THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHILOLOGY AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF BENGALI, 1893-1955

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY

AHONA PANDA

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2019

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank my fantastic committee for helping me put this project together. My chair, Rochona Majumdar, helped me from the very first day I fumbled my way into American graduate school. With a background in English literature, I had to figure out my way in South Asian studies and without her very humane presence this disciplinary shift would have been absolutely impossible. She broadened my intellectual and teaching interests to gender and sexuality studies and contemporary South Asian politics and film. And of course, her question for the last few years—"Why philology?"—is integral to the final conceptualization of this dissertation. Rochona*di*'s sharp and profound questions, her complete and absolute support and warmth, her guidance and friendship, and the commitment and courage she displayed while battling illness have inspired and invigorated me. Thibaut d'Hubert, the kindest of advisers and the best Bangla teacher I have ever had, was responsible for planting the seed of this dissertation in my head during our Advanced Readings in Bengali class. Had he not exposed me to the vast range of philological scholarship on Bengali in the twentieth century, this would have been a different dissertation. Moreover, the philological training he has given me has always made me read any source at least four times before I trust myself to write about it. The incredible depth and erudition he brings to the study of language and aesthetics is something from which I tried to learn while writing this dissertation. Dipesh Chakrabarty taught me history despite myself. Convinced that I could never be a real historian, I tried hard to understand methods and concepts in his classes and conversations. Discussing Tagore, the New Left and *Annales* historians with him—whom I had read until then with an untrained eye—taught me that history is about using one's powers of empathy and intuition in order to understand how people lived and

thought in the past. I am grateful for his patience and belief in me and for helping me develop the arguments in this dissertation.

The unofficial fourth member of my committee has been the brilliant Whitney Cox, whose unwavering support is something I treasure. He has engaged with this dissertation, read chapters and offered me critical feedback, and gave me important conceptual tools with which to think through the problem of philology. Wendy Doniger, not on my committee but my Sanskrit teacher and the woman I worship, has made me think about the diverse ways in which people can use language. She has always reminded me that people are never bland, whether they are alive or dead. I learned how to see my historical protagonists as real people from my many conversations with her and from reading her work over the years. Without her kindness, wit, brilliance, and warmth, I would have written a more boring dissertation. I am also grateful to Ulrike Stark for helping me with my many questions on book history and to Muzaffar Alam for making me think of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Calcutta differently. Both Alam *sa'ab* and Naim *sa'ab* have made me rethink what Kazi Nazrul Islam means in the present. I am also grateful to the late Steve Collins for teaching me how to write and think better. Gary Tubb's Sanskrit class also taught me an enormous amount. The ways in which words can develop as concepts is something that his Sanskrit classes embedded deep within me. In other departments across the university, I have benefited from classes and conversations with David Shulman, Leora Auslander, Emily Lynn Osborn, Tara Zahra, Robert Bird, Justin Steinberg, Boris Maslov, and Rocco Rubini. All my dreams came true when I had the opportunity to take a class with Carlo Ginzburg. These many opportunities to learn across the Humanities and Social Sciences have enriched this dissertation and expanded its scope. I found two additional mentors and teachers in Dhaka who made this dissertation what it is today. Anisuzzaman and Badruddin Umar helped me figure out my way through the labyrinth of archives into the land of argument.

This dissertation has been generously funded by the Humanities Division at the University of Chicago, the Committee on Southern Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, the Nicholson Center for Research in the British Isles, the Social Science Research Council, and the Franke Institute for the Humanities. Both the Social Science Research Council and the Franke Institute helped me come into contact with great interlocutors. During my archival research in West Bengal, Bangladesh, and the UK, many people helped me navigate the archives. I especially thank James Nye and Laura Ring for easing me into the archives. Abhijit Bhattacharjee at the Center for Studies in Social Sciences was also quite helpful. In Dhaka, Shamsuzzaman Khan opened up the Bangla Academy and allowed me to copy anything I needed. At the Nazrul Institute, Tamanna *apa* kept the reading room open for an extra hour every day just for me. Professor Mesbah Kamal helped me access the Central Library of Dhaka University. Of course, without Anis *sir* and Umar *sir*, I would never have navigated these complex archives or history. All that I learned about our joint and beautiful heritage was from these two mentors. Tazeen Murshid and Willem Van Der Geest, my family in Dhaka, made the entire stay in Bangladesh possible. Without Tazeen *mashi*'s ever-watchful eye, this dissertation would not have been written. I also thank Humayun Chowdhury, Saiq'a Chowdhury and Sharmin Murshid for their hospitality. I would like to thank Eilat Maoz, Nimrod Ben Zeev, Cihan Tekay, and Paul Deslandes for asking me incisive questions at the SSRC workshop. The Franke Institute has been a great space in which I interacted with some great minds engaged in humanistic research. Jacqueline Stewart, Françoise Meltzer, Rachel Galvin, Elaine Hadley, Maria Anna Mariani, Matthew Boyle, and Miguel Martinez helped me a great deal in thinking through this thesis, and I learned a lot from reading their work. Noa Merkin, Silvia Guslandi, and Amanda Shubert provided me incomparable support and always pointed me to food when I needed it most.

During my undergraduate years in Calcutta, the friendships I made sustained me through my twenties. Anurima, Sion, Bandy, Arnab, Shaswata, Nandita, Rajrupa (Raju), Sunrita, Howlie and others discussed and tolerated my endless rants on Rabindranath, Bibhutibhushan, Tarashankar, and Manik. My teachers Abhijit Gupta (Tintinda), Rimi B. Chatterjee, Samantak Das, Ananda Lal, and Moinak Biswas encouraged me long after I had left Jadavpur University. The classes on Renaissance Europe offered by Professors Sukanta Chaudhuri, Supriya Chaudhuri, and Amlan Dasgupta were unforgettable and have stayed with me over this last decade. The teachers who never taught me officially but made me who I am today must also be mentioned. My obsession with Bengali literature began when I very unfortunately wanted to be a poet at age 13, and Samarendra Sengupta and Sunil Ganguly (by a strange quirk of fate) enabled it. I am grateful for those first few lessons in *sāhitya* and for the chance to meet and hear the great Bengali poets all those years ago at *Budh Sandhya*. My friends at Oxford helped me believe in myself during a very difficult year. I have no words to thank April Elizabeth Pierce, Camille Pidoux, Isabel Stoppani de Berrié (my wonderful Berry), Max Bradbury, and Courtney Raisin. Aishani Roy made it her life's mission to support me from those days, and she and Christian Norris gave me a home and family to return to in London during these last few years. Thanks also to Hia and Peter Jordan for giving me love and a home in London. Bodhisattva Kar was the first person to hand me a history reading list a decade ago and the first person I sprung my *communitas* on. Meheli Sen and Phillip Webb have fed me, heard me out, and given me kindness and affection. Anustup Basu, Eric Gurevitch, Hasan Siddiqui, Zoya Sameen, and Nell Hawley have read and commented on parts of this dissertation. Sam Hodgkin, Claire Roosien, Eilat Maoz, Margherita Trento, Nazmul Sultan, Tejas Parasher, Eduardo L. Acosta, Shariq Khan, Jenisha Borah, Adil Hossain, and Zachary Leonard have discussed many aspects of this dissertation with me. Sarbajit Mitra has been my consultant archivist and helped me retrieve countless

documents at the British Library and in Calcutta. Sannoy Das and Krithika Ashok have been my link to sanity and *biryani*. Larissa Fardelos and H.S. Sum Cheuk Shing enlivened many dismal days. Christian Kietzmann brought back books from the library so that I could finish sooner. I am grateful to all of them for their friendship.

My first teacher of history was at school in Loreto House. Amita Prasad opened up many worlds of imagination and knowledge for me at a young age, as did my wonderful Bengali teachers Mrs. Mitra and Mrs. Madhumita Ghosh. During my graduate program, Nilanjan Das gave me love and companionship during the most difficult parts, always helped me transliterate correctly, and translated knotty Sanskrit *śloka*s when I felt helpless. Eléonore Rimbault somehow descended into my life during my final year and made it possible for me to remain alive, effectively becoming the sibling I have never had. Mala Bhattacharya and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya gave me affection and sustenance throughout these uneven years. Without my neighbor and best friend Ramona Sen, life would be without food, dogs, and love. Chandrani Bhattacharyya, ever smiling and generous, showed me that to be a historian one just needed to have an insatiable curiosity and a sense of attachment to place. Chitta Panda issued an injunction early on in my life to never be a professional historian, but has been singularly responsible for developing a historical sensibility within me. Nandini Bhattacharyya-Panda, finest of historians and mothers, read and commented on much of the dissertation with a keen eye. My parents have kept me going with their obscure wit, honesty, generosity, and unflinching idealism. My gratitude goes to Dylan Montanari, who turned his fine editorial eye to this dissertation in its final stages, makes me believe that it can be a book, and is the very best of friends one can hope for.

This dissertation is for the people who taught me about the past and who disappeared while I was still learning about it from them. I think of the late Tapan and Pratima (Hashi) Raychaudhuri, Manjusha and Chanakyadeb Bhattacharyya, Jagneswar and Ava Panda,

Sumitendranath and Shyamasree Tagore, Chakraborty *dadu*, Ashok Kumar Mukherjee (*Oporer Dadu*), and Arkaprabha Deb. Each of these people showered me with love and very many stories. It was too early for Sabyasachi Bhattacharya to go, but he went anyway. Had it not been for Bappa *jethu,* I might never have applied to Chicago. All that I have learned of love and life is from my beautiful and brilliant grandmother, Ava Rani Panda (*Haba* Rani as she called herself), who dropped out of school in the 1940s because the headmaster of the village school pulled her hair. In our time, we have no corporal punishment, so she was always glad that things were better for me. She was waiting to see the complete dissertation, but then the universe pulled a fast one on the two of us. I dedicate this dissertation to Tapan Raychaudhuri*,* who ensured that I learn Bengali at the age of seven, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya who made it possible for me to embark on a PhD, and Ava Rani Panda, my dearest *thakurma,* in whose eyes I saw eternity.

Abstract

In 1947, two regions with majority Muslim populations, Punjab and Bengal, decided to join Pakistan after Indian independence. From 1948 on, however, the Bengali-speaking majority population of East Pakistan decided that on linguistic grounds they should assert their identity against Urdu-imposing West Pakistan. The 1950s witnessed several movements premised on the right of East Pakistan to have Bengali as a state language. The language movement of East Pakistan was ultimately seen as a nationalist forerunner to the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. This dissertation traces a longer history of Bengali ethno-linguistic nationalism by charting out the life of philology in colonial Bengal and mapping its relationship with the Hindus and Muslims. Contending that philology was critical to the construction of a twentieth-century *communitas,* a space of inspired friendship and conflicted collaboration between Hindus and Muslims, which ran as a parallel trajectory to *realpolitik*, a world of real political events dominated by questions of national interest, this dissertation argues for an alternative political history of the Hindus and Muslims that does not stop with the *telos* of the Partition in 1947.

Philology and the Politics of Language: The Case of Bengali, 1893-1955 begins and ends with two academies of language. The first is the Bengal Academy of Literature or the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, established in colonial Calcutta in 1893, and the second is the Bangla Academy, established in Dhaka in 1955. Analyzing the period between the founding of these two academies, this dissertation explores the role of philology—the structures of linguistic and literary understanding of the world—in the unfolding of the political relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal in this period of political history, which witnessed a number of major events and ruptures. From the second decade of the twentieth century, literary societies established by Bengali Muslims responded to the institutional hold

over Hindus in the cultural and literary realms. By studying the proceedings of these literary societies and the popular periodicals of the time, I trace the debates and discussions surrounding the language question in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, while a number of Bengali Muslims favored turning to Urdu or debated about adopting Arabic as a universal Muslim *lingua franca,* the majority of Bengali Muslims—now a visible political and social bourgeois interest group—staked their claims on the Bengali language, arguing that national and social interest lay in the joint cultural reconstruction of the Bengali language by both Hindus and Muslims.

The first threat to philology as a unified *communitas* was posed in the late 1930s with the rise of separatist sentiments. The utopian fraternity of Hindus and Muslims in the cultural realm eventually dissolved with the Pakistan movement in the 1940s. After the Partition of 1947, however, the language question emerged anew in East Pakistan with a widespread movement demanding that Bengali be made the state language. Many of the debates that unfolded during this high period of linguistic nationalism occurred in earlier iterations in the colonial period such as distinctions between mother tongue and state language, various forms of linguistic imperialism, the Sanskritization of Bengali, and the recognition of the long history of Muslim contributions to the Bengali language. Muslims and Hindus who remained in East Pakistan dissented together against the imposition of Urdu by West Pakistan. By examining the prehistory of the language movement and linking it to earlier conflicts and allegiances within the joint philological milieu of Hindus and Muslims, I reveal the many complexities inherent in the articulation of a Bengali Muslim political identity and consciousness.

The problem of the nation-state remains embedded as a basic fact of twentieth-century South Asian historiography. The Partition of 1947 is the most striking indictment of the divergent paths of Hindu and Muslim nationalisms. This dissertation rejects 1947 as the

most decisive break in the history of modern Bengal. By tracing a history of Bengali philology from the late nineteenth century to 1971, it posits a Hindu-Muslim relationship that constitutes a unity marked by tense and conflicted collaboration. The philological *communitas* ultimately outlived the great events and ruptures of the twentieth-century South Asian nation-states of India and Pakistan, and was decisive to the making of Bangladesh.

Introduction

Introducing the Problem

> Reader! There is a beginning to the pilgrim's *maner kathā* (the words of his heart) but no end. At every stage there are ruptures, but no end to the *kathā.* Life will end, the curtains will fall on the masque of life, but the words will never run out. The words of the *man* (heart) will flow on in the *man.* What other hope is there in life other than regret? The events of the world are of this kind. One thing comes, and another thing goes. How many have felt a unity, a connection with the words of the traveller, and how many must be abandoned at the end? As we reach the endpoint of the eulogy, the connections and the unity fade away.[1]

The first Bengali Muslim novelist, Mir Mosharraf Hossain, wrote a memoir that is precariously located between the liminal spaces of public and private, novel and autobiography, mofussil and metropolis, and Hindu and Muslim in the late nineteenth century. Muslims and Hindus alike had been applauding him for his straddling of several literary genres and for a lively prose style that alternated between bitterly poignant and wickedly funny. Having written novels, plays, essays, and an autobiography, all in a literary moment in which these genres were being recently consolidated and experimented with in Bengali society, his liminality was most evident in this memoir, which was neither a social and political history of the cruel indigo plantation economy in nineteenth-century Bengal nor a straightforward autobiography. *Udāsīn Pathiker Maner Kathā (About the Consciousness of the Melancholy Traveller* or *The Heartfelt Story of the Melancholy Traveller)* appeared at its time as a little-acknowledged and genre-defying work. The insertion of the consciousness of the unnamed but eminently recognizable *pathik* or traveller at several junctures of the narrative made reading this book an intensely private experience; the common realist narrative technique of addressing the reader directly to establish intimacy was made more immediate by the fact that this was no great nineteenth-century realist novel, it was the

[1] See Mir Mosharraf Hossain, *Mīr Mośārraph Hosen Racanāsaṃgraha* (Kolkata: Kamala Sahitya Bhaban, 1957), 295. I translate the word *man* as heart, but it could also be understood as mind, consciousness or sensibility.

narrator-author's lived experience. The work found itself in an odd predicament within a well fleshed-out public literary sphere and, unlike the author's other works, received relatively less critical attention at the time. Reviews of Mir Mosharraf Hossain's other works were on the whole extremely favorable, his linguistic register bringing a constant sense of bafflement to the Hindu *littérateurs* that Bengali Muslims could write in a high Sanskritic register at all.[2] As an instance of a work by the first Bengali Muslim novelist, highly regarded in his time but criticized by subsequent Bengali Muslim writers for not being distinctively Muslim—his play *Jamidārdarpaṇ* (1873) was too close to the earlier *Nīldarpaṇ* (1860) by Dinabandhu Mitra, his pathbreaking novel *Biṣādsindhu* (1887) too Sanskritized in tone— the autobiographical *Udāsīn Pathiker Maner Kathā* was exceptional. As the first Bengali Muslim novelist in the Bengali public sphere, Mir Mosharaff Hossain clearly raised the problem of the *man* (inadequately translated as either heart or mind) of the Bengali Muslim.

Philology and the Politics of Language: The Case of Bengali, 1893-1955 is a study of Bengali philology in a period that spans anti-colonial nationalism, Indian independence and partition, and the early years of East Pakistan. It is bookended by the establishment of two academies of language: the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, established in 1893 in colonial Calcutta, and the Bangla Academy, formed in 1955 in postcolonial Dhaka. These years witnessed and felt the force of two partitions of Bengal, in 1905 and 1947, respectively. Whereas the first partition was rescinded in 1911, the second partition paved the way for a

[2] Mir Mosharraf Hossain has been recognized as the first Bengali Muslim writer to get the attention of the Hindu writers and critics of his time. Born in 1847 to a *zamindar* family in Lahiripara, Kushtia, he studied Arabic and Persian at home before moving to a Bengali *pāṭhśālā*. He went to Calcutta to study but fell into an unfortunate marriage instead. Moving between Calcutta and Kushtia thereafter, his mentor was the journalist, poet, and Baul singer Harinath Majumdar, also known as Kangal Harinath. Harinath used to write for the journal *Saṃvād Prabhākar* and had also started his own local *Grāmbārtā Prakāśikā*. Mir Mosharraf Hossain started to write for both, often using the pseudonym "Maśā" (mosquito). His first book, *Ratnabatī*, was published in 1869. His second book *Gorāi Bridge* (1872), was reviewed by Bankimchandra Chatterjee in *Bangadarshan:* "Many Hindus cannot write as pure Bengali as he can." Two plays followed in swift succession. His breakthrough novel was *Biṣādsindhu* (1885). A description of the social and cultural lives of *mufassil* upper-class Muslims can be found in his autobiography as well as the semi-autobiographical *Udāsīn Pathiker Maner Kathā (The Heartfelt Words of a Melancholic Pilgrim,* 1890). The latter gave insight into Hindu-Muslim relations, the Bengali Muslim and lower caste peasantry at the mercy of indigo planters, and the transformation of provincial life under the Company and the Raj. See Mohammad Abdul Awal, *Mīr Maśārrapher Gadya Racanā* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1975).

third break in 1971. The literary, political, and cultural fate of the Bengali language analyzed in this project bears the mark of these events. Even though 1971 is outside this dissertation's chronological ambit, the establishment of the sovereign state of Bangladesh is in some ways immanent in this work.

This dissertation explores the role of philology—the structures of linguistic and literary understanding of the world—in the unfolding of the political relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal in a period of political history that witnessed several major events and ruptures. Going against the historiographical trend that recognizes only the *telos* of Partition and the historical inevitability of separatism, I conclude this study during the climactic moments of the Language Movement in East Pakistan and not the Partition of Bengal in 1947. On first analysis, the dissertation is a study of the transfer of power and political authority in the domains of language and culture; the reins over the Bengali language pass from the hegemonic Hindu *bhadralok* of the nineteenth century to the then-politically emancipated Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan. The story, however, is more complex than a seamless cultural history of a language in a period bookended by the founding of two authoritative academies. By the 1950s, political mobilization over the Bengali language had sowed the first seeds of discontent and strife with West Pakistan.

In conventional historiography, the roots of the Liberation War of 1971 and the establishment of Bangladesh are located in the volatile period between 1947 and 1955. In these accounts, the Language Movement is the beginning of the struggle for autonomy and political self-determination for Bengali Muslims.[3] Departing from this chronological

[3] There is little historiography on this topic in English, though a vast amount exists in Bengali. The definitive account of the political history of Bangladesh is found in Badruddin Umar's *The Emergence of Bangladesh* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004). He also wrote the most comprehensive history of the Language Movement in the three-volume *Pūrbabāṅglār Bhāsā Āndolan O Tat̲kālīn Rājnīti* (Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 1970), which was compiled and written before the 1971 war. See Chapter 3 for a more comprehensive analysis of historiographical trends on the Language Movement. An unpublished dissertation by Layli Uddin studies the role of Maulana Bhashani in the Language Movement. See Layli Uddin, *In The Land of Eternal Eid: Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c. 1930s-1971* (PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2016).

scaffolding, this dissertation argues that the political question of language-as-autonomy for Bengali Muslims arose much earlier in the late nineteenth century and remained embedded as an *inner history* of political community. Indeed, in many ways the Bengali language (as a set of philological practices and ways of being) was instrumental in both conceptually shaping as well as transcending the major political events and ruptures of twentieth-century Bengal including the Pakistan movement, the Partition of Bengal, and East Pakistan (1947-1971).

There are several strands of South Asian historiography within which this dissertation situates itself. The first is the trend of writing cultural histories of language in the colonial and postcolonial periods in order to study the role of language in the birth of modern regional identities. Several languages have been studied within this mode of history writing. Sumathi Ramaswamy and Lisa Mitchell have individually dealt with Tamil and Telugu to trace a distinctly affective engagement with language in South India in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mitchell traced the historical shifts in Telugu as it emerged as "mother tongue," reflecting a "complete reorganization of interests, everyday practices and knowledge production."[4] She examines attempts to purify and standardize Telugu within larger political mobilization. Similarly, Ramaswamy offers the new analytic category of "language devotion" to understand Tamil ethno-linguistic nationalism as a difficult, conflicted, and multifarious phenomenon. Both these books study the shifting dynamics of Southern Indian caste politics and regional separatism within the larger Indian state as *longue durée* processes, in which older forms of religious devotional discourse seep into twentieth-century language politics. Bernard Bate explores how politicians belonging to the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu increasingly turned to the high register, pure, and classical *centamil* to deliver

[4] Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

political lectures from the 1940s onwards.[5] All three look at the shaping of modern political idioms through the long legacies of earlier religious and literary devotional registers and practices.

In the context of other Indian languages, Prachi Deshpande has traced the continuity of precolonial *bakhar* traditions of the eighteenth-century Maratha state into colonial and postcolonial regimes in Maharashtra.[6] Combining older historiographical traditions with newer institutional history writing within the colonial framework, Deshpande crafts a long history of Marathi identity (with its various reproductions and contestations) as situated within history and memory. In this story of regional identity making across colonial rupture, the consolidation or formation of caste identities is, of course, of paramount importance. The story of the Hindustani language splitting into two distinct languages in the nineteenth century, Hindi and Urdu, is perhaps the most obvious parallel to the subject matter of this dissertation. The sectarian conflict between Hindus and Muslims by the late nineteenth century crystallized into a Hindu nationalist demand for the recognition and consolidation of Hindi as an autonomous language in the Devnagari script. Ultimately, the two-nation theory became embodied in the state languages of the newly formed nation-states, India and Pakistan. A great deal of scholarly work has explored the many tensions and contradictions of the largely artificial and politically motivated split of Hindi and Urdu. The focus has been, for the most part, on the widening chasm between Hindus and Muslims, with the language conflict reflective of a social and political tragedy that was ultimately mirrored in the Partition of the Punjab.[7] The common grounds between Hindi and Urdu, and a mass (or even

[5] Bernard Bate, *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic: Democratic Practice in South India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
[6] Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
[7] See for instance Rizwan Ahmed, "Hindi is perfect, Urdu is messy: the discourse of delegitimation of Urdu in India," in *Orthography as Social Action: Scripts, Spelling, Identity and Power*, eds. Alexandra Jaffe et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012), 103-133; Christopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994); Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001); Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political*

niche) public that consumes both, has received relatively little scholarly attention barring Francesca Orsini's study of commercial publishing in post-1857 North India. *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* shows a world of commercialized leisure in which popular and cheap books such as *barahmasas,* songbooks, *qissas*, and detective novels demonstrated that Hindi and Urdu were in a "symbiotic and complementary relationship."[8] Ulrike Stark's study of Munshi Naval Kishore's hugely important press in Lucknow primarily traces a paradigmatic shift in Indian book history that the Naval Kishore Press brought about with a commercialization of print. Concomitantly, the study also traces the contradictions inherent within late nineteenth-century Hindu-Muslim divisions. Naval Kishore—"the Muslim *pandit* and Hindu *maulvi*"—simultaneously engaged in Hindu revivalism as well as preserving Muslim learning and literary cultures.[9] Both Orsini and Stark conclude their studies before 1900, prior to the political rifts and conflict between the two communities widen decisively, and are reflected within the realms of cultural production. David Lunn's doctoral dissertation *Looking for Common Ground: Aspects of Cultural Production in Hindi/Urdu, 1900-1947* presents the argument that the Hindi-Urdu divide in the twentieth century was a somewhat more complex phenomenon, arguing that the "lived, day-to-day reality of the language issue as experienced by at least some of its professional practitioners and ordinary users" was different from the way in which political leaders conceptualized the language divide.[10] This everyday experiencing of language is something he extends to studying the films of the 1940s as well. Nevertheless, the temporal marker of this dissertation is again, the fateful and decisive 1947.

History (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011); Harish Trivedi, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia,* ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 958-1022.

[8] Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009).

[9] Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

[10] David J. Lunn, *Looking for common ground: aspects of cultural production in Hindi/Urdu, 1900-1947* (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 2012), 11.

The history of the Hindu-Muslim conflict in South Asia, whether in the case of North India and the Partition of the Punjab, or in Bengal, has been seen as a history of conflict and division. Separatism is the inevitable historical sentiment that dominated and won out over the course of the early twentieth century. In these accounts, Partition is the *telos* that works backwards, almost as prolepsis. Even in scholarship about print and the public sphere in North India, the historical inevitability of the Partition is an embedded fact. The late nineteenth-century public sphere hinted at such divisions, or presented a better world that would be tragically cut short as the twentieth century progressed.

The Partition is mostly commonly studied through political events; the parting of ways between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League are most important in this very large body of scholarship. This trend is what I call the *realpolitik* reading of the Hindu-Muslim relationship, one that foregrounds the analytic of the nation-state in modern South Asia. Communalism, in this analysis, is a problem inherent to the emergence of the nation-state. The major historiographical schools of South Asian history have all subscribed to this analytical model in understanding the phenomena of nationalism and communalism.[11] Though the Subaltern historians have looked for the small voices of history within nationalist resistance and provided counter-narratives of autonomy and agency to peasants, workers and the marginal actors of Indian history, ultimately the peasant is political against (or with) the big voices. The problem of nationalism and the nation-state remained its central concerns in

[11] For some representative scholarship, see Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968); John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson, and Anil Seal, eds. *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics 1870 to 1940* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1984); Bipan Chandra, *Ideology and Politics in Modern India* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1994); Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Nationalism, Democracy, and Development: State and Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

its various phases.[12] Both the *realpolitik* lens of nationalism-communalism and the Partition of 1947 are configured deeply within histories of the subcontinent as a real, inevitable, and inescapable fact.

By *realpolitik*, I refer to an understanding of history being planned and determined according to the interpretation of national interest and ideology by elected and popular political leaders in the late colonial and postcolonial periods. The word *realpolitik* as a political category emerged in Europe in the wake of the Revolutions of 1848, a series of popular uprisings across Europe that left liberals disillusioned and disenchanted. A large number of liberals, radicals, and socialists recognized the need for the practical possibilities in national and transnational politics rather than thinking of progress in a moral framework as triumph of virtue.[13] Taking this term loosely from Ludwig von Rochau's formulation of *realpolitik* as a system of political activity that considers its task the "attainment of concrete ends," I argue that most existing works of social and cultural history on the Hindu-Muslim question have not been able to evade the *realpolitik* aspect of Partition as the highest attainment of a concrete end for nationalist leaders.[14] For example, the most definitive work on the Bengal partition, Joya Chatterji's crucial *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, argued for the specificity of the Bengal Partition. Arguing against existing works on the partition of the subcontinent that focused on the negotiations of the transfer of power at an all-India level or considered the emergence of separatist politics amongst India's Muslim minorities, her book focused instead on the rise of Hindu communalism. In her reading, communalism and nationalism, though related, were not

[12] The school of course begins with the premise that the top-down nationalism of elite actors is inadequate. The nation-state still remains a primary concern even after what is known as the cultural turn in the works of Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee. For the problem of communalism, see Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[13] See Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

[14] John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

antinomies in the early twentieth century. The nationalist leader in Bengal often borrowed from religious symbolism to mobilize popular support and popular action.[15] Her major finding has been that the Bengal Partition was engineered and demanded by the Hindu *bhadralok*, contra the received wisdom of Muslim separatism. These Hindu *bhadralok* were the new landed gentry who acquired wealth and status in the wake of the Permanent Settlement and came to dominate the entirety of politics in the early twentieth century. Chatterji explains their hegemonic role:

> An aristocracy of wealth had begun to transform itself (at least in its own eyes) into an aristocracy of culture. In the twentieth century, *bhadralok* identity came to rest increasingly upon a perception of itself as a cultured and enlightened class, heir to the traditions of the 'Bengal Renaissance', and standard-bearer of progress and modernity. This self-image informed *bhadralok* politics, justifying the claim for representation by early nationalists. In later years, it also served to justify the demand that Hindus should continue to dominate Bengal, and ultimately that Bengal be partitioned.[16]

Bengal Divided is thus an analysis of how the Partition was an inevitable outcome of the late colonial transformation of the *bhadralok* class from an all-India power to a petty and provincial social group that was petrified of being reduced to a minority in the Legislative Assembly in the aftermath of the Communal Award of 1932 and the Poona Pact in quick succession. Haunted by desire for "real political power," they pushed for a separatist agenda in order to fight against the social and economic crises of the day—the sudden and dramatic collapse of agrarian prices and of rural credit, prosperous Muslim tenants who benefited from the situation, a newly enfranchised upper stratum of Muslim peasants from 1935 on, and a "restless Muslim intelligentsia."[17] This picture of Hindu-Muslim relations in Bengal,

---

[15] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 14.

[16] She then explains that the *bhadralok* hold on Bengali society was of course underlined by the fact that they were the major property-owners—"However, the new bhadralok definition of themselves as a modern, enlightened and cultured middle class was not without its own difficulties. It obscured the extent to which the fabric of bhadralok pre-eminence in Bengali society was made up of a variety of strands, in which their wealth and powers as a landed elite, their position at the top of the caste hierarchy, their privileged access to urban employment and to some measure of authority under colonial rule, all were woven into an intricate pattern of dominance." See *Bengal Divided,* 12.

[17] *Bengal Divided*, 15.

however accurate and focusing on complexities of class and social stratification, explains the Partition of Bengal but does not satisfactorily answer the complexities evident in the period under question.

First, some of the most restless Muslim intellectuals were vigorously anti-Partition, such as Kazi Nazrul Islam (who unfortunately was no longer politically active after 1942) and Kazi Abdul Wadud. More importantly, the Language Movement would erupt as a pressing point of discontent between East and West Pakistan a few months after the Partition of 1947. The Hindu parliamentarians who remained in East Pakistan were blamed by the representatives of the central West Pakistan government for trouble mongering in the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly in 1952.[18] By all accounts, the history of the Hindu-Muslim relationship in Bengal is far more complex than a subcontinental history in which Partition is enacted proleptically. Moreover, the story does not end in 1947. Nor did Bengali Muslim self-determination begin in 1948.[19] Rafiuddin Ahmed and Tazeen Murshid have provided social histories of Bengali Muslim self-determination and identity over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ahmed focuses on the gradual mobilization and transformation of Bengali Muslims into a coherent social group by the end of the nineteenth century when the gap between the elite Urdu-speaking upper-class *ashraf* and the peasantry (*atrap)* through the rise of mofussil religious associations (*anjumans*) finally appeared to close. His account ends during the first significant riots between Hindus and Muslims before the Partition of Bengal in 1905.[20] Murshid's narrative of the intelligentsia between 1871-1977 provides a social history in which a number of factors led the Bengali Muslim community, over a period of a century, to feel constant tension between religious and secular outlooks. She explains this through different approaches—the competing political visions of the *ashraf*

[18] See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.
[19] Badruddin Umar, *The Emergence of Bangladesh* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[20] Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

who idealized cultural origins outside Bengal and the "vernacular intelligentsia" whose worldview was more distinctly Bengali; the difference in orientations in the public and private ("personal life decisions" and "political decisions").[21] Recent scholarship on Bengali cultural and political history accept the *telos* of 1947, while exploring the complexities of Hindu-Muslim exchange in the first half of the twentieth century. Semanti Ghosh has argued that more than one articulation of nationalism emerged in Bengal in the period between 1905 and 1947; her book *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905-1947* demonstrates the negotiations between Hindus and Muslims on the questions of representation, sovereignty, and a unified nationalism. She studies a number of important political figures like Chittaranjan Das, A.K. Fazlul Haq and Abul Hashim in order to explore how regional loyalties, decentralization, and fair representation figured in Bengali political discourse before 1947.[22] Neilesh Bose's *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture and Islam in Colonial Bengal* makes the case that Muslim political mobilization in late colonial Bengal did not emanate from north Indian calls for a separatist "Muslim" state of Pakistan, but rather emerged out of a sustained engagement with local Bengali intellectual and literary traditions. Again, while he foregrounds local Islam and literary traditions as a central driving force in the movement towards East Pakistan, the Partition acts as a conclusive break.[23]

I argue that the real history of the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal cannot be understood by embarking on a study of "real political power" or as *realpolitik.* Nor does such a reading do justice to the long history of Bengali Muslim political self-determination, which ultimately finds fruition in the Liberation War of 1971 and the establishment of Bangladesh.

---

[21] Tazeen M. Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871-1977* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995), 363. Ahmed and Murshid provided the necessary corrective to the Hindu-dominated historiography of Bengal, but again moments of Hindu-Muslim conflict and contestation emerge more clearly in these accounts of the construction of Bengali Muslim identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Murshid's approach of combining social and intellectual history to escape the ruptures of the first and second Partitions of Bengal in 1905 and 1971 to write what the French might call *histoire des mentalités* of the Bengali Muslims is perhaps closest to my own project.

[22] Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal, 1905-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[23] Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture and Islam in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Histories of the post-Partition period, moreover, tend to narrate the stories of Indian and Pakistani nation-states that are already determined by the Partition and thus lack contingency. Yet, what of the continuities before and after 1947? To address this omission, I propose an alternative model of understanding the shared history of modern Bengal by focusing on language as the great ground of commonality between Hindus and Muslims. I study language not just as a cultural fact and object in itself, but also as a systematic and institutional phenomenon, which at the same time had an everyday life. Philology in this dissertation is both discourse as well as practice, the ground on which I analyze the polymorphous life of the Bengali language.

The primary argument of this dissertation is that Hindus and Muslims in Bengal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries imagined philology as a *communitas*, a space of inspired friendship that was part of but also distant from the public sphere. I argue that this *communitas,* with all its internal conflicts and tensions (or, to use Victor Turner's term, "liminalities") was a space of friendship mediated and formed by the shared inheritance of the Bengali language and characterized by a number of philological practices and experiences. Political community was built through philology practiced in the public sphere: the growth and consolidation of an academy of language, the multitudes of literary societies that existed in the public life of Bengal, and the profusion of print through new periodicals and publishing houses in the early twentieth century. This I designate as the normative and regulated philological *communitas*, in which the Bengali language was crafted institutionally within the realms of academy and print. Contrasted with this is the phenomenon of language perceived and experienced in the context of everyday and quotidian life. The philological *communitas* thus remains embedded in history through institutional documents and in the domains of mass print as well as a number of private and semi-private documents such as letters, diaries, marginalia, forgotten and incomplete dissertations, and unpublished

autobiographies. The *communitas* in this dissertation—the community of Hindus and Muslims who lived, loved, and fought with each other over language and life—stands as a parallel trajectory to the world of *realpolitik* in late colonial India. Hence, a number of transnational connections are inherent within these spaces, undermining easy polarities of colonizer and colonized, native and European, Hindu and Muslim, or even Congress and Muslim League. Consider for instance, the mysterious L. Liotard, who was foundational in the establishment of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, or the many European scholars who pledged support to the institution.[24] Or, the fact that after the Partition in August 1947, "Bengali Muslim" newspapers like *Azad* and *Ittefaq* were still being physically printed in Calcutta before being sent to East Pakistan for circulation.[25]

I use the word philology to refer to a certain mode of engagement with language and history in the nineteenth century, with political and intellectual roots in the European Renaissance. The word "philology" exists in two different forms in the academy today. The first is the broad trend across literary studies acknowledging that philology is the basis of current humanistic scholarship; hence we have *new* philology, *critical* philology, *radical* philology, and *world* philology.[26] The word *philologia* was coined in ancient Greece, as most terms of intellectual history tend to be, and first appeared in Plato. Taken literally, it means the love for *logos*, love of the word—talking, argument, and reason.[27] From ancient Greece to Rome and then to Italy in the Middle Ages, the word came to be associated with a tradition of studying and thinking the world through language via practices of reading, rhetoric, grammar,

[24] I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 1.
[25] See Chapter 3.
[26] See Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 21-26; Jonathan Culler, "The Return to Philology," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 3 (2002): 12-16; Michael Holquist, "Why We Should Remember Philology," *Profession* (2002): 72-79; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Jerome McGann, "Philology in a New Key," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 2 (2013): 327-46; Siegfried Wenzel, "Reflections on (New) Philology," *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 11-18; Sheldon Pollock, "Future Philology: The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World," *Critical Inquiry* 35:4 (2009): 931-961.
[27] James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3.

literature, and textual scholarship. By the twentieth century, philology was defined by its great practitioners as the only way of approaching the unresolvable paradoxes of history or namely, the tensions between the universal and the particular. In the seminal essay "Philologie der Weltliteratur" (1952), translated by Edward and Marie Said, Auerbach writes regarding Goethe's conception of a universalistic *Weltliteratur* (world literature):

> Our knowledge of world literatures is indebted to the impulse given to that epoch by historicist humanism: the concern that humanism was not only the overt discovery of materials and the development of methods of research, but beyond that their penetration and evaluation so that *an inner history of mankind*—which thereby created a conception of man unified in his multiplicity—could be written. Ever since Vico and Herder this humanism has been the true purpose of philology: because of this purpose philology became the dominant branch of the humanities. It drew the history of the other arts, the history of religion, law and politics after itself, and wove itself variously with them into certain fixed aims and commonly achieved concepts of order.[28]

To understand Erich Auerbach's own positioning as a *Philolog* of the old tradition, Said explains that philology, from Vico to Auerbach, does something that history cannot: "Historicist philology—which is much more than studying the derivation of words—is the discipline of uncovering beneath the surface of words *the life of a society* that is embedded there by the great writer's art."[29] To be a philologist, or to think philologically (and this is how I use philology in this dissertation), one has to use a language as both object-in-itself but also a means through which the historical imagination intuits self and society across space and time. Specifically, I argue that in Bengal, Hindus and, more importantly, Muslims embraced the Bengali language *philologically* in order to write and act out *an inner history* of political community, one that would reflect desire, futility, and the hopes unrealized and unrealizable in *realpolitik*. There is a certain lived plurality in language—especially in its quotidian aspect—that is overlooked in common narratives of Partition.

---

[28] Erich Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," trans. Marie Said and Edward Said, *The Centennial Review* 13, no. 1 (1969), 4.
[29] Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 455-456.

While political and intellectual exiles in Europe and North America engaged in constructing a philology that addressed their own conditions of homelessness and displacement, elsewhere in the world the specter of Renaissance Europe would reiterate itself in different forms. In the history of Bengal, the term "renaissance" was used for moments of social and political change; first by the Hindu *bhadraloks* in the spirit of liberal and intellectual reform in the nineteenth century, then by progressive Bengali Muslims who wanted a similar "awakening," and finally Muslim separatists who embraced the Lahore Resolution in Bengal.[30] To once again quote Said: "One must also have the courage to relive within oneself the whole of human history, as if it were one's own history."[31] The reappearance and discussion of the European Renaissance and its legacy of humanism—literature and linguistic practices at the heart of political rebirth—in Bengal over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was no coincidence. If the twentieth-century realities of war, imperialism, and political upheaval made Auerbach and Said rediscover the essence of humanism and philology in the West, in Bengal the Renaissance was similarly invoked to address conditions of colonialism and cultural exclusion in order to imagine radical political transformation.

There is of course a more precise appearance of philology in this dissertation, namely the tradition of Comparative Philology embraced by scholars and dilettantes of language, both Indian as well as European civil servants, in nineteenth-century India. Here, of course, the intellectual history of philology is crucial— the birthplace of Comparative Philology was fittingly the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, when William Jones ingeniously noticed the similitude of Sanskrit with Persian, Greek, and Latin, and broached the concept of the Indo-

[30] On the Bengal Renaissance, see David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance; the Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Susobhan Chandra Sarkar, *On the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979); Rammohun Roy, Rajat Kanta Ray, and V. C. Joshi, ed., *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975). I discuss the idea of Renaissance within the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia in detail in Chapter 2.
[31] *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, 456.

European language family.[32] The nineteenth century witnessed the Orientalist scholar working from afar on Sanskrit, along with the well-known civil servant philologists who, combining reasons both practical and passionate, devoted their lives to the study and consolidation of the Indian vernacular languages.[33] This is the historical moment at which this dissertation begins, with the establishment of the Bengal Academy of Literature in 1893, renamed Bangiya Sahitya Parishad thereafter. The Bengal Academy reflects new nationalist concerns that mark a distinct move away from earlier colonial knowledge production and antiquarianism. It also marks, I argue, the beginning of *communitas*; a space in which Hindus and Muslims work together, both *publicly* and *privately,* in regulating as well as experiencing the Bengali language as conflicted collaboration. The subsequent chapters explore the shifting political realities and the emergence and consolidation of political separatism, the first real threat to the distinct and autonomous spheres of *communitas* and *realpolitik.* During the Language Movement, I argue that the two merge in some ways in East Pakistan even as members of the philological *communitas* become the political leaders of the country.

While designating philology as *communitas,* I borrow from two conceptual understandings of the term. The first is, as mentioned, the use of the word by the anthropologist Victor Turner in the classic though somewhat old-fashioned *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Turner's understanding of "liminality" pinpoints moments when people within social groups—going through "rites of passage"—are "threshold people"; they are people who cannot be located within any established networks of

[32] See Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Rosane Rocher and Ludo Rocher, *The Making of Western Indology: Henry Thomas Colebrooke and the East India Company* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012); Rosane Rocher, *Orientalism, Poetry, and the Millennium: The Checkered Life of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, 1751-1830* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983) .

[33] See Sadhana Naithani, *In Quest of Indian Folktales: Pandit Ram Gharib Chaube and William Crooke* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) and Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William* (New Delhi: Orion Publications, 1978).

classification in social or cultural space.[34] This liminal period (which of course he explains with reference to rites) gives rise to some kind of an atemporal bond between human beings:

> We are presented…with a "moment in and out of time" and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. These are the ties organized in terms either of caste, class or rank hierarchies…it is as though there are here two major "models" for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated and often hierarchical systems of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus,* community, or even communion...It is rather a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond without which there could be *no* society.[35]

In Turner's understanding then, it is *communitas* that gives meaning to the normative social structure; the two are distinct yet dialectical. In my analysis of the Hindu-Muslim philological *communitas,* I cannot quite say that it is devoid of "caste, class or rank hierarchies"; indeed the regulatory function of language is instrumental in shaping them as I demonstrate in the first chapter. There is however, a utopian fraternity underlying the philological project that will never be fully understood within the scope of *realpolitik* history. It is perhaps no coincidence that both Hindu and Muslim Bengal showed a deep engagement, even obsession, with the European Renaissance. The roots of *communitas* go back to Petrarch and his successors, who in turn went back to Cicero's *De Amicitia (On Friendship).* The intellectual revolution of early modern Europe was premised on the rediscovery of political friendship between a few good men who wrote to each other. Practices of reading and writing changed dramatically during the Renaissance with the rediscovery of the epistolary Cicero; other important political thinkers such as Erasmus and Montaigne in turn rediscovered

[34] As Turner explains: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." See Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 95.
[35] He mentions he prefers the word *communitas* to *comitatus. The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 96-97.

Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Quintilian, and Demetrius. To write to each other within congenial and familiar spaces is an ethical enterprise. The *ars familiariter scribendi,* or the epistolary style, was rooted in identifying a group of likeminded people who were intimately involved in a common humanistic project that foregrounded and staged an *intimacy* that was located between the realms of private and public; made the private an object of public consumption and understanding.[36] This dissertation similarly explores the concept of *communitas* as applied to a group of men and women in colonial Bengal from the end of the nineteenth century onward, who used and experienced language to make and subvert history.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation consists of four chapters that are based on an extensive analysis of some hitherto undiscovered archival sources. The first chapter, an institutional history of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, analyzes the idea of the "academy" as a project in Bengali vernacular nationalism. Utilizing the Parishad's institutional periodicals, correspondence and early publications from 1893 to1917, I analyze the ways in which Bengali was standardized through a huge output of literary scholarship, the making of an authoritative dictionary, and the collection of medieval literary archives. I argue that, though the Hindu bhadralok tried to Sanskritize the Bengali language and initiated a philological *communitas* that included European intellectuals and English civil servant-philologists, Bengali Muslims were also an important part of this space. By retrieving the contributions of Abdul Karim Sahityaviśārad and Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui to the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, I examine how Bengali Muslims tried to stake a claim within the larger philological community.

The second chapter maps the rise of the phenomenon of the literary society among Bengali Muslims from the nineteenth century onwards to the early twentieth century. In this chapter, I look at how the word *sāhitya* or literature became a means to explore and develop

[36] See Kathy Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

a space for Hindu-Muslim friendship and allegiance. *Sāhitya* is shorthand for *communitas.* I explore the Musalman Sahitya Samiti (Calcutta, established in 1911) and Muslim Sahitya Samaj (Dhaka, established in 1926) in great detail, with the mouthpieces of the Musalman Sahitya Samiti, *Vaṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrika* and *Śikhā*, as the main sources. I also incorporate a number of popular periodicals like *Navanūr, Saogāt, Mohammadī*, and *Bulbul* in order to demonstrate shifting Hindu-Muslim relations. These periodicals reflect that earlier sentiments of friendship between the two communities waned with the 1930s. I conclude the chapter with rise of separatism and the desire for a Pakistani literature with the East Pakistan Renaissance Society (Calcutta, established in 1942) and Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad (Dhaka, also established in 1942). This chapter also examines how two literary societies, one that worked toward Hindu-Muslim unity and another that was unequivocally separatist, invoked two different conceptions of "Renaissance."

The third chapter moves into the critical first decade after the partition of India. The newly formed state of Pakistan was rocked by a politics of Bengali linguistic nationalism right from 1947. In April 1948, Dhirendranath Dutta argued in the Constituent Assembly that Bengali be made the state language of East Pakistan; in 1952, four students were gunned down by Pakistani military, leading to the biggest nationalist agitation preempting the liberation war of 1971. The Bangla Academy was formed in 1955. I reconstruct the period between 1947 and 1955 through diverse sources including manifestos, pamphlets, and documents of various organizations and intellectuals, including Syed Mujtaba Ali, Abdul Huq, Muhammad Shahidullah, the Tamaddun Majlis, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Habibullah Bahar Chowdhury, the Bangla Academy, and the Legislative Assembly of East Pakistan. This chapter argues that the Partition of 1947, though decisive, nonetheless did not erase all continuity and traffic between West Bengal and East Pakistan. The major argument extended in this chapter is that an earlier *communitas,* including those who had

turned separatist in 1947, once again found common ground among various factions of Bengali Muslims and Hindus over the Bengali language. Moreover, language was now a cause within *realpolitik.* As members of the *communitas* became political leaders, the earlier separation between two distinct domains collapsed. Philology *becomes* politics.

I conclude the dissertation with the first well-researched account of Kazi Nazrul Islam, arguably the most successful poet and music composer that appealed to Hindus and Muslims equally. Nazrul's vast corpus of stories and songs incorporated both Sanskritised and Perso-Arabic words and allusions, and he belonged to a unique generation of politically motivated intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s who strived to make the Bengali cultural industry more inclusive and egalitarian. Nazrul's political affiliations and beliefs rejected many absolutes: the colonial state, religious and sectarian identity, and the mainstream nationalist movement. The anti-separatist sentiments that Nazrul cultivated throughout the 1920s and 1930s were doomed to become a political failure in the 1940s. Nonetheless, Nazrul became a symbol of resistance in East Pakistan and was named National Poet of Bangladesh in 1971. He was the voice of undivided Bengal, the embodiment of the ideal *communitas.* Though misunderstood and rejected during the years of separatism, his great humanistic vision was recovered and acknowledged in the promise of 1971.

A Note on Sources

This dissertation uses a number of diverse sources in reconstructing the philological and political worlds of modern Bengal. This includes official papers such as the Legislative Assembly debates of East Pakistan and the institutional documents of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and the Bangla Academy. In the case of literary societies, I have consulted their mouthpieces and journals. Many of the periodicals and journals that I have consulted have also included lists of donors and members and other minutiae of meetings, so that it is

possible to reconstruct the inner world of these societies. In the chapter on the language movement in East Pakistan, I have made use of pamphlets and manifestos. The Bangla Academy as well as other state institutions and small publishing houses republished some of the pamphlets in edited volumes in the 1970s and 1980s. These pamphlets are distinct inasmuch as they were popular, cheaply produced, and enjoyed a wide circulation at a time of intense political protest and dissent. Though they are otherwise not easily available, I found most of them at the Bangla Academy in Dhaka. The periodicals were collated across the British Library and the Bangla Academy. Very few Bengali Muslim periodicals are now extant in West Bengal.

With respect to literary sources, I have consulted published novels and collections of poetry. A large source base consists of autobiographies and memoirs, correspondence, and collections of privately published testimonies of friends by "memorial committees." The family of Dhirendranath Dutta kindly gave me access to his private papers. For the chapter on Kazi Nazrul Islam, I made use of the Nazrul Institute in Dhaka which has collected all literature published on Nazrul in the last several decades, including little magazines and privately published materials.

The historians Badruddin Umar and Anisuzzaman, who are frequently cited in this dissertation, gave me certain materials pertaining to the East Pakistan period. While I have interviewed them along with the late Mustapha Nurul Islam, the dissertation is purely based on textual sources without any ethnographic component. These interviews enabled a more refined understanding of the methodological premises of this dissertation. The interviews helped me understand that *everyday experience* must figure as a central category of understanding within my thesis.

The English word "experience" comes from the Latin *experientia,* "a trial, proof,

experiment; knowledge gained by repeated trials."[37] As Peter Dear explains it, thinking of experience as a historical category emerged in early-modern Europe: "In studying the meanings of experience in the early modern period, however, we find more at stake than just the interpretation of perceptions. There is another philosophical issue, namely the relationship between the experience of a single event and the perception of a truth that holds generally.[38] The Bengali word for experience, *abhijñatā*, derived from the Sanskrit, means something over and beyond the English word "experience": "to recognize, perceive, know, be or become aware of; to acknowledge, agree to, own, to remember."[39] Memory and knowing is fundamental to *abhijñatā*, and we will, in the course of this dissertation, find that the everyday repeatedly creeps into institutional logic. The philologist Abdul Karim Sahityaviśārad weaves his experience of collecting manuscripts from Hindus who discriminate against him as a Muslim into his introductions to annotated manuscripts, the Muslim literary societies invoke the everyday life of Muslims as a prerequisite in forming a new Muslim literary idiom, and the autobiographies of Abul Mansur Ahmed, Dhirendranath Datta, Abbasuddin and Jasimuddin all invoke single everyday instances of being uplifted by or alienated from language. Many autobiographies form a source base for this dissertation; the genre of *smṛtikathā* in which the East Pakistani/Bangladeshi subject-citizen reminisces about memories of earlier selves is an interesting entry point through which to examine how everyday experience of language in the first half of the twentieth century would have serious repercussions in the years to come.

All translations from Bengali-language sources are my own.

---

[37] This definition is from Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary. Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary. Revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten by. Charlton T. Lewis, Ph.D. and Charles Short, LL.D.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), available online at www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/.
[38] See Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773-97; Peter Dear, "The Meanings of Experience," in *The Cambridge History of Science: Early Modern Science*, eds. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 106–31.
[39] Monier Monier-Williams, Ernst Leumann, and Carl Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 62.

Chapter One

The World within Words: Philology and the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad

In 1899, the periodical/mouthpiece of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*, carried an advertisement for Nagendranath Basu's encyclopedia, which promised to give Bengal the whole world and all its knowledge through first and foremost, a list of words:

> All possible Sanskrit, Bengali and rural words their meanings and manifestations; Arabic, Persian, Hindi words of colloquial origin and their meanings; ancient and modern communities, their beliefs and ways of being; human philosophies…a huge anthology of all possible *śāstras* known to humankind.[1]

The publisher of *Biśvakoṣ*, Nagendranath Basu, an archaeologist, was a founding member of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. It was no coincidence, however, that the encyclopedic urge began, as in the advertisement, with a small unit of the world, individual words. As a metaphor for the larger concerns of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, it highlights an obsessive desire to compile and limit language, and to see language as the first step towards knowing the world and the self. When the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad took up the cause of the Bengali language, the latter was still in a state of flux, though foremost among one's nationalist inheritances and concerns. That the members of the Parishad were of a specific social class and caste, Hindu, and educated within a specific cultural milieu, is part of the way in which a register of Bengali language and literary history would be consolidated.

[1] An image of this advertisement is included at the end of this chapter. Nagendranath Basu (1866-1938) was a philologist and archaeologist who was responsible for the publication of the first encyclopedia in Bengali, which was later republished in Hindi. Rangalal Mukhopadhyay and Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay edited the first volume of *Biśvakoṣ*, which was published in twenty-three volumes until 1911. Basu was interested in writing subregional histories such as that of the Rarh region in Bengal. His collection of manuscripts and inscriptions were foundational in the formation of the Bengali department of Calcutta University in 1906. Moreover, he edited several volumes of the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* during the 1890s. For more on Nagendranath Basu, see Kumudini Kanta Ganguli, *Pandit Nagendranath Basu: A Sketch of His Life and Works* (Calcutta: Kumudini Kanta Ganguli, 1916) and his autobiography edited by Prabir Mukhopadhyay—Nagendranath Basu, *Āmār Jīban-kathā* (Kolkata: Carcapad Publications, 2010).

Nor was the inheritance of a Bengali vernacular (forged within colonial institutions such as missionary presses, Asiatic Society and the Fort William College) unproblematic, because the history of the nineteenth-century standardization of Bengali in colonial institutions had still left the vernacular in a state of incompleteness.[2] This chapter charts a history of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad's assumption of control over a nascent vernacular of Bengali, addressing debates of legitimacy and authenticity within language. In the process, I show how the Parishad endeavored to establish a disciplinary Bengali philology, situating it within its understanding of the intellectual contours of European modernity. Though the impulse behind the Parishad was a spirit of vernacular nationalism, I shall demonstrate that the easy boundaries of European and native, colonizer and colonized, and even Hindu and Muslim, were often undermined and subverted by the joint transnational project of philology.

On first reading, this chapter demonstrates the Hindu *bhadralok* Sanskritizing, and at various stages, de-Persianizing the Bengali language by philological means. Was this an easy and seamless process? I argue that it was not, and I conclude with the contributions of two significant Bengali Muslims to the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. Within the institutional *bhadralok* Hindu hegemonic fold, tensions and cracks arose in the archives retrieved and stories told by Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad and Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui. This happened, of course, *within* the Parishad. I argue that the embeddedness of Muslim Bengal within the space even at the moment of conception was the beginning of the philological Bengali *communitas*.

[2] See Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 21. Cohn argued that the language of command for the British emerged as a command over language itself in the nineteenth century. Thus grammars, dictionaries, and textbooks emerged as a necessity for the British ruling class to understand and codify Indian subjects and their languages on European terms. Within this epistemological space there was a significant native presence, as Cohn points out, and "a great number of diverse Indian scholars, intellectuals, teachers, scribes, priests, lawyers, officials, merchants and bankers, whose knowledge as well as they themselves were to be converted into instruments of colonial rule." Cohn's argument thus projects how a distinct Orientalist imagination led to brilliant antiquarian collections, archaeological finds, and photographic forays in order to construct an India that could be structured in an accessible form for better political control and regulation.

There has been some secondary scholarship on the institutional history of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, most notably an account published by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad itself by Madanmohan Kumar.[3] Gautam Bhadra has written extensively on the contributions of Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad to the collection of premodern manuscripts, his acceptance to the fold of Bengali philology, and antiquarianism (*prācyacarcā*, *Baṅgabidyācarcā*). Bhadra's contention is that Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad's self taught philological practice—what he calls the *puthiprem* (love of, even romance with manuscripts)—stood in contradistinction to the more defined scholarly practices adopted by philologists such as Haraprasad Shastri, who followed a rigorous German model.[4] This *puthiprem*, according to Bhadra, gave rise to a politics of (Bengali Muslim) selfhood and identity (*ātmasattār rājnīti*). In this chapter, I chart out a brief institutional history of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in order to examine how a nineteenth-century colonial disciplinary philology gave way to a twentieth-century nationalist one. This new regime of language was regulated by the Hindu *bhadralok* within the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, who favored a Bengali closer to Sanskrit. Nonetheless, this space also bore witnessed to the parallel trajectory of these two Bengali Muslims, who were not exactly identical in background or intellectual aspiration. A major argument that this chapter extends is that the philological *communitas* was informed by friendships and allegiances—albeit with constraints and contestation—forged across the institutional space of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad.

Of Beginnings: The Bengal Academy of Literature

The Bangiya Sahitya Parishad was founded in 1893 by a group of like-minded lovers of literature and language, who convened at the house of Maharaja Benoykrishna Deb on July

[3] See Madanmohan Kumar, *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣader Itihās* (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1974).
[4] Gautam Bhadra, *Munśī Ābdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad O Ātmasattār Rājnīti* (Dhaka: Samhati Prokashan, 2007), 20. Bhadra also co-published an article on the Parishad in the journal *Ababhās*. See Gautam Bhadra and Dipa De, "Cintār Cālacitra: Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat (1300-1330)," *Ababhās* (April-June 2002): 28-54.

