge collection of the manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish exists; it is titled as the *Buhar Collection*²¹. A printed catalogue of these manuscripts is also available. The range of these works is multi-faceted having a large collection of works on the history of the Islamic East and many biographies. This is followed by the works on theology and law, manuscripts of Islamic theology, prayer books and invocations, Sufism and mystic philosophy; manuscripts of scientific subjects like arithmetic, astronomy, medicines, compendia of science and encyclopedias.

As per the catalogue details, one Munshi Syed Sadrudin of Buhar in Burdwan district laid the foundation of a library at Buhar, during the time of Syed Mir Jafar, the Nawab of Murshidabad. He had served as the *Mir Munshi* of the Nawab and later on of the Governor Warren Hastings, as well. Mughul Emperor Shah 'Alam had entrusted him the *mutawalliship* of the famous *Baees Hazari waqf* (the history of this *waqf* will follow later). In addition to this library, he founded the famous *Madrassa-e Jalalia* at Buhar. The importance of this seminary can be gauged from the fact that it was headed by no lesser a person than Mulla 'Abdul 'Ali *Bahrul Ulum* (d. A.D. 1810), the son and the successor of the famous Mulla Nizamuddin of Firangi Mahal (d. 1748), the founder of the curriculum for the Indian *madrassa* system known as *Dars-e Nizami*. It is of some interest to point out that when the conditions were not conducive for the continuation of the Firangi Mahal *Madrassa* at Lucknow under the Nawabi regime, *Bahrul Ulum* was forced to move out of Lucknow, went to Shahjahanpur, under the patronage of the Rohilla Chieftains. When Rohilkhand was finally annexed by the then Nawab-Wazir with the British support in A.D. 1774, he, along with his eleven hundred students was invited by the Buhar family and its Nawab to continue teaching at their *madrassa*.

This *Madrasa e Jalalia* at Buhar, soon acquired fame far and wide, scholars and students started enrolling themselves at this seminary. We know for certain that the famous Chishti-Nizami Sufi at Delhi, Maulana Fakhruddin (A.H. 1199/1785 A.D.) was at this *madrasa* for about two years to study texts like *Mussallam*, *Hashiya-e Qadeema* and *Tafsir-e Baidhawi* for which he could not find a person of the stature of *Bahr-ul-Uloom* at Delhi. We are told that the entire expenditure of this *madrasa* and that of the library was met by the revenue from the *Baees Hazari waqf*.²³

It appears that the members of Buhar family were also men of letters and scholars. Also the last representative of the family (about whom we know from this catalogue, another Maulavi Sadruddin Ahmad d. 1905) was himself a scholar of some repute as numerous manuscripts in this collection bear his comments and marginal notes, which show how attentively he was perusing these books. He has been credited to have written the biography of the Prophet, *Rawayat-e Mustafa* and has brought out a critical edition of Imam Nasai's *al-Khasais*. Last but not the least, as the publication of Allama Shibli No'mani's (d.1914) *Al-Farooq* (the history of the reign of the Second Caliph of the Rashidun period) led to some contestations among the Muslim elite on sectarian lines, perhaps Maulavi Sadruddin wrote *Al-Murtaza* in reply to this work. Both the works were published together in large size litho edition.

Fortunately, for the scholars the holdings of this library were transferred to the National Library of Calcutta way back in 1905, but we know nothing about the fortunes of such an illustrious family who not only enjoyed a huge *ma'afi* grant, but was also well connected during the *Nizamat* and early British period. What happened to the *madrasa* and the other institutions the family used to maintain out of the revenues from *Baees Hazari Waqf*? Perhaps a perusal of the family history (depending on whether any of these have survived?), government records and the files of *In'am* Commission could tell us about the colonial policies *Vis-a Vis* the institutions of higher learning during the pre-colonial times.