23 to discuss the possibility of a literary academy in Bengal, a suggestion floated by the civil servant and amateur philologist, John Beames.[5] Present at this meeting with the Maharaja were fifteen learned Bengali gentlemen, along with a mysterious government clerk named L. Liotard, on whom concrete information is scarce.[6] Chief among these founding members was Kshetrapal Chakrabarty, a writer interested in Hinduism, philosophy, and psychology. Beames, a district magistrate posted in Balasore in Orissa, had been privately studying the grammar of north Indian languages since the 1860s. In 1872, in a proposal published in Bankim Chandra Chatterji's *Baṅgadarśan,* Beames had suggested that an institution dedicated to the dissemination of the literature and language of Bengali be established. This proposal was later taken up by Chakrabarty and put forward to the munificent Shovabazar Maharaja. In the inaugural meeting, Chakrabarty addressed the gathering with an urgency pertaining to the then-present state of the Bengali language, which he had witnessed as "reader, author and critic."[7] Summarizing the life of Bengali in the latter half of the nineteenth century, he clearly indicated that the language of both poetry and prose was a recent invention and development, declaring that Bengali "could not even so recently as forty years ago boast of a dozen readable books and periodicals."[8] His survey of Bengali literature included some common and notable medieval literary texts, including vernacular translations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* by Kṛttibāsa, Kāśīrām Dās Kavikaṅkana's Chaṇḍīmaṅgala, and Bhāratcandra Rāya Guṇākar's *Annadāmaṅgala.* The productions of the nineteenth century included a more diverse range of literary production: the novel, with the

[5] A letter from Beames dated December 14, 1893, written from Taunton, England. It was read out aloud at the twentieth meeting of the Bengal Academy of Literature held on January 7, 1894. See *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 7 (February 1894): 6-7.
[6] On Liotard, we know that he worked in the departments of Finance and Commerce and the department of Agriculture. He wrote several monographs on various issues within the domains of agriculture and trade, including one on silk. I could not trace his first name. See L. Liotard (and the Department of Revenue and Agriculture), *Memorandum on Silk in India* (Calcutta: Government Publishing), 1883.
[7] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 1 (August 17, 1893): 1. I found one copy of the document at the British Library. The front page was in a torn condition and I have surmised the month. This date would be the date of publication of the proceedings of the meeting. Thereafter, from the fourth meeting, the dates of publication of the minutes and the actual meetings are listed separately.
[8] Ibid.

advent of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, periodical literature in the form of *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, the development of drama in the plays of Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Dinabandhu Mitra, and the contribution of the colonial pedagogical and institutional framework—primers, grammars, and translations of such Fort William pundits as Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Mrityunjay Tarkalankar, and Shyamacharan Sarkar.[9]

Within Chakrabarty's ragtag and page-long survey of several centuries of lifespan of the Bengali language, there are two primary concerns. The first, of course, was implicit in these early foundational speeches and documents of the Bengal Academy of Letters, one that would become more urgent and audible in the next couple of decades as archives were acquired and the writing of Bengal's literary history progressed. This was the status of Bengali as a vernacular descended from the classical Sanskrit. Second, the concern that literary production in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, while prolific, had little unity and merit. As Chakrabarty notes, "Between 1872 and 1881 periodicals, poems, dramas and novels issued almost daily from the printer's hands, but the literature was by no means complete…"[10] Beames, he added, "was not wrong in advocating consolidation and uniformity in language."[11]

That the primary role of the Academy at the time was to achieve some semblance of consolidation with respect to the vernacular was a task set forth by Beames, who clearly delineated its basic function: "That the language of Bengal requires consolidating and defining will not be questioned. On one hand limits must be set to the practice of reproducing Sanskrit words wholesale, and on the other it is necessary to restrict the use of low, vulgar

[9] John McGuire's study of the rise of the *bhadralok* class looks at the role of the press in the consolidation of the *bhadralok* and of related professions after the proliferation of print starting in the 1870s. See John McGuire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadralok in Calcutta, 1857-1885* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1983).
[10] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 1 (August 1893): 2.
[11] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 1 (August 1893): 3.

and provincial terms…"[12] However, it was the elusive Liotard, a man who leaves no traces of any literary work, who outlined the significance of the word *academy* in the "society" that the men, both British and Bengali, had convened. In an address titled "A Few Words About the Origin of the Word Academies," Liotard sought to trace the word academy back to its Greek origins—not mentioning, interestingly, the more obvious parallel of the Académie Française that would crop up in later discussions within the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. In the Chairman's Address, delivered in May of 1899, then-editor Dwijendranath Tagore (1840-1926) would make the perverse and provocative argument that if Shakespeare had been constrained by a force as strong as the French Academy, he would not have risen above the talents of a Pope or Dryden.[13] Similarly, he argued, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad would be better off without the constraining functions of an Academy; instead, it should allow young writers to revel in the adolescence of the Bengali language.[14] Dwijendranath's position goes against Liotard and Beames's advocacy of an academy as crucial to the development of the language.

If we think of the formative years of the Academy as the formation of a literary *communitas*, philology in late nineteenth-century Bengal was projected as a transnational enterprise in which a love and regard for the Bengali language was more important than a parochially defined national identity. It was suggested by Liotard that several distinguished Indologists—"gentlemen interested in Indian literature"—be made honorary members of the Academy, namely George Birdwood, Max Muller, Monier Williams, Edwin Arnold, and W.W. Hunter. Three letters in response were reprinted in the Academy's journal, thus giving

[12] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 1 (August 1893): 5.
[13] Dwijendranath Tagore, "Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 6, no. 2 (BS 1306/May 1899): 87. Dwijendranath Tagore was the older brother of Rabindranath Tagore. He was translator, a poet, and he wrote critical commentaries on Indian philosophy. He was also well known for pioneering the use of shorthand and musical notations in Bengali. Between 1897 and 1899 he was appointed as President of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. See also Maitreyi Mitra, *Dvijendranāth Ṭhākur Man O Śilpa* (Kolkata, Jignasa Publications, 1981).
[14] Dwijendranath Tagore, "Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 6, no. 2 (BS 1306/May 1899): 87.

us an insight into how these leading scholars both within and outside the British Empire felt about this new institution. In his letter, Max Muller wrote:

> I fully sympathise with the objects of the Bengal Academy of Literature, and hope that your efforts may be successful. I wish you would include within your sphere of study the history of the Bengali language purely from a grammatical point of view. Its progress from Prakrit to the popular Bengali of a hundred years ago and its rapid return to Classical Sanskrit forms, would form a most interesting subject of research. You should also try to collect Bengali stories and, when possible, Bengali inscriptions, and old names of places, rivers etc…because all that helps to give a people a knowledge of and a pride in their history, strengthens their patriotism and places it on a true foundation…[15]

Similarly, W. W. Hunter replied directly to "Dear Maharaja Kumar" Benoy Krishna Deb:

> [The Bengal Academy] may have a powerful influence in moulding Bengali into a language for men of letters, and in giving to it a greater consistency and a more distinctive individuality…. I am glad to observe that you make an authoritative Dictionary the central work of your Society. I trust that in time the Academy may also be able to bring out a scientific grammar of the language, and to collate existing inflections and post-positions with older or intermediate forms. It has always been a pleasure to me that I passed the High Proficiency standard in Bengali: for it opened to me the treasures of a young literary language in one of its most interesting stages of development.[16]

Finally, George Birdwood would tacitly emphasize the Hindu character of this new institution: "When the day comes that the Hindus act as their own intermediaries between India and the rest of the world—when they go out and seek for themselves in America and Africa, and Europe, markets for the productions of India—instead of leaving this to be done by foreigners, then you may be assured that the dawn of a day of prosperity for your native country has arrived which in reality, and hard fact, will far transcend all your ideals of the glories of the era of Vikramaditya."[17]

There are certain important aspects that come to light in these messages given to the Academy by these European intellectuals, who supported some of the primary tasks that had

[15] The letter was read out at the twenty-first meeting of the Academy on February 4, 1894. *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 7 (February 1894): 8-9.
[16] This was read out at the twentieth meeting of the Academy on January 7, 1894. *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 7 (February 1894): 7.
[17] Ibid.

been agreed upon by the members of the Academy. Interestingly, of the three eminent scholars mentioned above, Birdwood and Muller had both been elected members of the French Academy. At the fourth meeting of the Academy on August 13, 1893, the Bengal Academy of Letters agreed that it would undertake two principal literary activities—first, members would study and write learned articles in fields such as Bengali poetry and drama; the etymology of names of places and rivers in Bengal; Bengali philosophy, religion and mythology; the "literature of science in Bengali," i.e. metaphysics, astronomy, and medicine; contemporary fiction among Bengalis; criticism in application to literature; "biography of Bengali men of letters"; the choice of subjects in poetry and prose; and, most tellingly, "Hindu literature as portraying society and ethics among the Bengalis, past and present."[18] The second task of the Academy was far more urgent, though ambitious and time-consuming—it was the compilation of an authoritative dictionary.

It seems from the reports of the first few months that Liotard did most of the speaking at these initial meetings. After all, it was he who laid forth the proposal for the dictionary—"Gentlemen, if our Academy did nothing but this in the way of publication, its existence would be justified. There are of course Bengali dictionaries already in use…but a Dictionary seems required which would be the result of the joint labours of a body of men devoted in a philanthropic spirit to the improvement of the literature: a Dictionary which would purify and consolidate the Bengali language, excluding all low vulgar and provincial terms, and restricting the wholesale use of Sanskrit words."[19] Liotard's idea was to have a collaborative dictionary; each member would be assigned a letter and would list all possible words in his knowledge under that particular letter. After a few months, these labours would be discussed with the other members of the Academy, who would revise, edit, and add meanings. This would then lead to a "good, solid, standard Dictionary…Thereafter any word not found in the

[18] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 2 (September 1893): 1-2.
[19] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 1 (August 1893): 2-6 (?).

Dictionary of the Academy must be considered out of form and inadmissible in polite society, and would be excluded from the pages of all good writers. The Academy is open to every qualified person wishing to be admitted as member; and we have as yet not restricted the number that may be admitted."[20]

The Bengali Dictionary would become the first important task to be taken up by the Bengal Academy of Letters, a project that was advocated vociferously by John Beames. In the long nineteenth century, most of the discussion on word usage took place within the field of grammar. However, grammar books served a pedagogical purpose; the dictionary as a central concern reflected that the language was finally coming into its own. Beames's own *Grammar of the Bengali Language, Literary and Colloquial* was published in 1891 and had followed two influential grammars written by Englishmen in the preceding century. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, a writer in the employ of the East India Company, wrote the inaugural grammar of Bengali. *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* in 1778 closely aligned the Bengali language with its parent language Sanskrit, arguing that "Mahomedan" or Portuguese words were "unauthorized expressions."[21] Apparently, Halhed had employed two collaborators while writing the Bengali grammar, a Sanskrit *pandit* and a munshi. The *pandit* prevailed upon Halhed to prefer a Sanskritized Bengali over the one advocated by the

[20] Ibid.

[21] "It may not be superfluous in this place to remark, that grammar of the pure Bengal dialect cannot be expected to convey thorough idea of the modern jargon of the kingdom. The many political revolutions it has sustained have greatly impaired the simplicity of its language; and long communication with men of different Religions, countries and manners has rendered foreign words in some degree familiar to Bengal ear. The Mahomedans have for the most part introduced such terms as relate to the functions of their own Religion, or the exercise of their own laws and government the Portuguese have supplied them with appellations of some European art and inventions and in the environs of each foreign colony the idiom of the native Bengalese is tinctured with that of the strangers who have settled there...The following work presents the Bengal language merely as derived from its parent the Sanskrit. In the course of its design I have avoided, with some care, the admission of such words as are not natives of the country, and for that reason have selected all my instances from the most authentic and ancient compositions. But would advise every person who is desirous to distinguish himself as an accurate translator to pay some attention both to the Persian and Hindostanic dialects since in, the occurrences of modern business, as managed by the present illiterate generation, he will find all his letters, representations and accounts interspersed with variety of borrowed phrases or unauthorised expressions. Such hope have no place in these sheets and as cannot be accused of interfering with the province of those who may have illustrated either of the other dialects of India..." Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, *Bodhaprakāśaṃ Śabdaśāstraṃ Phiriṅgināmupakārārtho Kriẏate Hāledaṅgrejī/ A Grammar of the Bengal Language* (Calcutta: Printed by Charles Wilkins at Hoogly in Bengal, 1778), xxii.

munshi, which had a profusion of Perso-Arabic words. As a result, the *munshi* was dismissed.[22] William Carey, the Christian missionary who wrote the second major dictionary of Bengali published in 1805, explained that he improved upon Halhed's work—"I have made some distinctions and observations not noticed by him, particularly on the declension of nouns and verbs, and in the use of particles."[23] However, Carey would dedicate a different work in order to study a more colloquial Bengali that he wrote with considerable assistance from his *munshi* Ramram Basu, *Dialogues Intended to Facilitate the Acquiring of Bengali.* Published in 1818, this book gave glimpses of conversations or "colloquies" among Bengali subalterns, such as servants, women, and fishermen. It was an attempt to bring colloquial speech into the purview of more systematic grammrs—"…to gain a flexibility of expression, which could not be soon acquired by constant and rigid attention to grammatical rules alone. I do not suggest by this that these conversations are ungrammatical; those Dialogues are strictly regular which are inserted on purpose to show the difference of orders of people in different situations, Khansaman, or a Sirkar, talking to an European generally intermixes his language with words derived from Arabic or Persian, and some corrupted English and Portuguese words …"[24]

A number of Bengali scholars also wrote grammars of Bengali, including Rammohun Roy in 1826 and Shyamacharan Sarkar in 1850. Following Rammohun Roy's lead, Sarkar would move away from the origins of the Bengali language in Sanskrit, and would discuss both local dialects and "loan words..[25] Beames modeled his own *Grammar* on Shyamacharan Sarkar's work, saying that he owed greatly to this predecessor as well as other native pundits who were consulted by his "adviser and helper" Priyanath Mukherjee. Beames highlighted

[22] Mohammad Abdul Qayyum, "Halheder Purba Baṅgīya Munśī," ed. Sunil Kumar Mukhopadhyay, *Bhāṣā-Sāhitya Patra (Jahangirnagar University)* 4th year (BS 1383/1976): 139–52.
[23] The Preface to William Carey's first edition cited in *Memoir of William Carey*, ed. Eustace Carey (London: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1836), 598.
[24] William Carey, *Dialogues Intended to Facilitate the Acquiring of the Bengalee Language* (Serampore: Missionary Press, 1818), iv.
[25] Hanna Ruth Thompson, *Bengali* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 10.

the importance of this particular grammar—its attention to colloquial forms—while addressing certain prejudices that might lie with high Bengali cultural intelligentsia who would prefer the *sādhu bhāṣā* —"I am aware that many Bengali savants have a prejudice against such forms, and it must be admitted that they are unsuited for literary composition. But to omit or disparage them is to do injustice to the language…I think it is the duty of a grammarian to exhibit to the utmost of his ability all forms and phrases of the language…I venture to hope that my humble undertaking will be met with approval from the Academy."[26] As for dictionaries, there were several listed in the exhaustive catalogue of the Reverend James Long's, which were not referenced by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in their discussions of an "authoritative dictionary."[27] Perhaps they were neither exhaustive nor methodical enough for consideration. Beames mentioned a correspondence with Dr. Murray, the editor of the Oxford English Dictionary who had "written to me promising to send me some notes on the method pursued by him…I will forward them when I get them, and hope they will prove useful."[28]

The Academy itself had written to Beames to ask him suggestions for the compilation of the Dictionary. In a long letter to the Academy, Beames underlined the basic function of the dictionary—"a storehouse of all the words in a language"—which should contain not only words used in literature, but those in colloquial speech. However, words used by the "lowest" and "highest" classes would prove to be a problem. Whereas the lowest classes used "coarse and vulgar words," which were either corruptions of good words or "altered and corrupted Prakrit words," the higher classes used "pure Sanskrit words" to an extent that again

[26] Twenty-Ninth Meeting of the Academy, May 27, 1894. *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 11: 1.
[27] James Long lists several nineteenth-century Bengali dictionaries, including names of Persian-Bengali and Sanskrit-Bengali dictionaries, namely those by Joy Gopal (1843), Mastaphi (1838), *Anglo-Bengali dictionary* (1853), *Shamachurn* (1850), Rozario's *English, Bengali and Urdu Dictionary* (1837), and *Dictionary of Elegant Bengali* (1837). See James Long, *Catalogue of the Vernacular Literature Committee* (Calcutta: Vernacular Literature Committee Library, 1855).
[28] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 11: 1.

threatened to undermine the natural growth of the vernacular. The solution to this problem, according to Beames, lay in the method adopted by the compilers of the Oxford English Dictionary—"This method consists in reading carefully the works of all the authors of acknowledged eminence in the language and noting down the words used by them." Since the task was such a stupendous one, it could obviously not be done by one person, and had to be a collaborative task. Citing how English compilers divided up Milton, Shakespeare, Bacon, and others, Beames suggested a similar approach with the great Bengali writers such as the pre-modern Kabi Kankan, Bharatchandra, and modern authors such as Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and others. Of course, Beames's outline ignored one important fact. Since the literary scholars of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad were continuously discovering newer literary manuscripts of hitherto unknown writers, this could have been a potentially long and hopeless task. One of the foremost Bengali intellectuals who took up the task of word compilation was Babu Basanta Ranjan Ray of Bankura, who sent about 1500 words to the Academy, both native and of "foreign origin," namely Arabic and Persian—"now as regards the words of foreign origin, we do not find any synonymous native expressions conveying the same idea: consequently we are obliged to use them almost verbatim, and moreover we find them largely in use among standard authors."[29]

Beames laid out three kinds of words that would be included in this Bengali dictionary—two from the Sanskrit (*tatsama* and *tadbhāva)* and one indigenous (*deśaja)*. Of the first two, he suggested that *tadbhāva* words, words derived from Sanskrit but changed over centuries, be given with the original Sanskrit root, its Prakrit derivation, and the present form of the Bengali word. *Tatsama* words, in which the Bengali word was still identical to the Sanskrit, posed a bigger problem as the word meaning had changed perhaps in the vernacular. To this, Beames's solution was to give examples of how the word, identical in

[29] Letter from Babu Basanta Ranjan Ray. *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 9 (April 1894): 7.

form with Sanskrit, would bear a different *meaning* in Bengali. He cited how the domain of law was the most influential when it came to changes in meaning. However, it was with regard to indigenous or *deśaja* words that he made his most forceful and tricky point—"Many of them are the most useful words in the language, and no dictionary would be complete without them. It is a fault in the existing meager dictionaries of Bengali that they do not always insert these colloquial words. *By giving only those meanings of Desaja words which are used by respectable persons anything objectionable in them can easily be avoided."*[30] Beames, while arguing for the fluidity of the Bengali vernacular, in which form can remain the same while meanings change over time and usage, also desired to make it more inclusive. Knowing that inclusivity itself could be a difficult project within the cultural intelligentsia of Bengal and the rigid confines of an Academy, Beames foregrounded the question of respectability. Though Beames himself does not explicitly raise it, the question that begs to be asked here is: *who* and *how* does one define or determine respectability?

Beames's interventions in the field of Bengali grammar and literature, and in the intellectual life of the Bengal Academy of Letters, were appraised by Hirendranath Dutta in an address delivered in June at the Twenty-Ninth meeting of the Bengal Academy of Letters. This review would give us an insight into how there was a considerable change of tone in how a native intellectual could respond to an European philologist—politely laudatory, but more crucially perhaps, extremely critical. Dutta said:

> Grammar is a science, though grammarians prefer to define it as an art—the art of speaking and writing a language correctly. It is sister to the science of language, and I think the elder sister. As such it is based upon the comparative method. We know that the grammar of Panini was called forth by the comparison of different forms of speech—principally the *Chandas* (the language of the *Vedas*) and the *Bhasa* (the spoken language). The first formal Greek grammar (compiled by Krates) was founded on the comparison of Greek with a foreign tongue, the Latin. Grammar, therefore, being essentially

[30] "Hints on the Method to be Adopted in Compiling a Bengali Dictionary," *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 9 (April 1894): 8-9.

> comparative, a foreigner is in some respects better fitted to write a scientific Bengali grammar than a Bengali himself.[31]

Having effusively complimented Beames, who had come into contact with many types of dialects in Bengal while serving in the civil service, Dutta went on to say that the specimens selected by Beames covered almost all Bengali styles—"the styles of Tekchand and Bankim and Vidyasagar, the colloquialisms of the tillers of the soil and the Urduized Bengali in use in courts of law"—and yet Dutta also significantly differed from Beames on some knotty grammatical points. For instance, while Beames tried to show that certain verbal forms have certain verbal endings in Bengali, Dutta argued that these words were in actuality compound verbs.

The concluding remarks of that session mentioned that in the matter of Beames versus Dutta, the latter was favored: "The President had a few words to say: first, in regard to colloquialisms, it seemed to him looking through the work that some of the terms were of quite local use, tribal expressions which could scarcely be said to belong to the Bengali language properly so called, but as the work was designedly meant to include them they would no doubt be of use."[32] By this time, the Englishman was somewhat of an outsider, and his critical gaze was acknowledged yet reserved for the benefit not of Bengalis, but rather of Europeans. Beames's *Grammar*—"deserves commendation, and will prove of great service to Europeans desiring to acquire a knowledge of the language as written and spoken in the country."[33] Moreover, what words could be determined as *Bengali* was to be left in the hands of the native intellectual. In these early deliberations, two points are worthy of consideration. First, right from the very beginnings of philological activity in the Bengali language, the days of Halhed and Carey, the slow distancing of Arabic and Persian words to the Bengali lexicon was a continuous process that reached its zenith in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. Second, no

[31] Hirendranath Dutta delivered this at the Twenty-Ninth meeting held on May 27, 1894. *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 11 (June 1894): 2-3.
[32] *The Bengal Academy of Literature* 1, no. 11 (June 1894): 6.
[33] Ibid.

Bengali Muslims were part of the institutional space in the inaugural phase of the Bengal Academy of Literature. As the Bengal Academy metamorphosed into a bigger and more ambitious Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, a new regime of language came into being. This phase coincided with a rising surge of both Indian and Bengali nationalism, and a regulated language came to define social, cultural, and political identity in certain ways. Even as epistemological categories such as History and Science came to be determined and defined at the turn of the century, the Hindu *bhadralok*-dominated *communitas* of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad found newer ways of pledging allegiance and proximity to Sanskrit and Hindu Bengal.

The Academy's Early Years: Building an Archive and Locating 'Language'

> Language is the site of manifestation of the human heart. Whenever the waves of mental states have arisen, whenever new matters have been discovered and disseminated, they are outside commonly held meanings and are thus described in language and clearly inscribed in a word or phrase. In the word "Nirvana" the entire mystery of Buddhism is conveyed. What the Buddha decided after much debate and thought has then been encapsulated in this one paltry word and kept the doctrine of the Buddhists alive for two thousand years. That [the word] human (*manuṣya*) has been derived from the son of Brahma, Manu, and in the Pauranic narratives; the words '*manuṣya'* and *'mānab'* record this origin. That the waves of the sea move by the moon, this scientific fact is again forever encapsulated in the word *'samudra'*. That the Hindus have for many years observed differences of caste may not always be told in history, but the word *yāvana* clearly proves this social fact. The root of the word *yāvana* means to mix. Those who did not judge caste and ate and mingled freely with everyone, they are the *yāvana.* If we continue investigating in this vein, we will find many such gems of knowledge in that great treasury which is language.[34]

Once the Bengal Academy of Letters transitioned into the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, shifting base from the house of Benoykrishna Deb to its new premises, its present location donated by another patron, Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandy, the periodical changed form and content. From being predominantly written as minutes of individual meetings, in the

[34] Bisheshwar Chakrabarty, "*Śabda-Rahasya (The Necessity of Learning Words and the Significance of Language)*," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 3, no. 1 (Baiśākh BS 1303/May 1896): 9-12.

primary language of English, it became a periodical written in Bengali that was published three times a month (a *traimāsika)* by the Bivabhati Press located on 2 Masjidbari Street. These new periodicals carried several articles by the members of the Parishad. The articles in the periodicals of the 1890s and early 1900s were predominantly of two kinds: one major preoccupation was the search for new manuscripts of pre-modern Bengali poets, and annotated passages, along with biographical details of aforementioned poets, were provided in the space of these periodicals. A parallel and related literary urge was to place nineteenth-century poets along a literary continuum—thus, periodicals of 1895-1896 featured several articles on the poetic innovations of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Entwined with the search for pre-modern poetic archives in Bengal was a concern with the social history of the life and times of these poets. Suitable examples would be the discovery of manuscripts of Caṇḍīdāsa, the *Rāyamaṅgala* of Kṛṣṇarāma Dāsa, and the *Rādhikāmaṅgala* of Udbhavānanda. Soon, the archival urge would grow to the extent that first, several special issues would be dedicated to *prācīna puthira vivaraṇa,* which would later be collated, collected, and published under the editorial supervision of Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad. The second major concern of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad was to understand the function of language as a category of historical and social analysis. In this section, I examine how various discussions within the periodicals available from the first decade of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad firmly fixed language as both a marker of identity as well as the foremost category of historical analysis and enquiry. In the process, the Bengali language itself became fixed and marked within a political domain dominated by a specific class of Hindu Bengali men of money and leisure, that class of men which is called by historians as the *bhadralok.*

One of the earliest projects that the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad took on was the question of *paribhāṣā,* translated as "technical language." The word *paribhāṣā*, taken from the Sanskrit, occurs in Pāṇini's grammar as "definition" or "a rule or maxim which teaches

the proper interpretation or application of other rules."[35] The philologists in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad took on the question of *paribhāṣā* as a way in which to fix certain words for technical language used to describe the scientific and natural world. Chief among those who compiled this language was the Premchand-Roychand scholar in Physics and Chemistry, popular writer of science, and later principal of Ripon College in Calcutta, Ramendrasundar Trivedi (1864-1919). Trivedi, who was an influential figure in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and editor of several volumes of the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā,* wrote extensively on questions of language, the science of language, and the language of science. In an inaugural essay called *Vaijñānika Paribhāṣā,* he laid the foundations of what ought to be technical language/definition:

> It would be right to say that words form the body of language, and *bhāva* (mental states) its life. There is a connection between words and mental states. There is no necessity for me to figure out whether this connection has been ordained by the almighty. In most cases the connection between the word and its meaning is imagined by human beings, there is no doubt about that. A word is a sign. When five people use that sign everywhere and all the time within one specific meaning, life goes on and the purpose of language is served. Language would be complete if there was a unique signifier for every mental state that arose in one's mind. Though we have infinite number of mental states, we only have a very limited number of words in our vocabulary. Therefore using a limited number of words, we have to express this infinite number of states. Herein lies the incompleteness of language… For the construction of scientific language (*paribhāṣā)* we have to remember a few things. For the word that is to be used, there has to be a definite, fixed, limited and clear meaning; that word cannot be used to mean any other thing, nor for that meaning may any other word be used. This is the main principle underlying scientific language.[36]

Ramendrasundar goes on to describe the necessity of scientific learning for the colonial world, acknowledging that science was one of the supreme achievements of the West. ("We have stumbled into a relationship with Western civilization. The profusion of knowledge that it has acquired through much toil has been disseminated within us. If we

[35] Monier Monier-Williams, Ernst Leumann, and Carl Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 598.
[36] Ramendrasundar Trivedi, "*Vaijñanik Paribhāṣā,*" in *Śabda Kathā* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Press Depository, 1917), 161-189. Originally published in the *Sahitya Parishat Patrika* around 1898. I have not been able to locate the periodical with the original article.

wanted to, we could make this incomparable treasure accumulated by others our very own. There is no personal, parochial or racial opposition or conflict in this."[37]) However, Ramendrasundar Trivedi's theory of scientific language itself was more indebted to classical Indic tradition. In fact, Ramendrasundar's theorization of *paribhāṣā* as a relationship between *bhāva* and *śabda* owed specifically to *Nyāya* theories of language. In the seventeenth-century Gadādhara Bhaṭṭācārya's *Śaktivāda,* such *naiyāyika* ideas of meaning relations (*vrtti)* are of two kinds: *śakti* and *paribhāṣā*. *Śakti* is determined by the will of god and *paribhāṣā* by human stipulation and convention. Ramendrasundar is no doubt referring to that distinction in the passage quoted above. [38]

While Ramendrasundar Trivedi acknowledged that science is universal, and a European import that must be accepted without thinking through colonized/colonizer binaries, language however was very much a concern of the native subject. Could science find expression in the vernacular? Ramendrasundar argued, "In the path to knowledge, the foreign language turns out to be situated as a kind of end point. The French perhaps hope that one day their language will be used across the world in time, and the English also expect that their language will be the world language—however, such hopes are still distant as of now. We hear that many are trying to create a universal language; yet that day is far off. Therefore,

---

[37] Ibid, 183.

[38] I thank Nilanjan Das for helping me with this rather technical translation. Here is the relevant passage from Gadādhara Bhaṭṭācārya's *Śaktivāda*: "The relation between a word and its meaning is of two kinds: primary and secondary. That which is conveyed by a word in virtue of this meaning relation is called the meaning of the word. The primary meaning relation consists in a desire of the form 'Let this word convey this meaning' or of the form 'From this word, let this meaning be understood.' Here, a meaning relation of recent origin is paribhāṣā. A word that conveys its meaning in virtue of such a relation is *pāribhāṣika*, e.g., words like *nadī*, *vṛddhi*, etc., whose meaning relations were specified by the authors of the *śāstra*-s. However, a meaning relation specified by God is *śakti*. A word which conveys its meaning in virtue of such a meaning relation is a referring expression (*vācaka-śabda*), e.g., a word like 'cow' which conveys that which possesses cowhood. Here, the meaning that is conveyed—i.e., the cow, etc.—is the referent. That is what we call the primary meaning of the word." (*saṃketo lakṣaṇā cārthe padavṛttiḥ| vṛttyā padapratipādya eva padārtha ity abhidhīyate| "idaṃ padam imam arthaṃ bodhayatu" iti "asmāc chabdād ayam artho boddhavyaḥ" iti vecchā saṃketarupā vṛttiḥ| tatra - ādhunikasaṃketaḥ paribhāṣā tayā cārthabodhakaṃ padaṃ pāribhāṣikaṃ yathā śāstrakārādisaṃketitanadīvṛddhyādipadam| īsvarasaṃketaḥ śaktis tayā cārthabodhakaṃ padaṃ yathā gotvādiviśiṣṭabodhakaṃ gavādipadaṃ tadbodhyo'rtho gavādir vācyaḥ sa eva mukhyārtha ity ucyate|*) See Gadādhara Bhaṭṭācārya, *Śaktivāda with Sudarśanācārya's Ādarśa*, ed. Pt. Sudarśanācārya (Bombay: Own Press, 1913), 1-3.

to acquire Western knowledge there is no way out other than with the help of unfamiliar and foreign tongues…but these languages shall never be our own; and will never express our own inner words and states. If our races must inherit the knowledge assimilated by the West, we must convert our mother tongue to a Sanskritized form that may be worthy of disseminating knowledge, and producing it. We must infuse Bengali with new blood."[39]

Addressing the role of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in the creation of a new Bengali language for the purpose of science, Ramendrasundar mentions the proposal passed by Rajanikanta Gupta to form a special committee for the purposes of determining *paribhāṣā,* within the fields of mathematics, chemistry, astrology*,* physics*, et al.* Ramendrasundar made some salient points on the question of fluidity and fixity of language vis-à-vis *bhāṣāra itihāsa* with reference to the question of fixing technical language. First, referring to indigenous knowledge systems, he mentioned how Sanskrit pandits of say, *āyurveda,* incorporated *deśaja* words within their lexicons thus legitimizing words of non-Sanskrit origins. Second, classical Sanskrit, when exposed to Greek knowledge, also incorporated Greek technical terms (he gives examples from cosmology and astronomy to make this point), thus again expanding ancient Sanskrit *paribhāṣā.*

While acknowledging that English words for the sciences had become commonsensical with the advent of colonialism in Indian languages, Ramendrasundar would valorize Sanskrit as *the* language for a scientific lexicon, even in Bengali. Since ancient Indian civilization has an advanced scientific vocabulary, Ramendrasundar believed that neither neologisms within the Bengali, nor colloquial or *calita* words often of Perso-Arabic origins or its English equivalents, should be used in creating and consolidating *paribhāṣā.* According to Ramendrasundar:

[39] Ramendrasundar Trivedi, "*Vaijñanik Paribhāṣā*," 165.

> There is no need to borrow words from everywhere. Our ancient language of Sanskrit is a gem-studded womb. Even if we drew upon this inexhaustible treasury for all of eternity, even then there would be no deficit. In the English, science has borrowed a great number of words from the Greek. Just as English bears a specific relationship with the Greek, so does Bengali relate closely to the Sanskrit, yet in richness Sanskrit is no less than the Greek language. Therefore we can unhesitatingly keep enriching our language of science borrowing from the Sanskrit.[40]

The extent to which Ramendrasundar value the Sanskrit over linguistic borrowing from other languages could be seen in another article in the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* on technical language for the human anatomy. The article begins with a reference to a book that he had recently borrowed from his friend and associate at the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Rabindranath Tagore. The book in question was an 1825 treatise called *A Vocabulary of Names of the Various Parts of the Human Body and of Medical and Technical Terms in English, Arabic, Persian, Hindee and Sanskrit for the Use of the Members of the Medical Department in India* and was compiled by a surgeon of the East India Company, "Superintendent of the Native Medical Institution," belonging to Rabindranath's grandfather Sir Dwarakanath Tagore. Ramendrasundar describes the book's multilingual layout, citing how it was divided into three parts. The first part was in the Latin script and the words in English; the second in *nāgrī* and in Hindi and Sanskrit, and the final part in lithograph was in the Persianate script with the Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani words. When Ramendrasundar reproduced terms of anatomy and medicine in the pages of the *Parishat Patrika*, however, he did away with the third part altogether: "knowing that in our time, these words might be of benefit to medical professionals and anthologists of medical terms, I am hereby reproducing the English technical terms and their Sanskrit synonyms…"[41]

It was not that Ramendrasundar Trivedi was alone in the enterprise of creating a vernacular Bengali for science. Others such as Apurbachandra Dutt and Jogeshchandra Ray

[40] Ibid, 169.
[41] Ramendrasundar Trivedi, "Vaidyaka paribhāṣā," *Śabda-Kathā*. It was first published as "*Vaijñānika paribhāṣā: Cikitsā Vijñāna*" in *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 6, no. 4, (BS 1306/1899): 285-297.

would write on the problems and difficulties of translation in science, and the necessity moreover for keeping certain key terms of Western science—such as names of elements—untranslated. These debates would continue within the pages of the *Pariṣat Patrikā* in the first decades of the twentieth century. These debates, and Ramendrasundar Trivedi's conceptualization of *paribhāṣā* itself, however, played a certain key role.

This discussion of the vernacularization of science might invite a reading of Europe provincialized, in which we have a literal transition to, and translation from, the most modern aspect of European modernity, Science, which is here both universal, as well as something embedded within 'our' tradition. This is not the kind of argument I wish to embark on. What I would like to focus on instead is the role that the theorization of *paribhāṣā* played in the way that the modern Bengali vernacular was consolidated in the opening decade of the twentieth century. First, *paribhāṣā* established the *ratnagarbhā* Sanskrit as an originary language, in which earlier late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Indological scholarship on Indo-European languages and the valorization of Sanskrit found distinct echoes. If Western science could make Greek and Latin the languages of discovery and invention, then why could not India exalt Sanskrit to a similar vantage point? Second, the desire to create a technical language of indisputable signifiers/referents based on consensus would do certain things to words of Sanskrit origin in Bengali: first, it would render these words denotative and not connotative, prescriptive and no longer descriptive. No word of other origin (Perso-Arabic) could compete with these words in the lexicon. And, in that sense, if students and practitioners within these fields had to commit these words to memory, no matter how nonsensical the enterprise was, then these words would become a part of commonsense through everyday usage.[42] Ramendrasundar Trivedi, one of the foremost writers of popular

[42] That disputes on translation was an active debate in these circles and met with no easy consensus was mentioned by Apurbachandra Dutt in *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 3, no. 1 (BS 1303/1896): 13-17. Most notably, Ramendrasundar kept Nickel untranslated but desired to call Cobalt *Guhyaka,* a fact that was dismissed by all

science and linguistics in the early twentieth century, was also an extremely significant figure in foregrounding a Bengali language that distanced itself from the legacies of Persian and Arabic to technical language.

Poetry as History/History as Words: Of Lists and Catalogs

If words and etymology were operating through a comparative framework within the discursive framework of 'Science' in the early years of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, so was the equally important category of 'History.' One of the most pressing concerns, which the Academy had begun with and started to consolidate by the turn of the century, was the necessity to uncover the earliest history of Bengal. The tendency to embark on a personal reclamation of history by the late nineteenth century was rooted in the beginnings of what Chakrabarty calls the "public life of history" in colonial India. It was a period that witnessed the birth of a pan-Indian nationalist movement and the search for provincial identities in Maharashtra and Bengal symbolized a tension between the regional and a larger idea of India. Chakrabarty explains that a generation of individual scholars were stirred by a generic "enthusiasm or hunger for history," a phrase used by Tagore.[43] Therefore, the philological activities of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad were embedded within a multidisciplinary lens, purely linguistic, but also archaeological (through figures such as Rakhaldas Banerjee and Akshay Kumar Maitra), through articles on art and architecture, and famous personalities, and religion.[44] The underlying principle of unity was of course the question of language—how could both a linguistic and geographical unit of Bengal be said to exist, and how could its history be recovered through studying its language? What continuities lay between the modern Bengali sensibility and mind, and those Bengalis lost in the oblivion of historical

---

his contemporaries as being absolutely absurd and of great disservice to students of chemistry unfortunately happening to be Bengali.

[43] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Itihāser Janajīvan O Anyānya Prabandha* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 2011), 29.

[44] Tapati Guhathakurata mentions this aspect of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

time? In an article called *Itihāsa Racanāra Pranālī (The Principles of Writing History)*, Rajanikanta Gupta addressed these concerns to situate the function of what an organization like the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad could do at a time when the history of the nation had just begun to be written, to get first and foremost a sense of history *as* narrative and of history *as* a history of the people, *lokasamāja.* Rajanikanta cites that history is seen as a modern and European phenomenon, and the new breed of nationalist historians were blindly and uncritically writing valiant defenses of the Indian past, or were piling citation upon citation and argument over argument. The solution, according to Rajanikanta, was to look at the historians of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds—where poetry and history occupied the same continuum in the figures of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Livy and Homer. Similarly, in Indic tradition one had to extend the same desire to extricate history out of Valmiki and Vyasa, and in Bengal, Mukundaram and Krittibas. What the modern age had acquired in terms of scientific method and sophisticated theories of history, it had lost in terms of imagination and farsightedness.[45]

That poetry could be a source of history had been argued by earlier Bengalis, most notably by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, whose *Kṛṣṇacaritra* (1884) for example had desired to analyze the Mahabharata as an authentic text detailing the life of Krishna.[46] The philological activities of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, which included a massive hunt for Bengali manuscripts in the vernacular, would make the debate surrounding social history qua literary history, or history vis-à-vis a more sophisticated one. One of the most important figures in the creation of the archives of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad was Haraprasad Shastri. Shastri's foray into the philological landscape of Bengal began as a servant of the Raj as his first appointment was that of chief *pandit* and Translation Master of the Hare School.

[45] Rajanikanta Gupta, "Itihāsa Racanār Pranālī," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 5, no.1 (BS 1305): 19-27.
[46] For more on this topic, see Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Myth of Praxis: The Construction of the Figure of Krishna in Krishnacarita* (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1987) and Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

From there he steadily became the Sanskrit Professor at Canning College and then the Assistant Translator at the Bengal Translator's Office. In 1886, he became Librarian at the Bengal Library where his superior, Sir Alfred Kroff, recognized his work as an ace archivist. In 1894, he was appointed as Senior Professor of Sanskrit at Presidency College. In 1900, he became Principal of Sanskrit College in Calcutta and the Registrar of Sanskrit Examinations of Bengal. Even after his official retirement in 1908, the colonial authorities continued to employ him within the apparatus of the state as an adviser to the Bureau of Information for the benefit of Civil Officers in Bengal, in history, religions, customs and folklore of Bengal. And perhaps most significantly, when Raja Rajendralal Mitra[47] died in 1891, he was made to prepare annotated catalogues for the 12,000 manuscripts in the custody of the Asiatic Society, for which he was given the aid of two additional pandits.[48] Shastri however, as a biographer notes, was a paid servant of the state but continued to perform labors of love for the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, where he began his association as a member in 1896. Thereafter, he was unanimously elected Vice Chairman and then Chairman for more than three decades.[49]

It was in this capacity that he extended his great antiquarian and archiving abilities to enrich the collection of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. Shastri however did not find himself a lone missionary in the cause of collecting old Bengali manuscripts. His own situation was a fairly fortunate one, because he tasked the travelling *pandits* given to him by the Asiatic Society to exclusively concentrate on buying Bengali manuscripts from private individuals on these archival forays for not just the Asiatic Society, but Shastri himself.[50] Shastri also mentions his contemporaries Nagendranath Basu and Dinesh Chandra Sen in this first spate of massive manuscript collection, which emerged out of a spirit of what I call an "archival activism." Basu and Sen was a new breed of intellectuals and philologists who took upon

[47] Rajendralal Mitra was the first Indian to be appointed as the president of the Asiatic Society in 1885, an impenetrable colonial bastion, where he had begun as a librarian in 1846.
[48] Ganapati Sarkar, *Haraprasāda Jīvanī* (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1938), 18-19.
[49] Ibid, 21.
[50] Ibid.

themselves the mantle of collection and textual exegesis, both being involved with the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad since its inception. Basu, an ardent encyclopaedist and archeologist, would not leave his house and would send booksellers into remote villages to buy up manuscripts for him.[51] Shastri's soulmate of sorts, of course, was Dinesh Chandra Sen, who would write the first definitive *History of Bengali Literature and Language* in 1896 and who wanted to look for manuscripts in Eastern Bengal. Sen wrote to the Asiatic Society for assistance, who forwarded the letter to Shastri. Shastri would lend Dinesh Chandra Sen his travelling *pandit*, Binodbehari Kavyatirtha, for an indefinite period of time. Both Basu and Sen's Bengali manuscript collections and scholarship would go on towards the establishment of the Bengali department at the University of Calcutta in 1906.[52]

One of the major tasks that the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad had taken on was the recurrent *Punthir Saṃkṣipta Vivaraṇa,* variously edited in the *pariṣat patrikā*s by Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Nagendranath Basu, Haraprasad Shastri, and Abdul Karim Sahityaviśarad. There were a great many manuscripts discovered in these years, a fact noted by Nagendranath Basu in an introductory note to one of the articles he edited in the *Pariṣat Patrikā.* Beginning with an oft-quoted, popular Sanskrit couplet of unknown origin, *Anantaśāstraṃ Bahu Veditavyaṃ* ("there is much to be known in the innumerable *śāstra*s") Nagendranath argued that the same could be said about Bengali manuscripts, tens of hundreds of which were being discovered in the countryside of Bengal. It would be an error, he said, to think that Bengali literature was new and prolific after the advent of print and colonialism, that Bengali *sāhityacarcā* and the development of literary cultures and sensibilities were a product of the nineteenth century. This was a view that was prevalent when Nagendranath was younger, but the efforts of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad had contributed towards dispelling such notions. He cited his contemporary Dineshchandra Sen's

[51] Ibid, 3
[52] Ibid. Dinesh Chandra Sen was the first head of the Department of Bengali at the University of Calcutta, established in 1906, appointed by the Vice Chancellor, Ashutosh Mukherjee.

Vaṅga Bhāṣā O Sāhitya (1896)—"There is no village in Bengal where there has not been at least a few village poets"—and every specific village or place, according to Nagendranath gave rise to distinct poetics of place and thought. Customs, rituals, practices, religions, beliefs, law; all of these were reflected in even the most humble and rustic poetry found in the manuscripts. Overall, a national history of the Bengali people could be extricated from the medieval *puthis* which numbered in the thousands by this time, a history of both external events and behaviors as well as (and more importantly) a distinct Bengali sensibility and world view.[53]

Haraprasad Shastri, who discovered the *Caryāpada* in 1907, arguably the oldest instance of Bengali, voiced similar concerns in the introduction to *Hājār Bacharer Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāya Bauddha Gān o Dohā*.[54] Shastri said that in the years that saw the establishment of schools in colonial Bengal, textbooks and primers written by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar were taught as elementary Bengali, and the prevailing understanding was that Bengali was a new language, fathered by Vidyasagar.[55] However, despite the efforts of a nineteenth century Bengali intelligentsia, there was no understanding that Bengali was an old yet constantly evolving language with a long history. It was believed, wrote Shastri, that the

[53] Nagendranath Basu, "Bāṃlā punthir saṃkṣipta vivaraṇa," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 4, no. 4 (B.S. 1304/1897): 296-297.

[54] Shastri had initially travelled to Nepal in 1897-98 in order to collect manuscripts for the Asiatic Society. On his third visit to Nepal in 1907, he discovered a bunch of manuscripts in the library of the Royal Court that convinced him were the first recorded instance of the Bengali language. Compiling four of the manuscripts, he would bring out the edited volume *Hājār Bacharer Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāya Bauddha Gān o Dohā*. With generous support from the Raja of Lalgola, Jogindranarayan Ray, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad finally published the book in 1917.

[55] Vidyasagar's role as "creator" of standardized Bengali prose rested on his consolidation of the grammatical rules of Bengali that were introduced by earlier prose stylists. Though Fort William was dissolved by the Dalhousie administration in 1854, Vidyasagar served as its head clerk in the years 1841-1846, at which time he began a series of translations from Sanskrit. The first of these was *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* in 1847. Beginning in these years, Vidyasagar introduced and standardized Bengali orthography and alphabet, consolidated the sequential use of both subject-object-verb and object-subject verb and the use of indirect speech, and also adopted a new system of punctuation borrowed from English. Again, the use of Sanskrit in Vidyasagar's vocabulary could be witnessed in the structure of his nominal and verbal phases. He, too, abandoned the usage of Perso-Arabic words in both his translations and his original writing. After leaving Fort William College, Vidyasagar would establish the Sanskrit Press and Depository with another grammarian and Fort William College pandit, Madan Mohan Tarkalankar and they would go on to publish seminal textbooks until the 1860s. See Hiranmay Banerjee, *Iswarchandra Vidyasagar* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1968) and Sisir Kumar Das, *Early Bengali Prose, Carey to Vidyasagar* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1966).

newness of Bengali—its status as a nineteenth-century creation—made it a language of translation and neologisms, where one had to turn to either Sanskrit, the root language, or to English to express thoughts, ideas and criticism. With the first attempt to write a history of the Bengali language in 1871, by a Sanskrit scholar called Ramgati Nyayaratna, the history of composition in Bengali could be by pushed back by a paltry 300 years.[56] The medieval poets that Nyayaratna extricated from the oblivion of history however, were all of a singular mold, Bengali epic poets who translated from Sanskrit epics such as the *Rāmāyāṇa,* the *Mahābhārata,* and the *Purāṇas.*

Shastri recounted how the Brahminical scholars of the late nineteenth century were completely unaware of the vernacular poetry of Vaiṣṇava bhakti poets that were being published by the Asiatic Society and the Bengal Library. He mentioned an address he gave to a gathering at the Kombuletola Library in 1891, where he had specifically talked about 150 Vaiṣṇava poets, their biographies, and their verses in a critical vein. Shastri witnessed great amazement, even bewilderment, on the part of the learned men of Bengal to discover a completely unknown aspect of Bengali literary history. Yet as Shastri mentioned, these were all recently published books, easily available in Calcutta. If books already published could elicit so much bewilderment, what about the thousands of manuscripts yet to be collected?[57] The discovery of the *Caryāpada*s had effectively pushed back the status of Bengali as an older language than had been hitherto believed. Nagendranath Basu had stated, "Those who like to discuss philology, those who want to know a chronological account of the origins of the Bengali language, it is extremely important for them search for and discover old Bengali manuscripts."[58] Shastri, following Basu's prescription, struck gold on one of his expeditions

[56] Ramgati Nyayaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā O Vāṅgālā Sāhityaviṣayaka Prastāb* (Kolkata: Supreme Book Distributors, 1991).
[57] Haraprasad Shastri, "Introduction," in *Hājār Bacharer Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāya Bauddha Gān o Dohā* (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1916), 1-19, henceforth *Bauddha Gāna o Dohā.*
[58] Nagendranath Basu, "Bāṃlā punthir saṃkṣipta vivaraṇa," 296-297.

and discovered the *Caryāpada,* which he "proved" Bengali through grammatical and textual exegesis.[59]

The main concern of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, however, remained that of making the question of history and identity inherently connected with language. While, on the one hand, the social history of Bengal emerged through the archiving of pre-modern Bengali manuscripts, on the other, recurrent columns such as *Śabda -Rahasya*, *Śabda -Samālocana,* and *Śabdara-Tālikā* designated words not from Sanskrit as 'foreign' words of indigenous or Perso-Arabic origins (*Deśaja Śabda*, *Phārsī o Ārabī Śabda*). This demonstrated a kind of wild and utopian desire to list words of all possible origins and the value of thinking history in and through them in Bengali. Broadly speaking, there were two camps in the early twentieth century, as pointed out by the baffled Ramendrasundar Trivedi in a presidential address to the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in 1900, later anthologized as *Bāṃlā Byākaraṇ* (Bengali Grammar). According to Ramendrasundar, the camps could be said to be of broadly two bents—one favored a Sanskritized Bengali in the figure of Haraprasad Shastri and the second, led by Rabindranath Tagore, desired to incorporate words of more colloquial origin.[60] Sometimes, as in the case of Abdul Karim Sahityaviśārad, words would creep in from the edges of Bengal, and would be glossed and explained for the benefit of the metropolitan and learned Hindu reader. So, Abdul Karim explained, it was at the behest of Rabindranath Tagore himself that he started collecting and compiling children's rhymes for the *Sāhitya*

[59] Shastri would cite not just adjectival and verb forms found in the text that would also belong to a vocabulary familiar to subsequent Bengali, but would also cite a few lines from one of the verses by the *siddhācārya* Bhusuku to make what he considered a clinching argument: *Bāja ṇāba pāḍī pauā khāle bāhiu |Ada Baṃgāle kleśa luḍiu || Āji Bhusu Baṃgālī bhailī |Ṇia ghariṇī Caṇḍālī lelī ||* Shastri translated this as, "After sailing on the boat on a lotus lake, I reached this Bengal to let go of all bitterness. Today O Bhusu, you are indeed a Bengali, as you have taken a lower caste woman as wife." This isolated verse, according to Shastri, was representative of a larger possibility that the whole body of songs were written by Buddhist mystics who were based out of Bengal. He would cite further anecdotal evidence to establish that yet another *siddhācārya* Lui was Bengali, because in the Rāṛh region the followers of the folk deity Dharma Thakur (the legend of which Shastri would associate with Buddhist cults) would still sacrifice animals to Lui. Haraprasad Shastri, *Bauddha Gāna o Dohā,* 12-15.

[60] Ramendrasundar Trivedi, "Bāṅglā Vyākaraṇ," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 8, no. 4 (B.S. 1308/1901): 201-229.

Pariṣat Patrikā in the introduction to the rhymes reproduced as *Cattagrāmer Chele Bhulāno Chaḍā,* otherwise this dialect was hardly of interest to the general Bengali reader.[61]

The philological friendships and collaborations discussed so far reflect a number of familiar Hindu Bengali intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, this *communitas* was not quite as exclusionary as it seems to be so far. The Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in fact, had two extremely important Bengali Muslim philologists who made signal contributions to their early archives. In the final section of this chapter, I highlight the careers of Abdul Karim Sahityaviśārad and Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui to argue that we must extend the contours of *communitas* in the institutional history of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad.

The Trials of Abdul Karim and Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui

In 1901, a humble schoolmaster of a local Municipal School wrote a letter of petition to the famous and redoubtable Haraprasad Shastri from Chittagong, on the edges of East Bengal, far away from metropolitan Calcutta:

> In Chittagong…there are innumerable manuscripts in the houses of *Brahmin*s and *Kāyasthas*. The people of this country are so bound in superstition that they would not give up their attachment so easily…Meanwhile I have been designated as the "outcaste" *Musalmān*! The Hindus do not want to give their manuscripts to a *mleccha* Muslim so it has become even harder for me to collect manuscripts! There seems to be sin in giving the manuscripts to me! In a country where mindsets are like this, it seems amazing to not have bitter Hindu-Muslim conflict from day to day.[62]

Abdul Karim would write a few more letters to Shastri before being commissioned by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad to collect *puthis.* Born in 1869 in Patiya, Chittagong he belonged to a family of *munshi*s. His father passed away before his birth and his grandfather and uncle raised him. He began his schooling with some Arabic at home and then studied Bengali, English, and Sanskrit at school. Enrolled in the First Arts Course at Chittagong

[61] Abdul Karim, "Cattagrāmer Chele Bhulāno Chaḍā," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 9, no. 2 (B.S. 1309/1902):76-91.
[62] Letter dated September 6, 1901, to Haraprasad Shastri from Abdul Karim, in *Haraprasāda Śāstrī Smāraka Grantha: A Commemoration Volume on Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri* (Calcutta: Sanyal Prakashan, 1960), 65.

College, he had to discontinue formal studies due to illness and straitened financial circumstances. He was appointed the headmaster of the local municipal Sitakunda Minor School, and then became a temporary clerk at the local court. At around this time, the poet Nabinchandra Sen, then a personal assistant of the Commissioner, started to take personal interest in Abdul Karim's literary abilities and passion. He tried to get him a job at the Commissioner's Office at Chittagong. One of Abdul Karim's great friends from his native village, Kalishankar Chakraborty, used to publish a local periodical called *Jyoti.* Kalishankar was so moved by Abdul Karim's passion for collecting old manuscripts that he ran an advertisement in the *Jyoti* announcing that anybody who helped Abdul Karim acquire old handwritten manuscripts would get a year's subscription of the *Jyoti* for free. Some of Nabinchandra Sen's enemies in the Commissioner's office tried to frame him and Abdul Karim for having dishonest dealings with the periodical in question. Nabinchandra Sen got away but Abdul Karim was dismissed from his position.[63]

Abdul Karim managed to get another job at Anowara Middle School in Chittagong. Somehow managing to run his household on a meager salary, he pursed a life in philology on the side. During this time, he renewed his energies in acquiring countless manuscripts. The first significant publication of his findings was *A Descriptive Catalogue of 433 Bengali Manuscripts Found in the District of Chittagong.*[64] Thereafter, Abdul Karim compiled, annotated and published a number of medieval *puthis* which included a vast range of both Hindu and Muslim subjects within the Parishad. Abdul Karim's careful incorporation of popular medieval Hindu and Vaiṣṇava texts no doubt cemented his position in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. These included *Rādhikār Mānbhaṅga (Kabitā), Kabi Narottam Dās Praṇīta* (1905), *Kālketur Cautiśā* (*A Poem of 32 Stanzas Describing an Episode in the Story of Kala-Ketu*, 1910), *Lakṣmīcandra Pāñcāli* (*An Ancient Bengali Poem on the Efficacy of*

[63] "Abdul Karim", Ali Ahmed, ed., *Bāṃlā Muslim Granthapañjī* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985), 93-94.
[64] Published between 1903-1905 in the ninth and tenth volumes of the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*.

Vows to Lakshmi Chandra, 1910-1911).[65] He also published longer annotated manuscripts in the next decade under the series *Sāhitya Pariṣat Granthābalī* such as *Mṛgalubdha Saṃvād* (*A Saiva Religious Story in Verse Composed, According to the Editor's Surmise, More than Three Hundred Years Ago,* 1916) and *Gaṅgā-Maṅgal* (*A Religious Poem on the Sacred River Ganges Composed Most Probably in the Sixteenth Century AD by a Brahman Named Madhava*, 1916).[66] Abdul Karim Sahityaviśarad also managed to foreground the forgotten history of popular Bengali Muslim poets in this project of recovery. The first of these was not published by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad but by the *Sanatan Dharma Samiti* of Rajshahi, *Musalmān Vaiṣṇav Kabi Saiyad Marttajā* (1904) and collaborating with Brajasundar Sanyal, he also edited in the same year *Musalmān Vaiṣṇav Kabi Āli Rāzā bā Kānu Phakirer Gāner Saṃgraha* (Rajshahi, 1904).[67] On Bengali Muslim poets, he published in the periodical of the Parishad, *Prācīn Musalmān Kabigaṇ* (1906), *Gorakṣa Bijaya* (by Sheikh Faizulla Marhum, 1917), *Jñānasāgar* (a religious poem by Ali Raja alias Kanu Fakir, 1917). In the introduction to the third volume of *Musalmān Vaiṣṇav Kabi*, editor Brajasundar Sanyal thanks Abdul Karim profusely for his hard labor in retrieving the poems by the poets Ālāol, Mīrzā Phāyzullā, Saiyad Nasiraddin, Nasir Mahammad, Ser Cānder, Ebādollah et al. Sanyal also mentions how Abdul Karim had provided a poem retrieved from Alaol to Dineshchandra Sen for *Baṅgabhāṣā O Sāhitya* (1896), but was completely unacknowledged by the latter.

[65] *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 17, nos. 1&4 (1910-1911).
[66] The descriptions come from the *Bengal Library Catalogue*, *Second supplementary catalogue of Bengali books in the library of the British museum acquired during the years 1911-1934*, eds. J. F. Blumhardt. and J. V. S. Wilkinson. Reproduced in the bibliography provided in *Bāṃlā Muslim Granthapañjī*, 94-98. These books were published by Ramkamal Sinha for the Sahitya Parishad at 243/1 Upper Circular Road and printed at the very popular Metcalfe Printing Works, 34 Mechuabazar Street in Calcutta.
[67] I found a copy of the third volume of *Musalmān Vaiṣṇav Kabi* in the Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Collection, Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata. Bibliophile, antiquarian, and bookseller Indranath Majumdar of Subarnarekha had donated the copy. Little information is available on the publisher Sanatan Dharma Samiti of Rajshahi. The book was dedicated to Nabinchandra Sen, possibly as a mark of Abdul Karim's gratitude. Brajasundar Sanyal, Abdul Karim's collaborator, was a well-known folklorist from Rajshahi who was one of those rare Hindus who worked hard to retrieve forgotten Muslim poets in history.

Brajasundar Sanyal clarifies that this present work carries this same *pada* with due recognition to the archivist, Abdul Karim.[68]

At the time of his death in 1953, Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad had the single largest personal collection of manuscripts in a now fragmented Bengal, as well as rare and unique pieces of which no other copy remained in other collections or archives.[69] As the editor of the *Descriptive Catalogue* of his manuscripts stated, Middle Bengali literature would have huge chunks missing had it not been for Abdul Karim Sahityaviśarad—"Posterity owes him a debt of profound gratitude to the services of literature."[70] Posterity would repay that debt in the recovery of his archives and reputation in East Pakistan and Bangladesh after his death in 1953.[71] What, though, of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and the fellow philologists of his time? In 1911, an *atirikta saṃkhyā* or special edition of the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* published an exhaustive list of Abdul Karim's collected manuscripts to date, portions of which had been annually published in its pages since 1902. In what was perhaps the most personal of introductory statements within the philological milieu of the time, Abdul Karim wrote with a great deal of bitterness:

> I did not hesitate for a moment in performing the kind of excruciating labor that went into the search and compilation of these manuscripts. On many occasions I have shed blood and sometimes (what is even dearer to me) given precious money in order to obtain these manuscripts. Due to lack of favorable circumstances, these now languish in my cupboards. Despite the kind of care and effort that went into the procuring of these manuscripts, I have not been able to take them out to the general populace due to the paucity of funds. If the Parishat was not benevolent enough to publish this in the body of their periodicals, then no doubt these would still be gradually diminishing in my

[68] Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad would of course get due recognition in the coming decade, but the politics of citation and acknowledgement is interesting to note. See Brajasundar Sanyal and Abdul Karim, eds., *Musalmān Vaiṣṇav Kabi: Tṛtīya Khaṇḍa*, vol. 3 (Rajshahi: Sanatan Dharma Samiti, 1904).
[69] Syed Sajjad Hussain, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection by Munshi Abdul Karim and Ahmad Sharif* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960), xiii.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Beginning with recognition from the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad became a cornerstone of sorts for a younger generation of philologists in East Pakistan such as Abdul Hai, Syed Mannan, Enamul Haq, Anisuzzaman, et al. The University of Chittagong, which houses most of his manuscript collection, and published his collected works, named the library in his honor. The Bangla Academy, established in 1955 and instrumental in the liberation politics until 1971, named him as one of the founding figures of Bengali philology in the modern period.

> cupboards. Though still hardly easily available to most of the common people, what the Parishat has done for the sake of Bengali literature is commendable. Not just my gratitude alone, the Parishat should be thanked by everyone. I have unwaveringly given most of my life to recover the forgotten ancient literature of Bengal. For this, while I have received a lot of spoken enthusiasm for the cause of different regions, I have hardly been helped in any practical way. Perhaps I do not even have the right to wonder whether I am worthy of getting this assistance. However unworthy I am, like others I have the right to care for my mother tongue. Grasping nothing else but the knowledge of this right, I have done whatever I can do….".[72]

Abdul Karim's efforts in compiling manuscripts included both *puthis* from Hindu and Muslim authors. What characterized these early years was repeated failure to publish annotated manuscripts of Bengali Muslim poets within the *bhadralok* circles of Calcutta.[73] As I explore in more detail in the next chapter on the birth of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti in the second decade of the twentieth century, Abdul Karim did not limit himself to Muslim *puthi*s, for his cause was that of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad—the Bengali language. The question of identity, however, is a difficult one. We are not merely who we see ourselves as being, but also how the world sees us. So it went with the experience of being a Bengali Muslim in the first decade of the twentieth century. It was perhaps with this bitter realization that Abdul Karim tried to force the *Musālman* in the naming of Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti to a younger generation of Muslim intellectuals hanging out in Calcutta, who wanted a more generic and inclusive name.[74]

Another pioneer in the collection and compilation of *puthi*s was scholar, writer, journalist, and homeopath Abdul Gafur Siddiqui (1872-1959). Born in Basirhat in West Bengal, Abdul Gafur Siddiqui's father Munshi Golam Maola was a prolific writer of *puthi*

---

[72] Abdul Karim, "Nibedan," in *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā, atirikta saṃkhyā, compilations of entries from Bengali years 1309-1320* (1902-1913): 1-2. (No other information available.)

[73] He made repeated attempts to publish the pre-modern Arakanese poet Alaol's manuscripts in the first few decades of the twentieth century. He was rejected by Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Visva Bharati University, and Dhaka University. His collection of manuscripts was finally published by Chittagong University in independent Bangladesh twenty-three years after his death in 1977.

[74] Founder of the Communist Party of India Muzaffar Ahmed Ahmed described how Abdul Karim inserted the *Musalmān* in the organization's name as he felt that no Hindu would either buy or read the magazine otherwise. Muzaffar Ahmed, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920-1929* (Kolkata: National Book Agency Private Limited, 1970), 24.

literature and owned an influential *puthi* printing press in Calcutta, the Habibi Press. His great-uncle Sufi Khodadad Siddiqui was a descendant of the great Wahhabi anticolonial leader Syed Mir Nisar Ali Titumir (1782-1831).[75] Munshi Golam Maola was active in the nineteenth-century Muslim public sphere in Calcutta and was an office bearer of the Central Mahomedan Association.[76] Abdul Gafur Siddiqui's primary education began in a *maktab* in Khaspur, 24 Parganas before he proceeded to a government school. On his early education—having been taught by both Hindus and Muslims—he wrote in the journal *Mukul* in 1955:

> My education was planned according to the teachings of Islam. When I was four and a half years old, I was handed the *takhti,* the holy *Āmpārā* and the Urdu *kitāb* primer '*Laḍko'kā Khel*'. Mir Fattah Ali ran the first *maktab* I went to but it closed down. Thereafter I studied with Rahman Baksh Siddiqui. I was admitted to Baksh *khuḍo*'s school (*pāṭhśālā*) where there were four teachers. Pandit Jadabchandra Mallick, Pandit Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, Munshi Sheikh Mohammad Jafar and Pandit Upendranath Chattopadhyay. When I finished primary school, I was admitted to a school in Jadurhati. After clearing the examinations, I was finally admitted to the City Collegiate School in Calcutta.[77]

Abdul Gafur Siddiqui's professional life began with jobs as medical officer in the Oriental Gas Company in Calcutta and then R.G. Kar Medical College. He quit this line of work to join the Homeopathy College in Calcutta and at the same time, took over the Habibi Press. At the time, he was concerned about how to keep alive the *puthi* press—a nineteenth-century popular publishing phenomenon—in a very different twentieth=century book market. Also, since he was an insider to the *puthi* trade, he had an intimate knowledge of Bengali Muslim

---

[75] Titumir, a one-time *lathiyal,* was also a *hafiz* and a scholar of the *Hadith* who mobilized peasants against the tyranny of some notable (Hindu) Zamindars of the North 24 Parganas and Nadia. Ultimately, he was instrumental in fighting back against the British. The most exhaustive study of Titumir so far has been Gautam Bhadra's analysis of the popular leader's role in the peasant uprisings in the nineteenth century. See Gautam Bhadra, *Imān o niśān: Ūnīśa śatake Bāṃlār kṛshak caitanyer ek adhyāẏa, 1800-1850* (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 1994). See also Sugata Bose, "Resistance and Consciousness," in *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 140–80.

[76] The Central Mahomedan Association was a group of affluent Muslim men based in Calcutta who "deriving its inspirations from the noble traditions of the past, proposes to work in harmony with western culture and progressive tendencies of the age. It aims of the political regeneration of the Indian Mahomedans by a moral revival and by constant endeavors to obtain from Government a recognition of their just and reasonable claims." See Wakil Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake Bāṅgāli Musalmāner Cintā O Cetanār Dhārā* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1997), 131-141.

[77] Saifuddin Choudhury, *Abdul Gafur Siddiqui* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993), 11.

print and presence in nineteenth-century Calcutta. In "Baṭṭalār Puthi" (*Masik Mohammadī*, 1940), he writes:

> The name 'Baṭṭalār Puthi' for whatever reason is given [to this body of literature] or for howsoever it was created. When the first *puthi* printing press was established in the neighborhood (*mohāllāh*) of Misrigunj in Calcutta, this literature was known as 'Mosalmānī Bāṃlā Puthi.'Puthis of this kind were not just typeset and published in Battala. These puthis were first published in Calcutta neighborhoods like Misrigunj, Hajipara, Mechuabazar and Shovabazar.[78]

Byomkesh Mustaphi, who was an office bearer at the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, asked Abdul Gafur Siddiqui to extend his energies in enriching the collection of the Parishad. Invited to speak at the Ninth Session of the Bangiya Sahitya Sammelan, Abdul Gafur Siddiqui addressed some widely debated points of conflict between Hindus and Muslims over the language question. This lecture was reprinted along with a large number of *puthis* that he had collected and compiled in an extensive special issue of the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* (1916).[79] Abdul Gafur Siddiqui begins by mentioning that the question of the mother tongue of Bengali Muslims had become a topic of great contention across Bengal. There were four commonly held positions on the theme, and he expands on them in a bitterly ironic tone.

Some people, says Abdul Gafur Siddiqui, argued that the mother tongue of Bengali Muslims was not Bengali at all, but Urdu, since all Indian Muslims fell under one unified community. Indian Muslims of various parts of the country including Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Punjab, and Bombay must all speak the connecting language of Urdu.[80] He scoffs at such an idea and remarks that, if Indian Muslims could not find common cause without sharing a common language, then, according to the Koran's teachings, the language that binds them would be Arabic. He then points out that, compared to the number of Muslims in other parts

[78] The argument being that just "Battala" literature had both Hindu and Muslim content, whereas Muslim *puthi* literature had a distinct trajectory in Calcutta and displayed a long presence of Muslims—speaking and consuming Bengali literature—in Calcutta. Cited in *Abdul Gafur Siddiqui*, 14.
[79] Abdul Gafur Siddiqui, "Musalmān O Baṅgasāhitya," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā,* no. 2 (BS 1323, 1916). Volume unknown. Henceforth "Musalmān O Baṅgasāhitya."
[80] Musalmān O Baṅgasāhitya," 95.

of the country, Bengali Muslims were in a majority. Hence, if a connecting language was required for political reasons, then why could not Bengali be such a language?

Another group of people, according to Abdul Gafur Siddiqui, claim that Bengali Muslims do not accept Bengali as their mother tongue, which is why they have not contributed much to the language.[81] Since they are not serving the language as well as the Hindus, then surely they (despite being children of the *Baṅgabhāṣā Jananī*) do not really feel a necessity to maintain the connection with the Bengali language.[82] A third group moreover claims that Muslims had begun to serve and cultivate (*sebā o tāhār carcā)* the Bengali language but Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and his followers had hit such hard blows that the Muslims had to return midway. Hence, compared to the Hindus, Muslims have fallen behind. This is, no doubt, a reference to some Muslim littérateurs.[83] Finally, the fourth group opined that Muslims were, in the past, quite detached from the question of cultivating Bengali, but had overcome their earlier reluctance. Hence, in recent time, Bengali Muslims had started discussing and writing Bengali literature prolifically.[84]

All of these opinions, Abdul Gafur Siddiqui claims, are false. Contrary to all received wisdom, he lays out his position that Bengali Muslims have, at all points in history, equally served and cultivated the Bengali language as the Hindus. The fault lies in the modern and educated Bengali middle class: "There is only one reason why the modern educated Hindu and a few modern educated Muslims with a Hindu sensibility (*hindubhābāpanna*) claim that Muslims are not the servers of the mother tongue (*bhāṣā-jananīr sebak nahe*)."[85] This is because the Hindu brothers (*Hindubhrātā*) have abandoned the *real* (*āsal*) Bengali language:

> They have inserted many Sanskrit words into the Bengali language. They are trying to purge the Arabic, Persian and Urdu words that had become part of the Bengali language and are attempting to replace these with new Sanskrit

[81] Ibid, 95.
[82] This must surely be a dig at the predominantly Hindu audience. Ibid.
[83] Ibid, 96.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

> words. How successful they have been in this task, or hoped for success, only they can clarify. For particular reasons, Muslims cannot abandon the use of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu words in Bengali, cannot cultivate the Bengali language without these words. This is because even if their motherland is Bengal and mother tongue Bengali, their language of religion is Arabic and to some degree, Persian and Urdu.[86]

Abdul Gafur Siddiqui patiently explains that the problem is one of translatability. If Muslims tried to find corresponding Sanskritic words in the Bengali language for socio-religious terms of reference, then the very thought-worlds and life-worlds of Muslims would disappear. He provides a number of examples in his lecture and begins with *Allah.* To say Allah—one word—connotes the one monotheistic god without form (*nirākār khodātāwālā*), and no other qualifiers are required to explain the many significations and properties one associates with Allah. Would Īśvar or Parameśvar achieve these same associations?[87] The associational property of words and language, the ability of a word to hold worlds of meaning for its speakers, is something Abdul Gafur Siddiqui foregrounds. This is a philologist who is trying to explain to the normative and regulative practitioners of philology that language has a simultaneous and often contradictory everyday life. You may insist on changing words to remake a language, but this process can destroy the worlds of thought, affect, emotions, and attitudes—in short, the life-worlds—of people. Language is not merely a written artifice meant to create aesthetic objects:

> Just as the Bengali language is of the Hindus, it also of the Muslims. The main purpose of vernacular education is not writing plays, novels and poems and then reading them. Education and cultivation of the mother tongue is meant for using the language to know about one's religion and work (*dharma karma*) and being able to maintain one's religious beliefs (*dharmabiśvās*). If the Bengali language is purged of Arabic and Persian words, then it must be understood that the Bengali Muslims are being dipossessed of their right (*bedakhal*) to the Bengali language.[88]

Then again, Abdul Gafur Siddiqui argues, the "mleccha Musalmān" is not seen as capable of discussing and studying the *Devabhāṣā* Sanskrit. The few Muslim students who

[86] Ibid, 96-97.
[87] Ibid, 97.
[88] Ibid, 98.

take up Sanskrit in school and college find difficulty in grasping it and for these and many other reasons they cannot enter the "Bāṇīmandir" to worship and serve the Goddess of Speech. *Bāṇīmandir* is glossed in the article as the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad to clarify any ambiguity; by designating the institution as a temple of language, he underlines the ritualistic aspect of an academy of language. Normative, regulatory, and proscribed with caste lines, the *Bāṇīmandir* leaves the Bengali Muslims standing outside its doors. In the same densely allegorical and ironic vein, Abdul Gafur Siddiqui goes on to explain that Bengali Muslims, educationally and often economically disadvantaged, continue to cultivate the Bengali language in their own individual thatched huts according to their limited resources. The Hindu brothers (*bhrātāgaṇ*) engaged in silent cultivation (*nīrab sādhanā*) of language have as their prize the contemptuous behavior and hatred of their Muslim counterparts.[89] It is at this point that Abdul Gafur Siddiqui contends that the history of Bengali Muslim literature and print exists despite the historical amnesia:

> There are 40 presses run by Muslims, in Calcutta and the *mofussil*s, printing thousands of books that are sold and circulated in the market. Do we keep any news of that? We are Bengalis of the twentieth century; proud of our education, and by calling these books "Baṭṭalār Puthi" we sit relieved having done our duty. Reading the Baṭṭalār Puthi is a distant exercise; just hearing the name gives us palpitations and fever. Like spotting tigers in the bushes, we keep seeing shadows of bad taste and bad words in these books…. these books have authors who have high powers of poetry, selections of words, sweetness of language, natural and original expression. Reading these makes one feel wonder; the heart dances in joy. Their souls could rest in peace if only they were born somewhere else and not this unfortunate and ungrateful country. Just as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* is high literature for the Hindu brothers, *Baṭṭalār Puthi*, *Āmīr Hāmzā* and *Dāstān Āmīr Hāmzā* is high literature for the Muslims.[90]

Abdul Gafur Siddiqui ends the lecture with a reference to his friendship with Byomkesh Mustaphi who had entreated that the former seriously embark on collecting and compiling the *puthis*. It is this idea of friendship that permeates and overcomes the irony and

[89] Ibid, 98.
[90] Ibid, 99.

bitterness of the earlier part of the lecture. It was Mustaphi's friendship—his words on his deathbed—that excited and inspired (*uttejita o utsāhita*) Abdul Gafur Siddiqui to undertake this mammoth task of recovery. Abdul Gafur Siddiqui admits that this task of historical recovery was so difficult that he had only succeeded partially; of 8,325 texts, only 4,446 are extant. 2,982 had fallen out of circulation and were lost. 795 were caught in disputes between inheritors and the colonial government had proscribed 102.[91]

After having provided a mammoth list—with crucial annotation—he ends again on the promise of friendship and fraternity. For almost a thousand years now, he notes sadly, Hindus and Muslims lived in Bengal together. Now, unfortunately, Hindus know very little about Islam and hence misunderstand the social behaviors and the politics of the Muslims for the most part. But what if they had the ability to dispel the misunderstandings and embark on a new project of establishing familiarity and understanding? To read is to know, and this joint reading and sharing must happen within the shared *communitas* of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad:

> If they (Hindus) did not hate the "Baṭtalār Puthi" because they are about Islam and instead read them with interest, then all misconceptions about the customs, behaviors and politics of the Muslims would be dispelled. In the first part of my essay, I said that I have not yet finished my work of searching for manuscripts (*anusandhān*) and have not yet located many of these books. Once I have collected all the books and finished my task, I will gift the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad one copy of each text.[92]

The Philological *Communitas*: The Lament of Abdul Karim

I end this chapter with Abdul Karim's introduction to a manuscript he had discovered and published with a critical introduction in 1917, *Satyanārayaner Puthi (The Manuscript of Satyanārayan)*.[93] Abdul Karim at the time was a founding member of the Bangiya Musalman

[91] Ibid, 100.
[92] Ibid, 121.
[93] *Satyanārāyaner Puthi Śrī Kavi Ballabh Biracita,* ed. Abdul Karim (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Mandir, 1917). The text was published thanks to a generous donation made by the Maharaja of Lalgola, Jogindranarayan Rai Bahadur.

Sahitya Samiti and the operations of this organization began in earnest in 1917, the same year that this particular manuscript was published by a donation made by a munificent patron-Maharaja. Abdul Karim's bitterly poignant introduction to the *puthi* was very much tinged with presentist political angst. It speaks to a certain dissolution of Hindu and Muslim relations that had existed in the pre-modern period. He laments a prelapsarian universe in which the two communities shared religion and community through that great binding force of humanity, language.

Satyanārāyan was a special deity, common to the three great religions that had lived and flourished in Bengal: Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. According to Abdul Karim, Hindus and Muslims worshipped the same local deity *Satya* (Truth) with different names—either as *Nārāyaṇa* (Viṣṇu), or as *Pīr, Paigambar, Fakir* or even *Khudā.* While the terms of divine reference differed, the essence remained the same. Abdul Karim tried to find a historical explanation, and citing his friend, the folklorist Ranjanbilas Raychaudhuri, put forward the idea that, perhaps, the worship of Satyapīr / Satyanārāyan was a local manifestation of that great synthesis of religious traditions, the supreme achievement of Mughal Emperor Akbar, *Din-i-ilāhi.* Abdul Karim cited the fact that innumerable *Satyanārāyan punthi*-s had been found on the archival excavations of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, and almost every village in Bengal had a tradition of worshipping Satyanārāyan. Since no Vaishnava texts mentioned Satyanārāyan, it could be surmised that the syncretic tradition of Satyanārāyan dated from after the time of Caitanya.[94]

Written by Hindu and Muslim poets alike, songs worshipping Satyanārāyan or Satyapīr signaled only a superficial difference between Hindus and Muslims through words. Abdul Karim raised the question whether there was truly any *pīr* called Satyapīr, tracing the latter to Sufi poet, mystic, and teacher Mansur al-Hallaj of Baghdad, who, having reached a

[94] Ibid, 9.

state of extreme meditation, started to shout *Ana 'l-Ḥaqq* ("I am truth"). Declared a kefir by a monotheistic Islam, he was cut into pieces and burnt, and yet the mound of ashes called out *I am Truth* to the skies. Abdul Karim wondered whether the Satyapīr of Bengal was the very same Hallaj with his declaration of an ego and selfhood transcended. Being the philologist that he was, Abdul Karim dismissed this possibility due to lack of evidence.[95]

Nevertheless, the fact remained that Satyapīr/Satyanārāyan was reflexive of a larger body of literature from medieval Bengal that symbolized a particular unity and continuity of Hindus and Muslims, a world in which openness and love led monotheistic Islam to have poets like Syed Jafar and Mirza Hossain Ali, who wrote love lyrics commemorating the Hindu gods Radha and Krishna and devotional hymns to Kali. As the modern age of *re-collection* and *remembering* begins, these Muslim poets who composed in Hindu idioms and genres were falling into the darkness of oblivion and historical amnesia. Abdul Karim noted with sadness that this cultural unity was no longer a political possibility. What were once differences in word-as-referent (Nārāyan/Paigambar) had now become far more deep rooted. Moreover, the following that folk deities had once enjoyed was now under threat. People had cooled towards ancient and animistic rituals, customs, and beliefs. Time, being in constant flux, led one from old belief systems to new ones. Nonetheless, the *Satyanārāyan Punthi* of Kabi Ballabha, though waning in popularity, would be difficult to obliterate completely in Bengal, being an elusive, hybrid, and widely circulated text. The poet Ballabha, like the Bengali language, could neither be pinpointed as Hindu or Muslim. The only fact that Abdul Karim, a philologist on the margins, could say with certainty and textual evidence was this; Kabi Ballabha was from a lower caste, subjugated by the upper caste Brahmins—"*Vedavidhi*

[95] Ibid, 7.

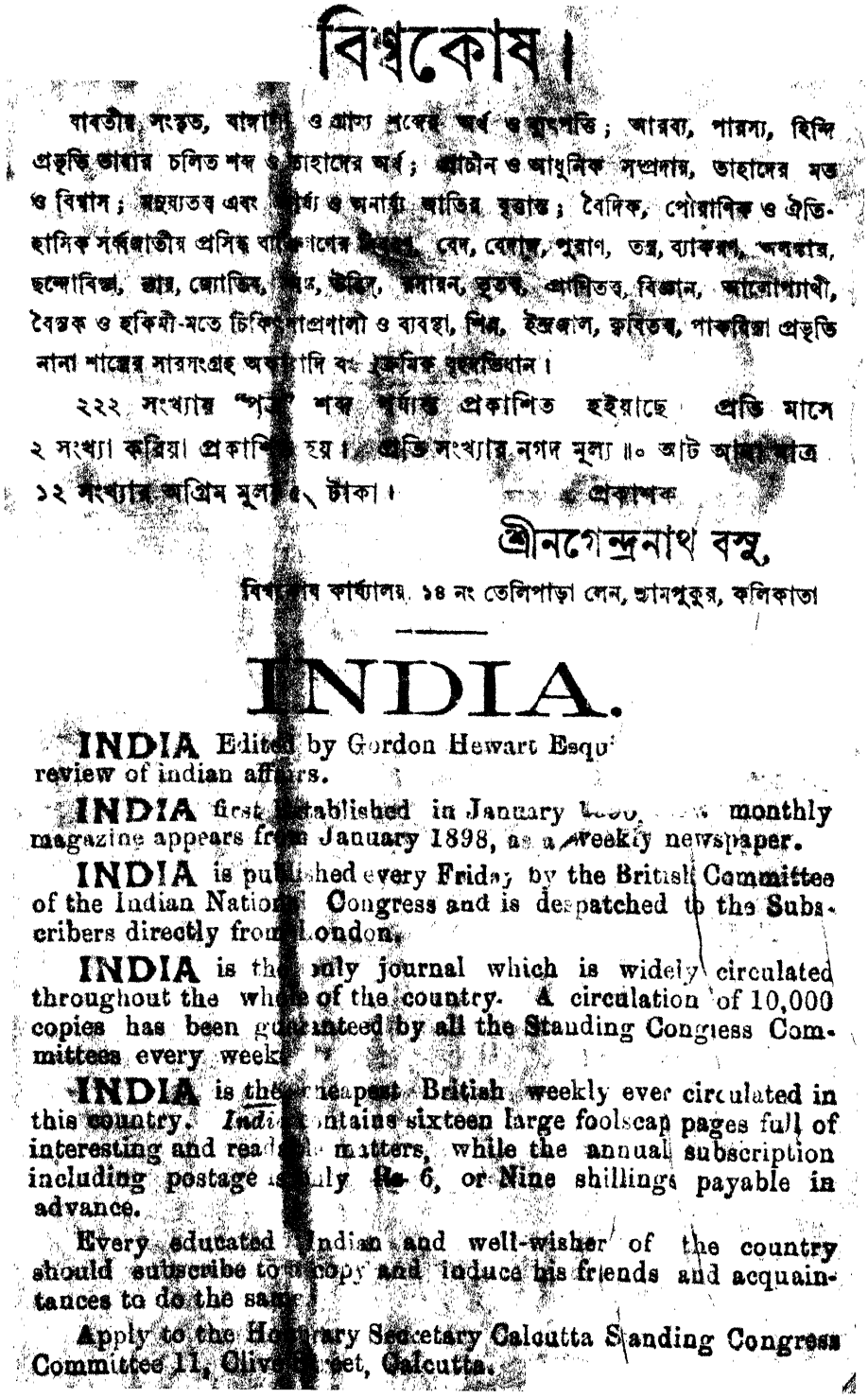
mata/ Ballabha gāna gīta/ Haiyā Brāhmaṇera dāsa" ("Ballabha sings the song, according to the rules and scriptures, being the servant of the Brahmins").[96]

As long as Satyanārāyan *pīr* existed in the linguistic and literary continuums across Bengal, could Hindus and Muslims actually ever completely drift apart? Abdul Karim's wistful gloss of the Satyapīr/Satyanārāyaṇa tradition in 1917 also undercuts the widening real political chasm between the Hindus and Muslims in this period, a rift more clearly visible in Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui's address of 1916. Both Bengali Muslim philologists respond in different ways to present political reality, one with sadness and the other with anger. Moreover, Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad was from the margins of Bengal, Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui of the Habibi Press was located at the epicenter of nineteenth century publishing and print culture in Calcutta. Moreover, these different locations were accompanied by very different philological sensibilities. Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad wrote an article in the *Māsik Mohammadī* (May 1938) on the poet Ālāol wherein he claimed that the philological duo of Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui and Bisheshwar Chakrabarty mistakenly ascribed new manuscripts to the medieval poet, manuscripts that Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui could not ultimately even produce for inspection.[97] Abdul Karim argued that very few philologists in Bengal were even interested, much less expert, in medieval Bengali literature; hence Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui made such unverified claims easily without going into textual veracity. Most significantly, Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad ends the article by pointing out that this response was not adequate in the limited circles of the *Mohammadī*, and that he would publish the response in the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*.

The differences between Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad and Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui complicate the nature of contestation within the philological *communitas*. Friendship and allegiances existed across Hindu and Muslim divides, and tensions too were evident between

[96] Ibid, 14.
[97] Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad, "Madhyayuger kabi o biṣayak agranthita prabandha," in *Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad Racanābalī Vol. 1*, ed. Abul Ahsan Choudhury (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1997), 195.

not just within Hindus but also Bengali Muslims within the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. Hence, a study of Bengali philology can give us insight into how—even during moments of widening separatism in the late 1930s—there was no homogenous Bengali Muslim subjectivity. As I have tried to show, philology, or the study of language and literature, is an entrypoint into the many divided subjectivities that went into the making of modern Bengal.



বিশ্বকোষ।

যাবতীয় সংস্কৃত, বাঙ্গালা ও অন্যান্য গ্রন্থের অর্থ ও ব্যুৎপত্তি; আরব্য, পারস্য, হিন্দি প্রভৃতি ভাষার চলিত শব্দ ও তাহাদের অর্থ; প্রাচীন ও আধুনিক সম্প্রদায়, তাহাদের মত ও বিশ্বাস; মনুষ্যতত্ত্ব এবং [illegible] ও অনার্য্য জাতির বৃত্তান্ত; বৈদিক, পৌরাণিক ও ঐতিহাসিক সর্ব্বজাতীয় প্রসিদ্ধ ব্যক্তিগণের [illegible], বেদ, বেদাঙ্গ, পুরাণ, তন্ত্র, ব্যাকরণ, অলঙ্কার, ছন্দোবিদ্যা, ন্যায়, জ্যোতিষ, [illegible], উদ্ভিদ, রসায়ন, ভূতত্ত্ব, প্রাণিতত্ত্ব, বিজ্ঞান, আরোগ্যার্থী, বৈদ্যক ও হকিমী-মতে চিকিৎসাপ্রণালী ও ব্যবস্থা, শিল্প, ইন্দ্রজাল, কৃষিতত্ত্ব, পাকবিদ্যা প্রভৃতি নানা শাস্ত্রের সারসংগ্রহ অর্থাদি বহু ঐতিহাসিক বৃহদভিধান।

২২২ সংখ্যায় "পৃথ্বী" শব্দ পর্য্যন্ত প্রকাশিত হইয়াছে প্রতি মাসে ২ সংখ্যা করিয়া প্রকাশিত হয়। প্রতিসংখ্যার নগদ মূল্য ।০ আট আনা মাত্র ১২ সংখ্যার অগ্রিম মূল্য ৪৲ টাকা। প্রকাশক

শ্রীনগেন্দ্রনাথ বসু,

বিশ্বকোষ কার্য্যালয়, ১৪ নং তেলিপাড়া লেন, শ্যামপুকুর, কলিকাতা

INDIA.

INDIA Edited by Gordon Hewart Esqu[illegible] review of indian affairs.

INDIA first established in January 1[illegible], a monthly magazine appears from January 1898, as a weekly newspaper.

INDIA is published every Friday by the British Committee of the Indian National Congress and is despatched to the Subscribers directly from London.

INDIA is the only journal which is widely circulated throughout the whole of the country. A circulation of 10,000 copies has been guaranteed by all the Standing Congress Committees every week.

INDIA is the cheapest British weekly ever circulated in this country. *India* contains sixteen large foolscap pages full of interesting and readable matters, while the annual subscription including postage is only Rs. 6, or Nine shillings payable in advance.

Every educated Indian and well-wisher of the country should subscribe to a copy and induce his friends and acquaintances to do the same.

Apply to the Honorary Secretary Calcutta Standing Congress Committee 11, Clive Street, Calcutta.

Figure 1. Advertisement for Nagendranath Basu, *Biśvakoṣ*. Published in *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* 3, no. 1 (May 1896).

Chapter Two

Sāhitya as *Communitas*: History, the Everyday, and Visions of Renaissance

> The word *sāhitya* (literature) comes from the word *sahita* (together with). And so, if we look at the meaning of the word-root, we see an idea of coalescence (*milana*) in the word *sāhitya.* This is not just the coalescence of *bhāva* (affect) with *bhāva,* or language (*bhāṣā)* with language, or text (*grantha*) with text; but of human (*mānuṣ*) with human, of past with the present, of the distant with the near. Such *intimate* connections are only made possible by *sāhitya.* The people of a country that lacks literature are not connected to each other with these life-affirming bonds; they are alienated.[1]

In an address read before the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in 1896 (BS 1302), Rabindranath Tagore first laid out a distinct conception of literature and literary activity that would inform much of his later intellectual life. For instance, in some of his last philosophical musings on a potential theory of literature, which he claims was influenced by the *Upaniṣad*s, Tagore went back to an understanding of *sāhitya* as an everyday practice, with an entirely different temporality from the machinations of statist history.[2] Literature, for Tagore, was a civilizational construct; it defied the easy binaries of colonizer and colonized, of Hindu and Muslim, of insider and outsider. Literature was the way in which the past was most alive, in which the singular creative spirit of human beings is most evident, defying the pettiness and limitations of a historicist consciousness. Literature is everyday history, capturing a quotidian reality beyond events and ruptures. To quote his essay "Sāhitye Aitihāsikatā*"* (Historicality in Literature), "The picture of a village that the poet saw that day, surely it was affected by some knocks and blows of statist history. But in the poet's creation, what emerges is the history of human joys and sorrows which goes beyond all other histories—in the agricultural lands, in the villages—one's own daily happiness and miseries—expressed at times by poets in the Mughal state, or sometimes in the English state, eternally articulating our simple

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, "Bāṃla Jātīya Sāhitya," in *Rabīndra Racanābalī*, vol. 10 (Kolkata: Paścimbaṅga Sarkār, 1989), 351–61.
[2] See Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

humanity; not the values of feudalism or the modern state."[3] Along with *sāhitya*, Tagore's other great conceptual foray was the theorization of *bhāṣā*. As a writer and pedagogue who singlehandedly reconstructed a modern vernacular idiom of Bengali, his role as grammarian has been neglected.[4] The connecting thread behind Tagore's joint conceptualization of *sāhitya* and *bhāṣā* was an understanding of an imaginary of togetherness (*communitas*), which by virtue of the qualities of literature and language was inherently universalistic. And yet, even an imagined universalistic *jātīyatā* may be marked by real boundaries and exclusions practised in the everyday realm of words.

Consider for instance, Tagore's short review of an essay published in the magazine *Prabāsī* in 1932. In "Maktab Madrāsār Bāṃlā Bhāṣā," Tagore argued that language had its own life force (*prāṇadharma*), and hence the forced attempt by Bengali Muslims to introduce new Arabic and Persian words was ill advised. Much of the Bengali language, Tagore argued, has an ordinary logic of Arabic and Persian words; why, then, the desire to remake the Bengali language?[5] Writing in the 1930s, Tagore identified a "forced reconstruction of language" as absurd (*kimbhutkimākār)* and reactionary, the unfortunate spread of the communal problem to the very language itself. Perhaps it did not occur to Tagore that the fundamental basis of communal feeling lay in the sentient unit of civilization that he zealously defended, the Bengali language.

In this chapter, I trace the development of a Bengali Muslim intelligentsia in Bengal, specifically the urban centers of Calcutta and Dhaka, through the articulation of new political

---

[3] Rabindranath Tagore, "Sāhityer Aitihasikatā," in *Rabindra Racanābalī*, vol. 10 (Kolkata: Paścimbaṅga Sarkār, 1989), 588–89. The essay is part of the collection of essays called *Sāhityer Svarūp* (*The Form of Literature*). The translation is mine.

[4] Almost no critical attention has been given to his many lectures on grammar and language delivered at the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, some of which were printed together as the collection *Śabdatattva*. See Rabindranath Tagore, *Śabdatattva* (Kolkata: Indian Publishing House, 1909).

[5] As Tagore writes, "*Śiśupāṭhya Bāṃlā ketābe gāyer jore Ārabiyānā Pārsīyānā karaṭākei ācārniṣṭa Musalmān yadi sādhutā bale jñāna karen tabe Iṃreji skulpāṭhyer bhāṣākeo mājhe mājhe Pārsī bā Ārabī chiṭiye śodhāna nā karen kena?*" Rabindranath Tagore, "Maktab Madrāsār Bhāṣā," *Rabīndra Racanābalī*, vol. 10 (Kolkata: Paścimbaṅga Sarkār, 1989), 787–88. The essay is part of the larger collection of essays *Bāṃlā Śabdatattva (Bengali Linguistics).*

and cultural aspirations in a number of collective bodies and concomitant new apparatus of print in the early twentieth century. I first explore the tensions between institutional philology (the regulatory and normative role of language) and the everyday worlds of language and literature (its lived aspect or language-as-experience) invoked by my sources. Second, by embarking on a political reading of these proceedings of literary societies, I advance the argument that *sāhitya* becomes a compelling political category for Bengali Muslims across a spectrum of political and intellectual positions. While the real political world unfolded in Bengal and India, the invocation of *sāhitya* as a *communitas* premised on Hindu-Muslim unity continued in the space of literary societies. This ended during the Pakistan Movement in 1940s. As littérateurs (*sāhityik*s) became key political figures in the Pakistan movement, a new idiom of sāhitya-as-difference emerged. This chapter establishes that language and literature, in its institutional aspect, posited certain grounds of difference between Hindus and Muslims. And yet, a utopian linguistic and literary fraternity continued well into the separatist movement, which the latter continuously invoked in order to deny its existence in order to justify the Pakistan Movement. These tensions underlying the philological *communitas* helps us better understand the tense and conflicted nature of a Bengali Muslim political subjectivity that struggled to voice and assert itself in the course of the twentieth century. By incorporating a wide variety of Bengali Muslim political positions and voices up to 1947, I also demonstrate how there was no singular or homogeneous "Bengali Muslim." Even as allegiances shifted and the real political world dictated the course of events in modern Bengal, the Bengali language itself became a meeting ground for a great and diverse array of political positions. For instance, Bengali Muslims defined the word *jāti* (translated as nation, ethnicity or even race) in a number of ways in the first half of the twentieth century by Bengali Muslims. This political and cultural plurality is one, I argue, made possible by and seen in the philological domain.

The Emergence of the "Literary Society"

The nineteenth century in Bengal saw a great change in the social fabric of the region. A massive change in earlier property relations, giving rise to a new *zamindari* and trading class centered in Calcutta was accompanied by the proliferation of secular liberal western education. Modern institutions of higher learning and new print mechanisms came into place, giving rise to a vigorous public sphere. The "Bengal Renaissance" was characterized by a spirit of public debate and discussion, of religious and social reform, the championing of women's rights, and new innovations in writing prose and poetry.[6] The apotheosis of this last was of course the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, as I demonstrated in the first chapter. The phenomenon of voluntary association—designated a "society" in colonial Bengal—was very much a product of the newly expanding public sphere in this period. The *Hindoo Patriot* wrote in 1877, "Debating societies, people's associations, religious coteries have sprung into existence wherever there are a few natives to talk and act together."[7] The reasons for which Hindu Bengalis formed associations ranged from intellectual iconoclasm, as in the case for the Hindu College-centered Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, to the mundane business of protecting planter landholder interests such as the Indigo Planters Association, the Landholders' Society, and the British Indian Association. Compared to the multitude of Hindu associations and societies, Muslim ones were fewer in number and more scattered. While the late nineteenth century saw a profusion of Muslim societies across Bengal, the mid-nineteenth century had only a handful based in Calcutta like the inaugural

[6] See David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance; The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Susobhan Chandra Sarkar, *On the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979); and Rammohun Roy, Rajat Kanta Ray, and V. C. Joshi, eds., *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975).
[7] See Rajat Sanyal, *Voluntary Associations and the Urban Public Life in Bengal, 1815-1876: An Aspect of Social History* (Calcutta: Riddhi-India, 1980), 221.

Anjuman–i–Islāmī, established in 1855 by Maulvi Mohammad Mazhar and Abdur Rauf, and Nawab Abdul Latif's Mahomedan Literary Society, established in 1863.[8]

Though the Mahomedan Literary Society never held lectures in Bengali, Abdul Latif recognized the need for instruction in the Bengali language in the mid-nineteenth century. As a prominent civil servant, he was responsible for floating the idea of an Anglo-Persian school in which outgoing students could either opt for further Arabic studies at the Arabic Madrassah at Hooghly or for English education at the erstwhile Hindu College, now Presidency College. However, a *pandit* teaching Bengali was also essential, Latif identified, because "…the Mahomedans of Bengal are sadly deficient in the knowledge of Bengali literature. But, as the Bengali is the language of the courts, their ignorance of it interferes with the proper working of our legal tribunals, as well as their own prospects of entering the public service."[9] While the Urdu-Hindi controversy raged in North India, Abdul Latif was called upon to give evidence before the Education Commission set up by Lord Ripon. Arguing against the proposition that Urdu be made the universal vernacular of Indian Muslims, he argued in favor of Bengali, saying, "my opinion as regards Bengal is that Primary Instruction for the Lower classes of the people, who for the most part are ethically allied to the Hindoos, should be in the Bengali Language—purified, however from the super-structure of Sanskritisim of learned Hindoos."[10] Abdul Latif clearly makes two points here: first, the familiar *ashraf-atrap* distinction when it came to who speaks which language (Bengali or Urdu) in the nineteenth-century Bengali Muslim community. The second, of

[8] The first had its proceedings published in Persian in the periodical *Doorbeen*. The objective of the latter was "to impart useful information to the higher and educated classes of the Mahomedan Community by means of Lectures, Addresses, and Discourses on various subjects in Literature, Science and Society, which are delivered, at the monthly meetings in the Oordoo, Persian, Arabic and English languages. *Abstract of Proceedings of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta At a Meeting Held at the Residence of Moulvie Abdool Luteef Khan Bahadoor On Wednesday, the 23rd November, 1870.* See Abdul Latif, *Autobiography and Other Writings of Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur*, ed. Muhammad Mohar Ali (Chittagong: Mehrub Publications, 1968), 113-138.

[9] Abdul Latif, *Autobiography and Other Writings of Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur*, xix.

[10] Ibid, 194-195.

course, is that while (lower-class) Muslims speak Bengali, it should not emulate or follow the path of Sanskritised Bengali that was being fashioned by the Bengali Hindus.

The 1870s and 1880s witnessed a number of other Muslim organizations cropping up in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal including The Madrassa Literary and Debating Club (1875) and the Central National Mahomedan Association (1878) with branches in Bogra, Chittagong, Khulna, Hooghly, Jahanabad, Midnapore, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Bardhaman, Mymensingh, Pabna, and Malda in the subsequent decade. A decisive moment came with the establishment of the Dhaka Musalman Suhrid Samiti in Dhaka in 1883 by students of Dhaka College. Its initial aim was to spread education amongst Muslim women, but by 1886-87 had expanded its vision to argue that:

> Only education is the only way towards human progress. By great misfortune, the lifeless Muslims of Bengal lack this invaluable thing. The Musalman Suhrid Samiti have embarked on activities which addresses these questions of the present—how the Muslims of Bengal might amend and change their current conditions, how their intolerable economic poverty and social disorder may be removed, how they may be immersed in education and be decorated with the ornaments of knowledge, how they may stand equal to the other communities in Bengal.[11]

By the turn of the century, a few Bengali Muslim writers had risen to some prominence. The first few to make a splash in the metropolis were the novelist and playwright Mir Mosharraf Hossain of Kushtia, the poet Kaikobad of Faridpur, Sheikh Abdur Rahim of Basirhat, Muzzamil Haq of Shantipur. and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi of Chittagong.[12]

By the 1890s, several "Bengali Muslim" periodicals also became popular, including *Hitakarī* (1890, a fortnightly published by Mir Mosharraf Hossain), *Mihir O Sudhākar* (1889,

[11] Wakil Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake Bāṅgāli Musalmāner Cintā O Cetanār Dhārā* (Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1997), 151.

[12] Sheikh Abdur Rahim was the protégé of Ram Madhab Basu, zamindar of Taki, who funded his education and his move to Calcutta. Here, Sheikh Abdur Rahim ran a number of periodicals including *Mihir O Sudhākar, Hāphez*, and *Islām Pracārak.* Mohammad Kazem Ali Qureshi wrote under the name Kaikobad. Born to a lawyer at the Dhaka District Judge Court in 1857, Kaikobad worked as a postmaster and published prolifically from 1870. His most influential historical epic poem was *Mahāśmaśān* (1904), which was based on the Third Battle of Panipat.

a weekly established by Reazuddin Ahmed and Sheikh Abdur Rahim, published by Munshi Fazlur Rahaman's Latiff Press), *Islām Pracārak* (1890, a monthly magazine established by Rezauddin Ahmed), and *Haphez* and *Kohinūr.*[13] At the turn of the century, there were several other periodicals added to the list, of which Mohammad Asad Ali's *Nabanūr* was an important departure in the way it which foregrounded *sāhitya* as an important space for the Hindu and Muslims communities to get to know each other better.[14] A number of well-known Hindu writers wrote for *Nabanūr*, including Kumudranjan Mullick, Jibendrakumar Dutta, Charubala Debi, Rampran Gupta, Atulchandra Mukherjee, Brajasundar Sanyal, Jogendranath Gupta, and Dakshinaranjan Mitra-Majumdar. Well-established Muslim and upcoming younger writers wrote for the journal as well the poet Kaikobad, the philologist Abdul Karim, writers Imdadul Haq and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat, Munshi Ahmad Ali Dewan, Munshi Mohammad Ebrar Ansari, and others. Owned by Mohammad Asad Ali and edited by Syed Emdad Ali, the prefatory note to the inaugural edition begins with a reference to the earliest Bengali Muslim periodicals circulating since the late nineteenth century. These journals in questions are the *Ākhbāre-Eslāmīyā*, *Māsik Mihir*, *Hāphez*, *Kohinūr* and *Laharī*. Why on earth, Syed Emdad Ali asks, do we need yet another Bengali Muslim periodical, when these early attempts met with an untimely and unfortunate end? Syed Emdad Ali affirms that the answer lies in the necessity to serve the mother tongue. The cause is Bengali, the mother tongue of a once glorious community of Bengali Muslims, now in a piteous state of apathy and dissolution. *Sāhitya* is the only remedy for the revival of the Muslim community: "*Sāhitya* is the only staff to move the fallen Muslims and to rescue them. It is only through

[13] "Annual Return of Presses Worked and the Newspapers published in the Bengal Presidency during 1900-1901," *Report on the Administration of Bengal during 1900-1901* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1902), cccxiii. *Sudhākar* (1889, weekly) and *Mihir* (1892) were independently published before they merged.
[14] Published from 143 Karaya Road, the copy of the first year of *Nabanūr* that I accessed at the British Library had the name Subodh Chandra Mitter and the date "20/4/08" inscribed in pencil on it. Subodh Chandra Mitter (if the copy belonged to him) was a well-known attorney who translated Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Debī Caudhuranī* into English in 1946. From contributors and readers, we may conclude that the periodical enjoyed a readership across Hindu-Muslim divides at the turn of the century.

sāhitya that one gets the power of the national life (*jātīya jībaner śakti*). If the Muslim can stand on his own feet again, that can only be through the force of the practice of sāhitya (*sāhitya carcā-labdha śakti*)." [15] The Bengali language would be given a new form and Bengali Muslims must be intent on the formation of a new "*Musalmān Bāṃlā Sāhitya*" enriched by the translation from ancient Arabic and Persian texts. Syed Emdad Ali writes:

> We fervently hope that all respected Hindu writers show empathy towards the Musalmān *jāti* and bound by the goodwill of living together demonstrate their love for Muslims and support *Nabanūr.* On India's invisible canvas of destiny the sorrows and joys of Hindus and Muslims are painted in the same hues; the Hindu now defeats the once-victorious Muslim. The fortunes of India now depend on the mingling of these two great races. *Sāhitya* is the vast arena in which this meeting must happen. The Muslims are the new servers of the Bengali language; the new must always take help from the old. In taking this support a beautiful relationship will be established; this will be the only way to make these two different religious communities one; at least this will increase their *friendship* (*sakhyabhāb*).[16]

Syed Emdad Ali's editorial note gives us some insight into the Hindu-Muslim relations as it existed at the turn of the century, before the first partition of Bengal in 1905 that witnessed significant fallout between Hindus and Muslims.[17] Unfortunately, *Nabanūr* ran only until 1906. However, it marked a literary time and milieu that was noted later by subsequent writers as comprising a distinctive era, the *Nabanūr āmal*.[18]

The Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti: *Sāhitya* as *Sādhanā*

The Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti was set up by a group of young and motivated Bengali Muslim scholars dissatisfied with the structure of the then-reigning academy of the Bengali language, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. On September 4, 1911, Maulavi Mohammad Maniruzzaman, Muhammad Shahidullah, Mohammad Mozammel Huq,

---

[15] Syed Emdad Ali, "Sūcanā," *Nabanūr* 1, no. 1 (B.S. Baiśākh 1310/ May 1903): 1–3.
[16] Ibid, 3.
[17] See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010).
[18] In a review of a biography of Prophet Muhammad written by Bibi Sara Taifur, Kazi Imdadul Haq pointed out that significant women writers were still absent within Bengali Muslim literary circles. Haq indicated that the one writer who had made a great impression on the milieu was Mrs. R.S. Hossain (Begum Rokeya Sakhawat), during the *Nabanūr āmal* (era). Kazi Imdadul Haq, "Svarger Jyotiḥ," *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (May 1918, Baiśākh 1325): 66.

Mohammad Yakub Ali Choudhury, and Mohammad Ahmad Ali, established this philological society in Calcutta, of which Shahidullah was appointed the first secretary.[19] After its first session under the chairmanship of Maulvi Ekin Uddin Ahmad, Shahidullah had to leave Calcutta and the Samiti was no longer active for some time until 1915. On October 3, 1915, the Samiti had a general meeting at the Islam Mission Hall, located on 29 Upper Circular Road, chaired by the Additional Inspector of Schools, Khan Bahadur Mohammad Ahsan Ullah. Shahidullah resigned as secretary, and was replaced by Maulvi Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad and Mozammel Huq. Ultimately, the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti began operations only in 1917.[20]

Despite initial hiccups lasting for almost six years, the Bangiya Musalman Samiti started meeting regularly in 1917 and had six general meetings that year with lectures of considerable interest presented by well known members of the Bengali Muslim literary intelligentsia of the time. These included Maulvi Abdullah Hel Baki's "Bhūgol o Musalmān" ("Geography and the Muslim"); Mohammad Maniruzzaman on "Vaṃgīya Musalmān O Urdu Samasyā" ("Bengali Muslims and the Problem of Urdu"), and Maulvi Abul Hussain on "Jātīya Kalyāṇe Matṛbhāṣā" ("The Mother Tongue for the National Good"). The big annual session of that year was supremely successful, held at the Moslem Institute, adjacent to the Calcutta Madrassa, on a wintry December evening. Attended by lovers of literature from Bengal and Assam, the hall was apparently overflowing. In February 1918, it was decided that a mouthpiece for the organization was required and Imdadul Haq, Muhammad Shahidullah, Mozammel Haq, Moinuddin Hossain, Reyazuddin Ahmad, and the young Communist Muzaffar Ahmed were on the editorial board. At the same meeting, it was

[19] "Vaṃgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā," year 1, issue 1, (Baiśākh 1325 B.S., May 1918): 72.
[20] I have tried to reconstruct the early institutional history of the organization by going through the editorial sections and advertisements of its quarterly periodicals. The final editorial section called the *Samiti Saṃvād (News of The Association)* includes *Vivaraṇī* (Descriptions), *Kārya-Nirvāhak Committee* (Organizational Committee), *Niyamāvalī* (Rules), a list of donors and sponsors, and finally, a list of books acquired for the library.

decided that a large office space would be rented on 47/2 Mirzapur Street in Calcutta for a library and reading room. The quarterly was intended for publishing the writing of upcoming writers, providing a space for established Bengali Muslim authors; the Samiti would on the whole retrieve Bengali Muslim literary archives for contemporaneous debate and discussion.[21]

The inaugural edition of the *Bangīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* announced that the twentieth century was an age of progress. Bengali Muslims also wanted to aspire to such a *jātīya unnati* (national progress) through a *jātīya sāhitya* (national literature). Sāhitya, the editors claim, is the "lever" of progress. The Samiti itself had a few ends in mind in this respect. First, the past had to be extricated from oblivion. Second, the Bengali Muslims required *a jātīya itihās,* a national history. This *itihāsa* would work as a bridge of letters (*akṣara-setu*). Extending that analogy, this bridge had raw materials (*upakaraṇ*), but then one needed the mechanics. The past was lying around one in a raucous silence waiting to speak and to be heard; the *pīrkathā*, the old ruins, genealogies, folk sayings, ancient manuscripts. But: *tāhāder sratā kothāy* (Where is their audience?) The manifesto: *Āmrā cāi sei sakal kāhinī śunite o śonāte* (We want to hear and make heard all these stories).[22] A new and more inclusive *communitas* must be formulated extending the limits of the older one; Muslims must stake a claim on Bengal and recover their place within the Bengali imaginary. Hindus are the neighbors (*pratibeśī*), a good account must be given of oneself to them so that their unfavorable opinions (*hīn dhāraṇā*) disappear. This, too, is the task of the new *sāhitya*: to achieve a friendship and fraternity (*saubhrātra)* with the Hindus. A new picture of Bengali Muslim society must emerge within plays, novels, and poetry, a *samāj* that includes the

[21] The Bengali Muslim intellectuals associated with the Samiti were, for the most part, already well-known publishers, editors, writers and lawyers. Prominent editors included Mohammad Akram Khan (of "Mohāmmadī" and "Al Eslām"), Mujibur Rahman (of the English "Musalman"), Mohammad Maniruzzaman (of the English "Soltan"), Shaikh Abdur Rahim (of "Moslem Hitaiṣī"). Not one but two Mozammel Haqs were part of the organizational committee; both were writers.

[22] Muhammad Shahidullah and Mohammad Mozammel Haq, "Nivedan," *Bangīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (April-May 1918/Baiśākh 1325): 1–2.

virtues and variety of all classes of people including peasants, gentlemen, householders, *fakirs,* wives, mothers and children. The present reality must be molded according to ideals (*ādarśa*), and the everyday realm of the private must gradually trickle into a reworked literary public sphere: "We now work for the cause of constructing society (*samāj- gaṭhan*)…We want—plays, novels and poetry that show the beauty and sweetness of our familial lives (*pāribārik jīban*)."[23] The editorial note ends with the declaration that this *communitas* must be extended to include many Bengali Muslims hidden away from the metropolitan centers of culture and knowledge who must also be given a sense of community to belong to:

> Hidden away from the eyes of people many poets, novelists, philosophers and historians live as a germinating seed in Bengali Muslim society. If given a friendly (*anukūl*) environment they may turn into great shade-giving trees. Many Muslim littérateurs are immersed in the *silent pursuit of sāhitya.* These early efforts go unfulfilled because they are not manifested in the eyes of the masses. We want to make audible this *silent sāhitya.*[24]

There is an implicit understanding that there is a large and as yet undifferentiated mass of people who are emerging into a new community of reading and writing publics; but it is also a group of people for whom *sāhitya* is a private *sādhanā.* The word *sādhanā,* which recurs again and again over the years with *sāhitya,* is only inadequately translated as "pursuit" and is closer to the word "worship." Standing between work and worship, between labor and devotion, *sāhitya* can be glossed as an act of devotional labor that is not quite part of the public sphere. In its first year of existence, the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti was precariously located between the public (an informal society of likeminded intellectuals) and the private (inasmuch the reader or the upcoming *sāhityik* cannot be fully conceptualized as tangible entities). This can be contrasted with the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, which had a very clear conception of its members and audience and whose lines of inclusion and exclusion

[23] "Nivedan," 1.
[24] Ibid, 2.

were more clearly demarcated. A list of readers and members are included at the end of the first year's edition. Despite a number of Hindu contributors, there are no Hindu patrons.

Hence, the first Chairman's address delivered by Shahidullah begins with a reference to the conflicted linguistic predicament of the Bengali Muslim. Torn between a multiplicity of languages—Arabic (the language of religion), Persian (the language of courtliness), Urdu (the connecting language of Indian Muslims), English (the state language) and Bengali (the mother tongue)—the Bengali Muslim is caught in a tornado of languages (*bhāṣār ghūrṇipāk*). His solution is to declare the preeminence of Bengali as mother tongue by introducing it as the first medium of instruction in both madrasas and public schools. He rues the fact that a certain section within Bengali Muslims still conceives Urdu as the mother tongue that is evident in current discussions within periodicals from time to time. It is unfortunate, he laments, that you cannot explain *what* a mother tongue is to such sections like a simple law of geometry: "Bengali is the language of our conversations, our joys and loves, and of our thought and imagination."[25] In short, Bengali is the language of the everyday experience. He elaborates on language as affective *experience* even further:

> Which other language can enter your ears to go directly into your marrow and linger to agitate your soul? What other syllables of a language can make the exile's ears thirsty? Which other language's beautiful faculties of imagination can paint pictures of enchantment within the mind? Whose heart is stone enough to not awaken in love for the mother tongue?[26]

For Shahidullah, national identity and progress is connected to expressing oneself in the mother tongue, and he illustrates this with other examples from around the world. Iran, he argues, was colonized by the Arabs but only took religion and a few words, not their language. England found its identity when Wycliffe translated the Bible from Latin into English. Germany, too, found its own national life when it embraced the German language and no longer designated it as barbaric. Closer to home, North Indian Muslims (a minority)

[25] "Dvitīya Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Sammilaner Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," *Bangīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (April-May 1918/Baiśākh 1325), 5.
[26] Ibid.

are ahead of the Bengali Muslims, who are demographically larger, because they translate Islamic texts into Urdu and cultivate a vernacular life. Meanwhile, several of the *ulama* in Bengal have a preference *against* vernacular translation and call such attempts *kafir,* going against the teachings of the *Koran* itself, which privileges the *svajātīya bhāṣā.*[27] Language is tied to land. It configures the very basis of belonging. And so, Shahidullah says, after the Muslim conquest of Bengal, Muslims realized that "this always green and bounteous land was not merely for conquest but for work, enjoyment, life and death…from then, Muslims knew that Bengali is needed."[28] When Persian was the state language, and the Brahmins were intent on preserving the sanctity of Sanskrit as the language of knowledge, Muslim patron-kings allowed the development of the vernacular. The Bengali manuscripts composed by Muslims, in which Persian words trickled in, came to be known as the *puthi sāhitya* eventually. This is the "pure *sāhitya* of the Bengali Muslims."[29] Had the historic Battle of Plassey not occurred, the normal course of the Bengali language would go the *puthi* way. But history, Shahidullah points out, is a series of infinite vicissitudes, full of ups (*utthān*) and downs (*patan*).[30] To construct the Bengali *jātī*, Hindus need the Muslims and the Muslims need the Hindus. He pleads for an ideal *communitas* in which language unites and not divides: "In light of this ideal, Brother Musalmān, in the hundred obstacles against our unity, do not make language one of them; and brother Hindu, in your plays and novels do not vilify Muslims by painting dark portraits and bring agony to their already broken hearts!"[31]

In many of these philological addresses, two common tropes emerge over and again. First, there are references to the role of language in constructing political communities and

[27] Ibid, 5-6.
[28] Ibid, 8.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Shahidullah lyrically describes the circularity of history, referring to the history of Hindu-Muslim relations as an almost Boethian Rota Fortunae, or the *bhāvacakra* in which periods of friendship and antagonism alternate over a longue durée.
[31] Ibid, 9.

national identities across the world. Hence, an implicit internationalism is evident in the politics that philology gives rise to.