The *Baees Hazari* and *Shash Hazari waqf* at Pandua, Malda

The extensive and magnificent architectural remains of the earlier times in the present sub division of Pandua in the Malda district testify to the importance of the place during the pre-colonial times. It is the home of the massive structures of *Eklakhi Masjid*, *Sona Masjid* which are protected monuments of the State's Archeological Department. Pandua

boasts of having two major Sufi institutions; the *dargah* of Shaikh Noor Qutbe Alam (d.1410) and his family, known as *Shash Hazari* Trust (popularly known as the *Choti Dargah*) and the *Chillahgah* of the legendary Shaikh Jalalud din Tabrizi (d.1225 A.D.), also known as the *Baees Hazari* Trust (popularly known as the *Badi Dargah*). It appears that these institutions were richly endowed by the rulers of the Ilyas Shahi dynasty, the Mughuls and also during the Nizamat period. The extensive property enjoyed by the *mutawallis* of these *dargahs* continued till the 20th century. So much so, that during the final settlement operations of the district, the settlement officer M.O. Carter in 1928 reported that the estate of the *Baees Hazari Dargah* was of an area of 16 and a half sq. miles, or approximately 1 lakh *bigas* of land. The estate of the *Shash Hazari* consisted of 47 villages in *pargana* Bhansari. The translated version of the two *Farmans* concerning with these grants are reproduced as Appendix A and B. A close reading of the text of the *Farmans* makes it very clear that these extensive grants were confirmed and continued by the later authorities (Mughul rulers and the Nazims of Bengal).

In the absence of the records from these institutions, any court proceedings of the litigations, revenue records or other connected histories, it is difficult to trace the gradual decline of these institutions and subsequent patronage for the education and other measures of welfare for the society. The Buhar family acted as the *mutawalli* of the trust of the *Baees Hazari* was able to establish a magnificent library which as stated survives as an important section of the National Library of Calcutta. The family was able to maintain a huge seminary in the form of *Madrasa-i-Jalalia*, which counted luminaries like Mullah ‘Abdul ‘Ali *Bahrul Uloom* among its professors and Maulana Shah Fakhrud din Dehlavi, the famous Chishti Sufi, among its pupils.

It is apparent that pre-colonial Bengal displayed aspects of the intellectual life which could put its scholarship ‘at par’ with the scholarship of the other parts of the Indian sub-continent. The pre-colonial state and society was quite liberal in supporting such institutions, which were engaged in the transmission of knowledge and carrying out numerous activities, meeting the societal needs of the people. It will be interesting to look into the details of the colonial policies, actual administrative measures and the rift within the families and consequent litigations, all of which led to gradual irrelevance of their core activities. Needless to say, their memory still survives in popular imagination of the region. Even now, thousands pay a visit to the annual celebrations at these *dargah*. Now both these

dargah complexes exist as the symbols of the shared past and composite culture in the region. Perhaps, the only remnant legacy from the rich and historical past!

The marginalization and the exclusion (and the ultimate demonization?) were the twin results of the Colonial policies on the Indo-Islamic scholastic elite which were nurturing the institutions of learning for the past hundreds of years. This disastrous impact not only ruined the institutions and the families associated with these centers: it had another far reaching impact, the rise of the radical tendencies' among the masses. At the initial stages, we noticed that the Fara'izi and Wahabi movements derived their main strength and support base from the regions where the colonial administration marginalized the traditional elite and practically destroyed the earlier institutions of learning. However, this question is beyond the scope of present study.