Second, the "broken-hearted" Muslim is constantly evoked invoking a sense of the personal and the affective within public gatherings. This sentiment was disseminated in two ways. In one section of Bengali Muslims, it strengthened the resolve to embrace Bengali more wholeheartedly. Another opposing faction favored a turn to the Urdu. Syed Emdad Ali articulates their position in another influential essay, "Baṅga Bhāṣā O Musalmān," which was widely republished in other periodicals. He cites the example of Maulvi Sadek Khan, who wrote:

> I have read Bengali as my vernacular up to the BA examination and from my own bitter experience I say, and I am sure, hundreds of Muhamedan students both of schools and colleges will endorse my opinion that Bengali textbooks are nauseously distasteful to Muhamedan sentiments. Some of the books bristle with Hindu mythological allusions and Sanskrit phraseology. So that in mastering them a knowledge of Sanskrit is also absolutely necessary. I might refer you to such books as Srikanta and Kalidas of the BA standard. The disadvantage is absolutely keenly felt by all Muhamedan students and it is easy to see that it will be hundred times increased as soon as Bengali becomes the medium of higher education. Books on different branches of the western arts and science will have to be rendered into Bengali and the resources of their language being inadequate, hundreds and thousands of Sanskrit words will be imported with the result that Muhamedan students would find it hopelessly difficult to learn.[32]

This is, Syed Emdad Ali argues, an impasse. It is true that the regulated language, imposed on students top down from the educational and cultural centers, leave the Bengali Muslim students at a disadvantage. They cannot relate to what they must learn; it is divorced from the reality of their very experience and existence. To forcibly inject Arabic and Persian words into the language is not the solution to this problem. Language must function as the great unifier: "It must increase the feelings of intimacy (*hṛdyatā*) and friendship (*sakhya*

[32] Syed Emdad Ali, "Baṅga Bhāṣā O Musalmān," *Bangīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 2 (Śrābaṇa 1325/ July 1918): 79–87.

bhāb).” So the two *dhārā*s of the language must flow together as one, the Gaṅgā and Yamunā.[33]

The Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti expanded its scope later that year and had its third meeting as a big summit at Chittagong (*Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Sammilaner Tṛtīya Adhibeśan*), where Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad and Mohammad Akram Khan delivered two plenary lectures. The editors note that the first and second meetings had been on a much smaller scale in Calcutta, featuring a handful of friends and intimates who were members of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti.[34] However, it was time to branch out to the *sāhityik*s and *sāhityāmodī*s of other parts of Bengal. The venue decided upon was Chittagong, but the local organizers there and the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti ran into some discord over the delegate fee, which was ultimately subsidized by the eminent lawyer from Chittagong, Maulvi Abdus Sattar.[35] During the *Adhibeśan*, letters from absent members and well-wishers were read out, including messages from Syed Emdad Ali, Abdul Gafur Siddiqui, Serajul Islam, Rai Bahadur Mukundadeb Mukhopadhyay, Brajendrakumar Tantraratna, Mukundanath Ghosh, Chunilal Basu, Charuchandra Mitra, Manilal Gangopadhyay, and others.[36] Perhaps the most important development in this meeting was the drafting of a letter of petition published in their periodical. This *Ābedan Patra*—with a direct plea for crowd funding in order to rent a bigger house for the Samiti—clearly pointed out that *sāhitya,* so important for *jātīya* progress, was a personal responsibility for every individual Bengali.

Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśarad and Mohammad Akram Khan, the two main speakers at the conference, both spoke on Bengali Muslim identity and *sāhitya* but in two different modalities. Abdul Karim’s lecture was on the history of Chittagong, the once great city of Islamabad, meeting ground of all the great religious and cultural currents that had come to

[33] Ibid, 84-87.
[34] “Samiti Saṃvād: Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Sammilan, Tṛtīya Adhibeśan- Caṭṭagrām,” *Bangīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 4 (Māgh BS 1325/January 1918): 379–92.
[35] Ibid, 380.
[36] Ibid, 381.

Bengal.[37] His was a vision of the past characterized by a syncretic unity of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. The unique and particular language of Chittagong bore witness to these many crosscurrents: "Since ancient time Chittagong has been the meeting ground of many peoples (*nānā jātīr saṅgam sthal*). Hence its language shows words derived from many languages. The Hindu Rāḍh language, Muslim Arabic, Persian and Urdu words, (Afghan as well), the indigenous languages of the hill people, the languages of mercantile Armenian, French, Jews—Ālāol refers to them in the *Padmāvatī.* English and Portuguese are there too."[38] The spoken language of Chittagong, Abul Karim contends, is so different from written Bengali that many do not understand it and hence designate it as inferior. Its uniqueness as a language resides, in his opinion, in the fact that Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists all use the same dialect comprising words of diverse origins: "By listening to speech, you cannot determine anyone's *jātī* easily."[39] This Chittagong, with its curious language, was also home to some of Bengal's greatest literature. Waxing eloquent on the natural beauty and wilderness of Chittagong, which arises from its once strategic and now peripheral position bordering sea and mountain, Abdul Karim cites the many poetic traditions that had developed here. The tradition of *sarigān* had enchanted none other than the popular poet, Nabinchandra Sen. Abdul Karim then speaks of how he had spent years searching for *puthi*s that would disprove that many of the popular songs and ballads merely circulated orally in the past. That apart, he cites the example of the poet Ālāol, born eight miles north of Chittagong in a village called Jalalpur.[40] Ālaol, Daulat Kāzī, and Saiyad Soltān start off the list of a hundred and ten poets that he had retrieved from oblivion in the last two decades. Bengali literature, its Muslim contributors, and the cultural friendship of Hindus and Muslims

[37] Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad, "Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Sammelan Abhyarthanā-Samitir Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 4 (Māgh 1325/January February 1919): 254–94. For a discussion on Chittagong's poetics and the philological appraisal of Ālāol, see Thibaut d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[38] Ibid, 298.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid, 293.

was, according to Abdul Karim, no new development.[41] In the concluding section of his long lecture (*Musalmān Sāhityer Bhāṣā O Gati*) he reminds his audience that Muslims have historically contributed to the Bengali language as much as the Hindus. Moreover, while Hindus shrunk the contours of the language as they moved into modernity, the ancestors of Bengali Muslims had realized that "We cannot merely restrict our *sāhitya* to our own *jātī,* we must keep the doors open for other *jātī*s. The necessity for exchange and traffic with other *jātī*s is even more necessary for us than it was for them. Our *sāhitya* must be understandable for all *jātī*s."[42]

This contemplative and retrospective tone marked a great difference from Mohammad Akram Khan's more practical address.[43] Akram Khan was a journalist who edited two influential periodicals *Al-Eslām* and later, the *Mohammadī,* and also a man entirely disenchanted with the Indian National Congress, which he left for the Muslim League. Between 1918 and 1925, however, he participated in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements, and he extended support to Chittaranjan Das and the Bengal Pact. Addressing the *Matṛbhāṣār Sebak O Sāhityānurāgī Bandhugaṇ* ("Friends who serve the mother tongue and love literature"), he—ever the pragmatist, politically located in the present—speaks of the practical, applied problems of philology. Perhaps one of the first to broach the different roles of *jātīya* and *rāṣṭra bhāṣā* (national and state language) vis-à-vis the more commonly discussed *mātṛbhāṣā* (mother tongue), he highlights *jātī* for the Muslim is not contingent on clan, trade or country—it is religious. Hence, the *jātīya* language is not Bengali and can only be Arabic.[44] In a section of the address called "*Svātantra Keno?*" he recollected that some time ago, a Hindu nationalist leader had asked him at a political meeting why Bengali Muslims were trying to establish a "separate electorate" in the domain of literature.

[41] Ibid, 292-294.
[42] Ibid, 292.
[43] Mohammad Akram Khan, "Tṛtīya Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Sammilan Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 4 (Māgh 1325/ January-February 1919): 295–317.
[44] Ibid, 308.

Mohammad Akram's Khan response to this was that it was required for the benefit of Bengali literature.[45] Unlike Abdul Karim and Abdul Gafur Siddiqui's philological appraisal of past literary traditions, Akram Khan's stance was more forward-looking and directed to the present. Translations from great Islamic texts must be embarked upon for the enrichment of the Bengali language. The contemporary trends in literature on the whole favored realism—and the new literary form of the novel that tried to portray society as it is. The Bengali Muslim must return to idealism—in the spirit of Voltaire, Rousseau, Bismarck, Tolstoy, Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Jamaluddin, and others in order to infuse society with new hope. The self-conscious Akram Khan adds, however, "Can the mullah cross the boundaries of the masjid?"[46] Without a formal education, but trained as a *maulvi,* Akram Khan's uneasy positioning between Islamic and Western liberal spheres reflects an interesting subject-position. In this lecture itself, he criticizes the Bengali *ālem* (*ulama*) for often rejecting the Bengali language as a vehicle of religious instruction. Neither, he contends, is their Urdu very good. He notes with sadness that the *ulama* of previous generations were multilingual polymaths with a keen interest in the worlds outside their rigid structures of religious learning. He also interestingly gives us a history of what he claims was the first *patrikā* of the Bengali Muslims, the *Mohammadī* of Maulvi Kazi Abdul Khalek, established in 1877 and published from Shilaidaha.[47] This short lived periodical was revived by Akram Khan briefly in 1907, but was only fully functional again from 1927 right up to 1947 before moving to East Pakistan.[48] Akram Khan's vision of *sāhitya* distinguishes the *communitas* most categorically from the *realpolitik* perhaps because of his own positioning within these two worlds:

[45] Ibid, 302.
[46] Ibid, 301.
[47] Ibid, 306.
[48] Discontinued briefly during the partition, it found new life in East Pakistan from 1949-1970. Israil Khan, *Purbabāṅgālār Sāmayik Patra* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1999), 30-212.

> To conclude, I offer a sweet ending (*madhureṇa samāpāyet*)—the necessity of Hindu-Muslim unity. Hindus and Muslims are the two children of Bengal. That they can embrace each other in the domain of politics is a happy tiding. This is desirable, though they do so for their own self-interests. However, the union that the Hindus and Muslims will have in the field of *sāhitya* will not be a relationship of self-interest. It will be built on profound foundations; it will be pure. It is only through *sāhitya* that Hindus and Muslims will know each other as brothers, and we have begun this process…to that great mine (*ākar*) towards which run all words, all languages, all literature, all feelings, all rhymes, all rhythms, all melodies, all voices, all songs, to that *ākar* [Allah] I send a prayer for strength and success.[49]

The Muslim Sahitya Samaj: A Vision of Renaissance

The Muslim Sahitya Samaj, established in Dhaka in 1926, was a group of scholars based in Dhaka who wanted to bring about a *nabajāgaraṇ* or a renaissance in Bengali Muslim society. Its main organizational and ideological proponents were Kazi Abdul Wadud, who taught at Dhaka Intermediate College, Abul Husain, who was a professor of economics at Dhaka University, and Kazi Motahar Hossain, who taught physics and a number of other students at these institutions. Muhammad Shahidullah was the chairman of this organization, which was a different kind of organization from the usual literary societies that preceded it.[50] For one, it mainly comprised young professors and students of Dhaka University and Dhaka Intermediate College. Second, they named their journal *Śikhā* (flame, related to the burning desire for knowledge), a choice that was, as Mustapha Nurul Islam notes, a departure from even the most "progressive" periodicals that were active at the time with conspicuously Muslim names. *Śikhā* was one of those rare periodicals that desired to reach out to both Hindu and Muslim communities, and named itself accordingly like the nineteenth-century *Mihir O Sudhākar* and Nazrul's periodicals, *Navayug, Lāṅgal*, and *Gaṇabāṇī.*[51]

[49] Ibid, 316-317.
[50] The editor and compiler Mustapha Nurul Islam makes this point in his introduction to a compilation of articles that he selected and published from the society's periodicals and proceedings. See Mustapha Nurul Islam, *Śikhā Samagra, 1927-1931* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2003).
[51] *Śikhā Samagra,* 7.

But the most distinctive trait, compared to other periodicals, was *Śikhā*'s lack of advertisements. Its main purpose as the mouthpiece of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj was to publish the various addresses and discussions held within the institution all year. The inaugural edition of *Śikhā* announced that the task of the institution was "to cultivate thought (*cintā carcā karā*)". The first annual edition of *Śikhā,* edited by Abul Hossain, comprised contributions that spanned a number of themes pertaining to the state of literary activity and education amongst the Bengali Muslims. The necessity was, the essays pointed out, a new kind of *sāhitya* that would envisage and build a future for the community. As A. F. Rahaman explains in the first welcome address of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj:

> I have heard that the *parādhīn jāti* (Subject Race) has no politics. Whether this saying is true or not you all can decide. But I have seen that in our country there is nothing but politics and that too only of a certain kind. We are intent on breaking something into fragments, but have no enthusiasm for constructing something anew. We are so busy at peering at our masters with a binocular that we do not pay attention to what we are ourselves becoming…because our social life is so aimless, our literary activities are also indifferent. History shows us that when a race is on the path to progress, *sāhitya* had made its life force (*jībanī śakti)* bloom. Literature is the identifier of this life force. If you have something to say, you do not lack words. And if you have nothing much to say, you cannot create literature. The aim of life is not to read the history of the world and pass some examinations. History is the root of knowledge. A knowledgeable person does not just experience knowledge for himself. To spread knowledge or truth; to construct community, country, world with ideals of truth; that is human work. For this, we need *sāhitya.*[52]

This is, of course, a reference to the current state of anticolonial politics. It can be argued that the "politics…of a certain kind" refers to the interest-based *realpolitik* of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Against this background, the Chairman's Address invokes the question of a new and ideological *sāhitya* as foundational for the Bengali Muslim community. He first speaks of the question of a disputed mother tongue. Though more than half of the Bengali population is Muslim, nonetheless a section of a new

[52] The word "politics" occurs in the English. A.F. Rahaman, "Abhyarthanā Samitir Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," *Śikhā* 1 (1333 BS/April 1927). The first year was edited by Abul Hosen.

aspirational middle-class desires to identify with Urdu as a means to *śarāphat.* Urdu is, after all, the language of the upper classes, the *ashraf.* Yet, how can one abandon one's mother tongue, asks Tasaddak Ahmad.[53] Ahmad explains that a certain section claims that the Bengali Muslims speak: "a mixture of Bengali, Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages (*miśra bhāṣā*)," and it is this language that "should be the language of our *sāhitya.*"[54] He disagrees with this proposition, saying that the *punthi* literature could not emerge out of its popular and cheap print origins and be embraced universally. Such literature remains constricted within Battala and is not universally beloved (*adaraṇīya*) or imitated (*anukaraṇīya*).[55] *Sāhitya* must have some kind of universal appeal, and Bengali *sāhitya* is not the sole property of the Hindus (*sāhitya jinisṭā kārur ekceṭiyā sampatti nahe; sakaler i tāhāte samān adhikār*).[56] Historically, the Muslims had resisted the social transformation of the nineteenth century and held on to the pre-colonial past. He argues that, in this process of denial and resistance, the Bengali Muslims had wasted a lot of time in embracing the tools of constructing a national (*jātīya*) life.[57]

And so, Tasaddak Ahmad argues, the primary tool of constructing a *jātīya* life and selfhood is *sāhitya.* The long nineteenth-century neglect of Bengali literature had resulted in a condition wherein Bengali Muslims had no literature of their own, which reflected "our religion, our history, our community, our customs, our behaviors, laws and traditions," nothing that marked out difference from the other community. And yet, "Bengali literature is our only literature."[58] *Sāhitya,* along with all forms of artistic expression, is the means of reaching out to other human beings—to live together in a community. Language is the means

[53] Tasaddak Ahmad, "Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ, *Śikhā* 1 (1333 BS/April 1927): 7-16.
[54] Ibid, 8.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 9.
[58] Ibid.

through which humanity makes itself understood, cognizable (*bodhagamya*).[59] This common striving towards comprehensibility is accompanied by efforts to build community. Hindus have contributed a substantial amount to the language; now it is the historical turn of the Muslims who have to catch up to the Hindus. It was only then that Bengali would be the common mother tongue, nourishing and sustaining Hindus and Muslims equally (*Takhan āmrā Bāṃālī Hindu o Muslim dui bhāi eki bhāṣā-jananīr pījūṣdhārā pān kariya balīyān haiba*).[60] The crux of the Hindu-Muslim problem, according to Tasaddak Ahmad, is the great chasm of unfamiliarity between the two communities. Muslims knew about Hindus to a much greater degree than Hindus knew about Muslims. It was only through *sāhitya* that Muslims could give Hindus an insight into their own distinctive identity, yet find common ground:

> We might have dispute in the political domain, we may find no unity in religion, but if we are all something close to human then as we get to know each other well, we will feel faith and respect for each other. We can achieve this coming together only in *sāhitya.* It will never be realized in any political pact.[61]

What does this new *sāhitya* necessitate? For one, Islam must be the guiding force that shapes the new literary enterprise. The past is irrecoverable, yet it can provide some kind of inspiration. The past that must be recovered is not one in which Muslims were *nawabs* and kings, not one of mere political power, but one of spiritual greatness. That past is one that had a leader such as Prophet Muhammad, a past that produced texts such as the Koran-Majid. Moreover, Ahmad now proposes a radical revisionism in the Islam practiced by Bengal Muslims. Attacking ritualistic practice like *milād,* he advocates that Bengali Muslim bring Islam closer to everyday life. This incorporation of the highest ideals of religious and social Islam can only be done, he argues, through language.[62] Arabic and Persian words have, he says, historically been included in the Bengali language, making certain quotidian words

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, 10.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid, 12-13.

commonsensical. If someone now used Sanskrit words instead, such as "*pīṭhikā* for table, *raṅgamañca* for theatre, *calaccitra pradarśanī* for cinema and *dharmādhikaraṇa* for *ādālat* (court)," then they would surely be laughed at. However, the artificial idiom developed in the *maktab-madrāsā*s was not preferable either. The work of making the everyday life of Muslims natural and spontaneous as it was in real life reflected in *sāhitya* has to be done with great dexterity (*nipuṇatā*).[63]

The annual report for the year (*Bārṣik Vivaraṇī*) announced how and why the Muslim Sahitya Samaj was set up in the first place; the *jāti* (nation) and *sāhitya* were caught in a vicious paradox: "The *jāti* that has no literature has no life force—then again, the *jāti* that lacks life force also lacks the ability to create literature."[64] Hence, the Muslim Sahitya Samaj was set up to counter this vicious cycle of lifelessness by creating a "hunger for *sāhitya*" that in turn would reinvigorate the *jāti*.[65] The editor quotes William James: "The renovation of nations begins always at the top among the reflective members of the state and spreads outward and downward."[66] He makes it clear that some thoughtful citizens must revive society from top down and achieve mobilization by spreading their thought and ideology (*cintādhārā*). And this must be disseminated in the language of the masses: "*Ār se cintādhārā prakāś karte habe bipul janasaṃgher bhāṣāy*."[67] Abdul Kader had taken the initiative to gather some young littérateurs, who had begun operations on January 19, 1926, under the leadership of Muhammad Shahidullah, further aided by a Hindu Brahmin, Charu Bandyopadhyay.[68] The *Vivaraṇī* of the first year further described how the third meeting of the Society was held to commemorate the life and work of the recently deceased poet, Kazi

[63] Ibid, 13.
[64] "Bārṣik Vivaraṇī," *Śikhā* 1 (1333 BS/April 1927): 21.
[65] Ibid, 21.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid, 21-22.

Imdadul Haq.[69] The discussions held at the Society oscillated between the more literary and more immediately political; in 1926, we see two big sessions held on a reevaluation of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, *Rabīndrakāvyer Svarūp (The Form of Rabindranath's Poetry*) and the question of concessions to Indian Muslims respectively.[70] Hemanta Kumar Sarkar further spoke of the difficulties of *sāhityasṛṣṭi* (literary creation) in the context of the anticolonial political milieu of the time. Arguing that the *jātīya samasyā* was neglected in the light of the larger and all-consuming *rāṣṭra samasyā* (the problem of the State), newness in literature was suffering. The reigning literary giants, Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chatterjee, were further far distanced from the lives of the working class.[71]

In a lecture published in the first issue of *Śikhā* as "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā (The Problem of Bengali Muslim Literature)," Kazi Abdul Wadud announced the problem of *sāhitya* as the foundational of all the problems in the Bengali Muslim community. Speaking with a bitter irony, he says:

> Some critics noting the poverty of self expression of Bengali Muslims desire to ask—where do we have the time to judge Bengali Muslims' problem of literature, economic problems, educational problems etc. in various ways? The whole society is a problem![72]

The Muslim Sahitya Samaj had been discussing social and political issues of concern to the Bengali Muslims at the time, including political developments within the Congress, Muslim League and the Swarajya Party; pan-Islam and the role of Turkey in the wake of the Khilafat movement; and enumerating new hermeneutic practices of Islam. In most of these discussions, *sāhitya* emerges as a metonym for all other political concerns. A lack of literary innovation and newness seems to stand in for an overall political stagnation and impasse. Kazi Abdul Wadud—the foremost ideologue of the organization—was in search of common

[69] Ibid, 23.
[70] Ibid, 23-24. The question of reservations or "concessions" arose in the wake of the Bengal Pact initiated by Chittaranjan Das's Swarajya Party, which he began with Motilal Nehru and Husain Shahid Suhrawardy.
[71] Ibid, 25-26.
[72] Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā," *Śikhā* 1 (1333 BS/April 1927): 28–37.

ground between Hindus and Muslims. He reminds the audience that the long nineteenth century had indeed witnessed a great deal of rebellion and resistance against the imperialist ambitions of the British, primarily evidenced in the popular indigo rebellions. A large number of Bengali Muslim peasantry had participated in the popular protests, that in turn was immortalized in the figure of the noble Torab by playwright Dinabandhu Mitra in *Nīldarpan.*[73] Along with this vast number of unnamed peasantry lay the contributions, in kind, of the great donors of Bengali Muslim society like the *nawab*s of Dhaka, which also lay unacknowledged.[74] The literary crisis and lack of a representative Muslim *sāhitya*, Abdul Wadud diagnoses, is not meant to be a status quo. It is, in part, reflective of a larger social crisis, one in which processes of historical memory and self-forgetting mirror a lacuna in the way that the social life of the community is organized (*tār jībanāyojane baḍa rakamer truṭi upasthit hayeche*).[75] The big factor to reckon with in the everyday life of the Bengali Muslims, at this historic juncture, was Islam. How could Islam be thought anew in the everyday?[76] The great social legacies of a rigid and inherited Islam were clear—the confinement of women, execration against usury, problems with the fine arts, and thinking again within the strict boundaries of strictures set by the Koran and Hadith. All these traditional modes of thought and behavior had to be reevaluated in the context of the present historical and political moment.[77] For Abdul Wadud, the central tenet of Islam resided in the message of the eternal liberation of the indivisible human mind (*Islāmer śreṣṭha satya touhīd mānabcitter cira muktir bāṇī*). Human beings are hindered by the chains of their actions and ideals ("Every idea is a prison, every heaven is a prison"). It is worth standing in front of these shackles and recollecting the message that "there is none worthy of worship other than

[73] Ibid, 29.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid, 30.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Allah"; equality is thus the eternal companion on this path of Unitarian liberation and progress.[78] Bengali Muslims had to rethink Islam within the context of *humanism*:

> The men and women who live in Muslim society are not merely Muslims, they are human—they are related to the human beings who live in other countries and profess other faiths. In this human society spanning the world, various hopes, desires, efforts and futility give rise to a message. Man is audacious, he has eternal hunger; he is not even willing to accept the bonds of this inanimate world, so much for shackling the worlds of thought…*freedom of thought, emancipation of intellect*, not only should these be a fundamental right, this is the transport provided by God for his life path.[79]

There were a number of lectures at the Society in its first year of existence on various crises faced by Bengali Muslims. These included "Bāṃālī Musalmāner Artha Samasyā," "Bāṃālī Musalmāner Artha Sāmājik Galad," "Śikṣa Samasyā," and "Bāṃālī Musalmāner Śikṣa Samasyā" in the inaugural issue. However, *sāhitya* works as a metonym for these various other political issues, which are resolvable to some measure by a humanistic and hermeneutic revolution of sorts. The *Buddhi Mukti Āndolan* was by no means an atheistic movement that rejected Islam as the central force of Bengali Muslim society. It laid out a path for reexamining Islam through a modern political and rationalist lens, one that would borrow from political influences across the world to establish a common humanity. In an article called "Āmāder Nabajāgaraṇ O Śariyat (Our Renaissance and the Shariat)," Abdur Rashid explains that the title itself is a paradox that would invite wrath from several quarters; surely it was a provocation to the *ulama*. However, he explains: "*Śariyat* is our religious command. For mental and physical discipline, such commands are necessary and I am sure that if we investigate this we will find scientific reason behind these strictures. The thing is, with change in time we have new necessities; we can thus keep the deep meaning of the *Śariyat* intact and still make it useful for the everyday modern life."[80] Revisionist articles such as these made the Muslim Sahitya Samaj, and especially Abdul Wadud, come under

[78] Ibid, 31.
[79] Ibid, 33.
[80] Abdur Rashid, "Āmāder Nabajāgaraṇ O Śariyat," *Śikhā* 1 (1333 BS/April 1927): 93–99.

heavy attack from more conservative sections. When Abdul Wadud published his book *Nabaparyāya,* Akram Khan wrote a review in the *Mohammadī*: "Professor Kazi Abdul Wadud *sāheb* of the Dhaka University has published a book called *Nabaparyāya.* In this book and in the essay 'Sammohita Musalmān' he has expressed views that are not to be proved with logic, groundless in terms of history and fatal for religion…in the name of a 'new epoch' Kazi *sāheb* is trying to bring about a calamity."[81]

In the second year of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj's existence, Kazi Abdul Wadud delivered the lecture "Bāṃlār Jāgaraṇ," in which he first fleshed out his concept of the idea of renaissance as applicable to contemporary Bengal, the renaissance or *jāgaraṇ* (awakening) that ushered in modernity by the Bengali Hindus. He begins the lecture by countering the proposition that the intellectual awakening constituted by the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance was influenced by European thought and politics. In other words, according to him, the Bengal Renaissance did not unfold in the shadow of Europe:

> The trajectory of our thoughts and actions range from Raja Rammohun Roy's *Braḥmajñana* to Hindu Muslim riots over cow slaughter, the West's from the deist Encyclopaedists to Bolshevism; if we glance at the two it is evident that our country carries the burden of its own *karma,* out country is glaringly different from the West—this difference is simultaneously happy and sorrowful. It is happy because we get a sense of our distinct essence (*biśiśṭa sattva*), not merely an echo of Europe like an uncivilized or half-civilized race. It is also a source of sorrow because the character that emerges from our *jātīya* thought and deeds is not the fearless modern character enriched by the limitless experiences of the pasts, it is still a medieval human character controlled by the scriptures (*śastra*s).[82]

The reawakening of Bengal, argues Abdul Wadud, was ushered in by the inimitable figure of Rammohun Roy, who was exposed to modern European thought only in his late youth. Before that, he was trained in the syncretic and great intellectual traditions of the Hindus and Muslims, having known the three classical languages of Arabic, Persian, and

[81] Mohammad Akram Khan, "Nabaparyāya nā Naba-Paryay," *Mohammadī* 1, no. 5 (Phālgun 1334/ March 1928).
[82] Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Bāṅgālār Jāgaraṇ," *Śikhā* 2 (BS 1335/1928): 26-36. Kazi Motahar Hossain edited the second year of Śikhā.

Sanskrit equally well. This textual knowledge, however, did not prevent him from making ethnographic forays in North India and even Tibet.[83] Here, influenced by the great religious and spiritual movements of early modern India—Bhakti, Sufi, and Sikhism—he renewed his energy to question the scriptural knowledge handed down by Hinduism. In his sense, he was the last of the greats who had questioned India from within itself standing at the tail end of the eighteenth century; Nanak, Kabir, Dadu, Akbar, Abul Fazl, and Dara Shikoh. Rammohun's greatest strength lay, Abdul Wadud points out, in his ability to engage with different religious and intellectual traditions with intimate knowledge of languages and texts in each of these. He argued with Hindus on the corpus of the *śastra*s, with Muslims on the Koran, and with Christians on the Bible in Greek and Hebrew. Rammohun was in many respects, the ideal Renaissance man—as the social theorist Agnes Heller has defined it, the characteristic feature of the Renaissance Man is *versatility,* but a versatility that shapes itself according to *social needs*.[84] To Abdul Wadud, however, Rammohun Roy was a product of an independent and autonomous early modern *Indian* enlightenment, his versatility encompassing the many distinct cultural and social strands of the subcontinent. On the cusp of a major social change—from precolonial feudalism to a colonial capitalist economy—Rammohun Roy's knowledge of culture and religion enabled him to recognize the pressing claims of a multitude of social issues. These included "the abolition of *sati*, the autonomy of print, unlimited trade with China, the inheritance and property rights of women, Bengali grammar, critiques of English rule and directives towards improvement." *One man* advocated all of these.[85]

The legacy of Rammohun Roy thereafter, Abdul Wadud points out, was carried out within the Hindu College, where a young man of mixed Indian and Portuguese descent, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, taught for several years and influenced a generation of young

[83] Ibid, 27.
[84] See Ágnes Heller, *Renaissance Man* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 10.
[85] Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Bāṅgālār Jāgaraṇ," 27.

Hindu men to question the hierarchies of Hinduism.[86] These men, in whose rank was included the brilliant poet Michael Madhusudan Dutta, were iconoclasts and atheists for the most part. Many of these acolytes later turned to the Brahmo Samaj to reform Hinduism from within, though it has been argued later that Brahmoism was a separate religion on its own.[87] Two very distinct approaches grew within the Brahmo Samaj by the middle of the nineteenth century. One was the gentle religiosity of Debendranath Tagore, whose spirituality made him seek out the *Veda*s and the *Upaniṣad*s and who lived by the poetry of Hafiz. The other was the extreme rationalism of Akshaykumar Dutta who valorized labor over prayer.[88] These two shaped a Brahmo Samaj that had the pure human heart glowing in the knowledge and mastery of the self: "*Ātmapratyay siddha jñanojjvalita biśuddha hriday.*"[89] The long nineteenth century was however torn over the question of transcendental non-dualism and dualism (*advaitabād* and *dvaitabād*) within revaluations of Hinduism in Hindu Bengali society, the tail end of which was marked by a more medieval *Paurāṇic* account of Hinduism winning over the *Upaniṣad*ic one.[90] This conflicted, divided, and intellectually torn Hindu gave birth to different phases and kinds of *sāhitya* in the nineteenth century. The first was the high poetry of Michael Madhusudan Dutta who rejected, in the spirit of Romanticism, the wealth, status, and claims of a bourgeois Hindu society.[91] The second was the first Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who wrote in the realist tradition (*bāstabbād*); a writer who uninspired by Romantic aestheticism nevertheless accurately depicted a society ravaged by colonialism, famine and poverty, falling apart at the seams. Abdul Wadud also rues that this great writer had to change his focus from art to religion in the latter half of his

[86] Ibid, 28.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid, 29-30. Abdul Wadud is one of the few who reminds us that Hindus too were still part of a Persianate literary culture in the nineteenth century, which only erodes gradually in the latter half of the nineteenth century.
[89] Ibid, 31.
[90] Ibid, 33.
[91] Ibid.

life, until his definition of Hinduism and the ideal Hindu grew narrower and narrower.[92] The third phase of *sāhitya* comes at the end of the nineteenth century, because the social and political trends in Bengal are for the most part, Abdul Wadud argues, reactionary. The fin-de-siècle ushered in two figures, Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore who marked some sort of social and intellectual resolution for the contradictions of the nineteenth century. Though Vivekananda has many flaws (his emphasis on asceticism and the Vedanta, his polemical and confrontational approach, his straightforward binary of West as materialistic and India as spiritual and hence the moral superiority of the latter), he thought of structural and organizational change as a means of social uplift of the *jātī.* Then came Rabindranath who replaced Bankim's narrow *jātīyatā* with a broad and overarching universalist consciousness. Which version of *jātīyatā*, asks Abdul Wadud, would the average Bengali Hindu choose for himself?[93] Abdul Wadud's account of the Bengali Hindu renaissance emphasizes the many pluralities and tensions within the Bengali Hindus in the wake of Rammohun Roy, the original Renaissance Man. There was, in his interpretation, no unified Bengali Hindu subjectivity shaped by the Bengali Renaissance of the nineteenth century.

Hence, within this uneasy transition to modernity, carrying many vestiges of medieval thought and behavior, the Bengali Hindu psyche forgot to include the Muslim, and the Muslim, in turn, rejected a modernity that was most immediately available. The Hindu-Muslim problem, diagnoses Abdul Wadud, is a tragic paradox for both communities. Aside from enunciating some pan-Islamic ideas, the Bengali Muslim has no concrete plan to improve present-day material conditions of the Bengali Muslims.[94] Neither do the Bengali Hindus, despite all their cultural developments, have any concrete solution to the Hindu-Muslim conflict. For the large part, Abdul Wadud blames this situation on the fact that the true figure of the Bengal Renaissance, its originator Rammohun Roy—polyglot, visionary—

[92] Ibid, 33-34.
[93] Ibid, 35.
[94] Ibid.

has been forgotten. The defining characteristic of this Renaissance man was being "*bāhir-mukho*"; the ability to look outwards, to embrace all that was not one's own. Bengalis on the other hand are the opposite, they are *ghar-mukho,* and they find themselves caught within their own known and familiar terrain, which is, in either case, gradually shrinking.[95] And as for the Bengali Muslims, their renaissance would only be realizable if they look within the ideals of their own religion and civilization for a new life:

> The leader [the Prophet] who advised them—if you are hungry, eat and then offer *namāz*, in order to comply with him they might turn to materialism. And then it is not any less natural for them to then get shackled by material goods. And so the Musalmān is also in this situation—whether the Musalmān will be able to get rid of the chains of his consciousness and be worthy of bearing the flag of a new humanity, and how much time it will take, I do not know. If it happens, then their contributions to Bengali actions and thought will not be any less. Then the national life that emerges from the unity of the *svāpnik* Hindu and the *vastutantra* Muslim—the description of that history (*kīrti-kathā*) lies in the hands of future *sāhityik*s.[96]

Abdul Wadud makes two crucial points here. First, that the Bengali Muslim is caught in a double bind, the chains of consciousness, shackled within. Second, the *communitas* lies in the unity of these two opposing forces, the *svāpnik* Hindu and pragmatic Muslim, working together in a dialectical relationship.

The lectures at the Muslim Sahitya Samaj, i.e., the articles in *Śikhā* continued to range from the topical to the whimsical, such as the statistician Kazi Motahar Hossain's popular science writing (*Mānab Maner Kramabikāś*); or Anwar-ul Kadir's pieces on English literature, or the contributions of Muslims to the fine and performing arts of the subcontinent. Eventually the periodical was discontinued after the fifth year.[97] Some of the meetings and discussions were however published by a new periodical that emerged in 1933 called *Bulbul.* Edited by Mohammad Habibullah Bahar Chowdhury (1906-1966) and Begum Shamsunnahar

[95] Ibid, 36.
[96] Ibid.
[97] I have been able to locate the first five years at the British Library, though the fourth year was missing. Select articles of the five years were edited and published by Mustapha Nurul Islam, including the fourth year. See Mustapha Nurul Islam, *Śikhā Samagra, 1927-1931* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2003).

(later Mahmud, 1908-1964), it was reviewed favorably by Tagore, Saratchandra Chatterjee, Ibrahim Khan and Annadashankar Ray as well as newspapers such as the *Statesman*, *Amritabazar Patrika* and *Star of India*.[98] A huge controversy erupted when *Bulbul* published a speech delivered by the novelist Saratchandra Chatterjee's speech at the Muslim Sahitya Samaj in July 1936.

Saratchandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) had been a much-disputed figure amongst the Bengali Muslims in the 1930s. After having written a bunch of sentimental novels set in large and disintegrating upper caste joint families in Bengal, his literary mode changed in the 1920s. In 1924, he had openly declared his intention to write in the vein of socialist realism: "In this land of hunger and oppression when we will delve deep into the society and discover the sorrow and oppression of the common man, as in Russian literature, only then the literary exercises of our country will be meaningful."[99] In 1926, he wrote two devastating short stories to much controversy and critical acclaim, *Abhāgir Svarga* and *Maheś. Maheś* was about a poor Muslim agricultural laborer who, exploited by the wealthy Hindu landowner has to first neglect his beloved cow Maheś, and then is eventually driven to desperation and kills the cow in extreme despair arising out of poverty. Despite a story with a Muslim protagonist, a number of articles across various periodicals criticized his inability to fully engage with Bengali Muslims. Moreover, a letter published in *Bulbul* from Saratchandra himself declared that the writer felt fear and a shrinking away from the Muslim reader.[100] In "Abāñchita Byabadhān" (1936), Lilamay Ray and Mohammad Wajed Ali summarized why Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, despite being the foremost literary genius and bestselling author in Bengal,

[98] *Bulbul* continued the progressive trend of soliciting literary contributions from Hindus and Muslims alike. It also provided crucial political commentary and reflected the emerging separatist trends and sentiments of the 1930s. Neilesh Bose has an article on the literary innovations and contributions of the *Bulbul* group in the 1930s. See Neilesh Bose, "Remapping Muslim Literary Culture: Folklore, Bulbul, and World-Making in Late Colonial Bengal," *South Asian History and Culture* 5, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 212–25.
[99] Sisir Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature: 1911-1956, Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2005), 321.
[100] "Abāñchita Byabadhān," *Bulbul* 2, no. 5 (Āṣāḍh 1343/ June-July1936): 233-237.

was also responsible for widening the breach between Hindus and Muslims through irresponsible, thoughtless comments. Both writers speak of the complete failure of unified nation building because of Hindu failure to adequately *know* Muslims. Lilamay Ray declared that the project of unity was not to be achieved through *sāhitya*; it could only be achieved through *svajātya* (the project of building kinship). Political movements were not based on kinship (*ātmiyatā*) but through compromise and give-and-take (*āpoṣ*). Unity on the other hand is organic: "Just as adding flesh to the bone does not make a human, similarly adding Hindu to Muslim does not make a Bengali or an Indian. With a joint clapping of hands we may get self-rule but that self rule will also be like a patchwork quilt…Hindu society itself is compromised so nothing can be achieved other than Hindu-Muslim compromise. Hence, the distance will stay, there will be no *jātīyatā* and no kinship."[101] Mohammad Wajed Ali criticizes Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya as representative of the main political problem of India feeling "fear" at the specter of the Muslim reader:

> The main problem of India is a dialectic between the *bhoktā* (consumer) and the *bhojya* (consumption/consumable). If the consumption had been uninterrupted then there would be no problem. But now the gentleman Muslim is waking up gradually: in the cruel hour of misfortune he was unconscious, but his consciousness returns today. Today if you disregard this consciousness, if you do not see it with the eyes of empathy and compassion this problem will never be solved—not in the state (*rāṣṭra*), not in society (*samāj*), and not in literature (*sāhitya*).[102]

And moreover, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay had cited the universal premise of literature, had claimed that the tribe of the *sāhityik*s (littérateur) have no sect and no *jāti*. It sounds good to the ears, says Mohammad Wajed Ali, but it is also true that *sāhitya* is the creation of the human *man* (consciousness). Religion, society, environment, and culture create that individual human consciousness. Is it possible to separate that consciousness from the factors that created it in the first place?[103] Saratchandra embarked on an impassioned self-

[101] Ibid, 234.
[102] Ibid, 236.
[103] Ibid.

defense at the tenth annual meeting of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj shortly after this article was published. Beginning with a note of gratitude for being invited to speak at the proceedings he says, "Even though you have named (the organization) the Muslim Sahitya Samaj, there is a great open-mindedness in the choice (of speakers). Whether I am from the Hindu or the Muslim section of society, worship one god or many—you have not asked this question. You have merely thought that I am Bengali, having grown old in the service of Bengali literature."[104] His tone continues to be bitterly defensive as he goes on to address the allegations thrown at him, arguing that he was misunderstood and misquoted out of context about his views on *sāhitya* vis-à-vis Bengali Muslims. He explains the root of the controversy. Some time ago, Kazi Motahar Hossain had visited him in his Calcutta house—not to discuss literature, but to play chess. Saratchandra was not up to a chess game and they ended up discussing literature after all.[105] The ensuing conversation had ended up as a small letter to *Bulbul* that invited misunderstanding and wrath from several quarters, including Lilamay Ray and Mohammad Wajed Ali. What he really tried to say, explains Saratchandra, was that "if the pursuit of literature (*sāhitya-sādhanā*) is premised on truth, then in that truth unity (*aikya*) will come one day for sure. This is because those who serve literature (*sāhitya-sebak*) are close kinsmen of one another (*paramātmiya*). Whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, we all belong to one another."[106] There is an exclusionary utopianism in the ideal humanistic *communitas* that Saratchandra constructs here, one that privileges the *true sāhitya-sebak* over those who merely quibble over language and use it for political ends. He invokes a point made by Mohammad Wajed Ali made in "Abāñchita Byabadhān" to justify his position:

[104] "Abhibhāṣaṇ," *Bulbul* 3, no. 6 (Āśvin 1343/September-October 1936): 323.
[105] This is a strange explanation because they do not seem mutually exclusive pursuits to the average chess-playing littérateur. However, Kazi Motahar Hossain's prowess at chess was legendary and perhaps he could only indulge in one or the other activity.
[106] Ibid, 324.

> Wajed Ali *sāheb* has spoken some beautiful words of hope that should be remembered by Hindus and Muslims alike. He has said, "The protests or support given to the adding of Arabic and Persian words in the Bengali language is a matter of insignificance. This is because just writing with a pen doesn't quite cut it. It requires a great deal of literary power and creative talent. Where these do not exist, you may try just end up dressing the language in drag instead of ornamenting it." Who really has this knowledge? Only the connoisseurs of language (*sāhitya-rasik*) have it; those who *love* language will serve it without any machinations. I do not fear them. I only fear those who zealously try to guard the language without serving it.[107]

He illustrates this with a detailed summary of his story *Maheś* that had recently been removed from the school Matriculation syllabus in Bengal because it had cow slaughter (*go-hatyā*) in it. Meanwhile while Hindus disapproved of the story because a poor Muslim peasant had killed his (favorite) cow, Muslims like Minjanur Rahaman were disappointed because Saratchandra had chosen as an entrypoint a poor, dispossessed, and landless Muslim as protagonist.[108] Yet, Saratchandra defends his realism passionately arguing that much of the description in the text—the poor peasant Gaphur's predicament in a Hindu landowner dominated and Hindu majoritarian village, his daughter's Amina's struggle to draw water in a drought-afflicted landscape wherein Hindus feared touch and contamination, yet helped her out by giving her some of their own, and the beautiful relationship between man and animal in which a starving Gaphur tries to feed Maheś despite extreme and debilitating poverty. Hindus could not see the social problem; all they could read was cow-slaughter despite the maddeningly painful conditions that produced it. The story was replaced in the Matric syllabus with an earlier Saratchandra story *Rāmer Sumati* (*Ram's Good Sense*). Saratchandra says, "It is a very timid story—hope that it brings good sense to the Rams. The problem is that there are Rahims too in this country."[109]

There is a strange paradox embedded within Saratchandra's lecture. For Saratchandra, *sāhitya* must be socially responsible and (socialist) realism is the vehicle through which a

[107] Ibid, 325.
[108] Ibid, 329.
[109] Ibid, 327.

debilitated and crumbling semi-feudal and colonial economy must gaze at its own reflection. He addresses the charges against depicting only lower class Muslims in his corpus by asking whether the greatness of literature is contingent on the social classes depicted within it.[110] Moreover, he acknowledges that there is a widening chasm between Hindus and Muslims in the tumultuous decade of the 1930s. Yet, he cannot help conceptualizing *sāhitya* as a space of essentially bourgeois privilege, his *communitas* refuses to recognize the enormity of the widening chasm in the *realpolitik*. Saratchandra still invokes the utopian social group of inspired littérateurs who suspend the hierarchies and divisions of normal social structure:

> We must know that when human beings have fixed their minds on literary creation, then at that moment they are neither Hindu nor Muslim. They have surpassed to great measure the "I" that is known to many. Otherwise their cultivation of literature ends in futility. This is why though we have nothing in common; Maxim Gorky occupies the place of a close kinsman in our hearts. I ask all *sāhityik*s to remember this.[111]

Saratchandra died two years later in 1938, before the separatist movement took off with full force. The 1940s would decisively reject *sāhitya* as the universal *communitas* with bonds of kinship that suspends other social identities running a distinct and parallel trajectory to the *realpolitik.* One could of course argue that Saratchandra's privilege and fame made him immune to the claims of identity politics in the domain of *sāhitya*. The paradox lies in the fact that he *acknowledges* the communal problem but claims that *sāhitya* is, in a Romantic-idealist vein, the space of a "suspension of disbelief." How can a realist be an idealist at the same time, one may ask? Or, as Mohammad Wajed Ali sharply points out: how do you separate the artist from the social conditions that produced him? For the majority of Bengali Muslims, *sāhitya* would no longer remain the great space of possibility for unity in the 1940s. Instead, it would go on to be the greatest marker of political difference from the Hindus, a space for Muslim self-determination and autonomy. Interestingly, the separatist

[110] Ibid, 329.
[111] Ibid, 328.

movement would invoke the European Renaissance, too. The invoked Renaissance of the 1940s is an altogether different formulation than the Republic of Letters premised on a imagined universality which foregrounded a *communitas*, despite all liminal moments of conflict, between Hindus and Muslims.

The 1940s: A Language of Separatism

An editorial note in the *Mohammadī* in 1943 announced that the recent annual meeting of the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad held at Salimullah Hall, Dhaka University had concluded with great success. The event provided, it points out, a necessary encouragement and enthusiasm amongst the literati of Dhaka, a *nabajāgaraṇ* (new awakening). The editor mentions that another such literary organization had existed in Dhaka some time ago, the Dhaka Muslim Sahitya Samaj. Heavily criticized for the blows it tried to strike to the heart of Muslim society—on Muslim *samāj,* customs, and religious mores—it had, of late, somehow faded into insignificance. This gradual loss of *samarthan* (support) and *sahānubhūti* (sympathy) towards the Muslim Sahitya Samaj indicated that the littérateurs of Dhaka were waiting for a fresh "lead" in the realm of *sāhitya.* At this very moment, the Pakistan movement changed the political scene forever:

> Around this time the call for Pakistan startled the Indian Muslims. Though Pakistan came with the call of *svasthatā* in the political realm, it was only natural that this influence was felt in *sāhitya*... The Bengali Muslim *sāhityasebī*s realized that at the heart of their status as untouchables in the realm of *sāhitya* was a lack of *svasthatā* (originality) in literary creation and tendency to imitate others. From this experience was born the East Pakistan Renaissance Society in Calcutta and the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad in Dhaka.[112]

The Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad, based in Dhaka, met at the Dhaka Muslim Hall in 1943. Chaired by Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, the speakers included Syed Emdad Ali, Syed

[112] "Āloconā," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya*, ed. Sardar Phajlul Karim (Ḍhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968), 127-128. Henceforth, while all references are to *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya,* I will indicate the individual lectures and speakers.

Sajjad Hossain and Syed Ali Ahsan. Much of the discussion at this 1943 session focused on *sāhitya* as means of understanding the Bengali Muslim community, to evaluate literature as it stood in the tumultuous decade of the 40s. The younger littérateurs highlighted the fact that there had been considerable disconnect between Bengali Muslims' lived experience and their artistic life and representation. For historical reasons, they argue, Bengali Muslims had been unable to translate their own social realities into the corpus of literature. While reconstructing a genealogy of Bengali literature, most of the speakers at the assembly go back to the foundational figure of Ālāol. Ālāol's firm presence in canonical Hindu histories of Bengali literature unarguably makes him the first major Bengali Muslim writer. Yet Ālāol is not a figure that can be easily seen as an originary point for contemporary politics:

> Ālāol *sāhitya* is the proof that farsighted Muslims had understood a long time ago that it was necessary to connect Bengali Muslims with the Bengali language. The value of such a quest by a Bengali Muslim within the realm of Bengali literary creation in the eighteenth century is considerable. In a way it is impossible to evaluate Ālāol's place in the history of Bengali literature. Historically speaking, Bengali Muslim literature should begin with Ālāol. There is however no reflection of Muslim society in Ālāol's corpus. He is absolutely Hindu in sensibility (*hindubhāvapanna*). Hence even if we are of the same religion, we are not of the same clan. (*Tai sahadharmī haleo tini āmāder sahagotra nan*.)[113]

Let us for instance consider the language in which Syed Sajjad Hossain articulates the separatist idiom marking an intellectual distance with Ālāol. Using the word *gotra* for claiming distance conjures up a Brahminical sectarian imagination. Syed Ali Ahsan makes a similar point in his address. He argues that Bengali Muslims have no "historical tradition"; the lone figure standing out in medieval Bengal is Ālāol. However, Syed Ali Ahsan argues that Ālāol is exceptional to the point that he influenced no subsequent Bengali Muslim writers: "Enriched by *Hindubhāvadhārā,* he wrote Vaiṣṇava poetry, he had no proximity to Islamic culture (*kṛṣṭi*). All his *Musalmānī* compositions are not original creations, but are

[113] Syed Sajjad Hossain, "Samitir Sabhāpatir Āhvān," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya*, 106.

translations."[114] To Syed Ali Ahsan, other than religion there is absolutely no cultural connection between contemporary Bengali Muslims and the medieval poet, who composed within the same continuum as Hindu poets like Nidhu-babu, Kavikaṅkan, Bhāratcandra, Kāśīrām, and Kṛttibās. Even then, Bengali Hindus only included him as a token in histories of Bengali literature and in the two universities of Bengal (Calcutta and Dhaka) he was not included in the syllabus.[115]

The dissatisfaction with adequate literary forebears extends into the modern period. The great concern at this moment is that the twentieth century had also witnessed a great poverty of imagination and originality within the Bengali Muslim community. Hence, as Syed Ali Ahsan argues, even Mir Mosharraf Hossain, Mozammel Haq, Reazuddin, Kaikobad, and others failed to hold up a proper reflection of the Bengali Muslim *jāti.* Since *sāhitya* did not emerge out of the experience of the people, it might have succeeded aesthetically but did not forge a connection with the *prāṇa,* the life force or soul of the Bengali Muslims. In fact, the event also marked a felicitation ceremony for the aging writer Kaikobad, who—now a tottering octogenarian—spoke of the beginnings of modern Bengali literature in his inaugural address. He was, he recollects, one of four Bengali Muslim writers who tried to break into the Hindu Bengali fold; the others were prose writers Mir Mosharraf Hossain and Reazuddin, and fellow poet Mozammel Haq. These early Bengali writers, Kaikobad rues, faced an atmosphere of contempt and patronizing and thus wrote in a forced Sanskritic register to gain wider acceptability. It was because of this reason that his first book of verse *Aśrumālā* gained such widespread acceptability, feted by contemporary periodicals and eminent Hindu writers such as Nabinchandra Sen. The pandits of Vikrampur reviewed him: "The poet Kaikobad is a *musalmān* but his language is not *musalmānī,* his language is

[114]Syed Ali Ahsan, "Sampādaker Bibṛti," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya,* 114. A view held on Ālāol for a long time until Thibaut d'Hubert demonstrated how translation is an inadequate understanding of Ālāol's poetic idiom which assimilated and transformed Sanskrit, Persian and vernacular poetic traditions. See Thibaut d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace.*
[115] Ibid, 114.

refined (*susaṅskṛta*), restrained and beautiful."[116] Kaikobad's instrument of resistance was, in his own words, individual words (*śabda*):

> From such reviews you can understand that Hindus had a national hatred and revulsion for Muslim writing. For this reason, I did not use words other than pure (*biśuddha*) Bengali words. Many modern writers now say that I have imitated Hindu writers. But in reality, this was not so. That only Hindus can write pure Bengali and Muslims cannot, I broke this misconception and unnecessary vanity. I have said many irrelevant things today in order to clarify the unjust opinions that contemporary Muslim writers harbor about me.[117]

He concludes this address with a note of bitter hope; the world of conflict and competition would disappear, the incessant need that Bengali Muslims had to prove themselves to the Bengali Hindus was no longer a historical necessity. His own historical circumstance had given way to a future rife with possibility: "Today you have no need for imitation. Today you can preserve your autonomy and increase the beauty of the Muslim Bengali language, no obstacles, no hindrances, nobody to criticize you. Today your path is free."[118] This very future however, Syed Emdad Ali notes, has to be fleshed out in a specific way. *Sāhitya* was foundational in this arena of newness; it had to be carefully constructed to give life to the nation. An older generation of Bengali Muslims was handing over the baton to a younger generation. Hence, in the forging of a new nation, a new *sāhitya* had to be deployed to "disseminate a strong *bhāvadhārā* across the country, to ensure that education also spreads rapidly across the land."[119]

The idea of *sāhitya* as resistance also had a transnational element embedded within it. And here, many of the speakers brought in the question of other linguistic nationalisms of the twentieth century, particularly the Irish case. Speaking of the Celtic literary revival, spearheaded by W. B. Yeats, Syed Sajjad Hossain makes the point that the Irish and Bengali Muslim linguistic nationalisms have several points of commonality. Both are reactionary

[116] Syed Emdad Ali, "Udbodhan," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya*, 96.
[117] Ibid, 97.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid, 99.

movements that address cultural imperialism. Irish writers like Swift, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Thomas Moore, and Bernard Shaw had achieved fame in the English language, yet what connection did Ireland have with their literary corpuses?[120] The literary language of Ireland remained English, but English literature itself was a foreign literature for the Irish. He argues, "The literature that has no connection with life, no society can embrace that as a national literature, it is impossible to do so. The Muslim littérateurs of Bengal are faced with this same problem as the Irish have."[121] He goes on to pick on a phrase from Yeats's manifesto for the Celtic Revival: "a national drama or literature must spring from a native interest in life and its problems and a strong capacity for life 'among the people.'"[122]

Syed Sajjad Hossain advocates for an autonomous literature for Bengali Muslims that reflects 'life among the people' and argues that this does not imply setting aside the Hindus or past works of Bengali literature. Again citing the Celtic Revivalists, he vociferously points out that despite writers such as Jonathan Swift and George Bernard Shaw, a W. B. Yeats or a J. M. Synge was a historical and political necessity. Nor did Yeats, Douglas, Hyde, and Lady Gregory disavow the canon of English literature. Instead, they created a new Anglo-Irish idiom that did not weaken the foundations of the English language, instead strengthening and adding to it. Moreover, English littérateurs feted them. Similarly, Bengali Muslims must go about creating a new literary idiom that would resist Hindu cultural appropriation of the language that still disallowed the entry of Arabic and Persian words within it. The more he thought of it, says Syed Sajjad Hossain, the more he was convinced that: "The opposition mounted towards our literary movement is not just to preserve the high caste purity and superiority (*kaulinya*) of the language, but reflects instead the imperialist mentality of Hindu society. They cannot tolerate that Muslims find new life in either politics or literature."[123]

[120] Syed Sajjad Hossain, "Samitir Sabhāpatir Āhvān," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya*, 108.
[121] Ibid, 109.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid, 110.

Syed Sajjad Hossain's lecture underscores an important aspect of worldwide ethno-linguistic nationalism of the early twentieth century—the creation of new nationalist idioms through a selective reconstruction of dialects. Or, as Tom Nairn puts it: "The new middle-class intelligentsia of nationalism had to invite the masses into history; and the invitation card had to be written in a language they understood."[124] Literary scholars of Anglo-Irish literature have noted how a reconstructed idiom "translated" conflict between the Irish and the English. Yeats, for instance, tried to adopt "peasant speech" as corrective to his high poetry, though using Anglo-Irish dialect syntax to a lesser extent than Hyde, Lady Gregory, and Synge. However, some distinctive features of Yeats's Anglo-Irish poetry were the naming of things that have personal connotation, use of images taken from common experience, and idioms of the spoken voice.[125] As Syed Sajjad Hossain explains, the conceptualization of an idiom for "life among the people" (and thus necessarily *particular*) was the most important element of the Celtic Revival that needed to be adopted for the Bengali Muslims. It was this *everyday life* of the Muslims that was missing from the literary traditions of the Hindus. Only Muslims could be responsible for portraying the life of Muslims and there is no point in blaming the Hindus for excluding the Muslims from the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance.[126] *Sāhitya* then no longer remains the great fertile ground of intermingling and commonality (its universal component), but its obverse—the terrain of irreconcilable particularities and absolute difference. Syed Sajjad Hossain says:

> That Hindu writers could not create literature through accounts of Muslim social life is because their society and ours is separated by a great chasm of unfamiliarity. They may disregard this unfamiliarity in politics, but the recognition of this can be found in their *sāhitya.* We may have some doubt as to whether this is conscious on their part, but this just proves that Hindus and Muslims have racial (*jātigata*), social and cultural differences…in the early

[124] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 80.
[125] See Colin Meir, *The Ballads and Songs of W. B. Yeats: The Anglo-Irish Heritage in Subject and Style* (London: Macmillan, 1974).
[126] Syed Sajjad Hossain, "Samitir Sabhāpatir Āhvān," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya*, 107.