Appendix A

[Translation of the Imperial *Farman* confirming the *pargana* of *Shash Hazari* by Shah Shuja, as a revenue-free property; reproduced from M O Carter's *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Malda: 1928-1935*:]

Auspicious imperial command has been received to the effect that by virtue of imperial command forty seven *mauzas* in *pargana* Bhansari and others in *Sarkar* Jinnatabad were granted as *Madad ma'ash* of Sharfuddin, son of Nizamuddin, and for the expenses of the sacred *Rauza* (shrine) of Makdum Hazrat Noor Qutbe Alam, and beggars and the indigent. Now, having appointed Shaikh Kabir the *Sajjada Nashin* of the said *parganas* as the *Madad ma'ash* of the aforesaid person and the children of Shaikh Noor Qutbe 'Alam and for the expenses of the shrine and the poor and indigent, from the beginning of the *kharif* season of the year *taukoli*, so that having used the proceeds thereof as their means of livelihood along with the poor and indigent, they should keep themselves employed in praying for the empire. It is required that the officials and servants and *jagirdars* and *karories*, both present and future of the said *sarkar*, should do their best in perpetuating and maintaining this high command and should give up the said *mauza* as per schedule, and shall in no circumstance and in no way alter and change the same.

They shall not interfere with the disputes, with records, to *zerat*,

orchards (illegible), *kotwali*, *hazari*, *sadi*, *chowdhurai*, *salami*, *dihdari*, *shuqqadari*, *sabdai*, *jalkar*, *banker*, all civil rights, *ghats*, *hats*, *khash-kharid* and Imperial (illegible). They should not demand a fresh *sanad* every year, and if they (illegible) kept anything, they should not give credence to the same, and considering insistency in this necessary and incumbent, they shall not act against and deviate from the command. (Dated, the 25th *Shaban*, 1050 *Hijri*).

Schedule

In respect of *Madad ma'ash* of Shaikh Kabir and the children of Shaikh Noor Qutbe Alam and for the expense of the *Rauza* and the poor and indigent and according to the Memorandum, dated Tuesday, the 29th *Jamad us Sani* of the 23rd year of the auspicious reign in corresponding with the 1058 *Hijri* through the mission of His Excellency Mir Alaul Mulk and through the intelligence of my humble self, Dhanotar Das, is to the effect that in respect of Shaikh Kabir the *sajjadanashin* of the *Astana* of Makdum Hazrat Noor Qutbe Alam, a command of his Imperial Highness Shah Shuja was received on the 21st *Jamada II* of the 22nd year of the sacred reign corresponding to 23rd (illegible) 1058 *Hijri* to the effect that in accordance with the imperial command forty seven villages in the *parganas* of Bhansari and others in the *Sarkar* of Jinnatabad had been fixed as the *Madad ma'ash* of Sharfuddin, son of Nizamuddin and for the expenses of the *rauza* and those of the poor: that whereas we have bestowed the Sajjada Nasheen of the said Astana now upon Shaikh Kabir, we have granted the *Madad ma'ash* of the said person and children of Qutbe Alam and for the expenses of the *rauza* and the poor, from the beginning of the *kharif* season of the *Taukoil* year, so that they may keep themselves engaged in praying for the victorious empire. Memorandum written according to the attestation of the personage who received the mission (Alaul Mulk)

Appendix B

[Translation of the Imperial *Farman* by Emperor Shah 'Alam, dated 5th Muharram, 13th Regional Year confirming the *pargana* of *Baees Hazari* as a revenue free property for religious and charitable purposes; reproduced from M O Carter's *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Malda 1928-1935*:]