> twentieth century, Muslim writers realized this truth but could not portray this in literature. They wanted to imitate Hindu writers.[127]

Sajjad Hossain counters a remark made by a recent Hindu writer, that "Pakistan is not to be made possible in *sāhitya*" and that literature has the qualities of the universal: "In his opinion, indulging difference in literature is not only wrong, it is against the very *nature* of *sāhitya.*"[128] Syed Sajjad Hossain argues to the contrary that *sāhitya* is the very domain of the particular. And, in a similar vein, Syed Ali Ahsan argues that *sāhitya* was the only way in which the everyday life of Bengali Muslims would find representation: "We will have no prosperity if we do not portray our everyday perceptions and immediate experiences in literature…Islam has always accepted the many conflicts of life and sought liberation, asceticism has never given it fearlessness. Transcendentalism (*māyāvād*) is not for us; we will drink life to the lees."[129]

Abul Kalam Shamsuddin delivered addresses at both the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad meet in 1943, and the very crucial Summit of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society that gathered at the Islamia College Hall in Calcutta in July 1944. The East Pakistan Renaissance Society initially met at the office of the *Dainik Azad* in 1942, and was led by Abul Mansur Ahmed and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin. Many Muslim League leaders such as Khawaja Nazimuddin, Huseyn Suhrawardy, Nurul Amin, Mohammad Akram Khan, A.K. Fazlul Haq, Abul Kasem, and others attended the 1944 Summit.[130] If the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad meetings revolved around questions of literature and literariness with a distinct cultural project of *sāhitya* for reconstructing Bengali Muslim society, the East Pakistan Renaissance Society Summit (that included addresses by Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Abul Mansur Ahmed and Syed Sajjad Hossain) foregrounded the political question of self

[127] Ibid, 107.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Syed Ali Ahsan, "Sampādaker Bibṛti," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya,* 115. In some ways the divergent destinies of Syed Sajjad Hossain and Syed Ali Ahsan in East Pakistan and independent Bangladesh demonstrate the peculiar ironies and paradoxes of twentieth-century Bengali Muslim politics.
[130] We will get to know some of them better in the subsequent chapter.

determination. Of particular interest to all speakers was the question of why the Society incorporated 'Renaissance' within its name. Shamsuddin explains:

> The external freedom (or the political *āzādī*) of East Pakistan cannot come until its inhabitants get mentally emancipated, until the chaos inherent within their thought-worlds disappears. Our society is trying to achieve this mental emancipation within the race (*jātī*). This mental emancipation is a question of renaissance. A revolutionary transformation in thought-worlds (*cintārājya*) is called renaissance. To return to the past is not renaissance, neither is renaissance the fundamental uprooting and abandonment of the past. Renaissance embraces the future by standing on the foundational ground (*bhittibhūmi*) of the past, in the light of present experience. Renaissance is the revolution that takes place in human thought…this why we have called our organization East Pakistan Renaissance Society.[131]

The conceptual premise of Shamsuddin's lecture is freedom (*āzādī*). *Āzādī*, he argues, is a birthright available to every human being but freedom is not merely a question of external political agency and autonomy; at its root lies *svakīyatā* or individuality. Etymologically the word *svakīyatā* refers to the property of being one's own, or is extended to mean belonging to one's kin.[132] Contrasted with *svakīya* is the imitation of others (*parānukaraṇ*); imitation is a longstanding mental habit that grows deep roots. In an extraordinarily vivid word image, he compares Bengali Muslim intellectual enslavement (*parābaśatā*) by Hindus to an octopus whose tentacles has spread far and wide.[133] Shamsuddin argues that historically in the nineteenth century, Bengali Muslims tried to remain within a golden past, and thereafter realizing their futility turned to the path of imitation. The call for Pakistan returned a sense of finally coming into one's own, *svakīyatā.* This was parallel to what one saw in the domain of *sāhitya*, the time had come to return *svasthatā* and *svakīyatā* to language. Urdu was not the way, returning to *punthi* and *loksāhitya* literature was not the way. Standing on the firm ground of *punthi*, one had to realize the futility of the present experience of imitating Hindu Bengali *sāhitya*, to realize a

[131] Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, "Abhyarthānā Samitir Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya,* 132.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid, 130.

future literature (*bhābī sāhitya*) of the future.[134]

Two Nations Through Sāhitya

It was Abul Mansur Ahmed who established the idea of Pakistan as renaissance for Bengali Muslims.[135] To understand the purpose of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society, one had to delve deeper into the meanings of these two words—"Pakistan" and "Renaissance." Pakistan is a political concept; it is a political demand (*rājnaitik dābī*) issued by the Muslim League. In the world of *realpolitik* however, it is still a disputed concept in 1943. As a representative party of Indian Muslim self-interest, the Muslim League had made the political stakes of the demand for Pakistan clear, but the idea did not exist without considerable conflict: "Without doubt, Pakistan is the national ideal for Muslim India. In the political worlds however, there is no limit to the arguments and counter-arguments, no end to the anger and abuse. This is not unnatural. This is a new idea. However natural or necessary a new proposal is, nobody embraces it without protestation."[136] Abul Mansur Ahmed foregrounds that Pakistan is as of yet a geographical essence (*bhaugolik sattā*), one that must be infused with meaning. He also speaks of a distinctive East Pakistani identity distinct from the other communities of India, distinct even from the religious fraternity in West Pakistan.[137]

And so we have the *communitas*, the world of cultural brotherhood of the Bengali Muslims who must reimagine their political contours in the context of the *realpolitik* demand for Pakistan.[138] Abul Mansur Ahmed, on the cusp of becoming one of the most important

---

[134] Ibid, 132-33.
[135] Ian Talbot writes about how Abul Mansur Ahmed (and the East Pakistan Renaissance Society) marked a difference from the official stand of the Muslim League on Pakistan. By invoking cultural difference with Hindus and even other Indian Muslims, Abul Mansur Ahmed foregrounded political and cultural tensions between Urdu and Bengali speaking Muslims. See Ian Talbot, *A History of Modern South Asia: Politics, States, Diasporas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).
[136] Syed Sajjad Hossain, "Abhyarthānā Samitir Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim* Sāhitya, 137-138.
[137] Abul Mansur Ahmed, "Mūl Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ," in *Pākistān Āndolan O Muslim Sāhitya,* 141.
[138] Andrew Sartori has discussed Abul Mansur Ahmed's lecture in some detail. Sartori argues that Ahmed's call for *tamadduni āzādī* signaled a major departure from Hindu culturalism, inasmuch as the ethical and political

political figures in the newly established East Pakistan, still identifies himself as a littérateur and draws a distinction between the *rājnītik* (politician) and the *sāhityik*:

> Whatever the politician's analysis of what Pakistan may possibly mean, to the *sāhityik* it means cultural freedom (*tamaddunī āzādī*), cultural self-rule (*sāṃskṛtik svarāj*), and cultural autonomy. The leaders of state (*rāṣṭra netā*) will answer the question of whether a *jātī* can live without political freedom. Us *sāhityik*s can only say this much, without cultural freedom no *sāhitya* can even be conceived (surviving comes after that).[139]

Abul Mansur Ahmed's separatism inverts the order of how Hindu and Muslim difference had been conceived of up to this point. Philology, as I have argued, was conceived as a joint *communitas* in which the values of friendship and unity overcame a great deal of political conflict. Over and over again, even when *bhāṣā* continued to be regulated in the public sphere that, in turn, was met with resistance, at no point did the *communitas* altogether crumble and dissolve. Some kind of wild utopian imagination allowed the ideal of *sāhitya* to exist within its space of an unchallenged universalism and commonality. Abul Mansur Ahmed inverts this logic and argues that *sāhitya*, the ultimate self-expression of the human race, is ontologically premised not on similitude but on difference. He points out how the controversy over Pakistan hinges around the suggestion that "Hindus and Muslims are not called a single political race (*rājnaitik jāt*)."[140] Whether politically they are a unified race or not is a matter of debate, he argues, but it is indisputable that, in terms of culture, Hindus and Muslims are separate races. Despite many similarities in cultural aspects, the differences outweigh the similarities. The differences, he argues, are the essence. To argue for cultural continuity, then, is a fallacy. Difference-as-being is what characterizes the human condition:

> All of you know that in all creatures and in all races and even in all individuals, the truth is *difference*. This constitutes the essence. You can only identify one over another through that. There are a hundred and one

---

categories of the sphere of circulation were identified as the defining features of a specifically Bengali Muslim culture. See Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 219-223.

[139] Ibid, 138.

[140] Ibid.

> similarities between "I" and "you". In comparison, how much would be the difference? But it is that difference and not the similarity that helps us distinguish one. The matter of culture is such that all races across the world, not just Hindus and Muslims, have the same culture. Yet the culture-specific differences between races are so stark that this must give rise to various specific nationalisms. The manifestation of particularity is successful political self-rule, *rājnaitik svarāj*: "The essence of this manifestation is *tamaddunī āzādī* or cultural autonomy. This is called Pakistan.[141]

There is of course, another discursive shift in Abul Mansur Ahmed's formulation of the problem. He articulates a paradigmatic change from *sāhitya,* which always reckons with the universal, to the particular and specific culture (variously called *tamaddun* but more frequently s*aṃskṛti*). *Sāhitya* is a byproduct of the larger cultural continuum but is also the site of failure and oppression. Forever deprived of being truly part of the *communitas,* the Bengali Muslim has to negotiate a highly accomplished literature in which he has no part to play. This *sāhitya* belongs to Vidyasagar and Bankimchandra, to Tagore and Saratchandra. In fact Tagore, Abul Mansur Ahmed acknowledges, raised and displayed this literature in the eyes of the world. Yet, it is not the Bengali Muslim's literature, and it can never be the *sāhitya* of East Pakistan: "In this *sāhitya,* the Bengali Muslims have no real contribution, and not only that but this *sāhitya* has contributed nothing to the Bengali Muslims. Hence, Muslim society has found no inspiration for life from this *sāhitya*. This is because the creators of this *sāhitya* are not Muslim; its themes are not *Musalmānī*; its spirit is not *Musalmānī*; its language is not the language of Muslims."[142]

If Pakistan is a geographical unit, it has to be infused with a newness of thought and activity. *Sāhitya* has to be made anew; it has to be configured according to the particularities of Bengali Muslim character. Language, in this schema, is the reconfigured site of complete difference. This revolutionary reconfiguration of thought-worlds is Abul Mansur Ahmed's definition of the Renaissance:

---

[141] Ibid, 138-139.
[142] Ibid, 146.

> The Society does not want to bring about a renaissance of geography—but of human beings. The question arises: what is renaissance? In a few words, renaissance is the bolt of lightning that restores life to the dead bones of a *jātī*. It is the revolution brought about in every sphere of life—in state and in society, in art and industry, in trade and commerce. Some friends are asking: you are bringing Revolution, so why not just call it so? And some say, you are reviving the race, so why not call it Reformation or Revival? Why include "Renaissance" in the naming of the society?[143]

Revolution would be a misnomer, argues Abul Mansur Ahmed, since it refers to the change of power within the *realpolitik,* the State (*rāṣṭra*). Revolution is characterized by a circular logic; it may or may not achieve the progress of the nation and may even give rise to counter-revolutionary activity. The *sāhityik* is not content with the idea of the *realpolitik* revolution; he wants to conceive and implement the all-encompassing revolution (*sarbāṅgīn biplab*) of the *jātī.* This will give rise to a world premised on social equality, the kingdom of Allah, where individual autocratic regimes cease to matter.[144] Similarly the Reformation, the internal movement of religious reform is tied to the Christian church; Islam does not need reforming at present.[145] This leaves one with Revivalism, which is again not the desired outcome of the present political moment. "Going back" cannot be an option for the Bengali Muslims, for where would they go back to in time? This leaves one with the Renaissance, a crucial historical moment in European society which marked a rite of passage for that part of the world. Europe, argues Abul Mansur Ahmed, was ravaged by political crisis in the fifteenth century. On the one hand, two centuries of *jihad* with the Muslims had exhausted Christian political power at the hands of the great Islamic polities. On the other, the supremacy of the papal empire was in disarray. In industry, arts and knowledge, Muslims were the leaders and Christians mere supplicants. A lack of education, superstition, self-doubt, and domestic conflict devastated Christian Europe, and to top that, Muslims occupied Constantinople. The Muslim world was then at its zenith— politically, intellectually, and

[143] Ibid, 142.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid,143.

artistically. With the fall of Constantinople, the exhausted, lethargic, and slumbering Europeans woke up. The process of transitioning from the darkness of the Middle Ages to the light of modernity was a "half-lit, shadowy path"—and this was, Abul Mansur Ahmed tells us, the European Renaissance, a period of rebirth that allowed Europe to develop into the imperial power that it eventually came to be.[146]

The Renaissance is everything that the *realpolitik* cannot achieve. The anti-separatists might promise adequate representation to the Muslims but what of that, asks Abul Mansur Ahmed: "You will save this deprived, humiliated race with a few jobs? By establishing a few schools and colleges? By passing a few bills in the legislature? That cannot be. There must be a complete revolution to bring about their emancipation and freedom."[147] What the Muslim Renaissance must achieve is cultural autonomy through a *sāhitya* that foregrounds that the mental worlds and *muthos* of Hindus and Muslims are completely different. This can happen in two ways. One is the underlying *spirit* of literature and human ideology, the other the realm of everyday words: "In the so-called *jātīya sāhitya* of the Bengalis, not only is the life of the majority population Muslims missing, but also their very spoken words."[148]Much like Abdul Gafur Siddiqui's argument in his lecture to the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Abul Mansur Ahmed points out that the cultural references and words easily strewn about my Hindus do not raise the same "ideas of associations" in Muslims. On a much larger scale of spirit and sensibility, the religious tradition of the Hindus and its great devotional literature focus on *bhakti,* love and sacrifice. Its aesthetic traditions—*rasa*—uphold art for art's sake. The idolatrous Hindus seeking to please the *rasik* mind invented a form of literary art, reconciling *bhakti* and aesthetics, focusing on the *viraha* (separation) from the beloved. Abul Mansur Ahmed argues that Hindu aesthetics center around the ideals of sacrifice, asceticism, love, devotion; these are high ideals and have crafted literary idioms that center women as the

[146] Ibid, 144.
[147] Ibid, 145.
[148] Ibid, 151.

object and subject of love. These ideals are however not suitable for Muslim *sāhitya*, which have its own religious and cultural ideals of rights, justice and martyrdom (*haq, insāph* and *jehād-śahīd*.)[149]

Abul Mansur Ahmed's polemical formulation of Hindu and Muslim *zeitgeists* might not only seem erroneous and overtly generalizing, but also potentially reduce *sāhitya*'s many pluralities to irreducible cultural monoliths.[150] The next chapter on the language movement examines precisely this problem in the context of a new Pakistani *rāṣṭra;* what role does the *jātīya* imaginary of language, now reduced to a narrow conception in the separatist idiom, play within the *Realpolitik* of the new postcolonial nation-state of Pakistan?

[149] Ibid, 147. Abul Mansur Ahmed went on to expand the idea of cultural autonomy and the ideas of culture and civilization vis-à-vis the state in a book titled *Pāk Bāṃlār Kālcār*. See Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Pāk Bāṃlār Kālcār,* (Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 1966). Andrew Sartori writes about it in "Abul Mansur Ahmad and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism," in *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition*, eds. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[150] In fact, the copy I read of *Pāk Bāṃlār Kālcār* had marginalia that would delight the hearts of all his detractors. The reader not only disagreed with many of his propositions but also scribbled in bold next to three consecutive paragraphs—"You Goat! These are *tatsama* words…" "You have not understood this, sir!" and "Schlegel's 175-year-old decay theory!"

Chapter Three

Philology in Parliament: The Language Movement in East Pakistan, 1947-1955

The 21st of February, soaked in my brothers' blood
Can I forget it?
A February built on tears of a hundred mothers of martyred sons
Can I forget it?
February reddened with the blood of my golden land
Can I forget it?[1]

February 21, 1952, is one of the defining moments of a small country living on between reality and memory, a single day comprising a fateful twenty-four hours, described and commemorated over and over again in independent Bangladesh. The Pakistani police had been making its daily rounds since early morning of that day. Section 144, pertaining to unlawful assembly, had been imposed the previous day.[2] The atmosphere had been tense in Dhaka for some time over what was deemed the "Language Controversy"; the main scene of action and resistance against West Pakistan was Dhaka University, particularly the residential halls such as the Salimullah Hall. Students had been simmering for a while. On March 21, 1948, Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah himself had come to address the students of Dhaka University and amidst murmurs and grumbles had declared, "But let me make it clear to you that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead [you] is merely the enemy of Pakistan. Without one state language, no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function."[3] Between 1948 and 1952, the question of state

[1] The song *Ekuśer Gān*, composed by Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, became the anthem of the language movement and subsequent resistance against West Pakistan. It was set to music by composer Altaf Mahmud for Zaihar Raihan's political satire *Jīvan Theke Neoyā* (1970). The Pakistani Army killed Altaf Mahmud in September 1971. See Gaziul Huq and M.R. Akhtar Mukul, eds., *Bahannar Bhāṣā Āndolan* (Dhaka: Hakkani Publishers, 1984), 17-20.

[2] Section 144 (unlawful assembly) of the colonial penal code was carried over into the penal codes of independent India and Pakistan. It prohibited a meeting of more than five people, especially with firearms. It was originally used to prevent large religious gatherings turning into riots (or to control anticolonial activity). See David Kim, *Colonial Transformation and Asian Religions in Modern History* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 19.

[3] "*Speaking from an eighteen-foot-high rostrum before a gathering of about five lakhs people, the largest in the history of Dacca.... Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah arrived at the meeting ground with imposing magnificence under*

language was debated at length in parliament and civil society, until the Pakistani police opened fire on protesting students on February 21, 1952, killing four students.

This singular event has in many ways come to define what Bangladeshi historiography—and popular/statist history—calls the *Bhāṣā Āndolan* (the language movement). In this chapter, I explore the language movement as a series of political events and expressions in East Pakistan between 1947 and 1955. In existing historiography, primarily in Bengali, the language movement has been studied as the first expression of Bengali nationalism against West Pakistan. In these readings, the question of state language, what Jinnah dismissed as a manifestation of provincialism, was a means of expressing social and political autonomy. Following the lead of Badruddin Umar, historians of Bangladesh have designated language as a metonym for other economic and social discontent within East Bengal. This is a political-economic reading of the language question that highlights how West Pakistan botched up state policy and misread identity for provincialism. They protected their own class interests through the symbolic value of Urdu (the language of the ruling *ashraf* since the nineteenth century) and denied the claims of Bengali Muslim workers and peasants.[4] In such accounts, February 21st was the moment of absolute crisis—but also a moment of recognition—signifying a fundamental breach between West and East Pakistan.

---

military escort and majestically proceeded to the rostrum and was warmly cheered by the vast multitude who gathered to listen to him. A government of East Bengal plane showered flower petals and cameras clicked. The Governor-General saluted the people on all sides before taking his seat and was garlanded by Khwaja Habibullah, Chairman of the Reception Committee." *The Nation's Voice, Vol. VII: Launching the State and the End of the Journey (Aug. 1947 - Sept. 1948)*, ed. Waheed Ahmad (Karachi: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 2003), 243-258.

[4] Badruddin Umar's definitive history of the language movement, *Pūrbabāṅgālār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Tat̲kālīn Rājnīti*, is written in three volumes. First published in 1970, Umar connected the mass mobilization of the Language Movement to rural and urban economic crises of the time, including famine, longstanding tenancy problems of landowner-peasant, the movements led by farmers in various districts including Sylhet and Mymensingh, and the agitations by the urban working class including workers employed in the railways, tea plantations, jute, cement, and oil industries. Connected to these popular peasant and worker uprisings, naturally, was his emphasis on the role of the Communist Party. As an involved witness and the first historian of the language movement, one who collected the archives of these historical events as they unfolded around him, he set the tone for all subsequent historical appraisal of the period. In my interview with Umar, he informed me that he donated all original papers that he collected to the Bangla Academy in 1984, which were published in two volumes. Many of the primary documents that I use in this chapter are actually secondary reprints of

This chapter returns to the question of language as autonomy, and it explores how language as a continuum of cultural praxis and not merely state policy came to the forefront of political self-expression in the decade. In other words, I trace the discursive formulations surrounding language in the period through understudied archives—pamphlets, manifestos, even Legislative Assembly proceedings—in order to understand how language signified different things to different people with a broad range of political aspirations and desires.

This enables me to recover the centrality of the earlier *communitas* in the language politics of the 1950s. I argue that a deeper analysis of the language question can capture many fissures and contradictions of the "Bengali Pakistani" subjectivity in the East Pakistan period. As the citizens of the new East Pakistani state began to feel profound discomfort with West Pakistan's rejection of Bengali as the primary state language, they brought in many earlier debates about Bengali Muslim contributions to the Bengali language. Philological discussions crept into the Parliament, now inhabited by men who were writers and journalists in undivided Bengal like Abul Kalam Shamsuddin of *Mohammadī* and *Azad*, Habibullah Bahar Chowdhury of *Bulbul* and others. The Legislative Assembly also comprised Bengali Hindus, such as the parliamentarian Dhirendranath Datta and Monoranjan Dhar. Through the language question, a spectrum of political beliefs came to the fore, coming to symbolize a profound break with West Pakistan. How did this major rupture unfold on the heels of the rupture of Partition? Can the language movement be at all classified as a uniform political movement, or does it instead give us insight into a profound lack of communication between different political identities and cultures?

While language was discussed before 1947 as a concept tied to the *jātīya* imaginary, the discursive shift in East Pakistan made it a question of the *rāṣṭra* (state). As explored in the previous chapter, the question of the *jātī* meant different things at various junctures in the

---

original pamphlets/manifestos published by the Bangla Academy, mostly before 1971, if not otherwise indicated. See Badruddin Umar, *Pūrbabāṅgālār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Taṯkālīn Rājnīti* (Dhaka: Subarna, 2017).

early twentieth century—sometimes it referred to the unified Bengali *jātī,* which was the *communitas* of the Hindus and Muslims, and during the separatist movement it exclusively referred to Bengali Muslims alone. During the language movement, however, the language question is always referred to as the *rāṣṭrabhāṣā*, which marks it as a problem of the nation-state, the *realpolitik.* As the *jātī*'s demand for a *rāṣṭrabhāṣā* of its own was met with silence and rejection, the *communitas* launched a renewed struggle within the *realpolitik* of Pakistan.

The Question of the State Language: Bengali versus Urdu

In 1948, the Bengali littérateur Syed Mujtaba Ali wrote an article called "Purba Pākistāner Rāṣṭra Bhāṣā" ("The State Language of East Pakistan") in the Calcutta-based periodical *Chaturanga*. It was reprinted and distributed widely as a small pamphlet/monograph in East Pakistan eight years later, in 1955, by a press based in Chittagong.[5] This article was originally an incomplete address that he tried to deliver to a packed hall of supporters and bitter opponents at the Kendriya Musalman Sahitya Sangsad in Sylhet in December 1947, a few months after the Partition in August.[6]

[5] Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Purba Pākistāner Rāṣṭra Bhāṣā* (Chittagong: Baighar, 1955). Henceforth *Purba Pākistāner Rāṣṭra Bhāṣā.* Syed Mujtaba Ali (1904-1974) was a writer, educator, and polyglot whose life was split between East and West Bengal. He was born in Karimganj, Sylhet, and obtained his BA from Visva Bharati, Shantiniketan, in 1926, where he learned several languages. Additionally, he studied at the Universities of Calcutta and Aligarh before receiving a DPhil in Comparative Religions at the University of Bonn. Thereafter, he went on to study at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. He had taught at Kabul from 1927 to 1929, which he commemorated in his most celebrated collection of stories, *Deśe Bideśe (In a Land Far From Home).* After his experience in Cairo, he came back to teach in India (Baroda) and East Bengal (Bogra, Rajshahi) before the Partition. He initially chose to go to East Pakistan but moved to India in the wake of the language movement, working in the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, the All India Radio, and at Visva Bharati University (as professor of German and Islamic Studies) in the 1950s and 1960s. He returned to an independent Bangladesh in 1972, dying in 1974. See Nurur Rahaman Khan, *Syed Mujtaba Ali, 1904-1974* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987).
[6] The Kendriya Muslim Sahitya Sangsad had been organizing a few meetings on the question of Bengali as state language. The first of these was presided over by Md Matin Uddin, the meeting was organized around the theme "Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā"; and the speaker was littérateur and critic Md. Muslim Choudhury, who put forward the proposition that the preeminent state language of Pakistan should be Bengali as the largest majority population in Pakistan spoke the language. He also entreated the Bengali *ulama* to infuse a Muslim sensibility ("*bhāvadhārā*") in Bengali literature to make the language deeply Islamic. See Nasir Uddin Ahmad, *Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Āndolane Sileṭ Kendrīya Muslim Sāhitya Saṃsader Bhūmikā* (Sylhet: Kendriya Muslim Sahitya Sangsad, 1975), 7 (henceforth, *Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Āndolane Sileṭ Kendrīya Muslim Sāhitya Saṃsader Bhūmikā*).

This was the second meeting of the Kendriya Musalman Sahitya Sangsad, organized around the question, "Purba Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Bāṃlā nā Urdu Haoyā Ucit?" ("Should the State Language of East Pakistan be Bengali or Urdu?") The secretary of the Sangsad, Maulvi Muhammad Nurul Haq, had invited the then-famous writer Syed Mujtaba Ali to present on the topic of this most pressing question. The event, however, perhaps because of Syed Mujtaba Ali's reputation, was jeopardized. What was envisioned as a hall full of one hundred men of erudition and discernment turned out instead to have gathered around fifteen hundred men, some of whom kept interrupting the general address by shouting that Arabic should be the state language.[7] Meanwhile, when Syed Mujtaba Ali took the stage to speak, the gathering started to shout, "We can get a rotten smell of Shantiniketan"—to which Syed Mujtaba Ali responded that he too was a son of Sylhet, and if the *Urduwala*s could respond in kind (by lecturing in Urdu as he could easily do), then they should do so without taking recourse to mere trouble mongering. Despite his spirited response, he could not finish his lecture amid the ruckus and the full transcript, as I have mentioned, was only reprinted later.

What did Syed Mujtaba Ali have to say to a Sylhet that was rapidly transforming from the Sylhet of his childhood, the Sylhet he had lived in before going to study at Tagore's university in Visva Bharati, Shantiniketan, in 1922? This new Sylhet, which opted to go into East Pakistan via the fateful Sylhet Referendum of 1947,[8] had been rapidly witnessing newly

[7] *Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Āndolane Sileṭ Kendrīya Muslim Sāhitya Saṃsader Bhūmikā*, 8.

[8] The general Muslim opinion in Sylhet was in favor of a reunion with Bengal right from 1874. From about 1910 to the mid-1920s, a Muslim middle-class political leadership emerged in the region. Around this same time a cleavage also emerged between Hindu and Muslim: evoked in the large part with a Bengali (Hindu) and Sylheti (Muslim) distinction. In 1912, the first partition of Bengal was annulled and Sylhet went to Assam. This saw a mass popular resistance and many appeals against the decision. The imperial government rejected all such appeals of the people of the Surma Valley (Sylhet and Cachar) for territorial and linguistic reorganization of the provinces of Assam and Bengal. Nor was Bengal interested in conceding to such demands, arguing that it would set a precedent for Bengali-speaking populations of Manbhum region in Bihar and Orissa to make similar claims. During the run up to the Partition, Assam (now a Governor's province) was sharply divided along religious and linguistic lines. The Viceroy decided to hold a Referendum in Sylhet on July 6-7, 1947; the majority voted to merge with East Pakistan. Radcliffe's Bengal Boundary Commission declared its award for Sylhet on August 13; from August 17, Sylhet was part of East Pakistan barring four *thana*s, which lay in Assam. See Sanjib Baruah, *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) and Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947: Contour of Freedom* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

formed Urdu *jāmeya*s, *ānjumān*s, and primary schools. It was here that Syed Mujtaba Ali had returned to advocate the cause for Bengali.

He begins with a reference to the primary argument that the *Urduwālā*s were using: East and West Pakistan were one wholly undivided unit, an *abhinna rāṣṭra.* One had to accept that the connecting factor binding the two states into one centralized structure was the central (*kendrīya*) language—Urdu. Could such an artificial connection be forged? No, argues Mujtaba Ali, this was a complete impossibility. In the history of languages and nation-states, this was untenable as seen from historical precedent.[9] To convince the parochial *Urduwālā*, he said examples from Europe would not be easily accepted, so he would venture to make an argument from those Muslim countries now designated as the "Pak" world.[10]

Thus, he speaks first and foremost of the complex nature of language, ethnicity and Islam in the Middle East. Citing the geographical proximity of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey in the medieval world, he explains how Iran converted en masse from Zoroastrianism to Islam in the time of Khalifa Abu Bakr. At this time, the "center" of all Muslim education and politics was Medina—"the language of the center was Arabic, in that language the Quran was expressed; the words of the Prophet as *Hadis* were in Arabic"[11]—and so the Persians started to learn Arabic and write in the language. During the Abbasid period, Baghdad became the center of power and was even more geographically close to Iran. Many Persians moved to Baghdad and acquired high fluency in Arabic; meanwhile Iran was occupied by Arab governors, officers, and merchants and had a profusion of Arabic madrasas and clerics. And yet, the Persian language returned three centuries later by the end of the tenth century. A royal injunction was given to the great poet Firdausi to compose an epic in the *deśaja* Persian

[9] Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Purba Pākistāner Rāṣṭra Bhāṣā,* 6.
[10] Ibid, 6.
[11] Ibid, 7.

avoiding as far as possible the use of Arabic words. Eventually, Persian became the state language of Iran.[12]

Syed Mujtaba Ali makes an important point at this juncture, claiming that "state language" is often mistakenly seen as merely an extension of religious/political affiliation, an expression of sectarian political aspiration winning the day:

> The *Urduwālā* might now claim in response that Iran became Shia and, facing conflict with the Sunni Arabs, reinstated Persian. Such a reply is merely a desire to deceive people. Historians will know that Firdausi's patron Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni was such a hardcore Sunni that in Sindh he was responsible for murdering thousands of Ismaili Shias…it is clear that in the Persian language movement fighting against Arabic, both Sunni and Shia sects participated equally.[13]

He provides a few more examples from the Islamic world in order to explain how the centralized "state language" model used by the Arabs failed repeatedly. Turkey eventually restored Turkish as state language. And as for Egypt—which the *Urdūwālā* claimed to be another home for Arabic—Mujtaba Ali argued that this was truly a result of colonialism and occupation. Many Arabs moved to Egypt after conquering it and imposed their language on the natives. Thus, the language spoken in Egypt is a creolized Egyptian Arabic. This intermingling of native Egyptian language and Arabic could be proved philologically; Egyptians do not pronounce the letter jīm as "ja" but as "ga," unlike in Arabic.[14]

Syed Mujtaba Ali's argument stands not only against Urdu as a centralized language working against the interests of Bengali Muslims, but against the very conception of a singular state language, which does away with the plurality of identities and political imagination in history. Consider, for instance, the example he gives from closer home, India in the time of the Pathan-Moghuls:

> The great poet Amir Khusrau composed poetry in a high register of Persian. However, he had such foresight that he realized that at the end, Persian would not carry on in this country; the *deśaja* language would be restored to its

[12] Ibid, 8.
[13] Ibid, 8-9.
[14] Ibid, 10.

> rightful place. Because he realized this fact, he experimented with his poetry by mixing Persian and Hindi. The *Urduwālā*s should be knowing this verse…(*translates into Bengali)…The Hindu youth takes on such beautiful form/When he speaks there is a shower of blossoms from his mouth/I said, Come here, let me kiss your mouth/He said, Āre Rāma! You are destroying my religion."*[15]

Syed Mujtaba Ali does not spend much time glossing the homoerotic nature of the cited verse, which clearly touches on themes of anxiety concerning social intermingling, nevertheless subverted by Khusrau's experimentation with language. However, this citation is significant, as Syed Mujtaba Ali's central concern is demonstrating that purity and pollution should not be a concern in the sphere of language, of joint traditions and culture. While discussing the twentieth-century nationalist movements in Iraq and Turkey, which wanted to expel the use of Arabic words, he says, "We are not in favor of such extreme nationalism or 'purification' (*viśuddhikaraṇa*)…in case *Urduwālā*s cannot understand our principles, we do not believe in purification as we are not trying to remove Sanskrit words from Bengali. That would be replicating the madness of Vidyasagar. Who does not understand today that by expelling Arabic and Persian words from Bengali, he acted in great stupidity?"[16] But that forceful expulsion by Hindu philologists was often resisted by the local *ālim-phāzil* of East Bengal, who continued to give public lectures in a Bengali laced heavily with Arabic, Persian, and Urdu words.[17] The other kind of *ulama,* who came from the North of India since the time of Mughal emperor Shahjahan, established Urdu as a leading language of religious discourse in Bengal. Yet, Syed Mujtaba Ali points out, despite the centuries-old traffic between North India and Bengal, this *ālim-phāzil* could not get the common people of Bengal to forget the "Nā-Pāk" Bengali and embrace Urdu or Persian. Despite the fact that knowing Persian would get employment, and knowing Arabic would ensure the certainty of a better afterlife, the common people of Bengal continued to speak in Bengali and compose

[15] Ibid, 11.
[16] Ibid, 10.
[17] Ibid, 12.

folk literary forms such as *Jārīmarsiyā, Bhāṭiyāli, Pīrmurśidī, Āul-Bāul, Sāin-Darbeśī,* and *Kecchāsāhitya*, even writing on Hindu themes such as the tears of the forlorn lover Rādhā.[18] Mujtaba Ali foregrounds this popular resilience against the higher strictures of religion:

> And we also know that the *maulvi*s and *maulana*s were not indifferent to this folk literature, they continuously issued fatwas against this literature as '*bid'at*', '*nājāiz*', '*kufr'* and '*širk*'. Yet, these are read at the riverbanks, cowsheds, in the houses of peasants. These books are published here, sold under trees on market days.[19]

Thereafter, Syed Mujtaba Ali goes into the logistics of implementing Urdu education in East Pakistan. Here, high schools and colleges would employ and disseminate a great number of erudite Urdu scholars to write on Islamic themes. Yet, East Pakistan comprised a majority population of Bengali speaking peasants whose education ends in middle school. This new Pakistan would leave out its majority population from the echelons of its new educational or pedagogical foundations. This, Syed Mujtaba Ali argues, is un-Islamic and the traditional *ulama* had never distinguished between the rich and the poor in this fashion. They taught the children of the rich and the poor through the same curriculum. To distinguish between a *devbhāṣā* (language of the gods) and *gaṇabhāṣā* (language of the people) is against the traditions of Islam.[20] He continues this analysis of class and the concomitant hierarchies of language.[21] At the end of the pamphlet, he ends with a warning to Pakistan, conveyed in the form of an apprehension. His main concern is that history is teleological, it does not repeat itself. Pakistan needs to teach the history of Islam with the understanding that the golden age of Abbasid Islam cannot be replicated in twentieth-century Pakistan. Yet one has to hold on to the essence of the democratic foundations of Islam, its fundamental

[18] Ibid, 13.
[19] Ibid, 14.
[20] Ibid, 16.
[21] Syed Mujtaba Ali's main argument is that the consolidation of a state language, disconnected from the large majority of people, began with the use of English language by the colonial government. The English-language reports on agriculture were indecipherable to the cultivators in the colonial state. His concern is that such kind of imperialist state practice would be repeated by the postcolonial Pakistani state if reports were written in Urdu, without a Bengali translation for the cultivators. Ibid, 17-20.

premises of equality. He argues that with the spread of Islam, every new locus of the religion developed its own particular variant—"Whenever Islam spread outside the Arab world, it embraced the knowledge and sciences, the arts and crafts of that part of the world to create a new civilization and culture."[22] This composite Indic Islam witnessed the construction of a monument like the Taj Mahal, the rise of a language like Urdu, art such as the Mughal miniatures, and even a musical genre like the *khayāl*.[23] It was in the interests of Pakistan to remember that language, too, is the site of this great intermingling of traditions. In that sense, to abandon one's mother tongue would be an act of idiocy; one must remember that Mirza Ghalib's Persian poetry remains neglected and forgotten in Iran, but his Urdu poetry is immortal. Literature would continue to capture the great crosscurrents of culture; the Bengali language would also continue to be a carrier (*bāhak*) of Islam:

> It is against the traditions of Islam to raise questions of "Pāk" and "Nā-Pāk". Just as you cannot designate a human being as "Nā-Pāk" to deprive him of the Kalimah, you cannot identify a language as "Nā-Pāk" to stop it from being a vehicle of Islam. "Chut Bāi" is not the path of Islam."[24]

This early contribution of Syed Mujtaba Ali to the language movement often does not find an extended mention in the existing historiography of the period. Nevertheless, as one of the early discursive contributions, it remains an important document of an individual who compared the situation in a newly forged nation-state with the rest of the Islamic world, and with contemporary European nationalism. The first real organized resistance to Urdu as state language was initiated by an organization called the Tamaddun Majlis, set up by three important ideologues and educators, Principal Abul Kasem, Kazi Motahar Hossain, and Abul Mansur Ahmed. Of the three, we are familiar with Abul Kasem and Kazi Motahar Hossain, who played an important role in the Muslim Sahitya Samaj of Dhaka of the 1920s and 1930s. Abul Mansur Ahmed's political career, cemented in the divisive and coalitional politics of

[22] Ibid, 61.
[23] Ibid, 61-62.
[24] Ibid, 51.

the late 1930s and 1940s in Calcutta, had been running parallel to his literary and journalistic career.[25] In early January 1947, it entered its fourth and final phase with the daily *Ittehad* that he had established at the behest of Suhrawardy. Wildly popular and providing employment to many Muslim graduates that Ahmed trained himself,[26] *Ittehad*—like other Bengali Muslim newspapers such as the *Azad*—continued to operate in Calcutta after August 1947. The new Indian government and the West Bengal administration—including chief ministers Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Bidhan Chandra Ray—continued to extend all protection to the "Pakistani" newspapers. However, when the *Ittehad* decided to move to Dhaka, it was faced with an initial ban by the Nazimuddin government, which did not want to support the circulation of a newspaper started by Suhrawardy.[27] With *Ittehad*'s uncertain life from August 1947 and death in 1950, Abul Mansur Ahmed's journalistic career came to an end, but a new political career began as opposition to the Muslim League in East Pakistan.[28]

It was in these Bengali Muslim—later "Pakistani"— dailies operating in Calcutta that a number of articles against Urdu were published by Abdul Huq, journalist and recent graduate of the English department of Calcutta University, in the months leading up to August 1947. These were "Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Biṣayak Prastāb" ("A Proposal Concerning the Issue of Bengali Language") in the *Ittehad* on June 29, 1947, "Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā" ("The State Language of Pakistan") in *Azad* on June 30, 1947, "Urdu Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Hale" ("If Urdu Becomes the State Language") in *Ittehad* on July 27, 1947*,* and "Purba Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā" ("The State Language of East Pakistan") in *Begum*, on August 3, 1947.

In the first of these articles, Huq's imaginary is still very much an Indian one, and in the spirit of journalistic ethnography discusses some contemporary examples and

[25] See Nurul Amin's biography and Mizanur Rahaman's intellectual biographies. Nurul Amin, *Abul Mansur Ahmed* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987) and Mizanur Rahaman, *Abul Mansur Ahmeder Cintādhārā* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2008).
[26] Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Atmakathā* (Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 2014), 309-315.
[27] Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Atmakathā,* 317.
[28] Nurul Amin, *Abul Mansur Ahmed* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987), 23.

counterfactual situations: "If today we took a national pledge that we would not speak in English, then both Dr. Suniti Chatterjee and Humayun Kabir would speak to Jawaharlal Nehru and even to his servant in Hindi, not in Bengali."[29] Bengalis, argues Abdul Huq, know Hindi and Urdu to some measure and bend to the will of the North Indian majority, regardless of gender and class. Citing two dubious instances he had himself encountered, he tells us about a man from his own district in East Bengal whose second marriage had been to an Urdu-speaking woman and whose entire household in Calcutta had been forced to become Urdu-speaking as a result of this unfortunate marriage.[30] His second example concerns a migrant rickshaw-puller who, fearing for his life in the ongoing riots of the time, began to work as a cook in a hostel (*mesbāḍi*) that Abdul Huq used to frequent. Upon knowing that, despite eight years spent in Bengal, the rickshaw-puller was not called upon to either speak or understand Bengali, Abdul Huq concludes with disgust that 60 million Bengalis do not have the national pride or self-esteem to make the Urdu-Hindi speaker learn their language. He proleptically points out, "…Yet, Urdu-Hindi is not the state language like English. The speakers of Urdu-Hindi are not the ruling class and nor are Bengalis the subject race."[31]

In "Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā," he makes an interesting argument for the preeminence of Bengali as state language. He points out that the main languages of Pakistan are five: Baluchi, Pashto, Sindhi, Punjabi and Bengali. Both wings of Pakistan have a significant presence of Urdu, but no region in either East or West Pakistan had Urdu as a mother tongue. The state language of the country must have one of these organic languages of the land as the mother tongue, but the number of speakers of Baluchi, Pashto and Sindhi were numerically much less than that of Punjabi and Bengali. In fact, he cited some (uncertain)[32] figures to

[29] Abdul Huq, "Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Biṣayak Prastāb," in *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Ādiparba* (Dhaka: Muktadhara, 1976), 7.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, 9.
[32] Ibid, 13. In an explanatory footnote written in 1975, he clarifies that the approximate figures were calculated before the Partition. Since the boundaries were not yet drawn, East Pakistan was supposed to be larger. Even in

make the claim that after a favorable outcome in the Sylhet Referendum the population of weaker limb (*bikalāṅga*) East Pakistan would be 50 million as opposed to the 30 million figure of West Pakistan.[33]

Urdu would eventually replace the hegemonic role held by English; this is a fear that Abdul Huq foresaw and examined in greater detail in "Urdu Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Hale", where he reminded us that for a long time in the Bengali Muslim community, English was seen as the *nāchārār jabān.* Despite having innumerable fatwas imposed by the *ulama* with English education historically seen as *hārām* throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, Bengali Muslims eventually had to embrace Western education and the English language to fight back and represent themselves socially and politically in colonial Bengal—"the language that we despised as the *nāchārār* language, the language we designated as *hārām* to be educated in, that language could still instill such slave mentality in us."[34] Such a situation would be replicated because of the blind belief in those accepting the future role that Urdu would play in the national life of Pakistan:

> Those who do not know the value of freedom, those who do not know about the languages of Pakistan, those who have no sympathy for literature and culture, and do not know the consequences of accepting one single language as the state language; only such people can be Bengali speakers and yet advocate another language [other than Bengali] as state language.[35]

A freedom that is complete and whole, concludes Abdul Huq, is one that includes the freedom to cultivate one's own language. Otherwise, freedom after 1947, for East Pakistan, would literally be *bandha-mukh,* gagged.[36] West Pakistan must make the effort to know the language of East Pakistan to *know* the people. And, most importantly, before determining the state language, Pakistanis must consult philologists (*bhāṣātattvabid).* Politicians alone cannot

---

the announcement of June 3, 1947, Malda, West Dinajpur and Murshidabad were supposed to be included in East Pakistan and West Bengal was supposed to have Khulna.

[33] Ibid, 13.

[34] Ibid, 20.

[35] Ibid, 19.

[36] Ibid.

determine the course of determining the cultural life of a new nation; just as economists would plan the economy, and military experts war, only philologists and experts on language and literature could determine what a state language should be.[37] In the last and shortest of these articles published in the female-oriented periodical *Begum,* his tone somewhat softens and he argues that several countries such as Canada and Switzerland had multiple state languages. Hence, Bengali should be one of the state languages of Pakistan. He then entreats the women of East Pakistan to agitate for the cause, saying that with respect to women's literature, the Bengali Muslim community was severely lacking. It was important, he says, that representatives from East Pakistan (particularly women) should stand up for Bengali in the Constituent Assembly of East Pakistan.[38]

The earliest discussions of this philological problem within concrete logistics of state policy was initiated by Muhammad Shahidullah, who wrote an article called "*Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Samasyā*" in the *Dainik Azad* in July 1947. In this short piece, he begins with India having decided to adopt Hindi in the Devnagari script as the state language. Meanwhile, the Muslim League is still in the process of deciding what the state language of Pakistan should be. Shahidullah's posits the universal state language of global Islam to be Arabic, the language of the *Koran* and *Hadiz*. However, in the context of the dominion of Pakistan, he believes that the matter of the state language is far more problematic. By this time, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed had declared that the state language of Pakistan should be Urdu. Yet, what of the many Hindus and Sikhs who remain in Pakistnan, Shahidullah asks? Moreover, why should Pakistan, like India, make the same mistake of adopting one state language for the entire diverse population of the nation-state? Shahidullah cites the instance of the Soviet Union as a diverse and vast country that opted to have several state-languages. He was also surprised by the fact that the decision to continue English as the preeminent official language

[37] Ibid, 23.
[38] Ibid, 25.

was discontinued, writing, "We can give up the English people, but hardly the English language. This is an international language, and a vehicle for modern thinking and science."[39] Finally, he claims that Bengali is the primary language spoken by the majority in East Pakistan, its literature being the most prolific. Urdu can only be second place to Bengali. Yet, because it was written in the Arabic script, Arabs, Persians, Afghans, and Indonesians would also easily read it. This would enable Urdu to be a more transnational language than Hindi. On the other hand, English would be far more accessible to the world.

Yet, Shahidullah points out, the question of the administrative language of the Pakistan dominion should not be conflated with the question of the state language. Bengali is the language of the people, irrespective of religion. To impose Urdu/Hindi in the courts and universities of Bangladesh would be equivalent to political servitude. "The view that Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed has expressed in the context of replacing the regional language of the schools with Urdu," Shahidullah says, "as an educator I must strongly protest this. Not only is this against principles of scientific education, but against the rights of self-rule and autonomy of the province."[40]

Identity and Alphabet: Writing Bengali in the Arabic Script

One of the main debates that raged in the conflict between Urdu and Bengali was deeply philological in nature and concerned a change in *haraph* or script. The proposal that Bengali be written in the Arabic script went back earlier. In 1915, 'Khādemol Eslām Bangabāsi' (a pseudonym) proposed in an article titled "Bāṅgālir Mātṛbhāṣā" ("The Mother Tongue of Bengalis"):

> If like Urdu, our language were to be written in the Arabic script, people of the Arab-Persianate world would read and learn our language easily, and we will also be able to read and learn their language. If our mother tongue is written in

[39] Muhammad Shahidullah, "*Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Samasyā*," *Dainik Azad,* 15 Śrāvan 1354 (July 1947). Reprinted in Muhammad Shahidullah, *Āmāder Samasyā* (Dhaka: Renaissance Publications, 1949), 32-33.
[40] Ibid.

> the Arabic script then it would definitely increase the reverence towards it by ordinary people…Muslims should increase efforts on this issue.[41]

Bashir Al Helal points out that the writing of Bengali in Arabic script was quite common in medieval Bengal. Consulting the archives of the Bangla Academy, he cites *puthi*s such as the sixteenth-century *Nītiśāstrabārtā* by Mojāmmel, Mohāmmad Khān's seventeenth-century *Maktul Hosena,* and Ālāol's seventeenth-century *Tohphā*.[42] He explains that, with the spread of Muslim empires across Asia and into the subcontinent, not only Iran but also other regions with Muslim rulers tried to use the Arabic script for a vast audience—reasoning that the pro-Arabic script lobby in East Pakistan repeatedly used.[43] The main ideologue of the Arabic script movement was the politician Fazlur Rahman, a member of the central cabinet of Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan and in charge of the Ministry of Education, Commerce, and Refugees.[44] A number of educators and civil servants joined him in the movement—the Urdu-speaking civil servant Fazle Ahmad Karim Fazli, Professor Osman Gani, Bihari Maulana Abdur Rahman Bekhud, and the Deputy Secretary of the Prādeśik Śikṣā Daptar*,* Minzanur Rahman.[45] The most important of these was a zealous teacher of Arabic and Persian in a Chittagong school, Maulana Zulfiqar Ali (1892-1954). He established a society called Harūphūl Korān and also published a journal of the same name, which continued until 1945.[46] After the Partition of 1947, he received some support from the Pakistani Government.

---

[41] *Al-Eslām* 1, no. 8 (Aghrāyaṅ BS 1322. Also cited in *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Dalīl*, ed. Abul Ahsan Chowdhury (Dhaka: Bangladesh Bhāṣā Samiti, 1988), 2; Bashir Al Helal, *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Itihāsa* (Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, 2016), 693.

[42] He also cites instances of transliteration from Bengali into Arabic script, such as Phayazullāh's transliteration of Phakīr Garibullāh's *Yusuph Zuleikhā* and Jāmāl Khān's transliteration of Ālī Rājā's *Jñanasāgar*. See Bashir Al Helal, *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Itihās* (Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, 2016), 694. The manuscripts are in the collection of the Bangla Academy.

[43] Bashir Al Helal, *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Itihās,* 694.

[44] He then became the minister for education and commerce in the cabinet of Khwaja Nazimuddin from 1951 to 1953.

[45] On December 3, 1949, the Tamaddun Majlis's *Sāptāhik Sainik* called him the "pradhān pāndā" (chief leader) for the script movement. Three primary archival documents were sourced and edited by Abul Ahsan Chowdhury in the collection *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Dalīl* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Bhāṣā Samiti, 1988). See *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Dalīl,* 3.

[46] *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Dalīl,* 2.

The first issue of the *Harūphūl Korān* was published along with an inaugural pamphlet/manifesto, which was divided into three parts. The first page begins with "*Harūphūl Korān Patrikākhāni Ārabī Akṣare Baṃlā Bhāṣāy Prakāś Karār Uddeśya* ("The Reason Behind Publishing the Journal *Harūphūl Korān* in Bengali Language in the Arabic Script"). Here, Zulfiqar Ali explained that it would aid the young children of Bengal to acquire a foreign language by first learning the script at a young age, when languages are still easy to grasp. For a long time, he argued, Arabic has been taught to young children via rote recitation and memorization.[47] By introducing Bengali—the familiar mother tongue—through Arabic script in *maktab*s and primary schools, children would be directly reading the Koran-Sharif without any intermediaries. They would also be able to read Urdu. The main issue that Zulfiqar Ali raises is that religious instruction for the most part in Bengal does not occur organically and naturally in Bengal. The unfamiliarity with Arabic is the primary reason behind the mechanical and superficial acquisition of Islamic religious traditions. Arabic could be brought closer home, made *familiar,* by the use of the mother tongue.[48] The introductory page gave way to a defense, *kaiphiyat*—no doubt Zulfiqar Ali anticipated much opposition to his plan. In "Bāṃlā Bhāṣāke Ārabī Akṣare Likhār Yukti Saṃgata Kaiphiyat*"* ("A Defense Supported with Arguments for Writing the Bengali Language in the Arabic Script"), Zulfiqar Ali extends this line of argument, saying that most children in Bengal never learn to pronounce Arabic properly. This is the primary reason why the Arabic script must be introduced in order to enable a correct ability to read and pronounce Arabic, something the *bikṛta* Devnagari or Bengali script does not allow. In fact, the familiarity with these latter scripts predisposes Muslim students to take up Sanskrit and Pali.[49] His trumping argument however comes with the difference in the number of alphabets required to write the same word in the two scripts—"compared to the Bengali script, the Arabic script can be written far

[47] Ibid, 22.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid, 23.

more briefly with less space and time…there ink, pen, paper and time spent will be less."[50] He then follows this with a sample primer of passages in both scripts.[51]

Some time in 1949, a supporter of the Bengali-in-Arabic-script movement published an anonymous pamphlet called *Haraph Samasyā: Nirapekṣa Ālocanā (The Problem of Script: An Unbiased Discussion).*[52] He called himself "Dūradarśī" ("The Farsighted"). There was no doubt that he was, in fact, quite unequivocal about his views on the necessity to convert to the Arabic script for Bengali. Dūradarśī begins his polemical essay by addressing the objection people were raising against a change to the Arabic script, that it was a proposal made by "foreigners" after the Partition. He reminds the reader that the proposal was indeed made *before* the Partition by a devout Bengali Muslim of East Bengal, Maulana Zulfiqar Ali, who—*khodābhakt,* learned, and observer of *rozā*—undertook this mission after a visitation in a dream by Rasūl-e-Karīm (the Holy Prophet). He not only wrote many books in the Arabic script, Dūradarśī writes, but also published them at his own expense. And hence, the scheme was definitely not *bideśī* (foreign), as alleged by those who resisted the script change. If indeed there was an origin for this idea, then it was the Holy Prophet, Rasūl-e-Karīm, who had appeared in Zulfiqar Ali's dreams. Dūradarśī expresses the concern that the term "foreigner" used to designate Muslims outside the dominion of Pakistan reveals reviled and un-Islamic sentiments; this is a call for East Pakistanis to relinquish their regional and sectarian interests to embrace all Muslims of a global Islam.[53]

Dūradarśī's second point is far more conceptual. He argues, "A change in script cannot destroy a language."[54] He cites examples in order to substantiate this claim. First, he speaks of how Urdu, a language that grew out of a spoken Prākṛta and Braj, came to be

[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid, 24-25.
[52] It was printed by M. K. Nazir at the Printing House, 35 Ashak Lane, Dhaka. (The exact date was never determined.) The pamphlet was reprinted as one of three primary sources edited by Abul Ahsan Chowdhury in the collection *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Dalīl.* I will be using this version here.
[53] Ibid, 31.
[54] Ibid.

written by Muslims in the Persian script. Instead of destroying the language, he points out, an old language was infused with new life and vitality. The addition of Arabic and Persian words to the language elevated Urdu within the Islamic *tamaddun* (culture). Script in that vein, he argues, is somewhat like new clothes (*natun poṣāk*).[55] He then ventures into his second example, "Let us consider the Persian language. By using a new version of the Arabic script (the nāstā'līq), the language found new expression and expansion. Many centuries have passed by since their script change, but Persian is still as independent to Arabic as it once was."[56] Moreover, he cites a number of languages like Pashto, Sindhi, and Indonesian that turned to the Arabic script and belonged to a larger nation of Islam, yet preserved an independent *svātantra* (independence) despite the turn. Dūradarśī's central claim is that language and script are completely different entities ("*Bhāṣā evaṃ haraph, ihārā paraspar ālāda jiniṣ*").[57] He adds another interesting caveat, perhaps to convince the naysayers. Those who advocate for Urdu as the language of East Pakistan do not actually desire Bengali to be written in the Arabic script, because that would mean that the language would continue to flourish albeit in a different form. The *Urduwālā*s desire the death of Bengali and anticipate its demise in due course if Bengali were to be continued to be written in its own script. It was for this reason that the *Urduwālā*s, too, resisted the idea of a change in script.[58]

Another important reason why Dūradarśī believed in the necessity of the change to the Arabic script was the thousands of maulvis and maulanas who received their *tālim* (education in Quran, Hadith and Islamic law) under the Dārs-e-Nizāmī.[59] These clerics and scholars had no familiarity with the Bengali tradition, but should they, along with the

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid, 32.
[59] A curriculum developed by Mulla Nizam-al-Din (died 1748) in the eighteenth century, who standardized and systematized Islamic learning in the eighteenth century. While, traditionally, education was seen as a lifelong process, in which one changed teachers and mastered several books over a long period, the new curriculum meant that one had to master a certain number of books within a specific time period. See Francis Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

unlettered, be instructed in the new Bengali-in-Arabic script, a new revolution in education would be witnessed.[60] He cites how the Pakistan government had proposed twenty schools for the adult illiterate population, which would go a long way toward removing the problem of illiteracy.[61] Such proposals were floating about and were being decided upon by a committee of learned scholars such as Muhammad Shahidullah and Abul Hasanat Ismail, who would soon give a decision.[62] Again, he addresses why it has been proposed that the easing out of the Bengali script and the introduction of the Arabic script need necessarily be a gradual and painstaking process. Naysayers argued that this change would mean a huge loss (*noksān*) to the Bengali print industry and to writers. Dūradarśī countered this charge by saying that it was a gradual shift in the publishing industry that must be made for the sake of Pakistan. Here, he says that it is not the past or the present that one should hold on to; thoughts such as economic or cultural loss should not be the animating principles.[63] The question one should ask at this juncture is this: what should be the themes (*viṣaya-bastu*) and sensibility (*bhāvadhārā)* of the future books of East Pakistan?[64] All the Musalmani words that had so far disappeared in the language crafted by the Hindus should finally be recovered. They would be used in profusion in the written language (*Sādhu Bāṃlā),* leading to a new East Pakistani Bengali language that would be very different from the language of West Bengal.[65] Dūradarśī says:

> For these reasons, the books written in Musalmānī Bāṃlā and Pākistānī Bāṃlā and of Pākistānī *bhāvadhārā* would decrease in numbers rapidly in West Bengal and Assam, *even if there is no change in script*. Our Bengali writers would have to depend only on the Pakistani readership for royalties. Even if the Bengali script continues, the book market must be restricted only within the borders of **East Bengal.** The change to the Arabic script would help West Pakistanis to learn the Bengali language.[66]

[60] Ibid, 33.
[61] Ibid, 42.
[62] Ibid, 33.
[63] Ibid, 34.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, 35.

To desire the shrinking of the book market for East Pakistan showed a sectarian imagination that clearly wanted to delineate crucial differences between East Pakistan and the Indian Bengali-speaking territories, including Assam. Many "Bengali Muslim" printers still operated in Calcutta, though primarily for an East Bengali audience; at this time, newspapers such as*Azad* and *Ittehad* and the editors of periodicals like *Saogāt* and *Mohammadī,* Md. Nasiruddin and Md. Akram Khan, were in the process of shifting shift base to Dhaka. The print spheres of Calcutta-Dhaka were not distinctly autonomous yet in the first few years after the Partition.[67]

Dūradarśī keeps coming back to one crucial point— the relationship between script and language. He repeatedly argues that language learning becomes easier with a sharedness of script; here, the continuum of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu with the Bengali-in-Arabic-script will be of vital importance. Though the grammar of Arabic is significantly different from Persian, which, in turn, is again different from Urdu, the script is very similar, the vocabulary is common, and, most importantly, the *bhāvadhārā* is shared. One must, he argues, introduce the Bengali into this larger Muslim continuity of language, the "common factor."[68] This will bring, he explains, Bengali closer to the Urdu. He provides examples of this claim:

> If the Arabic script is used, then these words will return to their own forms and pronunciations and in both Bengali and Urdu, their written versions will be the same. For instance عزو (*'azw*) assumes the form □□□ (aju) in the Bengali; in Urdu its spelling and pronunciation remains accurate. Urdu and Bengali are similar because they are from the same language family.[69]

[67] For instance, the East Bengal Legislative Assembly Debate from June 8, 1948, shows the annoyed East Bengali parliamentarian Monoranjan Gupta protest against the ban from March 13, 1948, on *Amritabazar Patrika, Ananda Bazar Patrika*, and *Swadhinata* in East Bengal, which had published anti-Pakistan articles. The ban was withdrawn, Khwaja Nazimuddin countered, from March 15. To this, Dhirendranath Dutta replied that the ban on *Amritabazar Patrika* persisted. Again, Nazimuddin clarified that despite the ban *Amritabazar Patrika* had published "a vicious article criticizing the Head of the State—Quaid-e-Azam" justifying a longer ban. Monoranjan Dhar explains that the subdivisional Officer of Chuadanga (a town in Khulna district adjacent to Nadia district in West Bengal) personally prevented agents at the Railway Station from distributing the newspapers. See *Proceedings of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly* (June 8, 1948) in *Assembly Proceedings: Official Report* (Dacca: East Pakistan Government Press, 1957), 25-26.
[68] *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Dalīl,* 35.
[69] Ibid, 36.