To the *Mutsuddis* of present and future important affairs, *Chowdhuries*, the *qanungoes*, tenants, cultivators, and all the inhabitants, the general public of the *waqf mahals* in *pargana Baees Hazari* take note. In obedience to the command of him who is the essence of the world, and which is bright as the sun's rays and who is exalted as the heavens, the *Tauliat* (trusteeship) of the sacred shrine of Qutub ul Aqtab Hazrat Makdoom Syed Jalal Tabrezi (may his secrets be sacred) together with the *waqf mahals* which from old times appertain to the sacred shrine aforesaid, is granted to the shelter of nobility, high in respectability and dignity Syed Sharfuddin. The said gentleman should, generation after generation and womb after womb, be the *Mutawalli* of the said Pandua shrine, and shall possess and occupy and appropriate all the *wakf mahals* together with all the jungles and rivers within the said *pargana*, and everything appertaining thereto. The high ministers, the great nobles and officials, *amils*, *mutassadis* having charge of the civil affairs, dignitaries of the political department and the present and future *Karories* should forever try to have this exalted command carried into effect and leave to him and his descendants, the administration of the said administration of the said *pargana* in *tauliat* forever and all times and considering him safe from change and alteration, they should not offer any interference with him on account of any kind of *peshkash*, such as *subadari*, *foujdari*, revenue, *sair*, expenses of the nature of *kilas*, *mahasilana*, *daroghona*, *shikar*, *begar*, *dah neme koka dammi sud doe* and *qanungoi* and should consider him absolutely free from all revenue and imperial demands and should not interfere there with. They shall not demand a fresh *sanad* every year and should consider any other person his co partner and co sharer and should consider him the fittest person and the permanent *mutawalli* of the holy shrine and shall not slight the good advice he may for their good. The duties of the said *mutawalli* are that he should spend the proceeds of the said *wakf mahals* in the performance of *Urs* anniversary, the Illumination of the shrine and the repairs and building of the same and in giving to students according to his own discretion and should keep himself engaged in praying for the prosperity of this Government.

The said trustee is not competent to grant *Istimrari* or *Mokarari* or lease at a low *jama* to any person anything appertaining to the said *parganas*. They should consider this very pre emptory and act according to what is written above and should not act against this imperial command. (Dated the 5th *Muharram* in the 13th *Julas* year of the reign)

Notes and References

1. Mohar Ali, Muhammad., *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, (in two vols.), Imam Muhammad, Ibn Sa'ud Islamic University, Riyadh, 1985
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, see especially chapter xxxii (Literary activities) pp. 843-875; it is interesting to note that Bengali was also written in the Arabic scripts. See Plate No, X1, facing page 874, (for the reproduction of a manuscript of early Bengali in Arabic script).
3. Abul Fazl 'Allami in his account of the twelve suba records, that the suba of Bengal had twenty-four large sarkars (the fiscal/administrative divisions); out of these, ten sarkars had the distinct touch of Arabic-Persian nomenclature, the names like Jannatabad, Fatehabad, Mehmoodabad, Khalifatabad, Tajpur, Barbakabad, Bazuha, Sharifatabad, Sulemanabad are the distinct reminders of the Arabic-Persian impact on the chancellery practices. Similarly, Abul Fazl has also named around eight hundred mahals and parganas. This long list of the fiscal sub-divisions include more than hundreds of names with distinct Arabic-Persian touch. Most of these names have survived well to the modern times
4. Mohar Ali, Muhammad, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 12-13
5. While examining some data related on Sufism and education in Awadh region, I have also looked at the Colonial policies *vis-a-vis* these institutions. I examined the fortunes of a large mystic establishment which was richly endowed by the Mughul rulers, the Nawab-Wazirs of Awadh and by the local landed elites prior to the introduction of the British rule in the area. This particular institution having very strong mystic predilections enjoyed the reputation of being 'one of the best managed institutions' in the region. But once the kingdom of Awadh was annexed by the British in February 1856 the institution was subjected to the British laws, it had fallen to bad times and within a period of twenty years the same institution was pronounced to be most 'ill managed', 'debt-ridden' institution of the region. Gradually, through consistent interference and promoting the endless process of litigation between the members of the various branches of the family, the institution was reduced to a shadow of its former self. That was the fate of one of the most well managed Sufi institution with a commitment for the societal obligation in the pre-colonial period, which suffered tremendously under the colonial regime, See my, '*Madrassa and Khanqah, or Madrasa in Khanqah? Education and Sufi Establishment in northern India*', in *Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity, Dini Madaris in India Post 9/11*, eds. Jan Peter Hartung & Helmut Reifeld, Sage, Delhi 2006, pp. 73-103.
6. Some data relating to the colonial policies in relation to the Indo-Islamic learning has been used by me in, 'Indo-Islamic Learning and the Colonial State' in *The Evolution of A Nation : Pre-colonial To Post-colonial (Essays in Memory of Professor R S Sharma)*, (ed.) D N Jha, Manohar, Delhi, 2014, pp. 429-449.
7. Sana Aziz, in a recent study, 'Delhi College during 1824-1877: A study of disputes on the misuse of trust funds of Perso-Arabic Learning, presented at the 24th session of the U. P .History Congress, Varansi, 9-10th Nov.2013, where she has examined some of these issues. It might look paradoxical that this Syed Hamid Ali is also mentioned as one of the spies for Major Hudson during 1857!