Towards the end of the essay, he clearly expressed why it was crucial that such a painful but necessary change be made:

> The all-powerful Allah through his infinite *meherbānī* (generosity) has broken the shackles of our political servitude. The question is this; will we now break the chains of our *tamaddunī* (cultural) servitude? These shackles have mingled in our body by now, when we try to shed them a bit of our skin will also fall off (though we can take care to see that our skin does not shed); we will also temporarily feel some physical pain. But the wound will heal quickly, and new skin will grow…in actuality, flesh was torn out, blood was flowing and we squirmed in pain…the wound will heal faster if our body is infused with the fresh blood of Islamic *bhāvadhārā* and culture.[70]

In this extraordinary analogy between body politic and script, Duradarśī reminds the reader of the all-too-real real (*prakṛtapakṣe*) physical violence of the Partition. On another level, he advocates an epistemic counter-violence to redress centuries of epistemic erasure of Bengali Muslims at the hands of Hindus. For example, he cites "Vidyasagar and Company" as the initiators of a Sanskritized written language that disregarded the colloquial language of the everyday, unfamiliar to both Muslims and Hindus beyond a handful of Sanskrit scholars. Most importantly, he reminds the reader, this standardization was not merely of vocabulary but also of script and orthography.[71]

***Tamaddun*: Of the City, or, Language as Belonging**

The Arabic word *tamaddun* (تمدن) comes from the root m-d-n, related to *madīna* or "the city." It is a verbal noun of the form *tamaddana*, meaning to become civilized or urbanized. *Tamaddun*, then, denotes the property of belonging to the city, a process of becoming.[72] In the context of the subcontinent, it was broadly used to mean the concept of

[70] Ibid, 46-47.
[71] Ibid, 45.
[72] Hans Wehr and J. Milton Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: Arabic-English*, 4th ed. (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 1055.

civilization. *Tamaddun* became central to the new politico-religious project of Pakistani self-making.[73] The writer Humayun Azad recollects:

> About eight hundred articles were published in the period between 1947 and 1951 in various periodicals such as *Mohammadī, Māhenao, Saogāt, Kāphelā, Naobāhār, Dilrubā, Imroz*. Most of the articles were short and without any theme or defining characteristics. The essayists kept on revisiting the same few topics and making the same points. Most of these essayists were involved in the *Pākistānbādī* currents: they believed in the statist-political-religious ideals of Pakistan. They were interested in establishing them everywhere in the country. They wanted to build language-literature-culture (*bhāṣā-sāhitya-saṇskṛti*)—what they called *tamaddun*— according to a Pakistani framework.[74]

It was ironic that the organization, which completely went against Pākistānbādī currents to establish the sovereign demands of Bengali, also chose to call itself the Tamaddun Majlis. On September 15, 1947, it published the pamphlet *Pākistāner Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Bāṃlā nā Urdu* (*Is the State Language of Pakistan Bengali or Urdu?*)[75] Abul Kasem took responsibility for producing this seventeen-page manifesto, which was privately published and distributed. It began with the main proposal (*prastāb)*— Bengali would be first and foremost the medium of instruction in East Pakistan. Second, it would be the language of the courts, and third, it would be the language of administration. The Pakistani central government would have two state languages, Bengali and Urdu. Bengali should be the primary language for those who reside in East Pakistan; Urdu would be the second or *anta-prādeśik* language required for those Bengalis who went to other parts of Pakistan for employment. For the purpose of convenience, the authors proposed, administration and scientific education would continue to be in both Bengali and English before the Bengali language underwent substantial reform.

---

[73] There is no conclusive discussion on this in the context of East Pakistan, though Neilesh Bose mentions this briefly in "Purba Pakistan Zindabad: Bengali Visions of Pakistan, 1940–1947." See *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 1–36. More interesting is the discussion of categories such as *tamaddun* and *tahzib* in early Muslim nationalism. See Faisal Devji, "Apologetic Modernity," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2007): 61–76.

[74] Humayun Azad, *Bhāṣā Āndolan: Sāhityik Paṭabhūmi* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1990), 30.

[75] The Tamaddun Majlis was the first step to an oppositional Bengali politics directed towards the Central Pakistani government, claimed Abul Kasem. Badruddin Umar disagrees with Kasem's claim arguing that it was instead the revolutionary students' outfit, the Gana Azadi League that had taken the first step. See Badruddin Umar, *Pūrbabāṅgālār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Tat̲kālīn Rājnīti*, vol. 1, 17-19.

The manifesto directly called upon the East Pakistanis to agitate over the cause of language: "If Urdu or Bengali be made the sole language of all of Pakistan, then it would be the on the same imperialist and irrational principles [as English]…we call upon all of East Pakistan to participate in this movement (*āndolan*)."[76] The Tamaddun Majlis also planned the agitation as a democratic movement that would unfold through constitutional means:

> There should be meetings in every school and college and in every city and should be drafted to protest against another language being forcefully thrust upon us; these should be sent to Quaid-e-Azam and other leaders.
> A deputation should go to every member of the Constituent Assembly to convince them that they should not express views against the Bengali language and thus move towards a path of suicide for the Bengalis.[77]

The initial response to the Tamaddun Majlis was quite lukewarm, though the organization was intellectually based at the Dhaka University, where the Majlis—described as a semi-cultural and semi-political Islamic organization—tried to recruit students for the cause.[78] The small office of the Tamaddun Majlis was located near the campus; Abul Kasem approached students at residential halls like the Muslim Hall and A.K. Fazlul Haq Hall and found that they were not exactly enthused about his concerns. Thereafter, he organized a *sāhitya sabhā* at the Fazlul Haq Hall in October 1947, which was presided over by the minister Habibullah Bahar Choudhury, with speeches by Jasimuddin, Kazi Motahar Hossain, and other ministers. The ministers were then, according to Abul Kasem, divided into two distinct camps. One camp was against Bengali, those ministers who sided with Prime Minister Nazimuddin; the other comprised supporters such as Habibullah Bahar Choudhury. They could not speak for the cause of the Bengali language movement in public, but gave tacit encouragement and support.[79] In these difficult first few months of the language agitation, Dhaka University—which went on to play a central role in the agitation in the days

[76] Mohammad Abul Kasem, *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Itihās* (Dhaka: Pakistan Tamaddun Majlis, 1967), 13, henceforth *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Itihās.*
[77] Ibid, 15.
[78] Ibid, 16.
[79] Abul Kasem speaks of the difficult position of the ministers at the time as an explanatory footnote. Ibid, 16.

to come—showed inertia. As Nurul Huq Bhuiyan, a professor of Chemistry at Dhaka University and a member of Tamaddun Majlis noted, nobody understood the significance of the movement at the beginning. Only a few science professors came forward to advocate for the role of Bengali as state language, and even the Bengali department seemed completely detached from the question.[80]

Meanwhile the Tamaddun Majlis went about creating a memorandum, signed by many eminent members of Bengali civil society. It was presented to the government, and in late December 1947, the Tamaddun Majlis set up the first *Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Saṅgrām Committee* (National Language Action Committee). This was the beginning of an attempt to build a mass movement, and the Tamaddun Majlis approached various political outfits for their support, including the Communist Party and the Chātra Federation (a left leaning students' party).[81] The Chātra League was splitting up at the time, recalls Kasem, into two groups. One group denying the leadership of Shah Azizur Rahman comprised Shamsul Haq, Aziz Ahmad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Naimuddin Ahmad, who extended early support to the Tamaddun Majlis.[82] The Majlis kept on sending its workers into the districts to enlist support, but meanwhile the city of Dhaka witnessed a great deal of unrest and an Urdu countermovement started to unfold. Majlis workers were not allowed to move freely in Dhaka and were attacked on sight. When Mohammad Siddiqullah (the general secretary of Salimullah Hall) tried to get handbills published in the Majlis's Baliyadi Press, he was forcefully restrained and nearly lynched.[83] The National Language Action Committee met secretly in the Majlis's headquarters in a room at the Surat Jamal Mess, but it was ransacked and vandalized.[84] The movement, however, only continued gaining momentum; the

[80] Mostapha Kamal, *Bhāṣā Āndolan: Sātcalliś theke Bāyānna* (Chittagong: Bangladesh Cooperative Book Society Ltd, 1987), 10. Henceforth, *Bhāṣā Āndolan: Sātcalliś theke Bāyānna.*
[81] Ibid, 17.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid, 20.
[84] Ibid, 13.

professors of the Tamaddun Majlis were succeeding in mobilizing the student community. At the All Pakistan Educational Conference held in Karachi on the December 5, 1947, it was declared that Urdu would be the sole state language of Pakistan.[85] In protest, students of Dhaka College, Jagannath College, and Dhaka University assembled at the Beltala grounds, and lectures were given by important students leaders like Farid Ahmad, Munir Chowdhury, A.K.M. Ahsan, Abdur Rahman Chowdhury, and Kalyani Dasgupta.[86] However, the city was convinced, for the most part, that the language movement was orchestrated by enemies of the Pakistani state. To this effect, the government spread posters.[87] The old city or *Purān* Dhaka in particular was very much against the student-led language movement. In November 1947, a large and angry mob had surrounded students including Mohammad Toaha and Ghulam Azam, dispersed by Azam who bravely addressed the people about the desirability of having Bengali as a state language.[88]

However, the tide began to turn in 1948 as the movement began to grow in scope. On February 28, 1948, Dhirendranath Datta raised the language question at the Constituent Assembly at Karachi, arguing that *lingua franca* Bengali should be considered as a state language and that this demand did not just stem from a "spirit of narrow Provincialism."[89] On March 11, 1948, students of Dhaka University and other colleges of the city organized a general strike. Several leaders were arrested and injured, including A. K. Fazlul Haq.[90] These protests went on for the next four days, until Jinnah himself arrived in Dhaka. On March 19

[85] *Proceedings of the Pakistan Educational Conference, Held At Karachi, From 27th November to 1st December 1947* (Islamabad: Govt. of Pakistan, Ministry of the Interior, Education Division, 1983).
[86] Kamal, *Bhāṣā Āndolan: Sātcalliś theke Bāyānna,* 17.
[87] Ibid, 14.
[88] This is the same Ghulam Azam who later became a collaborator of the Pakistani army, and denounced Bengali intellectuals to Major General Rao Farman Ali, leading to the mass killing of intellectuals on December 14, 1971. He headed the Jamaat-e-Islami for many years in independent Bangladesh. In 2012, at age 91, he was convicted of war crimes committed during the Bangladesh Liberation War by an International Crimes Tribunal in Bangladesh.
[89] For a discussion on Dhirendranath Datta's proposed amendment of making Bengali a state language at the Constituent Assembly and for the reactions of other members of the Pakistan National Congress, see Yakoob Khan Bangash, "Language, Identity and the State in Pakistan, 1947-48," *Journal of Political Studies* 25 (Summer 2018): 199-214.
[90] See Badruddin Umar, *Pūrbabāṅgālār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Taṯkālīn Rājnī*ti, vol. 1 (Dhaka: Subarna, 2017), 75-83.

and 24, he addressed students at the Ramna Racecourse Grounds and the Curzon Hall at the University of Dhaka. At both these events, he referred to an Urdu-only policy and overruled the possibility of making Bengali a state language.[91] From September 1947 to March 1948, then, the city of Dhaka charted out a gradual mass movement on the premise of language; the Tamaddun Majlis had succeeded in bringing a city and a people together in a linguistic order of belonging.

Philology in Parliament: The "Language Question" in 1948 and 1952

On April 8, 1948, the parliamentarian Dhirendranath Dutta tried to move a resolution in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly:

> (i.) This Assembly is of opinion that—(a) Bengali shall be adopted as official language of the Province of East Bengal; (b.) immediate steps shall be taken in order to replace English in the Province of East Bengal by Bengali; (c.) the medium of instruction in the educational institutions in East Bengal shall be Bengali.
>
> (ii.) This Assembly is further of opinion that Bengali should be one of the State languages of Pakistan; and
>
> (iii.) This Assembly *recommends* to the Government of Pakistan—
> (a.) to introduce Bengali immediately in all currencies in telegraph and postal articles such as postcards, forms, books etc., in Railway tickets and in all other kinds of official and demi-official forms of the State of Pakistan;
> (b.) to introduce Bengali as a medium and as one of the subjects for all competitive examinations for entry into all Central Civil Services and in all services in the Army, Navy and Air Force of Pakistan; and
>
> (iv.) This Assembly requests all the members of the Constituent Assembly and urges upon the members representing East Bengal to take all necessary steps for immediate adoption of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan.[92]

Dhirendranath Datta's main point of concern was the practical difficulties of omitting Bengali from everyday objects of use by the common people. How will the vast majority of peasants, he asked, make use of postcards, money order forms, telegraphs, and so on? Even

[91] Ibid, 109-125.
[92] *Proceedings of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, Vol. 1* (April 8, 1948), in *Assembly Proceedings: Official Report*, (Dacca: East Pakistan Govt. Press, 1957), 135.

currency had suddenly become indecipherable.[93] When Abdul Hamid and Hamidul Haq Chowdhury objected by saying that this was outside the jurisdiction of the Provincial Government, and could only be submitted as a recommendation to the Central Government, Dhirendranath Datta responded by saying that an issue such as this—when the instruments of the State become illegible to common people—cannot be dismissed as a "central subject." This is, he argues, a development that affects the people of a province. He clarifies that his suggestion is to make Bengali the Provincial Language of East Bengal, along with petitioning that it be made one of the State Languages of East Pakistan.[94] Various members of the Legislative Assembly went back and forth on these intricacies of "state language" and "official language," debating the comparative demands and merits of Bengali, Urdu, and English. Dhirendranath Datta had foregrounded a question of policy and literacy, the problems of the common people who could no longer *read* the State, hence unable to participate in civic life with ease.

At this point, the question of literacy and mass education gave way to an extraordinary turn to the literary. The minister Habibullah Bahar Choudhury delivered a lecture on Bengali literary and cultural pluralism right on the face of an obdurate Khawaja Nazimuddin, beginning with a promise of literary immortality for the powerful Chief Minister:

> Like the 15th of August, today will be an important day in history. The language of the people of Bengal may get the status of state language of East Pakistan. We are about to establish the language of the masses on the golden throne of the Legislative Assembly; this event will be remembered for many reasons. We must admit that Khawaja Nazimuddin is a fortunate man. Hosen Shāh, Nasrat Shāh, Parāgal Khān, Chuṭi Khān, Sir Ashutosh (Mukherjee); their names will be written in golden script in the history of Bengali literature. That Khawaja *sāheb* has allowed the proposal of raising Bengali literature to the status of state language in the *āin sabhā*; historians of Bengali literature will not forget this either.[95]

[93] Ibid, 136.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid, 153.

Habibullah Bahar Choudhury then goes back several centuries to the Pāṭhān court of Gauḍ, to the poetry of Kṛttibās, Canḍīdāsa, Vidyāpati, and Bijayagupta, which had immortalized for all time its Muslim rulers, Nasrat Shāh, Sultān Husen Shāh, and Chuti Khān. Citing a beautiful verse by Vidyāpati which pays tribute to Nasrat Shāh as "Gauḍesvar" *(Se je Nāsirā Śā jāane, jāre hānila Madan bāne/ Cirañjība Rahupañca Gauḍesvar Vidyāpati bhane)*, Habibullah Bahar Choudhury declares that, "Islam is a democratic religion, a revolutionary religion, therefore the followers of Islam had naturally given Bengali, the language of the masses, a place in the court."[96] The Shāhi court had arranged the translation of the epics *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* when the Brahmin scholars went about condemning the vernacular through the popular idiomatic phrase, "Kṛttibās Kāśīdaś and men disguised as Brahmins—these three are disastrous" (*Kṛttibese Kāśīdeśe ār Bāmun bese ei tin sarbaneśe*)."[97] Habibullah Bahar Choudhury points out that these medieval works—along with the popular folk ballads (*pallīgān* and *gītikathā*)—were retrieved to a great extent by philologist Dineshchandra Sen, whose immense contributions to world literature were recognized by a contemporary European scholar-littérateur like Romain Rolland.[98] The Hindu *śastrakār*s could not recognize the efforts of these folk compositions for centuries because these reflected the voice of the people. This literature was a form of popular resistance, the sound of revolt (*bidroher āowāj*) against repressive social hierarchies and customs. These verses spoke of things that were socially impermissible—they did not speak of reverence to Gods or the Brahmins; instead they posited a hero from lower castes, depicted young women choosing their own husbands and even portrayed love affairs between men and women of different religions and communities.[99] Hence, Habibullah Bahar Choudhury argues that:

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid, 154.
[99] Ibid.

> The literature that established its foundation through revolting against those who wrote the scriptures, the language that was right from the very outset the vehicle of the common masses; naturally it was supported by the Muslim nawabs and *Āmīr Bādśāh*s. That this language will be acknowledged as the state language of the newly formed East Pakistan, this is also natural—in English what is called "in the fitness of things."[100]

The promise of Pakistani democracy, Habibullah Bahar Choudhury points out, takes away the historical injustices of social hierarchy and oppression to some extent. By recognizing the common language binding the many communities in East Pakistan together—"Brahmin, non-Brahmin, Hindu, Muslim, Christian"— language itself is established as the greatest secular force. He cites a Sanskrit verse: "*Aṣṭādaśa purānāni rāmasya caritāni ca| bhāṣāyāṃ mānavaḥ śraddhā rouravaṃ narakaṃ gacchet||*"[101] The history of Indic literature, he argues, is a history of conflict between the rule of the elite (*abhijātatantra*) and the dictate of the popular (*gaṇatantra*). The evolution of the Indic language orders reflects this mass resistance to the languages of the elite; the binaries between Sanskrit/Pali, Sanskrit/Prakrit, Sanskrit/Apabhraṃsa, and, finally, Sanskrit/vernaculars are reflexive of this popular opposition.[102] Even in modern Bengal, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar desired to control and standardize Bengali by molding the language in a Sanskritic vein. Yet the colloquial had simultaneously challenged the Sanskritized Bengali. This long historical question had reared its head again in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly. On which side of history, Habibullah Bahar Choudhury asks, will the parliamentarians find themselves? He tells his fellow MLAs, "We are the supporters of democracy… we desire that the language of the masses (*gaṇabhāṣā*) and the literature of

[100] Ibid.
[101] Thibaut d'Hubert has an interesting gloss on how this verse has been cited extensively in histories of Middle Bengali literature, but without a traceable premodern source. See d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace*, 36.

the masses (*gaṇasāhitya*) raises its head high and stands after pushing aside the Sanskritized literature of the elite."[103]

After this, Habibullah Bahar Choudhury goes into deeper philological waters to questions of etymology and word usage. By invoking the most commonsensical words belonging to everyday speech and the most basic paraphernalia of literature and literacy, he foregrounds the contributions of Muslims to the Bengali language. Before the advent of the Muslims, he explicates, the Hindus wrote on palm leaves. The Muslims brought the apparatus of paper, ink, and illumination to the subcontinent. He also points out that the Persian words used for the law courts and administration has been historically ingrained into Bengali everyday life. Moreover, he observes that most words of Persian origin are not interchangeable with Sanskrit synonyms. To desire to do so, he argues, is the pathology of some (Hindu) *śucibātikgrastha* writers who argue that such words are foreign (*bideśi*). That Habibullah Bahar Choudhury uses the word *śucibātikgrastha*, literally meaning a psychological disease pertaining to fears about purity, is significant. By implicitly bringing in the pathology of purity and pollution within Hinduism, he argues that the Bengali language defeated many other such social customs and behaviors. The language was historically a joint collaboration of the Hindus and Muslims, so the two communities also jointly launched the demand moved in Pakistan for its recognition as state language.[104] Yet, for every Hindu contribution, Muslims had also left behind their mark in Bengali literature. Vigorously challenging those who claimed that Bengali is a Hindu language, he embarks on a rhetorically charged response:

> So we see that just as the Hindus have the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the Muslims have the *Āmir Hāmzā*; the Hindus have the *Mahābhārata* and the Muslims have the *Kāsāsol-Āmbiyā;* the Hindus have the *padāvalī* and the Muslims have the *Mārphati Gān*; the Hindus have *Vidyāsundar* and the Muslims have *Lāylī*

---

[102] *Proceedings of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, Vol. 1* (April 8, 1948) in *Assembly Proceedings: Official Report*, (Dacca: East Pakistan Govt. Press, 1957), 154.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid, 154-155.

> *Majnu*. The *Āmir Hāmzā*, *Jaṅgnāmā*, *Kāsāsol-Āmbiyā* are far more popular than the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata.*[105]

Habibullah Bahar Choudhury argues that the main contribution of the Muslims was not just introducing Arabic and Persian words to the Bengali lexicon; Daulat Kāzi and Ālāol also used some of the finest Sanskrit-derived words in Bengali poetry.[106] Moreover, Muslim patrons and poets enabled Bengali poetry to descend from the worlds of gods and goddesses into the human realm. They facilitated human subjects to become the subjects of poetry. Testament to this still lay in rural folk traditions such as the *pallīgīti,* the singers (with the title '*gāyen*') of which are mainly Muslim. Hence, "Muslims are not only the patrons, the enthusiasts and the writers but also the protectors …(this literature) developed in East Bengal, outside Brahminical hegemony, flourishing in an environment of folk Islam which helped it bypass the control of the *śastra*s and social customs."[107]

He ends his speech with some of the topical themes discussed by the Bengali intelligentsia at the time pertaining to the establishment of Bengali as the state language. First, he addresses the necessity to bring about some *bhāṣā-sanskār* (language reform), citing the efforts of Abul Hasnat Ismail and Muhammad Shahidullah. He raises the question of Bengali being written in the Arabic script. Whether this would be implemented or not, he agrees that it would not be a new development.[108] Ending with the example of Rabindranath Tagore who, he argued, embraced the three great currents of Bengal (Hindu, Muslim, European) in his path of universalist greatness, he formulated a similar pluralistic path for Pakistan to follow:

> Our standards will be necessity and beauty. We will not be directed by fundamentalism. According to both necessity and convenience, we will embrace all native and foreign words. In this matter we will be forward-looking just as in any other matter. Our principle will not be to go

[105] Ibid, 156.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid, 157.
[108] Ibid. The Legislative Assembly Report declares in parentheses that he brandishes a manuscript of Ālāol's *Padmāvatī* in the Arabic script for all to see at this point.

backwards.[109]

The language question, of course, did not meet any easy solution in the months to come. Pakistan was not prepared to concede to the demands of making Bengali a state language. To partially address the issue, The East Bengal Language Reconstruction Committee was formed by the government and presided over by Akram Khan.[110] One of its suggestions was that Bengali should be written in the Arabic script in order to bring an end to the language controversy for good. This was vehemently opposed and in January 1952, and the language issue once again resurfaced, with Nazimuddin defending the Urdu-only policy. An All-Party Central Language Action Committee was then formed at a meeting at the Bar Library Hall of the University of Dhaka, chaired by Maulana Bhashani on February 20.[111] This meeting called for a mass strike on February 21, when Section 144 was imposed. When four students died because of the police firing, the matter became a subject of debate in the Seventh Session of the Bengal Legislative Assembly held on February 22.

In this assembly meeting, the members of the Legislative Assembly began with a discussion of the events of the previous day. Ali Ahmed Khan and Maulana Tarkabagish both moved adjournment motions to discuss "a definite matter of urgent public importance and of recent occurrence, namely, assault on the peaceful citizens, students and passerby at the Medical College gate on February 21, 1952, at about 1pm, causing serious bodily injuries and several deaths by the police firing."[112] Nurul Amin opposed the motion and the adjournment fell through. Dhirendranath Datta raised another question of "Incorrect Reporting in Newspapers." He pointed out how the *Morning News* had incorrectly reported that he and other Hindu members of the Legislative Assembly, namely Monoranjan Dhar, Nellie Sengupta and Gobindalal Banerjee, had visited the premises of the Medical College to incite

[109] Ibid, 158.
[110] See Badruddin Umar, *Pūrbabāṅalār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Taṯkālīn Rājnīti, Vol. 1*, 259-268.
[111] See Badruddin Umar, *Pūrbabāṅalār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Taṯkālīn Rājnīti*, *Vol. 3,* 208.
[112] *Proceedings of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, Vol. 7* (February 22, 1952), in *Assembly Proceedings: Official Report* (Dacca: East Pakistan Govt. Press, 1957), 86.

students.[113] Monoranjan Dhar added, "Sir, this effort on the part of the Press seems deliberately calculated to divert the issue otherwise just to create communal feeling and to give communal bias to the whole thing; just to create mischief this paper has done all this."[114] At this point, when the Speaker replied that the *Morning News* was a banned paper, Shamsuddin Ahmed interjected, "May I know, Sir, why does this Government pay subsidy to this paper, to these *marduds* who are spreading calumnies against the members making insinuations? Sir, when the Assembly is in session, in front of this Assembly the police, the ruffians, have rushed into the hostel premises and fired at the students there…what have they done? Have they broken the heads of Ministers? They have done nothing of the sort. Well, it is a democratic country and we have got Pakistan."[115]

Shortly after, Nurul Amin wanted to move the "Special Motion Regarding Bengali as One of the State Languages" under rule 95. His suggestion that "this Assembly recommends to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan that Bengali be one of the State Languages of Pakistan" was, he clarified, meant to address the "confusion amongst a section of the public that the action that was taken by the Government yesterday was on account of the demand by the students for Bengali to be one of the State Languages."[116] He went on to explain that earlier peaceful protests had not occasioned any action taken by the Government, but "this time the information at the disposal of the District Magistrate was that they were going to paralyze the normal life of the people and therefore an order under section 144 Cr. P.C. was promulgated…Yesterday's incident was in connection with the determined attitude of a section of the people to break the law and that has no connection with the language question."[117]Sharfaruddin Ahmed seconded this motion, clarifying that what the students had done was not illegal, and that section 144 had to be removed and the Eastern Pakistan Rifles

[113] Ibid, 88.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid, 89.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid, 90.

taken off the streets of Dhaka. Khairat Hossain added an additional amendment, that a Judicial Enquiry be set up in three days and compensation be paid to the victims' heirs.[118] As the Speaker dismissed this proposal, a number of other legislators got up to speak, including Habibullah Bahar Choudhury, who reminded the House that four years ago "this Assembly recommended that Bengali should be the official language of this province."[119] Most members of the House pressed on the Speaker to add some amendment so that the matter was resolved at the earliest in the next session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan.[120]

It was at this point that Ali Ahmed Chowdhury proposed an amendment with regard to Khawaja Nazimuddin's role in the recent events. This amendment desired to "request the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Nazimuddin, to withdraw his version that Urdu only shall be State language of Pakistan."[121] When the Speaker tried to overrule this amendment, Ali Ahmed Chowdhury, Dhirendranath Datta, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Benode Chandra Chakraborty, Munindranath Bhattacharjee, and Basanta Kumar Das interjected with comments on how the situation in Dhaka had spiraled out of control, with the presence of police and imposition of section 144. Even as the Assembly met, curfew had also been imposed.[122] The person responsible for this situation, argued the members of the House, was Nazimuddin, who had stubbornly stuck to Urdu being the only state language of Pakistan; hence he must retract his statement. Shamsuddin Ahmed also returned, as "a point of information" to the Committee appointed by the government, who were trying to recommend that the Arabic or the Urdu script be used for Bengali.[123] By this time, the Assembly meeting was almost drawing to a close, but Nurul Amin reacted strongly: "It is neither the policy of this Government nor is this Government doing anything in this matter…Up till now he will

[118] Ibid, 90-91.
[119] Ibid, 93.
[120] Ibid. These included Khairat Hossain, Monoranjan Dhar, Anwara Khatoon, and Provas Chandra Lahiri.
[121] Ibid, 99.
[122] Ibid, 107.
[123] Ibid, 110.

not be able to find any order or circular of any decision taken by this Government in favor of Arabic or Urdu script."[124]

Nurul Amin then clearly suggested that a breach had occurred within the members of the Legislative Assembly, a breach that he interpreted as Hindu versus Muslim, Bengali versus Urdu, Dhirendranath Datta, and Hindu legislators with some Muslim supporters versus the rest:

> Now, Sir, many extraneous matters have been brought in connection with this motion. Some of the honorable members waxed eloquence (sic) to say that they were the only lovers and supporters of Bengal as if they were the only sons and inhabitants of Bengal *(At this stage there was great uproar in the House.)*
>
> I am referring to Mr. Munindra Nath Bhattacharjee and Mr. Benode Chandra Chakraborty sitting opposite. The only difference is that while they want to Sanskritise Bengali language, we want to Muslimize it. *(Cries of 'No, no' from the Opposition Benches.)* I understand the difference. We are adopting this Bengali language and we are not going to Sanskritize it.[125]

An outraged Munindranath Bhattacharjee responded, "Sir, I have never said that Bengali should be either Sanskritised Bengali or Muslimised Bengali."[126] To which Sureschandra Dasgupta pointed out sternly, "The responsibility of determining what the language of East Bengal should be has been given to the East Bengal Language Reconstruction Committee. We can consider adopting their suggestions after receiving their report. This is not the time to judge what Bengali I speak or what Bengali the Prime Minister speaks…it is not in our or the Prime Minister's hands to decide what form Bengali would take when it becomes the State Language. That depends on the Language Reconstruction Committee, the writers of East Bengal, the publishers…"[127] Nurul Amin continued to press that philological questions were being deployed to undermine the Pakistani state:

> Mr. Dasgupta has said that whether Bengali should be either Sanskritized or Muslimised is not the question before us. But the fact remains that the

[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid, 111.

> honorable members sitting opposite are always raising numerous objections to the language in which textbooks have been made. Nor, if there is the word 'Azad', if there is the word 'Allah', they will come to me with protest and that is why I want to clarify the position. *(Great uproar.)* I have received protests from Mr. Dhar and many other members on the floor of the House to the effect that their culture has been taken away. *(There was again uproar in the House.)*

Though the House passed the question that the Assembly recommend to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan that Bengali be one of the State Languages of Pakistan, Nurul Amin concluded the proceedings with a statement clearly indicating that he believed that the Hindu legislators were responsible for the conflict surrounding the language movement. Outside, the Bengali language was uniting a large cross-section of students and intelligentsia in Dhaka and other parts of East Bengal. At the East Bengal Legislative Assembly however, Nurul Amin believed that language was not a great unifying force, but rather a divisive one: "They think that through this language question they will enter into many more things and then they will have an effective opposition. This is the only way through which they can divide the majority of the people here. They must have some means and the language, they think, is one of the means by which they will be able to infiltrate into the society and divide them."[128]

The Bangla Academy: Standardization and Reform

The inaugural edition of the *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* gives a brief history of the events that led up to the formation of the Academy after the events of 1952:

> The history of the 'Bangla Academy' is inseparably linked with the 'language movement' in East Pakistan. Right from the beginning of 1948, the spontaneous demand of the young student population to recognize Bengali as the leading state language of Pakistan continued to gain daily momentum despite many obstacles. Only four years passed when in 1952 the movement became large and immediate; on the 21st of February there was firing on the student protesters in the premises of the Dhaka Medical College. In this unexpected and undesired calamity, four students died and several others were

[128] Ibid.

> injured. This event made the Language Movement cross over from being a student movement into a national people's movement. At the time, the Muslim League was in power in the country. The movement could no longer be in control of the government.[129]

After giving a short account of how the *Bhāṣā Āndolan* was initially a spontaneous students' movement culminating into a national movement that could no longer be managed easily enough by the Muslim League led central government, the editorial then turns to the general elections held in 1954. In these elections, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani[130] played an extremely important role with his newly formed Pakistan Awami Muslim League and had offered a Twenty-One Point Program on behalf of the contesting United Front Government.[131] The Awami Muslim League Manifesto putting the Bengali language question at the forefront first floated the suggestion of establishing a new Bangla Academy at the Burdwan House.[132] The United Front government saw a great deal of instability in the following year. The new leader of this coalition was A. K. Fazlul Haq, and leaders such as Suhrawardy and Abul Mansur Ahmed also rose to prominence in the federal government.[133] Governor General Ghulam Muhammad dissolved this provincial United Front Government, accusing A.K. Fazlul Haq of a desire to secede from West Pakistan. Around this time, Bhashani left the United Front and renamed the Awami Muslim League the Awami League. A new United Front government was formed without the Awami League with Abu Hussain Sarkar at the helm. The Bangla Academy came into existence during this turbulent political period:

---

[129] "Bāṃlā Ekādemīr Kathā," *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (January 1957): 80.
[130] Layli Uddin has written an unpublished dissertation on Bhashani, looking at Bhashani's role in the making of Bangladesh through the mobilization of peasants from 1930s onwards. See Layli Uddin, *In the Land of Eternal Eid: Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilization of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c. 1930s-1971* (PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2016).
[131] The United Front was a coalition of political parties that included the Awami Muslim League, the Krishak Praja Party, the Ganatantra Dal, and the Nizam-e-Islam. Three major East Bengali populist leaders were spearheading the coalition—Bhashani, Suhrawardy, and A. K. Fazlul Haq.
[132] "Bāṃlā Ekādemīr Kathā," *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (January 1957): 80.
[133] Younger politicians such as Khaleque Nawaz Khan, Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, "Mohan Mian," and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman also rose to prominence at this time.

> It was during the tenure of the new United Front government that the most important clause of the Twenty One Program was implemented at Burdwan House in the founding of the Bangla Academy on 3rd December 1955. We are enclosing the speeches given by Chief Minister Abu Hossain Sarkar and Education Minister Ashraf Uddin Ahmad Chowdhury at the inauguration of the Bangla Academy as important historical documents.[134]

The hastily assembled, new United Front government appointed a Preparatory Committee to form the Academy, comprising ten East Bengali intellectuals as members. The government issued resolution 4416, dated November 26, 1955.[135] This resolution announced that the Academy was being formed "with a view to developing the Bengali language and literature, the government has decided to establish a Bengali Academy with its headquarters in Dhaka. The Academy will in course of time not only grow into a center for translation and publication of philosophical, technical, scientific and literary works from other languages, but will also be a center for research and discussion among scholars of the Bengali language."[136] The scholars included as members of the Preparatory Committee were primarily educators such as M. Ahmed, A. F. M. Abdul Haq, A. H. Shadani, Khan Bahadur Abdur Rahman Khan, Zahurul Islam, S. M. Bhattacharjee, and also those with a deep interest in philology such as Muhammad Shahidullah, Abdul Hai, Qazi Motahar Hossain, and Mohammad Barkatullah.[137] The four departments with which the Academy began its operations were *Gabeṣaṇā* (research), *Anubād* (translation), *Saṅkalan O Prakaśanā* (editing and publication), and *Sāṅskṛtik* (cultural). The *Gabeṣaṇā* department was explicitly supposed to engage with questions of deep philology:

> To recover the history of the origins, development, vocabulary and phonetics of the Bengali language; to study the many trajectories of Bengali literature, philosophy, arts, sciences, society, religion and national cultures; to recover

[134] "Bāṃlā Ekādemīr Kathā," *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (January 1957): 80.
[135] The formation of the Bangla Academy is explained in great detail by Bashir Al Helal in *Bāṃlā Ekādemīr Itihāsa* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2018), 48-91. This resolution is cited in the English in Al Helal. It is in Bengali in the the primary source documents found at the end of the journal of the Bangla Academy, the *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā,* the first year of publication of which was 1957. I am referring to the primary sources throughout this section unless otherwise mentioned.
[136] "Bāṃlā Ekādemīr Kathā," *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (January 1957): 80-81; see also Bashir Al Helal, *Bāṃlā Ekādemīr Itihāsa,* 49-50.
[137] "Bāṃlā Ekādemīr Kathā," *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (January 1957): 81.

> old manuscripts, ancient chronicles, folk literature, folk music, folktales and fairytales, idioms (that have been forgotten) from the remotest corners of the region. Research will be done on these manuscripts extricated from the farthest corners of the region. It will be possible to recover the culture and tradition of the country. The Research department will also arrange for the reform of Bengali language, the Bengali script, Bengali spelling and grammar.[138]

The Translation Department, it was decided, would operate with a twofold mission. First, it would arrange translation from Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, Pali, and other ancient and classical languages, and from modern European languages such as English, French, German, Russian, and others into Bengali books that would align "with Pakistani ideals, religion and culture" that would "increase the treasures of the Bengali language."[139] Moreover, Bengali books would be translated into English and Urdu so that Bengali language and literature could spread outside East Pakistan. The aim of this was to enable that "the Bengali language be used at every level in the spheres of education, culture and administration…a department will be set up to increase the treasury of words in the language."[140]

While not completely breaking away from a larger political ideal of Pakistan, the conception of the Translation Department signals an interesting move towards articulating a distinct cultural autonomy for East Pakistan. Bengali would be in conversation not only with the world outside, but also in a dialogue—marking difference with—West Pakistan. The Publication Department was supposed to publish the translated books and other rare manuscripts and oral history archives recovered by the other two departments. Moreover, their main task would be to compile—like the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in the century prior—an authoritative dictionary replete with words from the many dialects of East Pakistan.

[138] Ibid, 82.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.

Meanwhile, the *Sāṅskṛtik* (cultural) Department would encourage new literary innovations and institute a literary award for writers.[141] All the departments would jointly work toward furthering the cause of the Bengali language. In the inaugural speech given by the Chief Minister Abu Hossain Sarkar on December 3, 1955, he announced that the greatest marker of achievement of the United Front was the Bangla Academy—the task ahead for the institution was to consolidate the language, to invest in writing new dictionaries, grammars and alphabets, and to build a new apparatus of print and publishing.[142] The second task was to recover the autonomy of the Bengali language of East Bengal. From Rangpur, to Chittagong to Jessore, each district had its own spoken dialects. How could, Sarkar asks, a standard language emerge from these different dialects? The task of the Bangla Academy, he points out, is to create a new standardized Bengali that would recognize the differences of dialects and yet forge a common language.[143] The new United Front government was desirous of building an equitable East Pakistan in which all forms of exploitation and inequity would come to an end. One had to forge a language and literature that would align with these sociopolitical aims.[144] In the next few years, the Bangla Academy published a number of different articles on literary history recovering the lives and works of Bengali Muslim writers across the ages. However, under the aegis of Muhammad Shahidullah, another important aim of the Academy was to standardize spelling and alphabet. For instance, in the sixth year of the Bangla Academy, Shahidullah discusses the efforts of the Language Reconstruction Committee to drop "redundant" vowels.[145] In the final, concluding section, I explore how a later generation of philologists in Bangladesh appraised the nature of philological scholarship arising out of the language movement.

---

[141] "Abu Hossain Sarkar's Lecture," *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (January 1957): 85.
[142] Ibid, 86.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] "Bāṃlā Lipi O Bānān Saṅskār" was published in the sixth year and fourth issue of the *Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā* (February 1963). See Ahmad Sharif, *Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Saṅskār Āndolan* (Bangladesh Language Society, 1986), 37-46.

On Language and *Mānas*: In Defense of *Jātisattā* (*Communitas*)

The philologist and preeminent Bengali literary historian, Ahmed Sharif, collected documents pertaining to the language movement and its long shadows in the East Pakistan period. In 1986, he published a small book entitled the *Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Saṅskār Āndolan* (*Bengali Language Reform Movement*). He begins the book with a short introduction:

> The Bengali language alphabet and spelling reform movement commenced in two phases with two different motives. Abul Hasnat Mohammad Ismail, Abul Kasem wanted a difference between Hindu Bengali and the Muslim *jabān* (language) so that the language could get an Islamic autonomy as a vehicle for the *tamaddun-tahzīb* of a Muslim state. In another phase, the movement was targeted at the alphabet, spellings, difficulty in writing, discontinuity and lack of rules of Bengali, hence proving that it was unfit as a state language for purposes of education and administration. Both movements were conspiratorial and destructive, the product of evil design…. since both movements were futile and useless, I am just enclosing the documents as examples of their motives.[146]

Though the introduction sounds judgmental, as though Ahmad Sharif is prejudiced against the historical trajectory that led to the *tamaddun-tahzībi* strand of Bengali in the East Pakistan period, he goes on to historicize that desire in those turbulent years. The fault behind finding the Bengali language lacking, he argues, lay with the (Pakistani) *rāṣṭra* (state) and not with the people. The newly independent Bengali Muslims had one antagonist and one antagonist only at the time, the Hindus. "From their very birth," he explains, "Bengali Muslims saw that the landowners were Hindus, the moneylenders were Hindus, the intelligentsia were Hindus, the salaried classes were Hindus, lawyers-doctors-industrialists were Hindus; the office was Hindu, the administration was Hindu."[147] Even the books written in the schools and colleges were by Hindus and were about Hindus. Therefore, the Pakistani state found it easy to convince the psychologically devastated Bengali Muslim population that the Bengali language had "many faults in its origins, its alphabet, its spelling, even in its

[146] Ahmad Sharif, "Introduction," in *Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Saṅskār Āndolan.*
[147] Ibid, 1.

very script."[148] The Bengali Muslim subject in the newly forged Pakistan was still staggering under the weight of the historical memory of deprivation, lacking success, wealth, livelihood, and education. This is why they wanted Pakistan in the first place. Moreover, the trajectory of the Pakistan Movement and the Partition, Ahmad Sharif points out, only went on to increase a bitter hatred of the Hindus because of the violent riots in Calcutta, Noakhali, and Bihar. To be *Pakistānpanthi* and to be Muslim were synonymous identities; in 1947 there was only one common enemy, the Hindu. The desire to reform the Bengali language and shear off its *Hinduyānī* in the first few years after Partition, Ahmad Sharif tells us, was not really a philological preoccupation but a political mission. Hatred toward Hindus, not a genuine love for language, was at the root of the creation of a new idiom of the Bengali language informed by the historical reason of an autonomous Islamic worldview and culture.

That Ahmad Sharif makes a hard and fast distinction between *bhāṣāprīti* (love for language) and *Hindubidveṣ* (bitter hatred for Hindus) is telling. His suggestion is that the two are somehow incompatible in the world of a pure philology. The other point worth noting is that he tries to provide an explanation for why even the great philologists of East Bengal fell prey to the machinations of the Pakistani state towards finding the Bengali language in need of reform: "This propaganda easily influenced the people due to another psychological reason (*ei pracār janagaṇke sahajei prabhābita kare anya ek manastāttvik kāraṇe*)." Bengali Muslims were vulnerable, wracked with "jealousy, grudge, and hatred (*īrṣā, kṣobh o bidveṣ*)*."*[149] The eminent Bangladeshi thinker and writer, Ahmad Sofa, makes a similar point, on the lines of a diagnosis, in his celebrated essay *Bāṅgāli Musalmāner Man* (*The Bengali Muslim's Consciousness,* 1981):

> That the Bengali Muslim's consciousness is still in the primitive stage is neither because he is Bengali, nor because he is Muslim. By some historical process that has unfolded over a long period of time, a great cobweb covers

[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid, 1-2.

> his consciousness; he cannot get out of it knowingly. So if he takes one step forward, he must take three steps backward. A mental fear drives this society. We cannot resolve this situation in two to four years, but perhaps we can find a way out if we try to know the form and propensities of that consciousness.[150]

Another Bengali social thinker and philologist, Anisuzzaman, also uses the term *mānas* in his magnum opus *Muslim Mānas O Bāṃlā Sāhitya* (*The Muslim Consciousness and Bengali Literature*, 1964). The book, a social history of Bengali Muslims retrieved and explained through literary archives and the development of the Bengali language from 1757 to 1918, contextualized the particular subjectivity of the Bengali Muslim mind as it grappled with the historical reality of being left behind during the colonial period. As Anisuzzaman explains it, Bengali Hindus had the means for a *nabajāgaraṅ*—with power and capital—and Bengali Muslims did not.[151]

Moving forward to the subcontinent post-Partition, Anisuzzaman captures the *mānas* in more poignant and devastating detail. In a 1997 essay entitled "Bāṃlādeś, Bāṅgāli O Bāṃlādeśi," he writes:

> During the mass movement in 1969, we could hear a sound that pierced the skies—"Wake up, O Bengali, wake up!" Nobody asked then, which Bengali is this who is being asked to awaken? Everyone knew that this Bengali's address is Padmā-Meghnā- Yamunā. That day the country knew and acknowledged one person as their leader, they gave him the honorific "Bangabandhu"—even this title manifested the newly acquired selfhood and identity of the country. On that 21st February, a new knowledge shone in the hearts of the people—a lone Bengali letter was written out in bold and on its top and bottom was inscribed—'*Ekti Bāṃlā akṣar /ekti Bāṅgālir jīvan (A single Bengali letter/is a Bengali's life)"*[152]

This striking passage invokes a single letter of the Bengali alphabet—bolded and written down in public during the zenith of the anti-Pakistan movement—as a defiant act of resistance. At this moment, the Bengali Muslim consciousness is untroubled, pristine; there is no questioning of Bengali identity, which is spontaneous and organic, and no longer even designated as Muslim. Anisuzzaman invokes a distinction at this juncture between *jātigata*

[150] Ahmad Sofa, *Bāṅgāli Musalmāner Man* (Dhaka: Khan Brothers and Company, 2018), 38.
[151] Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Mānas O Bāṃlā Sāhitya* (Calcutta: Pustak Bipani, 2000), 18-20.
[152] Anisuzzaman, "Bāṃlādeś, Bāṅgāli O Bāṃlādeśi," in *Śreṣṭha Prabandha* (Dhaka: Katha Prokash, 2015), 247.

sattā (the essence of a race or nation) and *rāṣṭrīya paricay* (state identity). What the language movement had achieved was bring together the collective Bengali Muslim, constructing a unified consciousness at a singular political moment. This political moment was not an isolated one in history; for centuries, Bengali Muslims had carved out their own space in the *jāti* before the modern *rāṣṭra* even existed. As Anisuzzaman explains, "This Bengali identity and essence has been flowing as a stream throughout history…we claim ourselves as inheritors of that long continuous flow of history."[153] That history of Bengal is one defined by plurality, witnessing the mingling of various peoples and places. Anisuzzaman, the literary historian, reminds us:

> In that history, we have found personalities who have particularly worn their Bengali identity as an ornament. In the fifteenth century, the foremost of the Bengali *darbeś* (derveshes) was Śekh Nūr Kutub Ālam—wherever he might have come from—he was known as Śekh Nūr Bāṅgāli. In the eighteenth century, the musician Lālā Bāṅgāli was welcomed lovingly in the court of Muhammad Shah. Syed Ahmed Barelvi's son was known in Noakhali as Maulānā Inām Uddin Bāṅgāli. The history of Bengalis has taken particular shape in our land between 1947 and 1971…the *jātisattā* originates in 1952, with the love for the language, the self-sacrifice and unity of the people as it emerged during the Language Movement.[154]

This ideal of *jātisattā* informs Anisuzzaman's analysis of the political formation of Bangladesh as one that outlasts the boundaries (both territorial and intellectual) of the nation-state. We could define that very *jātisattā* as the essence of the *communitas*. It is in that very sense he critiques those who had upheld the ideas of race and nation as inseparably connected, such as Abul Mansur Ahmed and his disciple Khondakar Abdul Hamid.[155] In an address delivered in the newly forged Bangladesh in 1976, Khondakar Abdul Hamid had asserted that despite all similarities in language and culture, the fundamental differences between East and West Bengal—of names-signs-law and inheritance, heritage-history, honor-trust, tongue-language, art-literature, architecture-music, everything (*nām-niśānā-owārisī*

[153] Ibid, 248.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid, 250.

uttarādhikār, aitijya-itihās, īmān-āmān, jabān-lisān, śilpa-sāhitya, sthāpatya-saṅgīta, sabkichu)[156]—were too profound to be overcome. To use the term *Bāṅgāli jātīyatā* was a misnomer. The word used should be "Bangladeshi."[157] It echoed Abul Mansur Ahmed's views that in race, language, and culture, West Bengalis were Indian.[158] Anisuzzaman's profound discomfort at the Bengali/Bangladeshi distinction stemmed from the fact that it marked a return to a two-nation theory of Hindu versus Muslim, a binary that a *jātisattā*-infused politics of language (the *communitas*) had consistently undermined.

But let us return to Ahmad Sharif, who expresses shock at how even the most famous philologists of colonial India and undivided Bengal such as Muhammad Shahidullah—those who pledged their support to the language movement—shifted their allegiance from a pluralistic Bengali and desired to reform and standardize it. As Sharif wonders, "Even he did not think that Bengali is not merely the language of East Bengal or East Pakistan, it is also the language of millions living in West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Assam, a common binding inheritance (*rikth*)."[159] Sharif believes that these people fell prey to the political machinations of the modern state and embarked on philological standardization, when the joint treasury of language was divided into compartmentalized regional and parochial identities. The political philology of state, Sharif argues, is the greatest threat to the immense pluralities of language, culture and identity:

> The copiousness and complexity of scripts is not an obstacle to progress in mass education and literacy…. Does decreasing the number of scripts or alphabets increase powers of intelligence and creativity in human beings? Will changing letters, words and ways of writing increase the wealth, industry and trade of a country?[160]

This threat to cultural pluralities embedded in language, Sharif points out, can change the very basis of the unchangeable—idioms, or what is called the *bāgdhārā* in Bengali. When

[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid, 251.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ahmed Sharif, *Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Saṅskār Āndolan,* 15.
[160] Ibid.

the poet Khan Mohammad Moinuddin proposed that Hindu idioms become Muslimized, so that *Dātā Karṇa* becomes *Dātā Hātem*, *Vidyādiggaj* becomes *Elemer Jāhāj*, or the *Anek sannyāsīte gājan naṣṭa* becomes *Anek pīre mejājā naṣṭa*, then there would be a fundamental loss in translation. In fact, extending Sharif's implicit argument, we can think of the very word "idiom" as connoting something essentially one's own. Etymologically, idiom derives from the Greek *idiōma,* "private property, peculiar phraseology," from *idiousthai*, meaning "to make one's own," from *idios*, "own, private."[161] Or let us consider *bāgdhārā*, in the Bengali, which defines the idiom as a set of words, a phrase, which has a distinct *praṇālī* (method, technique) of expression.[162] Here, its culturally specific, inner meaning must be conveyed through consensus and usage; meaning is not conveyed by words alone or by the lexicon. Moinuddin's proposal to substitute Hindu terms of reference with Muslim ones passes over the fact that a shared cultural meaning making occurred in the Bengali language across social-religious divides. To lose those terms of reference is again an attack on the pluralities of identity and the singularities of shared meaning in Bengal, the richness of its *communitas*.

Losing the pluralities embedded within language, Sharif contends, was the main driving force behind the language reform movement in East Pakistan. Like Anisuzzaman, he invokes Abul Mansur Ahmad as one of the main ideologues of the "Pak-Bangla" culture who had proposed the literary language of East Pakistan should adopt the linguistic styles of Dhaka and Mymensingh.[163] Though Abul Mansur Ahmed had indeed vigorously articulated the desire for a new literary and linguistic culture for East Pakistan, he was not a

[161] "Idiom" in Walter William Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1882), 253.
[162] Sailendra Biswas, *Saṃsada Bāṅgālā Abhidhān*, 7th ed. (Calcutta, Sahitya Samsad, 2004), 591.
[163] Ahmed Sharif, *Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Saṅskār Āndolan,* 13. In fact, Abul Mansur Ahmed wrote a book speaking of a distinctive Pakistani Bengali culture, relating it to the concepts of culture, civilization, and linguistic nationalism across the world, while maintaining that Pakistani Bengali had to maintain a distinct autonomy from the Bengali of West Bengal. See Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Pāk Bāṃlā Kālcār* (Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 1966).

"Tamadduni" either.[164] In Jasim Uddin's recollections of Habibullah Bahar Choudhury in the undivided Calcutta of their youth in the 1920s, Jasim Uddin fondly remembers Abul Mansur Ahmad as a member of the inner coterie of writers and journalists who surrounded Kazi Nazrul Islam with affection and adulation, protecting the poet from attacks by the "Islamist" brigade, including Maulana Akram Khan.[165] How did this same Abul Mansur Ahmad become a figure embodying the conflicted and divided Bengali Muslim consciousness, desperately wanting to change the very foundations of the Bengali language, believing in the ideals of Pakistan, yet also one of the first people to initiate the language movement against West Pakistan? Where can we trace the source of this contradiction?

"*Ārabi-Phārsi Banām Bāṃlā Śabda*"

Let us return to a warm summer afternoon in Calcutta. The year is 1925. A middle-class journalist and struggling writer who moved to Calcutta in 1922 enters into negotiations with the eminent Bengali publishing house Bhattacharyya and Sons to sell the copyright of his first book *Musalmāni Kathā*, a collection of children's stories. Abul Mansur Ahmed is not yet a successful lawyer, nor is he the Member of Parliament that he would become in East Pakistan. On that sultry afternoon in Cornwallis Street in Calcutta, he finds himself sweating in the presence of a relentless yet pleasant publisher. Mr. Bhattacharyya has insisted that Ahmed provide footnotes to those words in his book that are of Perso-Arabic origin. Ahmed contends that footnotes would ruin the layout of an illustrated children's book. So Bhattacharyya asks him to think of adding a glossary of "foreign" words instead. Ahmed finds himself increasingly angry and baffled by the publisher's demands and claims. Have Muslims not lived for centuries in Bengal and incorporated words like *jaṅgal* (jungle) and *jānālā* (window) in everyday speech? Bhattacharyya loses his sang-froid and says he is not a

[164] Ibid.
[165] Jasim Uddin, "Bandhu Habibullah Bahar," in *Habibullah* Bahar, eds. Anwara Bahar Choudhury and Shawkat Osman (Dacca: Bahar Memorial Committee, 1970), 66-67.

philologist but a commercial man; it is for business reasons that he asks the Muslim writer to be more "accessible." Bengali Hindus would not understand the Perso-Arabic words. An angry Ahmad replies, "I will provide footnotes for Perso-Arabic words if you also include footnotes for words of Sanskrit origin..."[166]

The conversation continues. Abul Mansur Ahmed is clad entirely in *khaki* as a Congressman. He realizes that this is a losing battle and his tone softens. Mr. Bhattacharya sizes up his khaki clothes and his tone softens too:

> Abul Mansur Ahmed: Let me understand the matter. You want to say that I should add 'jal' for 'pāni' (water), 'Isvar' for 'Allah,' 'Upabās' for 'Rozā' (fast) at the end, just like reproducing word-meanings from a wordbook?
>
> Mr. Bhattacharya (in a humble tone): Yes, you have apprehended correctly.
>
> Abul Mansur Ahmed: So I must admit that *pāni, Allah, namāz, rozā* are not Bengali words. But *jal, Isvar, upāsana and upabās* are Bengali words?
>
> Mr. Bhattacharya: No, why? Do Bengali words not have synonyms?[167]

Abul Mansur Ahmed agrees to undertake this task on the condition that Mr. Bhattacharya also asked Hindu writers to write glossaries for Muslim readers. Mr. Bhattacharya loses his mind at the suggestion. He asks Abul Mansur Ahmed to reconsider. In response, Abul Mansur Ahmed asks him to reconsider. The manuscript is returned, only to be published at half the price offered to the author by the Mohammadi Book Agency.[168]

This encounter, Abul Mansur Ahmed writes in his biography, was his first "sacrifice." Just as he left the lucrative offer from a Hindu publisher only to publish from a much smaller Muslim publishing company, he would leave the Congress to join the Muslim League; would leave his beloved city Calcutta to relocate to Dhaka, sacrifice piled on sacrifice.

---

[166] Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Ātmakathā,* 225-226.
[167] Ibid, 226. This is an episode recounted by Ahmed in his autobiography, which I cite adapted as a dialogue between the two characters.
[168] Ibid, 227.

The shrinking pluralities of language in East Pakistan, of which he became the face in some ways, had its origins in the lived experience of the Bengali language. In the 1920s and 1930s, he and his fellow Bengali-Muslim contemporaries in undivided Calcutta all faced this incurable and tragic predicament. There was a choice—either to stay back in a West Bengal shrouded with the memories of Tagore's sentimental universalism, as was Abdul Wadud and Syed Mujtaba Ali's path, or to forge a Bengali Muslim nationalism in East Pakistan that had its own conflicted and difficult logic, a nationalism that had to battle with the political Islam (and Urdu) imposed by West Pakistan. One of the many continuities that one carried from the earlier undivided Bengal into this brave, new world was the memory of battling for one's own language, for *everyday words*. Hindu Bengal, too, had not allowed for the pluralities of language and linguistic expression in the worlds of print and culture. The loss of pluralities in language (and its wistful and occasionally victorious reclaiming) in divided and undivided Bengal was in both cases, irrevocably and undeniably tragic. It was the failure of the *jātī* at the hands of the *rāṣṭra*, in other words, *communitas* succumbing to *realpolitik.*

Chapter Four

A Language of Unity, a Language of Loss: Kazi Nazrul Islam's Bengali

The Matter of a Word: Tagore versus Nazrul

In December 1922, two Bengali literary greats fell out over a word. The aging Rabindranath Tagore, a towering literary and political figure—internationally and nationally acclaimed poet and pedagogue, recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, had been fond of a young and upcoming new poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam, even dedicating his play *Vasanta (Spring)* to him. Nazrul, a *moffusil* boy and school dropout, who had run away to the army, had been cementing a literary and journalistic reputation in Calcutta, running two controversial political journals.[1] In an allusive poem that he recited to Tagore whose first name was Rabindranath—literally the Lord of the Sun—and whose name shortened into a simple Rabi, meaning the sun, Nazrul would pay tribute to the master poet, "*uḍibe se rabi āmāderi khun e rāṅgiyā punarbār*" ("The sun would rise again, reddened in our blood"). The word for blood (*khun*) that Nazrul would use was Persian in origin, and in ordinary Hindu Bengali usage, it had come to mean intentional murder. Tagore had apparently criticized Nazrul for using the word outside its common (Hindu) usage, a charge that had left the young poet, then jailed on account of publishing anticolonial material in his leftist periodical *Dhūmketu*, puzzled.