8. By way of exception are, of course, Azizur Rahman Mallick's, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 1757-1857*, Bangla Academy Dhaka, 1977, which has taken some cognizance of the impact of the mass resumptions of the revenue grants during the In'am Commission, and it's quite disastrous impact on the ultimate fortunes of the Muslims of Bengal, especially the *ashrafia*, who managed the institutions of learning and welfare.
9. It should be added here that the data provided by Hunter was a huge embarrassment to the colonial authorities who always tried to belittle the importance of this data. However, this trend of questioning Hunter continues with the modern European scholars, who keep on arguing that Hunter's writings should be examined in the light of 'adopting contemporary official caveats' However, in spite of such 'caveats' the data provided by Hunter is too important to be ignored as it is about the actual measures and the impact of these measures on the overall fortunes of the erstwhile governing class and the educational institutions they have maintained. See Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge, 1972, p. 268.
10. *Ibid* p. 140
11. *Ibid* p. 141
12. The chapter suggestively titled as 'The Wrongs of the Muhammadans under British Rule' between pp.108-162 provides the graphic details of the administrative lapses of the British officials; the policies the British govt. had adopted which ultimately resulted in the ruin of the Muslim elite in Bengal are discussed in a very loaded manner.
13. *Ibid*, p. 131.
14. *Ibid*.
15. *Ibid*.
16. *Ibid* p. 137-138.
17. *Ibid*, p. 139.
18. *Ibid* p. 139.
19. *Ibid*, p. 139.
20. *Ibid* p. 139.
21. A British loyalist Sir Syed Ahmed Khan analyses the suspicious attitude of the Muslim elite of the 19th Century North India regarding the new institutions of learning. They saw them as centers of conversions to Christianity teachers seen as s Kala Padri Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, Ed. Francis Robinson, Karachi, Oxford University Press, *passim*
22. I have not come across about the fortunes of this family in the large literature on the subject in the recent past. Only some details of *Baees Hazari Waqf* has been provided in Abid Ali's, *The Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua*, Calcutta 1931 (reprint. Calcutta 1986). But this doesn't have a single word on their family, library or *madrassa*. Some details of the family are available from the catalogue of *Persian Manuscripts in Buhar Collection, Volume I*, National Library, Calcutta, 1982, pp. i-v. In the recent past my research student Dr. Ms. Gitanjali Dey, (now Associate Professor of History, Laxmibai College for Womens, Delhi University) has submitted her M.Phil. dissertation entitled , *Mystics, Masters and Rural Society: A Study of the two Sufi Dargahs in Pandua, West Bengal*, to the

department of History, University of Delhi in 2005. Her visit to Paudua as well as to the District Collectorate, Malda has not proved very useful in locating the records for these huge '*maafi* estates'. Similarly, she was not able to trace the copy of the original *Farman* and other public records for the *shash hazari* estate from the then *mutawalli*. of the waqf.

23. Abdul Qaadir Rahmani, (trs) *Nur-i-Mutlaq: Sharah-i- Kalimatul Haq*, Urdu Translation of the text by Syed Shah Abdul Rehman Mauhid Lucknawi, Fine Offset Worls, Delhi, 2011. While describing the various journeys of the author, the translator mentions these facts as Shah Abdur Rehman himself had benefitted from the scholarship of Shah Fakhrid din Dehlavi, see pp. 12-16.