Nazrul would describe the reigning literary milieus of the 1920s—the heady era in which "literary circles were more malicious than political ones"—in a retrospective essay *Baḍar Pirīti Bālir Bāndh* ("The Love of Elders Is a Sandbank"). It was a world dominated by moneyed Hindu literary icons and their acolytes, figures such as Tagore and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, a world in which literature was clearly a bourgeois activity and pleasure.

[1] Nazrul edited the journals *Navayug (New Age), Dhūmketu (The Comet)*, and *Lāṅgal (The Plough)* throughout the early1920s. *Dhūmketu* ran into trouble with the colonial government for publishing inflammatory material and Nazrul was imprisoned for a year, when news of Tagore's criticism reached him. See Rafiqul Islam, *Nazrul Jīvanī* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2013) and Sisir Kar, *Niṣiddha Nazrul* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2016).

Meanwhile, literary periodicals that would publish new work and literary criticism such as *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*[2] would resent the literary success of a Muslim newcomer like Kazi Nazrul Islam. Nazrul, who had begun writing in various Bengali Muslim periodicals, was also associated with a new literary movement named *Kallol,* a group of young writers who would react to a Tagorean orthodoxy in literature and who wanted to replace Tagore's romanticism with a new social realism.[3] On the one hand, Nazrul's response to the attacks of *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* could be seen as a conflict between a new literary order and an old one, in which Nazrul's greatest flaw seems to be his youth and his tremendous appeal to young readers. The essay however hinges on the one misunderstanding that Nazrul cannot quite grapple with, namely Tagore's disapprobation on Nazrul's using the word *khun.*

The young writer's dismay stemmed from the fact that Tagore himself along with a number of other Hindu writers in Bengali literary history had historically used words of Perso-Arabic origin. Tagore, along with a number of other Hindu intellectuals, would also wear the clothes associated with Muslims, a cap, sherwani, pajamas, and beard but in their case the dress would be deemed "oriental." If a Muslim, however, used the external markers of dress or language that a Hindu so easily appropriated, they would be judged or jeered at for being a *miyān sahib*. Nazrul would suddenly realize that the Bengali language—a cultural space shared by *both* Hindus and Muslims—was also an instrument of difference, of otherness. How could, Nazrul asks, Hindu littérateurs forget that half of the worshippers of the Bengali-*Kāvyalakṣmī* are Muslim? Tagore whose neologisms had merited the need for at least three more new dictionaries, was now scared of some familiar Bengali words, words that he himself would use but were unacceptable when used by Muslims themselves.

[2] Established in 1929 by Sajanikanta Das, *Śanivārer Ciṭhi* was a reaction to the new literary modernism in Bengal, initially carrying satirical pieces before focusing on fiction and non-fiction in the 1930s.
[3] A discussion of the battle between the old guard and the avant-garde can be found in the chapter "Nation and Imagination" in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 155-163. While the question of realism, urban bourgeois life and poverty preoccupied the *Kallol* poets thus constituting their main difference from Tagore, Nazrul's status within a reactionary but otherwise Hindu literary milieu such as *Kallol* is itself an interesting question.

"Today we feel that this Rabindranath is not the Rabindranath we have known for so long", Nazrul writes, "The *vyaiyākaraṇa* (grammarian) pundits are making him say such a thing."[4]

This singular face-off between the two icons over the use of a Perso-Arabic word in Bengali signals a profound moment of alienation for both protagonists. While Nazrul is for the first time made cognizant of his religious identity, for Tagore the question is an aesthetic one. Why, when there are many perfectly acceptable words denoting the same thing, would this young poet have to use a word so far away from its 'conventional' usage? Was this not a contrived and artificial way of imposing Muslim-ness into a poem? Nor can we say that Tagore, as a Hindu, was alone in such a position and that this is a question that could be easily dismissed as a Hindu-Muslim divide. In a letter to the editor of *Śikhā*, written by Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśarad some years later in 1927, the latter is in some ways closer to Tagore's position:

> The little *sāhityacarccā* that we [Bengali Muslims] have embarked upon is being increasingly marked by a binary. One group favors using a language filled with *Musalmānī* words that out of circulation and unfathomable to the general public, and the other favor a Sanskritized language. So the language of this one group cannot be understood by the non-Muslims (*Amusalmān jāti*). It is important to resolve and discuss whether language should mark such differences of community (*jātibhed*). The time has come to revaluate whether the reinstatement of the "Musalmānī Bāṃlā" of old manuscripts and texts will bring about any good or not in the national life (*jātīya jīban*).[4]

This chapter is both a brief intellectual biography of the national poet (*jātīya kabi*) of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and also an exploration of the ways in which the question of the ideal *jātī* was never, in the most utopian Bengali imagination, merely a question of 'nation' implicated in a larger *rāṣṭra* (state). Nazrul was a poet who was an iconoclast at every stage of his life, vividly remembered and recollected by all his contemporaries in a number of personal reminiscences, including a dry, longsuffering Communist such as

[4] Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad, "Abhyarthanāsamitir Sampādaker Nikaṭ Likhita," *Śikhā* (February 26, 1927).

Muzaffar Ahmed.[5] Nazrul was a poet whose life lay in the public realm, even the *realpolitik*—he contested elections at least once—but whose writing, music, poetry, and life were always as precariously positioned as they were intensely private and intimate. From Buddhadev Bose and Sachindeb Burman to Abbasuddin and Jasimuddin, memoir after memoir recalled Nazrul as friend, intimate and beloved. Claimed by two states, India and Bangladesh, his elusive *jātīyatā* always eluded the *rāṣṭra* (state). He was—if a man could be a political concept embodied in flesh—the ideal *communitas.*

In the previous chapters, I have discussed institutional and everyday lives of philology in Bengal. From these accounts, we see a diversity of political positions on language and *jātī.* As a Bengali Muslim middle class intelligentsia began to grow and make their presence felt in Calcutta, it would seem that the story of Kazi Nazrul Islam was perhaps not exceptional in any way. Born into impoverished rural Muslim gentry, his early education was sponsored by wealthy Muslim benefactors, before he enlisted in the army for World War I. Instead of combat, he was posted in Naoshera and then Karachi, both in what is now Pakistan. He would return around 1920 to a politically volatile Bengal, in which the nature of nationalist agitation itself was changing. The reigning political dispensations were the Indian National Congress and the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, and the Communist Party of India itself would be founded by one of his closest friends, Muzaffar Ahmed.[6] Caught between these various political currents, Nazrul would begin his literary career in the pages of the better-

[5] Muzaffar Ahmed (1889-1973) and Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) were great friends, starting in 1917. While Nazrul, known as a poet, had stood for elections in Dhaka in 1926 and suffered a resounding defeat, Ahmed constantly writes in his memoirs that two options had been available for him—to either be a writer or to join mass politics. Having decided that he had very little literary merit, he went on to found the Communist Party of India and was resolutely anti-separatist, focusing instead on a politics of class struggle. For more on Bengali Muslim communists and on Ahmed's life, see Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist, 1913-1929: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2012).

[6] See John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson, and Anil Seal, eds., *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays On Indian Politics 1870 to 1940* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973); J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Richard Sisson and Stanley A. Wolpert, *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

known Bengali Muslim periodicals of the time. But Kazi Nazrul Islam was never wholly a "Muslim" poet. Claimed by Hindus and Muslims alike, Nazrul forged a new Bengali language, with a diction and register that incorporated words of both Sanskrit and Perso-Arabic origin. It was a language of political unity, an enterprise that referred to and borrowed from centuries of shared tradition and cultural codes.

This chapter tries to trace central aspects of Nazrul's literary life. The institutional apparatus of philology had influenced a milieu, a discussion of language as both dead as well as a living entity. Language required simultaneous remembering, deconstructing, and forging. If the remembering of the Bengali language was initiated by a Hindu-dominated Bangiya Sahitya Parishad that looked to the past, Bengali Muslims forged separate spaces—and later, *separatist* spaces—in order to memorialize Bengali and make it a living language of politics. Nazrul's task—to construct a language equally accessible to Hindus and Muslims—was a tricky one. I argue that, politically, he failed to create a language that could convince the two socio-religious communities that their political paths would be the same. Gradually, as the 1930s gave way to irreconcilable political differences between Hindus and Muslims with the rise of a new Bengali Muslim political class—as argued by scholars such as Joya Chatterji[7]—a figure such as Nazrul would become a relic of the past. Nazrul lived until 1976, but a neurological disorder would silence and paralyze him in 1942, and he saw neither the partition of 1947 and the language movement in East Pakistan in 1950s, nor the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971, when he was named the national poet of the new country. If we consider the Partition of Bengal and the communal violence between Hindus and Muslims as

[7] In the 1930s, the breach between the aims and objectives of the Indian National Congress and the Bengal Provincial Muslim League was growing larger. This was a time of new political dispensations and new political identities such as the Krishak Praja Party. 1929 was a watershed moment in some ways as the Depression struck agrarian Bengal, leaving peasants unable to pay rent. Joya Chatterji notes that in the early 1930s leading up to the Act of 1935 when a large number of Muslim peasants would get the vote, a new Muslim political class would emerge comprising men like Akram Khan, A. K. Fazlul Haq, and Tamizuddin Khan. These men had been Calcutta based intelligentsia in the 1920s—"*ashraf* in aspirations, but lowly in origins"—but now saw their political fortunes and futures in rural Bengal. That some of them believed in the *communitas* until the very end is something that this dissertation foregrounds. See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 72.

a political tragedy however, one asks, what was the tragedy of Kazi Nazrul Islam? Was it that his dream of communal unity through language was a failed project from its inception? Could his utopian construction of the Bengali language ever have materialized as a vehicle for unity, or was it doomed from the start to be *both* familiar but indecipherable even as was the case with Tagore, himself rendered unrecognizable by the machinations of the "philologist pundits"? Did that ideal *communitas*—not the flawed and conflicted *communitas* of East Pakistan—but the poetic, utopian, beautiful, and ultimately tragic vision of Nazrul live on? What was the aporia, this chapter asks, that was the language of Kazi Nazrul Islam?

A Language for Bengali Muslims: Nazrul in the 1920s

Nazrul's first few literary forays were in the periodical *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, starting in 1917 when Muzaffar Ahmed had joined in the capacity of an assistant editor. Ahmed himself would say that the organization (bearing the clarification "Musalmān") was not intended as a communal organization and that Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad had inserted the *Musalmān* in the organization's name because he felt that no Hindu would either buy or read the magazine otherwise.[8]

Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā, which I have discussed at length in the second chapter, published a series of articles on the disputes over the Bengali language in these years. The understanding of Bengali as something to be reclaimed by Bengali Muslims, either on the basis of ethnicity or on national terms, was a recurrent trope by the second decade of the twentieth century. As early as April 1915, *Al Eslām*, a conservative periodical published by Maulvi Mohammad Akram Khan, had published an article by the writer Siraji called *Sāhityaśakti O Jāti Saṃghaṭhan* ("The Power of Literature and National Reconstruction"). In the second issue brought out in 1917, Syed Emdad Ali's *Baṅgabhāṣā o Musalmān* (*The*

[8] Muzaffar Ahmed, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920-1929* (Kolkata: National Book Agency Private Limited, 1970), 24.

Bengali Language and the Muslim) had recognized that the question of language, specifically a written or literary language, had reached a critical stage for Bengali Muslims. While the modern vernacular had reached global recognition with Tagore's Nobel win in 1913, the long literary tradition had seen centuries of not only Muslim patronage but also participation.

While there was no doubt that the classical or theological languages of Muslims were Arabic and Persian, its Indian equal was Hindustani, a language that was associated with the upper class (*abhijāta*) in Bengal. Rural Bengali Muslims, however, spoke Bengali with a number of everyday Arabic, Persian, and Hindustani words. With the debate over the written or standardized vernacular in Bengal, a new conflict between Hindus and Muslims could be seen. Hindus would resist the *writing* of "Muslim" words into the language as an inauthentic practice, whereas Muslims would leave the imprints of their own religious and cultural identity on the language. This was a "crisis of language" that Syed Emdad Ali identified, a crisis marked by the philological debate on whether Bengali was the daughter or foster child of Sanskrit. Such a crisis, Emdad Ali believed, was resolved by the first Bengali Hindu novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who had singlehandedly built a new vernacular and literary language that grew out of Sanskrit, but also used words from Arabic and Persian, a language understood by Hindus and Muslims alike. Yet the real tragedy—and the reason for many Muslims to disagree with him—was that Bankim was known for his great antagonism towards Muslims.[9]

In the issues of *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* published in the years 1917-1919, Bengali Muslims of all ideological bents wrote about the language question with great consternation, and language became increasingly connected with a sense of political identity. In the third presidential lecture delivered at the *Vaṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Sammilan* by Mohammad Akram Khan, a distinction was made between the *mātṛbhāṣā* and the

[9] Syed Emdad Ali, "Baṅgabhāṣā o Musalmān," *Āl Eslām* 1 (April 1915): 85-86.

rāṣṭrabhāṣā of Bengali Muslims. The question of a special Bengali Muslim language, Akram Khan had argued, was actually a reactionary one. For centuries, the languages of both religion and administration in Bengal had rendered certain Perso-Arabic words commonsensical—and in the debate for *sādhu bhāṣā* that Hindu Bengali philologists had embarked on, a *sāhityer ādālat* (from the Arabic *'ādālat,* which was the standard administrative word for court in the colonial period) could not deem these words of common usage inauthentic—if Hindu-Muslim unity was to be achieved (an event that seemed unlikely in the rest of North India with the Hindu-Urdu debate), then the true site of unity would be in Bengal, in the *communitas* that recognized the joint contributions of Hindus and Muslims.[10]

It was against this backdrop that Nazrul embarked on a distinctively unique political project, the reconstruction of the Bengali language. He wrote to his friend, the critic Parimal Goswami, "Do you know what I feel inside me? A great task has fallen on my shoulders. That task is the convergence of Hindus and Muslims. Nobody else will be able to achieve this…every day and every moment I feel this urge."[11] For Nazrul, the question of Hindu and Muslim unity was clearly also one that was premised on the humanistic space that a joint literary tradition created—

> No good will come to this unfortunate country until we can dispel the mutual disrespect that Hindus and Muslims feel towards each other. *And I know that it is only through literature that one can dispel this disrespect.* Bengali literature is the foster daughter if not the biological child of Sanskrit. A Hindu affect is embedded within Bengali and if we try to remove this half the force will be lost from the language. Nobody can think of removing Greek influence from English. Bengali literature belongs to both Hindus and Muslims. Just as it is wrong for Muslims to get upset if they come across names of Hindu gods and goddesses, so it is not right that Hindus raise an eyebrow and frown upon seeing those everyday words that Muslims use in their daily lives in literature. I completely believe in Hindu-Muslim unity. I want to strike a blow at such customs and thus use *Musalmani* words, and the names of Hindu deities. The quality of my poetry has suffered in places because of this. But I have done this knowingly.[12]

[10] Mohammad Akram Khan, "Third Presidential Address of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti," *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 4 (Māgh 1325 B.S./ January 1918): 295-317.
[11] See Karunamoy Goswami, *Nazrul Gīti Prasaṅga* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1974), 155.
[12] He writes this in a letter to Ibrahim Khan. See Karunamoy Goswami, *Nazrul Gīti Prasaṅga*, 155.

In the 1920s, several journals such as *Moslem Bhārat, Saogāt, Āl Eslām, Islām Darśan* and *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* operated within an intertextual and metatextual world with common frames of reference, responding to different topical issues and political events from a variety of political viewpoints. Nazrul himself embarked on a literary and journalistic career within this milieu in 1918, with the publication of the poem *Mukti* ("Liberation") in *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*. He sent an essay and several short stories to *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* and to *Saogāt,* before he returned from the army for good in 1920. On his return to Calcutta, he stayed at the office of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti. In the decade of the 1920s, he collaboratively ran at least three periodicals with his friends; the short-lived *Navayug* (*New Age*), *Dhūmketu* (*Comet*), and the pro-Communist *Lāṅgal* (*The Plough*). These periodicals did not cater to an exclusively Bengali Muslim audience, looking instead for a larger platform—Hindu and Muslim—to address their concerns. Moreover, all three strived for working class unity, as described by Nazrul's friend and collaborator Muzaffar Ahmed, with whom he had jointly run *Navayug* (*New Age*) for two years.[13] All three periodicals were astronomically successful, no doubt also because of Nazrul's experimentation with a language that equally borrowed upon Hindu and Muslim philological references, literary allusions, and words from both a Sanskrit and Perso-Arabic register. Looking back upon his journalistic days at the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samiti's silver jubilee in 1941, where he delivered the presiding address, he reminisced—"The daily squabbling between Hindus and Muslims, the bitter conflict and hatred between races; one one hand, the great poverty, debt and deprivation in human life—and on the other, millions of rupees piling up like a rock in these greedy demonic banks—this

[13] Muzaffar Ahmed, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smṛtikathā* (Kolkata: National Book Agency Private Limited, 1967), 70-86.

inequality, this difference is something I came to banish. I wanted to establish equality, without any differences, in my poetry and music and in my work-life."[14]

For instance, *Navayug* had started off as a small daily funded by A. K. Fazlul Haq, an influential advocate at the High Court, who was then politically involved with Congress, the Muslim League, and the Khilafat Movement. Haq agreed to fund the venture if Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmed had the courage to run it. Ahmed and Nazrul's names would not be credited as editors in *Navayug,* with Haq featuring prominently as chief editor. Haq had left all organisational and intellectual duties to Ahmed and Nazrul, only asking them to focus on peasant and worker issues. He also requested them to consider naming the daily something that would be discernibly Muslim, as he was afraid that having a generic name would mean they would have no readership. Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmed firmly refused to do so, going against Haq's argument that Hindus would not buy this paper anyway, and Muslims would not buy it as they would not associate it with a Muslim proprietorship. According to the two, given the paper's topical anticolonial bent and its focus on class struggle, both communities would happily focus on the content without looking at whether the paper was Hindu or Muslim. Muzaffar Ahmed described how Nazrul's writing distinguished this daily from others. First, Nazrul who was inexperienced in journalism and had never entered a newsroom before, experimented with language from the outset. Moreover, he brought his great erudition and knowledge of Bengali literature to writing news stories. Ahmed gives an example of how Nazrul used lines from the medieval fifteenth-century poets Caṇḍīdāsa and Vidyāpati (known for writing love lyrics in the *padāvalī* tradition) to write headings for news stories. Once, he would rephrase a couplet from Tagore to write a heading about the Iraqi monarch, King Faisal I: "On a stormy night your clandestine meeting/O Faisal of Mine, friend of my

[14] Cited in Ahmed Sharif, *Ekāle Nazrul: A Collection of Six Lectures Delivered at the University of Chittagong* (Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 1990), 117.

heart."[15] No doubt such literary allusions would have attracted a Hindu readership. Chandidas would also make an appearance as the motto behind *Lāṅgal,* which was established as a political mouthpiece for The Workers and Peasants' Party with Nazrul as general editor. Here Chandidas was read as a harbinger of socialist thought in medieval Bengal: "*śunaha mānuṣ bhāi/savār upar manuṣ satya/tāhār upar nāi*" ("Listen O Brothers, Men/Humanity is the highest truth/There is none above that)."

The 1920s, however, had seen Nazrul's literary star rise with a number of poems that incorporated a new vocabulary of Islamic references and mythology on the one hand, and Hindu mythology on the other. These poems were *Kheyā Pārer Taraṇī*, *Shāt-il-Ārab*, *Qurbāni*, *Muharram*, and *Pralayollās,* published in 1921-22, most of which were anthologised in the collection *Agnivīṇa*, published in October 1922. These poems would serve to make words from a Perso-Arabic vocabulary familiar to a wider audience, and incorporate these within a terminology of the Indian nationalist movement. The poem *Qurbāni,* for instance, would speak of the Gandhian *satyagraha*—"*Ore hatyā nay āj satyāgraha, śaktir udbodhan/ durbal, bhīru, cup raho, oho khāmaka kṣubdha man! dhvani oṭhe raṇi dūr vāṇīr/ājikār e khun qurbānir/ dumbā-śir rum-bāsīr/śahīder śir serā āji/-- rahmān ki rudra nan?/ bās! cup khāmoś rodan/ āj śor othe jor 'khun de, jān de, śir de vatsa śon/ ore hatyā nay āj satyāgraha śaktir udbodhan!*" ("Today not death but Satyagraha inaugurates power/ Weaklings, cowards—be quiet! The heart is disgruntled without cause...the martyr's head is the best today—Is Rahman not Rudra? Enough! Quieten the tears/Today the voices are loud—give blood, give life, give your head, listen Brother/Not death but satyagraha inaugurates power"). The poem, which addressed the Gandhian ideal of non-violence and truth-seeking or *Satyagraha*, played with the idea of violent revolution by using the Islamic idea of *qurbāni* (sacrifice) and *śahīd* (martyrdom). In the stanzas I cite

[15] Ibid, 77.

above, Nazrul's language innovates with dual Hindu and Muslim frames of reference. A technique used in these early poems would be redeployed by Nazrul throughout his poetic corpus, a form of self-glossing in which he juxtaposes Hindu and Muslim words of the same meaning, introducing a mutual linguistic compatibility and contrast. Take, for example "Is Rahman not Rudra?" Here, Rahman and Rudra stand in contrast with each other, coming from different theological frameworks, but also point to analogous components within those frameworks, with Rahman referring to the Merciful, one of the ninety nine names of Allah, and Rudra denoting the classical Hindu deity from the Rigvedic period, a figure associated with terror—wind, storm, and thunder.[16] The interchangeable use of various names for Allah and of the Hindu deities was a constant motif in his poems and songs over the years and he was quoted as saying that those who see difference in the Hindu and Muslim names of gods are crazy ("*pāgal tārā āllā bhagavāner bhāve bhinna yārā*").[17]

The publication of *Vidrohī* ("The Rebel") in December 1921 changed the landscape of Bengali poetry, bringing about a fresh surge of debate on what Nazrul was doing to and with the Bengali language, a discussion that would have far-reaching consequences. *Vidrohī* blazed into the Bengali literary scene with a new vocabulary of mythological references, again shifting between Hindu to Muslim allusions. "I am a *sanyāsin*, soldier of good/ I am a prince, my royal attire is a faded saffron/ I am Bedouin, I am Chengiz/ I do not salute anyone but myself/ I am Vajra, I am the sound 'om' emanating from the north-east flute/I am the great roars of Isrāfil's trumpet/ I am Śiva's kettledrum and trident, Dharma's stick/ I am the *cakra* and the conch shell, the great sounds of Om, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā/ I am the crazy hermit Durbāsā, disciple of Viśvāmitra/ I am the blazing forest fire that will consume this world."[18]

[16] Kazi Nazrul Islam, "Qurbāni" in *Nazrul Racanābalī Janmaśatabarṣa Saṃskaraṇ*, vol. 1, ed. Rafiqul Islam, 43. This poem was anthologized in the collection *Agnibina* published on October 25, 1922.
[17] See Mohammad Haroun-or-Rashid, *Nazrul Sāhitye Dharma* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996), 63.
[18] "Vidrohī," in *Nazrul Racanābalī Janmaśatabarṣa Saṃskaraṇ*, vol. 1, 7.

The poem also inaugurated the use of a revised metrical form, moving away from the meters used in earlier modern Bengali poetry. Medieval Bengali poetry used meters inherited from Sanskrit, which were of two kinds, *akṣaravṛtta* (based of the number of letters in a line) and *mātrāvṛtta* (based on the length of vowel sounds). Pre-modern Bengali poetry would then adapt the *akṣaravṛtta* so that the number of syllables were of equal importance. Altogether, the great contribution of the Bengali poetic tradition to prosody had been *svaravṛtta*, a sound-based meter incorporating the closed syllables of Bengali pronounciation. This is to say that, within the Bengali tradition, older modes such as the lyric and the ballad, which emphasized the oral, performative dimensions of poetry, ensured that later developments in the tradition would also foreground the Bengali language's aural character. Nazrul's great achievement was to capitalize on this aspect of Bengali by further developing a poetics of sound.[19]

With the advent of modern Bengali poetry in the nineteenth century, the two great metrical innovators had been Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), whereas numerous other poets had also experimented with the two meters described above. While Dutt introduced free verse (*amitrākṣara*) in Bengali, Tagore experimented with many meters and had also written poetry in a new form, the *muktak* (characterized by long, uneven lines). Nazrul's contribution was to try to devise a new kind of aural poetry and meter. Nearly shunning *akṣaravṛtta* altogether, he would try to insert a new stress in *mātrāvṛtta,* which was used to stunning effect in the poem *Vidrohī.* As Abdul Mannan Syed notes, Nazrul's friend and fellow poet Satyendranath Dutta had been tinkering with a new *svara* meter, in which the accent would fall on the first letter or character, usually a closed syllable. Nazrul would take on this metrical style and use it to create a new sound-based poetry, one dependent on accent and syllable and meant to be recited aloud.[20]

---

[19] See Tarapada Bhattacharya, *Chanda-tattva O Chandovivartan* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1971); Prabodhchandra Sen, *Chanda Parikramā* (Calcutta: Jijnasa, 1977); and Abdul Quadir, *Chanda-Samīkṣaṇ* (Dhaka: Muktadhara, 1979).
[20] Abdul Mannan Syed, *Chanda* (Dhaka: Abosar, 2001), 78-94.

Nazrul's early poems had a common trope—*pralay*, or annihilation. He used the dual Hindu/Muslim allusive framework to refer to the destruction of an old order in order to start anew. For instance, the imagery of the cyclone or tempest was a constant motif, as was the image of the Hindu god Śiva, part of the Hindu holy trinity of gods along with Brahmā and Viṣṇu—Śiva who danced the dance of destruction, and in whose capacity lay the power to both destroy and create. In *Pralayollās,* Nazrul writes, "A future annihilation is coming, maddened by the dance of intoxication/ Across the seas the gates have been broken, overcoming all obstacles the locks have been broken/ Death-adorned in dark dungeons/In the fierce form of Mahākal (Śiva)/In the heat and smoke/ That terror is coming lighting a torch with thunderbolts/ Look that terror laughs!/ You all must make sounds of rejoicing!"[21]

Even *Vidrohī* would refer to multiple literary, theological, and political frames of reference to inaugurate a new poetic sensibility, one that desired to annihilate an existing status quo, both literary and political, wherein a distinctive poetic individualism and subjectivity within poetry was forged: "I am Orpheus's flute/ I calm the restless oceans/ I kiss to sleep the unbounded world/ Which extends itself to the melodies of my flute/ I am Krishna's flute/ When I hiss and go to touch the great skies/ The seven hells (which he designates as both the Hindu *narak* and Persian *dozakh)* themselves flicker and die out/ I am the messenger of revolution extending beyond the bounded and unbounded..."[22] It was however in the poem *Dhūmketu* ("The Comet"), that inaugurated the anti-colonial and pro-Communist periodical of the same name in 1922 that he would ruffle a number of feathers: "The rules of Brahmins reached out its hands to grab me/ Jagannath is crippled today burnt in my blazing fires/ I know well the cleverness of the creator, and the cunning of creation/ That is why I kick scriptures and rules and drive a hammer through the heart of the Creator."[23]

[21] "Pralayollās," in *Nazrul Racanābalī Janmaśatabarṣa Saṃskaraṇ*, vol. 1, 5.
[22] Ibid, 10-11.
[23] Ibid, 21.

Nazrul's poetry angered contemporary Hindu Bengali poets who were acolytes of Tagore (though Tagore himself had acknowledged the younger poet's genius) and they wrote satirical pieces about Nazrul in the periodical *Śanivārer Ciṭhi* throughout the mid-1920s. More damning, however, were the reactionary evaluations by contemporary Muslims. Munshi Mohammad Riyazuddin Ahmed would inaugurate the condemnation of Nazrul in the periodical *Islām Darśan* with the article, "Is the Man Muslim or the Devil?" Both *Islām Darśan* and *Māsik Mohammadī* would continue the trend with a number of articles.[24] An important summary of popular Muslim resentment towards Nazrul's use of Islam in his poetry of the 1920s could be found in the article "Islām and Najrul Islām", published in *Māsik Mohammadī* in 1928 by Nazir Ahmed Chowdhury. Chowdhury argued that the pride of the Bengali Muslim community in Nazrul as one of their own was entirely misplaced—"Whether Nazrul Islam is a big poet or a small poet, a great philosopher of the age or a wordsmith who uses a few interesting Bengali words, word-forms and symbols, we are not here to debate this...we can only discuss whether we have any claims on him or he on us as Muslim...by disguising themselves as Muslims, a new group and its leaders desires to attack the very basis of Islam. Nazrul has called his own followers a group of disbelievers."[25]

Caught between elite Hindu literary groups and reactionary Muslim ones, Nazrul would follow his own political and literary path. Along with Qutubuddin Ahmed, Hemantakumar Sarkar, and Shamsuddin Hussain, he would establish the Labour Swaraj party of the Indian Congress, which would leave the Indian National Congress after its leaders convened at the Nikhil Banga Praja Sammilan. It would be renamed The Workers' and Peasants Party of Bengal, its mouthpiece being *Laṅgal* (*The Plough*) in these years.

Laṅgal was a communist mouthpiece of sorts with Nazrul as general editor. It published a great deal of material written by Communist workers and sympathisers such as

[24] Cited in Rafiqul Islam, *Kazi Nazrul Islām Jīvan O Sṛṣṭi* (Kolkata: K.P.Bagchi &Co, 1997), 151.
[25] Nazir Ahmed Chowdhury, "Islām O Najrul Islām," *Mohammadī* 2, no.1 (November 1929): 27-29.

Muzaffar Ahmed and Saumyendranath Tagore on trade union unrest, landlord-tenant issues, and peasant welfare. While the periodical carried some literary translations of Soviet literature, such as Maxim Gorky's *Mother,* each issue of the periodical inevitably began with a Nazrul poem or song. Many of these songs were the theme songs (*udbodhan gīti*) of political conventions, such as *Kṛṣāṇer Gān* (*Songs of the Farmers*)*, Śramiker Gān* (*Songs of the Workers*), and *Jeleder Gān* (*Songs of the Fishermen*). *Jeleder Gan*, for example, published in November 1926, would use a simple and stark language speaking of the suffering of the fishermen as they ploughed through rivers and seas—the use of a repeated phrase would hammer home the triumph of working class uprising—"We will not lie at the bottom/ Listen O brother fisherman/ We will push through, rise up/In the world's court awakens/the labourers and peasants/We will push through, rise up."[26]

Writing about the rural and urban working classes. However, led to a crisis of language when it came to discussing revolution. With what language does one write *for* and *to* the working class? This was a problem that Nazrul had admitted to facing earlier on in his journalistic career. While running *Navayug* with Muzaffar Ahmed, he had written an important essay called *Strike* (1920) that was almost entirely devoid of any allusive language. The focus instead was on the lack of basic dignity of life of the miner, and Nazrul addressed the twentieth-century shift from religion to the idea of a (secular) man, what he called "larger humanity." For him, the twentieth century was characterised by the element of class struggle and the ability of workers to attain their rights in democracies such as modern Europe and America. Nazrul had raised the question of an oppressive colonial "bureaucratic" state that thrived on the labor of the industrial worker, but a true anticolonial movement was one premised on class struggle in which decolonization necessarily ensured the welfare of the industrial worker. The suffering of the oppressed is such that, as Nazrul declared, "We do not

[26] Nazrul Islam, "Jeleder Gān," *Lāṅgal* 1, no. 12 (Caitra 1332/March 1926): 3-5.

have the power to describe it in language."[27] This conundrum was finally solved with the adoption of various kinds of folk musical elements in the songs he wrote for *Lāṅgal.* The background for this could be found in Nazrul's involvement in a rural performance group in Bardhaman district in his childhood. Nazrul began a career in music as *Dukhu Miyān,* in the rustic world of *leṭo* music, in Churulia district in Burdwan. *Leṭo,* a derivative of *nāṭya*,[28] was a traditional musical performance, with some acting and storytelling, among the Muslims of the *Rarh* region of Bengal viz, the districts of Burdwan, Birbhum, Hugli, and Nadia. (A similar folk music tradition existed in Murshidabad, Malda, and Rajshahi called *Alkāp*.) *Leṭo,* on the same continuum of rural performative traditions in Bengal such as *jātrā* and *kathakatā*, was primarily a source of entertainment and storytelling for the Muslim peasant and laboring class. Under a makeshift *shamiana* on the largest open field of the village, *Leṭo* performances had assimilated *Pauranic* stories with *qissā* tales, but by the end of the nineteenth century had also incorporated contemporaneous events.[29] It was in a group of *Leṭo* performers that Nazrul began his dual life as poet and composer at the age of twelve or thirteen. Poverty had first made him work as a *muezzin* at a mosque, before he started to work full-time in rural theatre. His genius was recognized by the various groups of *Leṭo* in Rarh; by the time he ran away to the army at the age of seventeen, he was already called an *ostād.*

In the anonymity of *Leṭo*, Nazrul's name was often shrouded in pseudonyms or riddles.[30] It is important however to get a sense of the social world within which he was composing *leto* (all his biographers agree that Nazrul kept composing these songs even when he was supposed to be studying in school as he was so popular). To reconstruct that world is perhaps crucial in getting a sense of *why* and *how* a cultural project of Hindu-Muslim unity

[27] Muzaffar Ahmed, *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smṛtikathā* (Kolkata: National Book Agency Private Limited, 1967), 85.
[28] *Nāṭya* means "performance" in Sanskrit. The likely etymology of *Leṭo* would be Nāṭya—> Nāṭ; Nāṭ+Uya= Nāṭuya—> Neṭo—> Leṭo.
[29] See Wakil Ahmed, *Nazrul: Leṭo O Lok Aitihya* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2001).
[30] Muhammad Ayub Hossain, *Dukhumiyar Leṭogān* (Kolkata: Nazrul Foundation, 2003), 10-12.

through language came about in his later corpus. For instance, let us look at a word-picture of Churulia, his ancestral village provided by one of his biographers: "It had a Hindu leader. In the western and southern parts of the village lay the Muslim houses where *puthis* were read on lazy afternoons and evenings. Sometimes, *qissā*s were read out. During weddings, Muslim women would sing Muslim wedding songs. In the Hindu neighborhoods you had *kirtan, kathakata, Manasa gan*, Krishnajatra, Candir Panchali, and other songs. During the seasons, Satyapīr performances would happen and *Fakiri* gan would happen next to the *pīr mazhars*. Dukhu Miyān used to witness these performances…in his *Leṭo* songs, *saṃ* and *pālās*, this influence is deeply felt."[31]

Nazrul's early compositions included many small plays (*saṃ*) from Hindu Rāmayana and Mahabharata mythology, fewer *qissa*s—*Rājā Hariścandra, Meghnād Vadh, Kuś O Lav, Kaṃsa Vadh, Rājā Yudhiṣṭira, Dātā Karṇa,* and *Karṇa Vadh*, and a few satires in the *prahasana* tradition—*Svāmi Strīr Jhagrā, Sudkhor Brajen Mukherjee, Buro Jamidār, Bou er Biye,* and *Hārādhaner Biye*. The *pālaās* included some qissā stories such *as Akbar Bādśā* and *Yuvarāj Dārā Shikoh*, but also historical ones such as *Nīlkuthi* (with a Muslim *lāṭhiyāl* Zaynal who wishes to rescue his Muslim brothers and Hindu sisters from the oppression of the indigo planter). Common to all the playwriting was the element of song, and many of the plays show not only a composite mythological or historical framework of Hindu-Muslim togetherness in the Bengali village, but almost proleptically display the range of Nazrul's later compositions; other than the usual leto *Hāsir Gān,* there was the romantic *premer gān,* the Radha-Krishna songs, and the Islami *gān.* There was also, crucially, the *Miśra Gān,* or the mixed song which bore witness to his experimentation with language, which he often wrote—even as a child—in a mixed register, with smatterings of English along Bengali and Hindustani. One particular song written by Dukhu Miyān, for example, anticipates Nazrul's

[31] Ibid, 7.

satirical poems and songs composed in his later life, songs that his friend, the composer Salil Chowdhury, would designate as his best work. The song goes:

I will not live in Kailashpur I am Calcutta going
All these English fashion *oh my* Lightning
All his English fashions
He puts up a beautiful display!
Seeing one, friend hands a chair
Come on dear good morning!
And after the friend arrives
Smiles and does a handshake
Holding out a meeting!
And then after friends meet
Drinking *results out of sheer curiosity*
Dissolving all caste and pedigree
Nazrul Islam is telling![32]

The themes of the dominant aspirational metropole of Calcutta, the hope that the city would dissolve "caste and pedigree" and the curious mixture of laughter, wistfulness, and humor emphasizes that the earlier *communitas* of rural Bengal, at the turn of the century, was different. This *communitas*, Hindu and Muslim spectators not belonging to the *bhadralok*, had one common aspiration and antagonist: the English language and the city of Calcutta.

The Culture Industry: *Ghazal* and a Language for Vanishing Worlds

This chapter has tried to establish Kazi Nazrul Islam as a great innovator of the Bengali language, one whose foremost political mission was to create a new literary Bengali, a language for Hindu-Muslim unity. This section touches briefly on Nazrul's prolific career in the Bengali culture industry in the 1930s and looks at a distinctive language of loss, a personal aesthetic space that Nazrul had forged within a professional and commercial milieu. This was the poetic or musical form, the *ghazal*.[33]

[32] The song was reproduced in Karunamoy Goswami's *Nazrul Gīti Prasaṅga* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1974). My translation, leaving intact the English phrases he used, is necessarily an awkward one. The translation from Bengali is italicized while his own English sentences are not.
[33] I am grateful to the great-grandson of Nazrul, Ankan Kazi, for discussing Nazrul's contribution to the *ghazal* form with me, as well as for sharing his own unpublished article, "The Tradition and Meaning of the Bengali Ghazal in Nazrul's Work."

Outside the domain of literature, a turbulent political time had emerged by the middle of the 1920s within the Indian national movement and in Bengal. By the end of 1926, the periodical *Lāṅgal* (*The Plough*) closed after a large Hindu-Muslim riot broke out in Calcutta in April. In May, there was a major Provincial Congress meeting in which the conflicts within the Congress made Nazrul realize that much had happened since the three years of the "Hindu-Muslim pact" brought about by Chittaranjan Das.[34] The widening rift was something that he also found in Dhaka during his visit to East Bengal in June and July. In August, he would again raise the communal question in a letter to the editor sent to the conservative *Ātmaśakti,* which had criticized Muzaffar Ahmed's group *Ganavāṇī* for spreading Marxist ideas amongst the rural peasantry. Nazrul responded by saying that only Marxist politics and not identitarian/communal politics could bring about change to the miserable condition of the working classes.[35] Though he lived in Krishnanagar at the time, Nazrul decided to contest an election in Dhaka for one of two Muslim seats in the Central Legislative Assembly. As Nazrul's readership was reserved to young lower middle class or working class Muslims, it was unlikely that he would win against the influential Muslim zamindar contesting against him. Nazrul lost not just the seat, but also his security deposit.[36]

This period thus marked a turn away from the world of journalism and active legislative/electoral politics for Nazrul. Struggling with poverty, he turned to a more lucrative profession—music. Nazrul himself had been ignored by the British-owned Gramophone Company until late 1928, when his immense popularity made them pay his arrears, as other recording artists like Dilip Kumar Roy and Nalini Kanta Sarkar had already been covering his songs. Being signed by the recording company meant a new world for Nazrul, whose days

[34] For a discussion of the crisis brought about by Chittaranjan Das's death in 1925 and the failure of the Bengal Pact, see J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).
[35] The letter was addressed by Nazrul to the editor Gopal Lal Sanyal. See Kazi Nazrul Islam, *Nazruler Patrāvalī*, ed. Shahabuddin Ahmed (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2017), 81.
[36] This entire episode is described in great detail by Jasimuddin in his memoirs. See Jasimuddin, *Smṛtikathāsamagra*, ed. Pulak Chanda (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2016), 227-232.

of poverty and struggle were finally over. He moved to Calcutta and devoted his time and energies to these new intermedial forms—radio, gramophone records, and cinema—a world Bengali Muslims were just beginning to break into with a great deal of difficulty.[37]

Having initially joined the Gramophone Company (HMV) in 1929, Nazrul eventually started to freelance and composed and arranged music for other private companies such as Hindustan Records, Megaphone, Senolo, Pioneer, and others. In this capacity, he trained and composed for singers such as S. D. Burman, Suprobha Ghosh, Shaila Devi, Neelima Banerjee, Indubala, Angurbala, Harimati, K. Mullick, Dhiren Das, Girin Chakrabarti, Abbasuddin Ahmed, and Maude Costello. The new technologies themselves led to interesting innovations in both Nazrul's poetic/compositional career and to Hindustani Classical Music. Kamal Dasgupta recollected two unique programs on the radio that Nazrul had organized, the papers of which are now lost. One was on the idea of the wireless itself, for which Nazrul wrote a song that punned on the word *vina/ vīṇā —"Tomār vina tārer gīti bājuk āmār vīṇār tāre"* ("May wireless song resound on the strings of my vina") and another song, *"Akāśe āj chaḍiye dilām priya āmār kathār phul go, āmār gāner māla go kuḍiye niyo tumi"* ("I spread the flowers of my words in the sky, gather the garlands of my songs"). Both songs, Dasgupta averred, would have no literal meaning but would only make sense if the listener figured out that the wordplay referred to a new mode of communication enabled by wireless technology.[38]

The second program signaled a breakthrough in the way that the very meter (*mātrā*) of Hindustani music worked. Dasgupta has inquired why most Bengali songs were *trimātrik,* whereas Hindu songs were *caturmātrik.* Nazrul took up a book of Sanskrit *śloka*s, and

[37] An account of this can be found in Zakir Hossain Raju, *Bangladesh Cinema and National Identity: In Search of the Modern?* (London: Routledge, 2015). Zakir Hossain Raju briefly touches upon Nazrul's film compositions and collaboration with the singer Abbasuddin. Abbasuddin was asked to take a Hindu name in order to get acting gigs, which he refused.
[38] Kamal Dasgupta, "Kazida," in *Sudhijaner Dṛśṭite Nazrul Saṅgīt*, ed. Asadul Haq (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1999), 46.

modeled certain songs on innovative meters found within it. The program was called *Chandita* or *Chandaśrī*, and some of the songs written for the purpose of this program went on to become widely covered and popular Nazrul songs, such as *Mahuyā Bane Ban Pāpiyā* (composed in 7 mātrā), *Manjula Madhuchanda* (composed in 10 mātrā) and *Ājo Phālgune Bakula Kiṃsuker Bane* (composed in 18 *mātrā*, which was a first for Hindustani music as a whole, which did not have an 10 *mātrā chanda* before). The sheer innovativeness lay not in the matra however (though it was unusual in Bengali music) but in the way that the *jhnok* (stress) fell. In each *mātrā*, the stress was different when taken from a Sanskrit *śloka* metrical form than in the conventional Hindustani classical musical system.[39]

The Gramophone Company was making significant profits in the 1930s from Hindustani classical music, including lighter twentieth-century adaptations of classical forms. This music symbolized a cultural space for Hindu-Muslim friendship and allegiance to which larger political worlds were not witness. As the music critic Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay would write in *The Calcutta Review* in 1934:

> It is a real pleasure to report that the taste for classical music is spreading among our people. As yet, the circle is select, but it is there, and it is growing. Prophesying is a risky venture, but one could detect symptoms of increasing interest in high-class music. Nearly twice a week the Indian State Broadcasting Company manages to insinuate `classical items' into its programme. The Gramophone Companies are bringing out records in which virtuosity plays no insignificant part. These records are selling better than was expected. Young artists are singing *Kheyal*, young men and women are eager for *ustad*s; and in the idea that such are not available in Bengal,-they knock at the gates of the Marris College of Hindusthani Music at Lucknow. The Hindusthani style, or the Mabomedan style, the name should not count, is just now very popular. To one interested in the study of social movements, these facts are important; to the nationalist who values his country's culture, these are happy auguries, and to the critical mind they are as starting points for the process of evaluation. In any case, the movement is interesting and deserves scrutiny, and after scrutiny, encouragement.[40]

[39] Ibid, 47.
[40] Dhurjatiprasad Mukherji, "Classical Revival in Our Music and Principles of Composition," *Calcutta Review* (April 1934): 63-71.

Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay's article highlights an interesting social space that classical and semi-classical music created in the 1930s, a form of ideal *communitas* that the political and even literary worlds did not witness. Nazrul's move to music was an artistic decision that also proved to be a good commercial decision. Of the many songs Nazrul had been composing in the 1930s, the most lucrative was the Bengali *Islāmī gān*, a genre he would develop after his new professional relationships with the classical singer, *thumri* specialist Ustad Jamiruddin Khan and the folk singer Abbasuddin.[41] In the memoirs of Abbasuddin Ahmed, the most prolific folk singer of this period, the genesis of Nazrul's "islāmī" compositions could be found in the seed of his own idea that the "qawwali" form, so popular in Urdu, could be adapted to Bengali. Abbasuddin would offer this idea to the then-rehearsal officer-in-charge at the Gramophone Company, Bhagavati Bhattacharya, who shot down the idea immediately: "No, no such songs will not be received. This will not happen." Abbasuddin then asked *Kazida* to consider the idea, who composed the song "O Heart at the end of the fast on Ramzan comes the moon of happiness." Bhagavati-babu would come around, and they would release songs that became immensely popular. Bengali Muslims would eventually write to Abbasuddin to lower the price of the records, a proposition that Nazrul would reject, as that would mean that Abbasuddin would lose royalties if he recorded on twin record.[42] But Abbasuddin was happy with losing the money if it meant that poorer Muslims in rural Bengal would hear his music. Moreover, the demand for *Islāmī gān* was unprecedented and Hindu singers would soon start singing these songs too. In the absence of more Muslim singers, Abbasuddin writes, "Dhiren Das became Gani Miyan, Chitta Ray became Dilawar Hussain, Ascharyamayi and Harimati became Sakina Begum and Amina Begum and Girin Chakrabarti became Sona Miyan."[43]

Nazrul's past political associations would come back in the years of his commercial

[41] Abdul Muqit Chowdhury, *Najrul Islām: Islāmī Gān* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 2013), 14.
[42] Abasuddin's memoir, cited in Karunamay Goswami, *Nazrul Gīti Prasaṅga,* 268-27.
[43] Ibid, 271.

artistic production. In 1935, for example, he would compose the music for his friend Shailajananda Mukherjee's musical film *Pātālpurī (City of Hell)*, based on the coalmines of his birth-district, the Rarh region. Here, he would introduce a further musical improvisation and use the tribal folk music or *jhumur gān* of the Santhals.[44] A prolific music-composer for films in the late 1930s, he would compose songs using the melodies and genres of *dhrupad, kheyāl, tappā, thumri, ghazal, bhajan, bāul, bhāntiyali, jhumur,* and *qawwali.*

However, a number of different observers would make the point that Nazrul's greatest poetic and musical gift to Bengali was the form of the *ghazal* that he took from a different tradition and translated into a completely different part of the world, to a different language.[45] While the Hindu Atulprasad Sen was the first composer of *ghazal* in the Bengali language, for Nazrul the genre perhaps meant something personally and politically. It leads one to ask what the form of the *ghazal* would mean for an act of cultural translation in the late 1930s. A common trope in Nazrul's *ghazal*s right from his earliest translations and compositions was the idea of loss and exile, of *viccheda* (separation) that would gather urgency in the 1930s when the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity became ever more distant.

In a short translation of a poem by Rumi published in *Vaṅganūṛ* in 1920 called *The Flute's Pain,* Nazrul wrote proleptically—"Listen to this melody from a bamboo flute diffusing through the heart/ This is no melody, rather it is the widowed flute crying from *viccheda (*separation)/ Atttached to what infinity?/ Bounded within this body/ This flute, my body, suffers from this sorrowful lament/ It desires to kiss the unknown Beloved that is so distant/ The desire to find the Beloved/ Flutters in the music of separation."[46]

---

[44] Ibid, 94.

[45] For instance, Buddhadev Bose argued that Nazrul's ghazals remained an unparalleled contribution. Rajyeswar Mitra said, "Nazrul introduced a new element in our music. This is sheyar or recitation in melody…It was a new musical form in the context of Bengali songs." Goswami adds,"Nazrul has used classical melodies to suit ghazal temperament. The most widely applied melody is Bhairavi, that eternally sweet and sad thing which gives the fittest expression to the romantic melancholy." See Karunamoy Goswami, *Aspects of Nazrul Songs* (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1990), 116-117.

[46] "Bāńśīr Byathā," in *Nazrul Racanā Sambhār* (Kolkata: Abdul Aziz Al Aman, 1955), 71.

He experimented with writing a large number of songs in various forms and genres, most significant and prolific of of which was the *ghazal.* The traditional Persian *ḡazal* is a short lyric poem of seven to fourteen lines. The unit of ḡazal, as in most other forms of Persian poetry, is a line (*beyt*), which consists of two hemistiches (*meṣrāʿ*s) with a distinct caesura between the two. As a rule, each line contains a complete statement; sometimes the entire poetic statement is contained in one hemistich, and the second hemistich is then used to either emphasize the idea expressed in the first hemistich, or reiterate it in a different way, to illustrate it, or to introduce a new idea, or else as mere padding in order to complete the meter. The underlying assumptions and thematic, imaginal, and rhetorical conventions of Persian *ḡazalmaya* are usually discussed under the following rubrics—that of the Beloved, the Lover, the Love, Concepts of Beauty, the Wine Cult, the *Rend*s, *Qalandar*s and their Ilk, Mystical Ḡazals, etc.[47] The wine cult, so integral to the ḡazal tradition, and the ambiguity of the love for the divine couched in terms of profane love and earthly attachments, form the crux of the Sufi mystical tradition of the ḡazal.

Nazrul had been attracted to this genre since 1917, during his army days in Karachi, where he had been taking Persian lessons from an unnamed Punjabi maulvi. This early philological interest was a lifelong literary preoccupation, and he translated extensively from the Persian *ghazals* of Rumi, Hafez, and Omar Khayyam. He also eventually started a translation of the genre, writing original *ghazal*s in Bengali.

By the late 1920s, when his son Bulbul died, he had finished translating Hafez. In his introduction to the translations of Hafez, he mentioned that as he bid goodbye to the mortal body of his son, he welcomed that heavenly friend Hafez with tears in his eyes.[48] In Nazrul's gloss of the great Iranian tradition of Sufi poetry, the *sharaab-saki* referred to more than the

[47] See Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 237-298 (see also the bibliographies of the above-cited works).
[48] In the Introduction or "*Mukhabandha*" to the translated *Rubaiyyat-e-Hafez,* Nazrul outlines the circumstances of composition/translation, and his own reading or understanding of Persian literature. *Nazrul Racanābalī Janmaśatabarṣa Saṃskaraṇ*, vol. 4, 125-130.

avid drinker of alcohol—for him, the orthodoxy who mistakenly believed that Persian poetry was a poetry of gluttony and excess, did not understand that it was the poetry of a true seeker of God. The *ghazal* was the supreme achievement of a heterodox tradition that believed in individual freedom to seek an Allah of one's choice, whose divine, miraculous manifestation on earth (and he interestingly uses the Bhakti term *līlā*) is intoxicating. This is *sharaab* (wine).[49]

Nazrul explains that the *ghazal* as spiritual music was recognized even by Hindus, including the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj, such as Keshubchandra Sen and Debendranath Tagore, and was sung in the nineteenth century in their prayer rooms.[50] Along with hymns to Kali, and with a new genre of songs that he wrote and composed in the 1930s—"*Islāmī gān*"—*ghazal*s would form the triad of music that he became famous for.

Hindu-Muslim riots rose in frequency and intensity in the late 1930s.[51] In 1940, none other than A. K. Fazlul Haq who had once funded a periodical for both Hindus and Muslims passed the Lahore Resolution in Bengal in the office of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society. The beginning of the 1940s led to the passing of two great literary and political icons who had both advocated a Bengali identity that was both Hindu and Muslim in vision. Tagore died in 1941, fretting on the crisis of human values and of human civilization at the onset of World War II. Nazrul, suffering from a motor degenerative disease, lost his voice and cognitive capacities in 1942. Though he lived through the Partition of 1947 and the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971, he would not write or sing again. With his literal silencing, a generation of Bengali Muslim and Hindu voices also passed into the realms of oblivion. *Ghazal*, in that sense, was a historically important form for a Bengali Muslim poet to adopt. Elsewhere in the subcontinent, the master of the twentieth-century *ghazal* Faiz

[49] Ibid, 129-130.
[50] Ibid, 129.
[51] See Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Ahmed Faiz, who was also Marxist in orientation, had adapted the *ghazal* in Urdu.[52] For Faiz, the great translator of the Persian genre was the lonely Mirza Ghalib, writing in 1857 in the court of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, aware that an old world was passing —"The Mughal Princes gather in the Red Fort and recite their ghazals…this court will not last many days more. How can it be permanent? Who knows if they will meet tomorrow, and if they do will they meet after that? The assembly may vanish any moment."[53]

The adoption of the *ghazal* by Nazrul, with renewed fervor in the late 20s and 30s, signaled an understanding that his earlier literary and linguistic world was an impermanent one, as was a politics in which the unity of Hindus and Muslims was achieved through an appeal to a shared culture and language. The *ghazal*, then, became a way of translating the political reality of separatism and of the rift between two communities into a lament, an elegiac language of loss and the desire for a world and a vision—the ideal *communitas*— that was disappearing, never to return:

> Who has come to lay flowers on my tomb?
> Who remembers me after so long?
> He who you did not want all your life
> Let him sleep
> Do not rouse his slumber
> From the other side of death.
> When you bring flowers to my tomb
> Do not cry beside it, Beloved.
> If a flower withers from neglect
> It is not revived with tears.
> A tomb is not stone
> As rigid as you.
> many hopes and desires are extinguished in the soil of the earth,
> As blossoms are consumed by insects.
> Why is your arrival so untimely?
> Wipe your tears, and return.[54]

The Years after Partition

[52]See Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *The Rebel's Silhouette*, trans. Agha Shahid Ali (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991).
[53] Mirza Ghalib cited in William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857* (London: Penguin, 2007).
[54] This raga was composed in the late 1930s (exact date unknown) by Nazrul in the Raga Yogiya based on Bhairav *ṭhāṭ.* Kazi Nazrul Islam, *Śreṣṭha Nazrul Svaralipi* (Kolkata: Haraph Prakashani, 1995), 579.

A grave error has been made
Everything has been divided
Only Nazrul has not been partitioned.
Let this mistake remain
There remains only one who can be called Bengali
May there be cessation of his suffering.[55]

When Annada Shankar Ray (civil servant, littérateur, and bitter opposer of the partition of Bengal in 1947) wrote these lines in tribute to the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in West Bengal, he voiced the sentiments of many, Hindus and Muslims alike. Widely cited and anthologised, Ray's poem spoke to a long history of contestation over Kazi Nazrul Islam's legacy in the two Bengals divided in 1947. In many ways, Nazrul still stands both a lone and lonely figure in the history of Bengali literature and politics.[56] His afterlife however speaks to the ways in which the language of unity and solidarity that he forged remained in the political imagination of two communities of Bengalis after 1947—the Hindu majority left in India, and the Bengali Muslims joining East Pakistan, who eventually seceded from the Urdu-speaking West Pakistan. In West Bengal, Nazrul remained a very popular poet, partly because of his significant presence on radio. As Sukhamoy Mukherjee notes in one of the many reminiscences of Nazrul that were anthologized, Nazrul was one of the most popular children's writers in West Bengal; and after Tagore's death in 1942 for which Nazrul wrote a poem *Dupurer Rabi Pariyāche Ḍhale* that he himself recited on the radio, he was generally considered to be the greatest Bengali poet alive.[57] But gradually, Nazrul's great legacy—his music—fell into certain neglect and disrepair from the late 1940s. The composer Jagat Ghatak recollected how painstakingly Nazrul compiled into notations his prolific songs at the

[55] Annada Shankar Ray, "Nazrul," in *Śata-Kathāy Nazrul*, ed. Kalyani Kazi (Calcutta: Sahityam, 1999), 392.
[56] In 2017 for example, even as this dissertation is being written, the Indian Hindu right wing has its sights set on West Bengal and is in a process of remaking Bengali literary icons. On top of this list is Kazi Nazrul Islam, whose birth anniversary was celebrated by the Hindu majoritarian organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on May 25. Citing his marriage to a Hindu woman in his lifetime and his most popular musical legacies *Śyāmāsaṅgīt* or devotional Kali hymns, the RSS is eulogizing him as a "good Hindu," an event that has invited both wrath and hilarity in present day reasonably secular (though fast communalizing) West Bengal.
[57] Sukhamay Mukherjee was in school at the time, and the children used to memorize a number of Nazrul poems to recite aloud. Their teacher had announced in class "Make Kazi the Poet Laureate" to which all the children erupted in cheers. See Sukhamay Mukherjee, "Kavi Nazrul: Kayekti Kathā," in *Sudhījaner Dṛṣṭite Nazrul,* ed. Asadul Haq (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1999), 101-115.

radio station, always having someone at his disposal to write down the *svaralipi* while he freely composed. Towards the end of his working life, when the poet was already ill, his original *pāṇḍulipi* was lost from the radio station Akashvani.[58] Kamal Dasgupta, who kept on working at the Gramophone Company until 1960, was instrumental in keeping Nazrul's music alive in the first decade in independent India. He had preserved many of Nazrul's songs and notations from the years when the poet was most prolific, but quit the company when he saw that Nazrul was not getting due recognition. Only some *svaralipi* had been published, and when his songs were broadcast, they were not even done so as *Nazrul-gīti,* but only called *Ādhunik gān* (contemporary/modern music).[59]

Kamal Dasgupta listed four reasons why Nazrul's music fell out of circulation—no institution dedicated to the training of new musicians in Calcutta, the more noted Calcutta-based singers not covering his music, radio refusing to acknowledge his corpus as a specific *Nazrul gīti,* and the Gramophone Company refusing to release new records of Nazrul-giti renditions (beyond one hundred of his most popular songs).[60] The great writers of the (Hindu) Bengali modernist canon however, continued to see Nazrul as one of their own, while acknowledging his slippery and elusive poetic corpus. The novelist Premendra Mitra in his reminiscence *Aparimer* (*Immeasurable*) argued that Nazrul, ever since he blazed into Calcutta's literary consciousness, was a man of many parts and gifts. To describe him (soldier, poet, journalist, politician, composer, film director) one needed to borrow a word from European cinema; Nazrul was a montage.[61] Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay's piece *Sudhu Jhar Non, Agnigiri O (Not Just a Storm, A Volcano Too),* he recollected that Nazrul's new poetry in the decade between 1922-1930 symbolized the revolutionary potential of a

[58] Jagat Ghatak "Nazrul Smrti: Sangīt Prasaṅga," in *Sudhījaner Dṛṣṭite Nazrul,* ed. Asadul Haq (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1999), 29-40.
[59] Kamal Dasgupta, "Kazida," in *Sudhījaner Dṛṣṭite Nazrul,* ed. Asadul Haq (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1999), 53-54.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Premendra Mitra "Aparimer," in *Nazrul Pratibhā Paricay*, ed. Sufi Zulfiqar Haider (Dhaka: Sufi Zulfiqar Haider Foundation, 1968), 125-129.

generation in Bengal; this generation was not a just a *vidrohī* generation, but also a *viplabī* one. And thus the two political names from Bengal who most lived up to this sense of upheaval of an existing status quo—one was Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and the other, Kazi Nazrul Islam.[62] In fact Bose, who stood for an alternative political trajectory for India, was a great admirer of Nazrul's poetry. In 1929, Bose said that in the overall disconnect between the nation and literature, only Nazrul filled the gap—a true revolutionary. His songs were to be sung on the battlefields and in prisons.[63]

While that possibility did not unfold in India after 1947, it unfolded in East Pakistan in the years of the language movement. While Nazrul struggled with his motor degenerative disease and its expensive treatment and while his literary and musical corpus gradually faded somewhat in Calcutta, Kazi Nazrul Islam became a rallying point of sorts for a predominantly left-leaning cultural resistance by Bengali Muslims against the West Pakistanis who desired to impose Urdu. In the cultural resistance of the 1950s and the 1960s, some of his songs were constantly played and sung in the underground movement.[64] Nazrul had vigorously opposed the Pakistan movement in the late 1930s and had delivered an address to a newly launched Janasahitya Samsad (Institute of People's Literature) where he read out this poem *Goḍāmi Dharma Nay* ("Fundamentalism Is Not Religion") composed especially for the occasion—"Those who are goons and hypocrites, using the veil of religion/ Incite the unconscious masses./ They bring hatred between races and religions/ Filling their own stomachs, they desire evil/ In the guise of a religious movement and with an ugly power/ They try to make religion a common factor, becoming ministers/ They do not want good for all, only their own good/ They become landlords, moneylenders, affluent and aristocrats./ They have so much money, have they ever donated any?/ Do their houses and palaces every give shelter to the

[62] Ibid, 113-115.
[63] Ibid, 33.
[64] Ali Hossain Chowdhury, "Nazrul O Bāṃlādeśer Abhyuday," *Nazrul Institute Patrikā* 32 (February 2016): 124-136.

homeless?/ They are poisoning the country in the name of race and religion/ They are venomous serpents, destroy them all!"[65] In 1940, the Pakistan Movement gained momentum and as the *Pākistān Zindābād* (Long Live Pakistan!) rang out on the streets of Calcutta, Nazrul countered this slogan with his poem *Ek Allāh Zindābād* ("Long Live the One Allah")—"Let them speak words of hatred, conflict and slander/ We will say long live equality, peace and the one Allah!"[66]

Nazrul's anti-separatism did not find favor with more than a handful of Bengali Muslims of the time, either at the mass level or at higher political echelons. The last pipe dream was the United Bengal Movement, a movement in which Hindu leaders such as Sarat Chandra Bose and Kiran Shankar Ray tried to come to an agreement with Muslim leaders associated with the provincial Muslim League, A. K. Fazlul Haq, H.S. Suhrawardy, and Abul Hashim in May 1947 for a "United and Sovereign Bengal, based on joint electorates, adult franchise and reservation according to population." These leaders agreed, on a Nazrulesque vein, that Bengal would be a Socialist Republic, given that "the solution to the communal problem lay ultimately in social justice." The plan fell through because Nehru and Sardar Patel did not want the "balkanization" of the Indian Union, Jinnah would not be conceded any territory. Gandhi, who initially supported "Sarat-babu's" proposal, also withdrew support.[67]

And yet, language was became the central point of conflict before and after 1947, as the previous chapter explores. Nazrul's poetry, with its distinctive idiom of resistance and revolution, came to be embraced by a large number of dissenting East Pakistanis. This led to some consternation within the East Pakistani intelligentsia. A number of articles were published in various periodicals on the necessity to revaluate the status of Nazrul as a

[65] Ibid, 125.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Joya Chatterji discusses this unrealizable but last-ditch attempt to prevent the partition of Bengal in her work, arguing against earlier scholars like Leonard Gordon. See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided,* 260-261.

"Pakistani" poet.[68] Chief among his naysayers and sceptics amongst those who were pro-Pakistan were Golam Mostafa, who wrote two articles in the anti-Nazrul periodical *Naobāhār.* The first "*Nazrul Kāvyer Apardik* (*The Other Side of Nazrul's Poetry*)" (1951) argued that to call Nazrul a Pakistani poet would be to commita grave fallacy, as Nazrul had bitterly opposed Pakistan and in fact wrote of an undivided India in which he saw Hindus and Muslims as *Hara-Gaurī*, the sacred divine Hindu couple of Śiva and Pārvati. Mostafa focused on the word Hara Gauri with great bitterness, as if the use of Hindu imagery itself signaled a crucial difference.[69] Mohammad Arshad Ali Ibrahimpuri also voiced a similar concern in *Nazrul Prasaṅge* in the same periodical, "We must revaluate this cultivation and enthusiasm for Nazrul's literary corpus and see how beneficial or harmful it is for us. How much of ideals or inspiration he has for Pakistan is a big question mark for us today…we should ban a Pakistani edition of Nazrul's poems, as his ideals can be fatal for us."[70] Since a plan for the Pakistani edition of Nazrul's poems was doing the rounds, Golam Mostafa suggested a bowdlerization of Nazrul. For instance, *Agnivīṇā* was deemed to have seven acceptable (Islamic) poems, the other five going against the very idea of Islam and Pakistan.[71] Other East Pakistanis would condemn this narrow vision of Pakistanism, and would speak for Nazrul as a Pakistani poet.[72]

However, Nazrul's dream of an independent Bengal would come to fruition as yet. As West Pakistan launched Operation Searchlight against East Bengal and started massacring Bengali civilians in numerous scenes of massacre, the *Mukti Bahini* (liberation forces) often sang Nazrul military songs. These songs would be one of the main songs broadcast on the

[68] This trend had begun before Partition of 1947. In 1945, Mujibur Khan wrote in the *Mohammadi* that, while Nazrul opposed Pakistan, his 'Islamic" poems made him the foremost poet of Muslim nationalism—"The red torch of Din-i-Islami blazes in every direction/ O unaware ones, wake up now and light up your soul."
[69] Titas Chowdhury, "Saṃvād patre Nazrul birodhī pratikṛyā," *Nazrul Institute Patrikā* (April 2001): 570.
[70] Ibid, 571.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid. The editors of *Azad,* a daily, carried a number of articles applauding Nazrul, who had forged a *zabān* or tongue for East Pakistan.

Svadhin Bamgla Betar Kendra, an incredible initiative taken by a handful of Bengali engineers.[73] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose Prime Ministership had been denied by West Pakistan and who was on arrested on March 25, 1971, by the Pakistan military, had been deeply influenced by one of Nazrul poems—"This pristine Bangladesh/ Belongs to Bengalis. It is ours./Playing the trumpets of victory/ Without fear, we shall banish/ The pirates and robbers of other countries…Let Bengal be of the Bengalis! Victory to Bengal!"[74] Two days later on March 27, When Major Ziaur Rahman issued the Proclamation of Bangladeshi Independence as an emissary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Nazrul's *Jaya Bāṃlā* had achieved the status of a slogan:

> This is Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. I, Major Ziaur Rahman, at the direction of Bangobondhu Mujibur Rahman, hereby declare that Independent People's Republic of Bangladesh has been established. At his direction, I have taken the command as the temporary Head of the Republic. In the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, I call upon all Bengalis to rise against the attack by the West Pakistani Army. We shall fight to the last to free our motherland. Victory is, by the Grace of Allah, ours. *Jay Bangla*! [75]

When Jātī Became Rāṣṭra

In the heady 1920s, when political revolution and literary modernism made Calcutta an exciting and aspirational city for provincial Bengalis, Hindus and Muslims alike, Nazrul's *Vidrohī* had ushered in a new age for Bengal. What that age meant had eluded many at the time. Nevertheless, the advent of Nazrul had many poets write off Rabindranath Tagore, then the foremost literary innovator and political icon. One of the many anecdotes circulating about this supposed conflict between Tagore and Nazrul was a funny one, recounted by Anushilan Samiti member, the revolutionary Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, who then edited

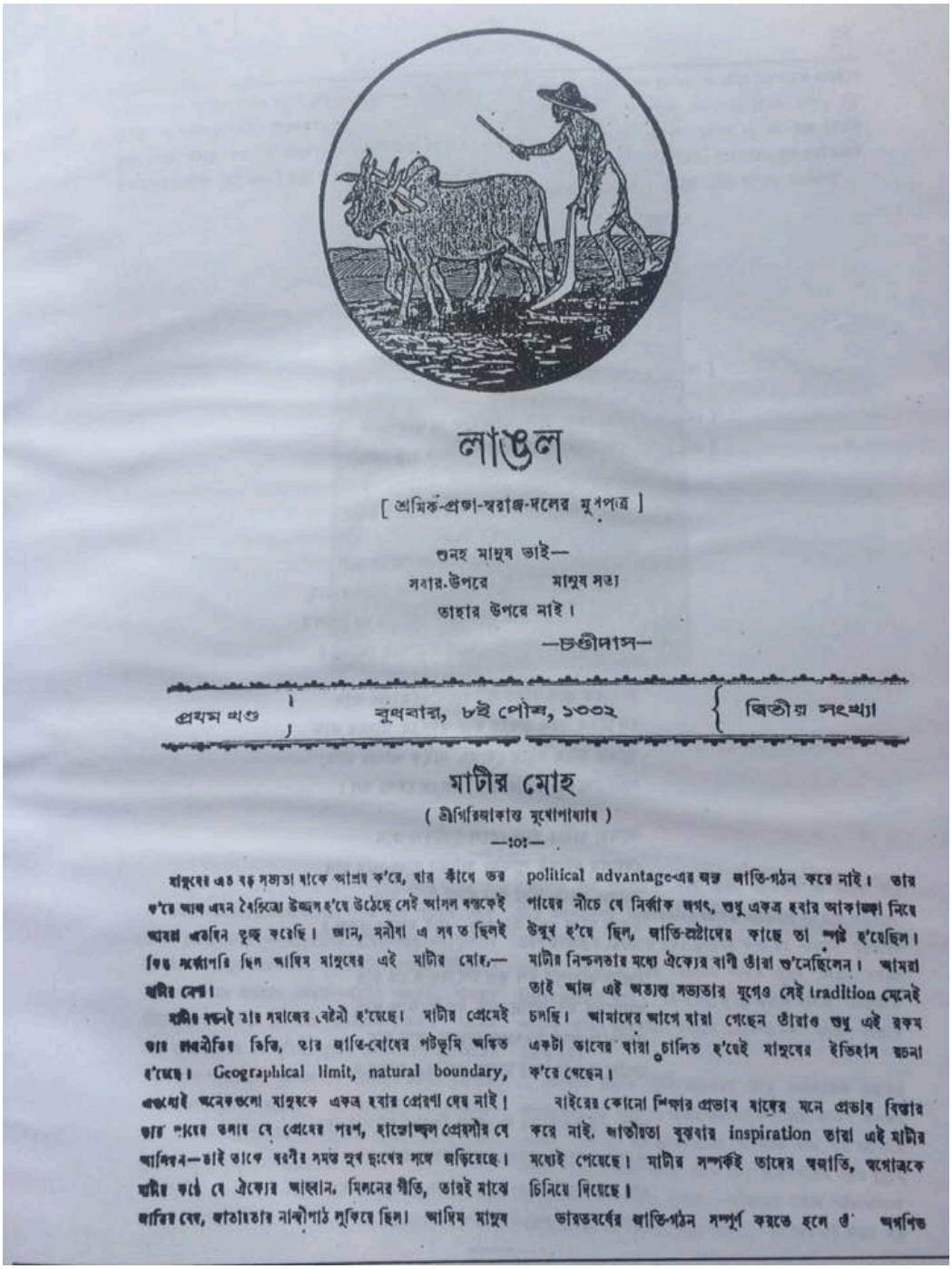
[73] Jyoti Sengupta, *History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh, 1947-1973* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1974), 324-326. The "radio rebels" were trying to set up an independent broadcasting unit in order to transmit the *mukti bahini*'s messages to the general population. This was eventually established in the radio transmitter center of Kalurghat, an industrial township in Chittagong. Jyoti Sengupta was the East Pakistan correspondent of the Press Trust of India.
[74] Ali Hossain Chowdhury, "Nazrul o Bāṃlādeśer Abhyudaya," *Nazrul Institute Patrikā* 32 (February 2016): 131.
[75] Recounted in Jyoti Sengupta, *History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh*, 326. This was also published as "A Radio Message from Kalurghat" in Meghana Guhathakurata and Willem Van Schendel, eds, *The Bangladesh Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 226.

the magazine *Bijali*. Bhattacharya wanted the decade-defining poem *Vidrohi* to be published in *Bijali*, but Nazrul had already promised it to *Moslem Bharat*. However, *Abi-da* convinced him that the poem, published a fortnight earlier, would credit *Moslem Bharat* as the original source. Satisfied, Nazrul ran off the next morning with a copy of his poem in the *Bijalī* to "Guruji" Tagore. Standing downstairs, Nazrul kept shouting, "Guruji! Guruji!" To which Tagore replied, "Why are you shouting like a bull, Kazi?" "I will kill you today, Guruji" said Nazrul, and proceeded to read out the poem to Tagore. At the end of the recitation, Tagore had embraced the younger poet and said, "Yes, indeed you will put an end to me, Kazi. I am moved beyond words at your poetry…may the world be illuminated through your poems."[76]

Neither of the poets, however, was in conflict or contest in the future. In 1971-72, the independent state of Bangladesh established both poets as founding poets of the new country. Though subject to some controversy, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman pushed for Tagore's *Āmār Sonār Bāṃlā* as the national anthem. Kazi Nazrul Islam, the National Poet of Bangladesh, had the honor of having the first song broadcast on the Swadhin Bamgla Betar Kendra. It ironically enough the same poem/song that had first ruffled Tagore's grammatical feathers with the word "khun," *Kāṇdārī Hnuśiyār (Boatman, Be Alert!)*:

> *Āji parīkṣā, jātīr athabā jāter karibe trāṇ?*
> *Dulitechi tarī, phuliteche jal, kāṇdārī hnuśiyār!*
> (Today stands the test; will you save the jāti (race), or the clan?
> The boat sways, and the water swells, be alert, O captain!)[77]

[76] Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, "Purano Katha" ("Old Stories"), in *Nazrul Pratibhā Paricay*, ed. Sufi Zulfiqar Haider (Dhaka: Sufi Zulfiqar Haider Foundation, 1968), 104-105.
[77] The day was May 25, 1971, Nazrul's birthday. The first official program that the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra offered was called "Jāgaraṇī," again named after one of Nazrul's poems. Ali Hossain Chowdhury, "Nazrul O Bāṃlādeśer Abhyuday," 133.



লাঙল

[শ্রমিক-প্রজা-স্বরাজ-দলের মুখপত্র]

শুনহ মানুষ ভাই—
সবার উপরে মানুষ সত্য
তাহার উপরে নাই।
—চণ্ডীদাস—

প্রথম খণ্ড | বুধবার, ৮ই পৌষ, ১৩৩২ | দ্বিতীয় সংখ্যা

মাটীর মোহ

(শ্রীগিরিজাকান্ত মুখোপাধ্যায়)

—১০১—

মানুষের এত বড় সভ্যতা যাকে আশ্রয় ক'রে, যার কাঁধে ভর ক'রে আজ এমন বৈচিত্র্যে উজ্জ্বল হ'য়ে উঠেছে সেই আসল বস্তুকেই আমরা এতদিন তুচ্ছ করেছি। জ্ঞান, মনীষা এ সব ত ছিলই কিন্তু সর্ব্বোপরি ছিল আদিম মানুষের এই মাটীর মোহ,—মাটীর নেশা।

মাটীর বন্ধনই তার সমাজের বেষ্টনী হ'য়েছে। মাটীর প্রেমেই তার রাষ্ট্রনীতির ভিত্তি, তার জাতি-বোধের পটভূমি অঙ্কিত হ'য়েছে। Geographical limit, natural boundary, এগুলোই অনেকগুলো মানুষকে একত্র হবার প্রেরণা দেয় নাই। তার পায়ের তলার যে প্রেমের পরশ, হাওয়াস্পর্শ প্রেয়সীর যে আশ্লেষ—তাই তাকে ধরণীর সমস্ত সুখ দুঃখের সঙ্গে জড়িয়েছে। মাটীর কণ্ঠে যে ঐক্যের আহ্বান, মিলনের গীতি, তারই মাঝে জাতির বেদ, জাতীয়তার নান্দীপাঠ লুকিয়ে ছিল। আদিম মানুষ political advantage-এর জন্য জাতি-গঠন করে নাই। তার পায়ের নীচে যে নির্ব্বাক জগৎ, শুধু একত্র হবার আকাঙ্ক্ষা নিয়ে উন্মুখ হ'য়ে ছিল, জাতি-স্রষ্টাদের কাছে তা স্পষ্ট হ'য়েছিল। মাটীর নিশ্চলতার মধ্যে ঐক্যের বাণী তাঁরা শুনেছিলেন। আমরা তাই আজ এই অত্যন্ত সভ্যতার যুগেও সেই tradition মেনেই চলছি। আমাদের আগে যারা গেছেন তাঁরাও শুধু এই রকম একটা ভাবের দ্বারা চালিত হ'য়েই মানুষের ইতিহাস রচনা ক'রে গেছেন।

বাইরের কোনো শিক্ষার প্রভাব যাদের মনে প্রভাব বিস্তার করে নাই, জাতীয়তা বুঝবার inspiration তারা এই মাটীর মধ্যেই পেয়েছে। মাটীর সম্পর্কই তাদের স্বজাতি, অগোত্রকে চিনিয়ে দিয়েছে।

ভারতবর্ষের জাতি-গঠন সম্পূর্ণ করতে হলে ও' অখণ্ডিত

Figure 2. *Lāṅgal 1,* no. 2, ed. Kazi Nazrul Islam (December 1925).

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that philology in Bengal constituted a sovereign political space that led to the formation of moral community beyond the purview of real political events and ruptures. This philological political community or *communitas* has had a unique and distinctive life and archival presence that runs parallel to the trajectory of twentieth-century Bengal, yet has been neglected in accounts of that history. The Bengal we know and study today is a truncated and divided Bengal that is informed by the structuring logic of the Partition of 1947. That Hindus and Muslims once had or could have had common cause might at first seem to be audacious, yet this dissertation has staked itself precisely on examining this claim. I contend that the domain of language—and its own peculiar sovereignty—represented a space in which such a political unity was imagined and sometimes enacted. The world of big political events and ideology, what I have tentatively designated the *realpolitik* (distancing the term from its current use in political theory and international relations) thus runs along a parallel trajectory to the utopian *communitas*.

The first chapter, a history of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, begins at a historical moment when a nineteenth-century regime of language was drawing to a close. While the nineteenth century carried on the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment discovery of the relatedness of languages and people (the disciplinary demands of Comparative Philology), the status of Bengali as vernacular was being forged, and not just in antiquarian circles. It was also a modern literary language that found new lives and markets in printing presses, literary salons, and on the streets. These concerns preoccupied the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad from its inception in the 1890s. How could the status of Bengali as a vernacular language be related to and also distinct from Sanskrit? The dominant role played by the Hindu *bhadralok* within the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad led to the sidelining of Bengali Muslim literary history

and the Perso-Arabic elements of the Bengali language itself. The presence of two important Bengali Muslim archivists, Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad and Abdul Gaphur Siddiqui however, ensured that the historical contributions of Muslims to Bengal did not go completely unrecorded in the annals of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. The institutional history developed in this chapter examines how an important cultural edifice— significantly, an academy that sought to regulate a nascent vernacular language—became a space of contested collaboration between Hindus and Muslims. This space, I argue, was the beginning of the *communitas* of subsequent Bengali linguistic nationalist politics.

The second chapter studies the phenomenon of the "literary society" in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bengal as a manifestation of colonial associational politics. It examines how Bengali Muslim literary societies responded to the institutional hold of the Hindu-dominated Bangiya Sahitya Parishad over the Bengali language. In this chapter, I have fleshed out the nature of *communitas* as an ideological formulation put forward by Bengali Muslims as a space of Hindu-Muslim unity mediated by philology. At a distance from *realpolitik,* the real political world determined by questions of nation (*jāti*) and state (*rāṣṭra*), the *communitas*—a utopian state of togetherness of the two communities—was marked by the alternative reimagining of these categories. The mediating element in these political debates was, crucially, the Bengali language. This chapter thus examines the way in which different formulations of a Bengali national imaginary were put forward in the first decades of the twentieth century vis-à-vis the domain of literature (*sāhitya*). Since the timeline encompasses a political landscape that included separatist politics, the formulation of a *communitas* premised on Hindu-Muslim togetherness began to change. Yet, embedded within the universalist premises of all literary and philological activity, there still remained a utopian desire for Hindu-Muslim unity. I conclude the chapter by presenting a set of internal conflicts and contradictions within the discursive framework of the new *sāhitya* of the Pakistan

Movement. The Bengali Muslim, until then a figure who was deprived of fully articulating a legitimate claim to the Bengali language, equated true sovereignty with the right over the Bengali language. The findings of this chapter help us to understand the conflicted nature of the Hindu-Muslim political relationship in the early twentieth-century before the Partition of 1947 and also demonstrates a longer history of tension between the political categories of nation (*jāti*) and state (*rāṣṭra*) in the late colonial period, just before the emergence of two new nation-states, India and Pakistan, in Bengal.

The third chapter examines the language movement and a political philology in East Pakistan between 1947 and 1955. As West Pakistan imposed Urdu as the centralized state language in the province of East Pakistan, a number of intellectuals, administrators, and parliamentarians—Hindus and Muslims alike—rallied around the cause of Bengali as a state language. I identify this moment as one in which the ideal *communitas* of language came into direct collision with the newly emergent state (*rāṣṭra*) of Pakistan. This chapter gives a detailed exposition of what the everyday life of philology became as it emerged out of institutions and gave rise to a mass movement. Questions pertaining to language and literature became central to the discussions of politicians, parliamentarians, and dissenters. As the Bengali language became the central locus for debates among Pakistani citizens on national belonging and inclusion, the earlier divides between *realpolitik* and *communitas* collapsed for good. And though Hindus and Muslims had decisively parted ways in 1947, the embedded and conflicted togetherness of the two communities—in language—came to the forefront during the resistance to West Pakistan in the language movement. This chapter foregrounds the paradoxical nature of a "political philology"; when the state co-opts a language, its pluralities and cultural nuances are flattened.

The third chapter raises questions with which I plan to engage in future work: how did East Pakistanis gradually realize that their political identity was one premised entirely on

Bengali, to such a degree that it was incompatible with Pakistan? To what extent did language function as a metonym for all other struggles and conflicts within the political economy? The vast amount of existing literature on this political period resides primarily in Bengali. The historiographical trend set by Badruddin Umar is to see the language question as a uniting factor across a wide spectrum of class and other political struggles. As the primary archivist of the language movement, Umar's focus on state documentation, on workers' struggles and other Communist leaders during the movement has been the most crucial intervention in terms of understanding the period under examination. By analyzing discursive pamphlets and the deeper discourse of philology not as post-1947 rupture but as continuous with earlier Bengali Muslim discourse, I situate the beginnings of the language movement of East Pakistan in the early twentieth century.

The final chapter focuses on the figure that, for this project, embodied the ideal *communitas*, Kazi Nazrul Islam, as his moves out of institutions into the world of popular and mass culture. Having studied philology--language and literature--in its institutional and everyday manifestations, the dissertation concludes by making the case that the life of the Bengali language was determined not just by print, but by the more intangible worlds of new intermedial forms of radio and cinema. These forms in turn borrowed from older performative traditions, jointly constructed by both Hindus and Muslims in rural Bengal. The embeddedness of language as memory and its careful reconstruction by an exceptional figure such as Kazi Nazrul Islam demonstrates that *communitas* as conceptualized in this dissertation functioned at a distance from r*ealpolitik*, undermining the boundedness of nations and borders, while also enriching the ideological basis for Hindus and Muslims to dream of unity across the national entities of India, Pakistan, and ultimately, Bangladesh.

Philology and the Politics of Language: The Case of Bengali, 1893-1955 attempts to chart an inner political history of Hindus and Muslims in twentieth-century Bengal. Using the

category of philology to capture an understanding of language, linguistic standardization, literary and cultural history, and humanistic scholarship and practice, I argue that Bengali language, as an instance of a modern Indian vernacular in the twentieth century, needs to be thought of as something more than an object-in-itself. Language, in its philological register, is a conduit for the historical imagination and for Bengali subjectivity. It is a lens through which both Hindu and Muslim modern Bengali subjects —saw themselves across space and time in order to construct political community. I have called this political community *communitas* in order to capture the sense in which such a community transcends categories such as nation (*jāti*) and state (*rāṣṭra*), and highlights the many intimacies—albeit constrained and conflicted—shared by Hindus and Muslims across political and nation-state divides. The philological experience of Bengali necessarily demanded a *friendship* between Hindus and Muslims as joint custodians of a shared language, though this tense, agonistic friendship that be more aptly called 'intimate enmity' to borrow a phrase from Ashis Nandy.

Today, the Bengali language remains the majoritarian language of Bangladesh and is spoken in West Bengal and a few other states in India. There is considerable intellectual and commercial traffic between West Bengal and Bangladesh in the twenty-first century. And yet, in an increasingly globalized world, there is a sense that languages are increasingly at threat and flattened out by increased immigration and diasporic mobilities across continents. In one of his last books, the eminent West Bengali writer Sunil Ganguly writes:

> Musalmān or Bengali; this question led to the partition of Bengal. Then after some years the newly liberated state (*svādhin rāṣṭra*) on that side of the border, without even taking our opinion, called their country Bangladesh. Many countries across the world now think that Bengalis only live in Bangladesh. In the not too distant future people may ask, Bengalis live in India too? Or—Hindus can be Bengali?[1]

Who is Sunil Ganguly writing *for*? The book is dedicated to his close friend, the philologist Anisuzzaman, across the border. Part lament, part reflection on the state of the

[1] Sunil Gangopadhyay, *Āmi ki Bāṅgāli?* (Kolkata: Patra Bharati, 2011), 44.

Bengali language today, the book is a collection of Ganguly's essays and lectures, many of which were published in the popular daily *Anandabazar Patrika*. The intended audience for this lament to the Bengali language is no doubt the Hindu Bengali reader in Calcutta. Interestingly, however, the overwhelming presence is the diasporic Bengali—neither Hindu nor Muslim—but a Bengali subjectivity struggling to retrieve and preserve Bengali language and identity in the wake of globalisation and immigration in the twenty-first century.

It is with this awareness that this dissertation arises out of a minority position in history, written in an area studies department comprising members that span a range of ethnicities and intellectual backgrounds. The *communitas* is ultimately a conceptual entity akin to that of the subaltern in the subaltern studies collective; a group of people who must be defined but whose actual composition shifts and changes. It is a moral economy that exists alongside and yet in opposition to a normative political economy. *Communitas* picks up where *Realpolitik* necessarily leaves off, and in the long twentieth century, philology was enlisted as a uniquely powerful tool of *communitas.* The majoritarian positions of political economy shift and transform in the course of this dissertation—at one point, it is the hegemonic Bengali *bhadralok* of the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad* in collusion with the colonial administrator-philologists; at another, it is the inflexible Muslim League separatist in the Pakistan movement; finally, it the West Pakistani state. The state (*rāṣṭra*) necessarily becomes a majoritarian force in the history of the modern world; the *jāti* (meaning both nation as well as race) recovers the minority positions of being and thinking by aligning itself with the cause of language. This dissertation ultimately recovers a hidden political trajectory in the history of modern Bengal: a section of Hindus and Muslims across time and space promised allegiance to language, giving rise to a radical politics of transformation and humanism that, despite its minority position, has nonetheless embedded itself in history, where it resides to this day.

Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES

ARCHIVES AND PERIODICALS

United Kingdom

British Library
South Asia Printed Books and Periodicals
    Bengali Periodicals
    Bengali Vernacular Tracts and Print Books
India Office Records and Private Papers
    Official Publications
    Indian Newspaper Reports
    European Manuscripts

India
West Bengal State Archives

Centre for Studies in Social Sciences
    Periodicals and Rare Books

Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Archive [Digital]

National Library of India
    Rare Books

Bangladesh
Bangla Academy
    Periodicals
    Official Publications

Parliament of Bangladesh
    East Bengal Legislative Assembly Papers

Nazrul Institute, Dhaka
    Periodicals and Rare Books

Dhaka University Central Library

Badruddin Umar Personal Collection

Anisuzzaman Personal Collection

Private Papers of Dhirendra Nath Dutta

United States

University of Chicago
South Asia Collection at Regenstein Library

Center for Research Libraries
East Bengal Legislative Assembly Papers [Microfilm]

Periodicals

Al-Islām. Calcutta. Monthly, Bengali. Vols. 1-6 (1915-1920).

The Bengal Academy of Literature. Calcutta: Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣad. Monthly, English and Bengali. Vol. 1, nos. 1-11 (1893-1894).

Bāṃlā Ekādemī Patrikā. Dhaka: Bangla Academy. Quarterly. Vol 1. (1957) and Vol 2, nos. 1-3 (1958).

Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā. Calcutta: Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Samiti. Quarterly, Bengali. Vols. 1-5 (1918-1922).

Bulbul. Calcutta. Quarterly (1933-1936) and then monthly, Bengali. (1933-37).

Mohammadī. Calcutta. Monthly, Bengali. Vol. 1, nos. 1-5 and 10-12 (1927-28); Vol. 2, nos. 1-6 and 11-12 (1928-29); Vol. 6 (1932-33); and Vol. 12, no. 12 (1939).

Moslem Bhārat. Calcutta. Monthly, Bengali. Vol. 1 (1921-1922) and Vol. 2, nos. 1-4 (1922).

Nabanūr. Calcutta. Monthly, Bengali. Vols. 1-3 (1903-1906) and Vol. 4, nos. 1-8 (1906-1907).

Nazrul Ekāḍemī Patrikā. Dhaka: Nazrul Academy. Bimonthly, Bengali. 1969-1976.

Nazrul Institute Patrikā. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute. 1985-present.

Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā. Calcutta: Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣad. Quarterly, Bengali. Vols. 1-42 (1894-1936); Vol. 43, nos. 1-2 (1936); Vol. 44, no.1 (1937); Vols. 45-48 (1938-42); Vol. 49, no. 4 (1943); and Vols. 50-51 (1943-4).

Saogāt. Calcutta. Monthly, Bengali. Vols. 1-3 (1918-1920).

Śikhā. Dhaka. Quarterly, Bengali. Vols. 1-5 (1926-1931).

East Bengal Legislative Assembly Papers

MF-1977.r1-8/East Pakistan (Pakistan). 1957. *Assembly Proceedings: Official Report*. Dacca: East Pakistan Government Press. [Microfilm].

Government Report

Report on the Administration of Bengal during 1900-1901. Calcutta: Government of India, 1902.

Ahmad, Abbasuddin. *Dinalipi O Āmāra Śilpījībaner Kathā*. Dhaka: Prathama Prakashana, 2009.

Ahmed, Abul Mansur. *Āmār-dekhā rājanītir pañcāś bachar.* Dhaka: Naoreja Kitabistan, 1975.
———. *Ātmakathā*. Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 2014.
———. *Pāk Bāṃlār kālcār.* Ḍhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 1966.

Ahmed, Ali, ed. *Bāṃlā Muslim Granthapañjī*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

Ahmed, Mohammad Nasir Uddin. *Rāshtrabhāṣā Āndolane Sileṭ Kendrīya Muslim Sāhitya Saṃsader Bhūmikā*. Sylhet: Kendriya Muslim Sahitya Samsad, 1975.

Ahmed, Muzaffar. *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Smṛtikathā*. Kolkata: National Book Agency Private Limited, 1967.
———. *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920-1929*. Kolkata: National Book Agency Private Limited, 1970.

Ahmed, Safiuddin. *Sāmayikpatre Bhāṣā sāhitya o Śikṣācintā*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1999.

Ahmed, Wakil. *Uniś Śatake Bāṅgāli Musalmāner Cintā O Cetanār Dhārā*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1997.

Al Helal, Bashir. *Bhāṣā Āndolaner itihās*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.
———. *Bhāṣā Āndolaner itihās*. Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, 2016.
———. *Bāṃlā Ekāḍemīr itihās*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1986.
———. *Bāṃlā Ekādemīr itihās*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2018.

Ali, Syed Mujtaba. *Purba Pākistāner Rāṣṭra Bhāṣā.* Chittagong: Baighar, 1955.

Amin, Nurul. *Abul Mansur Ahmed.* Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987.

Anisuzzaman. *Muslim Bāmlār Sāmayik Patra, 1831-1930.* Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969.
———. *Muslim Mānas O Bāṃlā Sāhitya.* Calcutta: Pustak Bipani, 2000.
———. *Śreṣṭha Prabandha*. Dhaka: Katha Prokash, 2015.

Awal, Mohammad Abdul. *Mīr Maśārrapher Gadya Racanā.* Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1975.

Azad, Humayun. *Bhāṣā Āndolan: Sāhityik Paṭabhūmi*. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1990.

Basu, Nagendranath. *Āmār Jīban-kathā*. Edited by Prabir Mukhopadhyay. Kolkata: Carcapad Publications, 2010.

Bhattacharya, Tarapada. *Chanda-Tattva O Chandovivartan*. Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1971.

Carey, William. *Dialogues Intended to Facilitate the Acquiring of the Bengalee Language*. Serampore: Missionary Press, 1818.
———. *Memoir of William Carey*. Edited by Eustace Carey. London: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 1836.

Chakrabarty, Ratan Lal, ed. *Bhāṣā Āndolan: Dalīlpatra.* Dhaka: Kalyan Prakashan, 1991.

Choudhury, Anwara Bahar, and Shawkat Osman, eds. *Habibullah Bahar.* Dacca: Bahar Memorial Committee, 1970.

Choudhury, Saifuddin. *Abdul Gafur Siddiqui* [*Jībanī Granthamālā*]. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993.

Chowdhury, Abdul Muqit. *Najrul Islām: Islāmī Gān*. Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 2013.

Chowdhury, Abul Ahsan, ed. *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Dalīl.* Dhaka: Bangladesh Bhasha Samiti, 1988.

De, Bishwanath. *Najrul Smṛti*. Kolkata: Sahityam, 1970.

De, Sunil Kanti. *Āñjumāne Olāmāẏe Bāṅgālā, 1913-1919 o Muslim samāj*. Kolkata: Mallik Brothers, 1992.

Gadādhara Bhaṭṭācārya, *Śaktivāda with Sudarśanācārya's Ādarśa*. Edited by Pt. Sudarśanācārya. Bombay: Own Press, 1913.

Gangopadhyay, Sunil. *Āmi ki Bāṅgāli?* Kolkata: Patra Bharati, 2011.

Goswami, Karunamay. *Aspects of Nazrul Songs*. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1990.
———. *Najrulgīti prasaṅga*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1978.

Haider, Sufi Zulifqar, ed. *Nazrul Pratibhā Paricay.* Dhaka: Sufi Zulfiqar Haider Foundation, 1968.

Halhed, Nathaniel Brassey. *Bodhaprakāśaṃ Śabdaśāstraṃ Phiriṅgināmupakārārtho Kriẏate Hāledaṅgrejī* [*A Grammar of the Bengal Language*]. Calcutta: Printed by Charles Wilkins at Hoogly in Bengal, 1778.

Haq, Asadul, ed. *Sudhijaner dṛṣṭite Nazrul*. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1999.

Haroun-or-Rashid, Mohammad. *Nazrul Sāhitye Dharma*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996.

Hossain, Dilwar. *Mohāmmadī Patrikāy Muslim Samāj.* Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994.

Hossain, Mir Mosharraf. *Racanāsaṃgraha*. Kolkata: Kamala Sahitya Bhaban, 1957.

Hossain, Mohammad Ayub. *Dukhumiyār Leṭogān*. Kolkata: Nazrul Foundation, 2003.

Huda, Mohammad Nurul, ed. *Lāṅgal O Gaṇabaṇī*. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2013.

Huq, Abdul. *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Ādiparba*. Dacca: Muktadhara, 1976.

Huq, Abul Quasem Fazlul. *Ekuśe Phebruāri Āndolan.* Chittagong: Purbalekh Prashani, 1976.

Huq, Gaziul, and M. R. Akhtar Mukul, eds. *Bahannar Bhāṣā Āndolan.* Dhaka: Hakkani Publishers, 1984.

Huq, Shamsul. *Bāṃlā Sāmayik Patra, 1947-1971.* Dhaka: Granthayan, 1973.

Hussain, Syed Sajjad, ed. *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in Munshi Abdul Karim's Collection by Munshi Abdul Karim and Ahmad Sharif*. Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960.

Islam, Kazi Nazrul. *Nazrul Racanābalī Janmaśatabarṣa saṃskaraṇ*, vols. 1-11. Edited by Rafiqul Islam. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2006.
———. *Nazruler Patrāvalī*. Edited by Shahabuddin Ahmed. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2017.
———. *Śreṣṭha Nazrul Svaralipi*. Kolkata: Haraph Prakashani, 1995.

Islam, Mustapha Nurul. *Āmāder Bāṅgālitver Cetanār Udbodhan O Bikāś*. Dhaka: Sagar Publishers, 1994.
———. *Najrul Islām.* Dhaka: Naoroj Kitabistan, 1969.
———. *Sāmayikpatre Jīban O Janamat, 1901-1930*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1977.
———. *Śikhā samagra, 1927-1931*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2003.

Islam, Rafiqul. *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Jīvan O Sṛṣṭi.* Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi and Co., 1997.
———. *Najrul Jīvanī.* Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2013.
———. *Najrul nirdeśikā.* Dhaka: Bangla Academy 1969.
———. *Najrul prasaṅge*. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1998.

Jasimuddin. *Smṛtikathāsamagra*. Edited by Pulak Chanda. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2016.

Kamal, Mostapha. *Bhāṣā Āndolan: Sātcalliś theke Bāyānna.* Chittagong: Bangladesh Cooperative Book Society Ltd., 1987.

Kar, Sisir. *Niṣiddha Nazrul*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2016.

Karim, Sardar Phajlul, ed. *Pākistāna āndolan o Muslim sāhitya.* Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968.

Kasem, Mohammad Abul. *Āmāder Bhāshār Rūp.* Dhaka: Kamrul Ahsan o Bhaira, 1968.
———. *Bhāṣā Āndolaner Itihās*. Dhaka: Pakistan Tamaddun Majlis, 1967.

Kazi, Kalyani, ed. *Śatakathāy Nazrul.* Calcutta: Sahityam, 1999.

Khan, Israil. *Muslim Sampādita O Prakāśita Bāṃlā Sāhitya Patrikā (1931-1947)*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2005.
———. *Purbabāṃlār Sāmayik Patra*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1999.

Khan, Nurur Rahaman. *Syed Mujtaba Ali, 1904-1974*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987.

Latif, Abdul. *Autobiography and Other Writings of Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur.* Edited by Muhammad Mohar Ali. Chittagong: Mehrub Publications, 1968.
———. *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif, His Writings & Related Documents.* Edited by Enamul Haque. Dacca: Samudra Prokashani, 1968.

Mahphuz, Imran. *Ābul Mansur Āhamad smārakgrantha*. Dhaka: Prathamā Prakāśana, 2015.

Mahphuzullah, Mohammad, ed. *Najrul o Nāsiruddīn Smārakgrantha.* Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1995.

Mamun, Muntasir. *Ḍhākā Prakāśa O Pūrba-Baṅger Samāj, 1863-64*. Dhaka: Subarna Prakashana, 1977.
———. *Uniś Śatake Bāṃlādeśer Saṃbāda-sāmayikapatra, 1847-1905*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.

Mitra, Ashok Kumar. *Najrul pratibhā pariciti.* Dhaka: Bani Bhaban, 1969.

Mukherji, Dhurjatiprasad. "Classical Revival in Our Music and Principles of Composition." *Calcutta Review* (April 1934): 63-71.

Mukhopadhyaya, Dhrubakumar. *Najrul Islām: Sampādak-Sāṃbādik Ebaṃ Patra-Patrikāy*. Kolkata: Classic Publication, 1999.

Nyayaratna, Ramgati. *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā O Bāṅgālā Sāhityaviṣayak Prastāb.* Kolkata: Supreme Book Distributors, 1991.

Qayyum, Mohammad Abdul. "Hālheder Purba Baṅgīya Munśī." *Bhāṣā-Sāhitya Patra* 4 (1976): 139–52.

Quadir, Abdul. *Chanda-Samīkṣaṇ*. Dhaka: Muktadhara, 1979.
——— (ed.). *Nazrul Racanā Sambhār*, Kolkata: Abdul Aziz Al Aman, 1955.

Sāhityaviśārad, Abdul Karim. *Abdul Karim Sāhityaviśārad Racanābalī*, vols. 1-4. Edited by Abul Ahsan Choudhury. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1997.
———. *Satyanārāyaner Puthi Śrī Kavi Ballabh Biracita*. Edited by Abdul Karim. Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Mandir, 1917.

Sanyal, Brajasundar, and Abdul Karim, eds. *Musalmān Vaiṣṇav Kabi: Tṛtīya Khaṇḍa*. Rajshahi: Sanatan Dharma Samiti, 1904.

Sarkar, Ganapati. *Haraprasād Jīvanī.* Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1938.

Sen, Dinesh Chandra. *Bengali Prose Style: 1800-1857*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1921.
———. *Bṛhat Baṅga: Suprācīn Kāl Haite Palāśīr Yuddha Paryanta.* Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 1993.
———. *Eastern Bengal Ballads, Mymensing*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1923.

———. *History of Bengali Language and Literature: A Series of Lectures Delivered as Reader to the Calcutta University*. 2nd ed. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1954.
———. *Purātanī: Muślim Narī-citra*. Kolkata: Bookfront Publication Forum, 2006.
———. *The Folk-Literature of Bengal: (Being Lectures Delivered to the Calcutta University in 1917, as Ramtanu Lahiri Research Fellow in the History of Bengali Language and Literature)*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1920.
———. *Baṅga Sāhitya Paricay; Or, Selections from the Bengali Literature from the Earliest Times to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century.* Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1914.

Sen, Prabodhchandra. *Chanda Parikramā.* Calcutta: Jijnasa, 1977.

Sen, Sukumar. *Bāṅgālā Sāhityēr Kathā*. Kolkata; Kolkata Bishwabidyalay, 1956.
———. *Baṭṭalār Chāpā O Chabi*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1984.
———. *Bhārat-bibhāg, Itihāsera Svapnabhaṅga.* Kolkata: Bhasha O Sahitya, 1999.
———. *Islāmi Bāṃlā Sāhitya*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1994.

Sengupta, Jyoti. *History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh, 1947-1973: Some Involvement.* Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1974.

Shahabuddin, Ahmad. *Islām o Najrul Islām*. Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 1980.

Shahidullah, Muhammad. *Āmāder Samasyā.* Dhaka: Renaissance Publications, 1949.
———. *Bāṃlā Sāhityer Kathā*. Dhaka: M. Safiyyullah, 1963.
———. *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣār Itibṛtta*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1965.
———. *Śahīdullāh-racanābalī*. Edited by Anisuzzaman. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994.
———. *Traditional Culture in East Pakistan*. Dacca: University of Dacca, 1963.

Shastri, Haraprasad. *Hājār Bacharer Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Bhāṣāya Bauddha Gān o Dohā.* Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1916.
———. *Haraprasāda Śāstrī Smārak Grantha: A Commemoration Volume on Mahāmahopādhyāya Haraprasad Shastri*. Calcutta: Sanyal Prakashan, 1960.

Sharif, Ahmed. *Bāṃlā Bhāṣā Saṅskār Āndolan.* Bangladesh Language Society, 1986.
———. *Ekāle Nazrul: A Collection of Six Lectures Delivered at the University of Chittagong* (Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 1990).

Sofa, Ahmad. *Bāṅgāli Musalmāner Man*. Dhaka: Khan Brothers and Company, 2018.

Syed, Abdul Mannan. *Najrul Islām: Kabi o Kabitā*. Dhaka: Nazrul Academy, 1977.
———. *Najrul Islām: Kālaj Kālottar*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy Academy, 1987.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "Bāṃla Jātīya Sāhitya." In *Rabīndra Racanābalī*, vol. 10, 351–361. Kolkata: Paścimbaṅga Sarkār, 1989.
———. "Maktab Madrāsār Bhāṣā." In *Rabīndra Racanābalī*, vol. 10, 787–788. Kolkata: Paścimbaṅga Sarkār, 1989.
———. "Sāhityer Aitihasikatā." In *Rabindra Racanābalī*, vol. 10, 588–589. Kolkata: Paścimbaṅga Sarkār, 1989.

Trivedi, Ramendrasundar. *Śabda Kathā.* Calcutta: Sanskrit Press Depository, 1917.

Umar, Badruddin. *Bhāṣā Āndolan Prasaṅga: Katipay Dalīl.* 1st ed. Vols. 1-2. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.
———. *Bhāṣā Āndolan Prasaṅga: Katipay Dalīl.* Vols. 1-2. Dhaka: Subarna, 2014.

Wehr, Hans, and J. Milton Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: (Arabic-English)*. Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1994.

Zaman, Selina Bahar, ed. *Dhūmketu.* Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 2013.

Secondary Sources

Ahmad, Kamruddin. *The Social History of East Pakistan.* Dacca: Amina Khatun, 1967.

Ahmed, Rafiuddin. *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Ahmed, Rizwan. "Hindi is perfect, Urdu is messy: the discourse of delegitimation of Urdu in India." In *Orthography as Social Action: Scripts, Spelling, Identity and Power*, edited by Alexandra Jaffe et al., 103-133. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012.

Ahmed, Siraj Dean. *Archaeology of Babel: The Colonial Foundation of the Humanities*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.

Ahmed, Sufia. *Muslim Community in Bengal (1884-1912)*. Dacca: S. Ahmed, distributed by Oxford University Press, 1974.

Al Faruki, Rashid. *Bāṃlār Jāgaraṇ O Anyānya Prasaṅga*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985.
———. *Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Bhāshā O Sāhitya Cintā, 1901-1930*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1991.
———. *Muslim-mānas: Saṃghāt O Pratikriyā*. Kolkata: Ratna, 1981.

Ali, Tariq Omar. *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute and Peasant Life in the Bengal Delta*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Amin, Shahid. *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.

Auerbach, Erich. "Philology and '*Weltliteratur*.'" Translated by Edward and Marie Said. *The Centennial Review* 13, no. 1 (1969): 1–17.

Banerjee, Hiranmay. *Iswarchandra Vidyasagar*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1968.

Banerjee, Sumanta. *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989.

Bangash, Yakoob Khan. "Language, Identity and the State in Pakistan, 1947-48." *Journal of Political Studies* 25 (Summer 2018): 199-214.

Baruah, Sanjib. *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Bate, Bernard. *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic: Democratic Practice in South India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Begum, Jahanara. *The Last Decade of Undivided Bengal*. Calcutta: Minerva Press, 1994.

Bew, John. *Realpolitik: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Bhadra, Gautam. *Imān O Niśān: Ūnīś Śatake Bāṃlār Kṛshak Caitanyera Ek Adhyāy, 1800-1850*. Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 1994.
———. *Nārkelbeḍiār Jaṅga, Titumīr*. Kolkata; Anushtup, 1990.
———. *Nyāḍā Baṭṭalāy Jāy Ka'bār?* Kolkata: Chatim Books, 2011.

Bhuian, Golam Kibria. *Bāṃlāy Muslim Madhyabitta Śreṇīr Bikāś*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1995.

Biswas, Sailendra. *Saṃsad Bāṅgāla Abhidhāna*. 7th ed. Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 2004. Hosted in *Digital Dictionaries of South Asia*, available online at https://dsalsrv04.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/biswasbangala/.

Black, Robert. *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Blanchot, Maurice. "Everyday Speech." Translated by Susan Hanson. *Yale French Studies*, no. 73 (1987): 12–20.

Bose, Neilesh. *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture and Islam in Colonial Bengal.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014.
———. "Purba Pakistan Zindabad: Bengali Visions of Pakistan, 1940–1947." *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2014): 1–36.
———. "Remapping Muslim Literary Culture: Folklore, Bulbul, and World-Making in Late Colonial Bengal." *South Asian History and Culture* 5, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 212–25.

Bose, Sugata. *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Bose, Sugata, and Ayesha Jalal. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.
———. *Nationalism, Democracy, and Development: State and Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Broomfield, John H. *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.

Carr, Edward Hallett. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.

Chakrabarty, Bidyut. *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947: Contour of Freedom*. 1st ed. London: Routledge Curzon, 2004.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Itihāser Janajīban O Anyānya Prabandha.* Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2011.
———. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
———. "Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal." *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 654-82.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori, eds. *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Chakraborti, Smarajit. *The Bengali Press, 1818-1868: A Study in the Growth of Public Opinion*. Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1976.

Chandra, Bipan. *Ideology and Politics in Modern India*. New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1994.
———. *Modern India*. New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1971.
———. *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1984.

Chatterjee, Partha. *Bengal, 1920-1947*. Calcutta: Published for Centre for Studies in Social Sciences [by] K.P. Bagchi, 1984.
———. *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
———. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
———. *Prajā O Tantra*. Kolkata: Anushtup, 2005.
———. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Chatterji, Joya. *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Chattopadhyay, Suchetana. *An Early Communist, 1913-1929: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta*. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2012.

Cohn, Bernard S. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Culler, Jonathan. "The Return to Philology." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 3 (2002): 12-16.

Dalrymple, William. *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857*. London: Penguin, 2007.

Das, Sisir Kumar. *Early Bengali Prose, Carey to Vidyasagar*. Calcutta: Bookland, 1966.

———. *History of Indian Literature: 1911-1956. Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2005.
———. *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William*. New Delhi: Orion Publications, 1978.

Das, Suranjan. *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

De, Dipa, and Gautam Bhadra. "Cintār Cālacitra: Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat (1300-1330)." *Ababhās* (April-June 2002): 28-52.

Dear, Peter. "The Meaning of Experience." In *The Cambridge History of Science: Early Modern Science*, edited by Katherine Parks and Lorraine Daston, 106-131. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Deshpande, Prachi. *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Devji, Faisal. "Apologetic Modernity." *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (April 2007): 61–76.

D'Hubert, Thibaut. *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Dubrow, Jennifer. *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018.

Eden, Kathy. *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Esposito, Roberto. *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Faiz, Faiz Ahmed. *The Rebel's Silhouette*. Translated by Agha Shahid Ali. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.

Gallagher, John, Gordon Johnson, and Anil Seal, eds. *Locality, Province, and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870 to 1940*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Ganguli, Kumidini Kanta. *Pandit Nagendranath Basu: A Sketch of His Life and Works*. Calcutta: Kumudini Kanta Ganguli, 1916.

Ghosh, Anindita. *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Ghosh, Semanti. *Different Nationalisms: Bengal, 1905-1947*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Guha, Ranajit. *History at the Limit of World-History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Guhathakurata, Meghna, and Willem van Schendel, eds. *The Bangladesh Reader: History, Culture and Politics.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Guhathakurata, Tapati. *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Haque, Muhammad Enamul. *Muslim Bāṃlā Sāhitya (Bāṃlā Sāhitye Muslim Abadāner Saṃkṣipta Itihās)*. Dacca: Pakistan Publications, 1968.

Hasnat, Abul. *Muslim Racita Upanyas.* Dacca: Ahmad Publishing House, 1970.

Heller, Agnes. *Renaissance Man*. New York: Schocken Books, 1981.

Holquist, Michael. "Why We Should Remember Philology." *Profession* (2002): 72-79.

Islam, Mustapha Nurul. *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press, 1901-1930*. Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1973.

Jalal, Ayesha. *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
———. *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

Joshi, V. C., ed. *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975.

Kamal, Ahmed. *State Against the Nation: The Decline of the Muslim League in Pre-Independence Bangladesh, 1947-54*. Dhaka: University Press, 2009.

Kaviraj, Sudipta. *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
———. *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.
———. *The Myth of Praxis: The Construction of the Figure of Krishna in Krishnacarita*. New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1987.

Khan, Asaduzzaman. *Bāṃlādeśer Kathāsāhitye Bhāṣā Āndolaner Cetanā*. Dhaka: Sahitya Biskash, 2015.

Khan, Yasmin. *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Kim, David W. *Colonial Transformation and Asian Religions in Modern History*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

King, Christopher R. *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India.* Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance; the Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
———. *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Lunn, David J., *Looking for Common Ground: Aspects of Cultural Production in Hindi/Urdu, 1900-1947.* PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 2012.

Kumar, Madanmohan. *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣader Itihās*. Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1974.

Man, Paul de. *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Mannan, Mohammad Seraj. *The Muslim Political Parties in Bengal 1936-1947 (A Study of Their Activities and Struggle for Freedom).* Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1987.

McGann, Jerome. "Philology in a New Key." *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 2 (2013): 327-46.

Mitra, Maitreyi. *Dvijendranāth Ṭhākur Man O Śilpa.* Kolkata, Jignasa Publications, 1981.

Mazzocco, Angelo. "Petrarch: Founder of Renaissance Humanism?" *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism* (January 2006): 213–42.

McGuire, John. *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadralok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*. Canberra: Australian National University, 1983.

Meir, Colin. *The Ballads and Songs of W. B. Yeats: The Anglo-Irish Heritage in Subject and Style*. London: Macmillan, 1974.

Meisami, Julie Scott. *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Mir, Farina. *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Mitchell, Lisa. *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

Monier-Williams, Monier, Ernst Leumann, and Carl Cappeller. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

Murshid, Tazeen M. *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871-1977.* Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Naithani, Sadhana. *In Quest of Indian Folktales: Pandit Ram Gharib Chaube and William Crooke*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford, 1983.

Neogy, Ajit K. *Partitions of Bengal.* Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1987.

Orsini, Francesca. *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009.

Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
———. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Pollock, Sheldon. "Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (January 2009): 931–61.

Qureshi, Mahmud Shah. *Étude sur l'evolution Intellectuelle chez les Musulmans du Bengale 1857-1947.* Paris: Mouton & Co., 1971.

Rahman, Tariq. *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rai, Alok. *Hindi Nationalism.* New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001.

Raju, Zakir Hossain. *Bangladesh Cinema and National Identity: In Search of the Modern?* London: Routledge, 2015.

Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Robinson, Francis. *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

Rocher, Rosane. *Orientalism, Poetry, and the Millennium: The Checkered Life of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, 1751-1830*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.

Rocher, Rosane, and Ludo Rocher. *The Making of Western Indology: Henry Thomas Colebrooke and the East India Company.* Oxford: Routledge, 2012.

Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Sanyal, Rajat. *Voluntary Associations and the Urban Public Life in Bengal, 1815-1876: An Aspect of Social History*. Calcutta: Riddhi-India, 1980.

Sarkar, Sumit. *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010.

Sarkar, Susobhan Chandra. *On the Bengal Renaissance*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979.

Sarkar, Tanika. *Bengal, 1928-1934, the Politics of Protest*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.

———. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

Sartori, Andrew. *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Scott, Joan W. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773-797.

Seal, Anil. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Sen, Sukumar. *History of Bengali Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1992.

Sisson, Richard, and Stanley A. Wolpert, *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Stark, Ulrike. *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007.

Talbot, Ian. *A History of Modern South Asia: Politics, States, Diasporas*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Thompson, Hanna Ruth. *Bengali.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012.

Trautmann, Thomas R. *Aryans and British India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Trivedi, Harish. "The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation." In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia,* edited by Sheldon Pollock, 958-1022. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Turner, James. *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Uddin, Layli. "In The Land of Eternal Eid: Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c. 1930s-1971." PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2016.

Uddin, Sufia M. *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity and Language in an Islamic Nation.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Umar, Badruddin. *Language Movement in East Bengal.* Dhaka: Jatiya Grontha Prakashan, 2000.

———. *Pūrbabāṅgālār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Taṯkālīn Rājnīti.* Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 1970.
———. *Pūrbabāṅgālār Bhāṣā Āndolana O Tatkālīn Rājnīti*. Dhaka: Subarna, 2017.
———. *The Emergence of Bangladesh*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Wenzel, Siegfried. "Reflections on (New) Philology." *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 11-18.