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# **Contribution of Distinguished Muslim Educationalists during the Colonial Era of Bengal**

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### **Abstract**

*After the establishments of Muslim Raj during colonial period, the muslim society was not completely detached from the field of education. Contemporary evidences, descriptions of the foreign tourists, sculptures & paintings of the muslim emperors proved that muslim society paid attention in education by the hands of Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury, Begum Rokeya, Faizunessa Choudhurani, Sir Syed Ahamed Khan, Syed Amir Ali, Wahed Hossain, Abdul Latuf, Mosharuff Hossain, Maulana Akran Khan. Their whole hearted participation and influence helped to uplift the muslim education. The main objective of this paper is to study the contribution of distinguished Muslim educationalists during the colonial era of Bengal. After vivid discussion and the documentation this paper showed that the spread of education in muslim society was possible during colonial era by the struggle of a few great muslim educationlists.*

*Key Words: Contribution, Muslim Educationalists, Colonial Era of Bengal*

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**Introduction:** The initiation of the Muslim administration ensured in India by Bakhtiar Khalji in 1203 through his victory over Bengal. Socio- economic, cultural & educational upliftment of a country entirely depends on the will and attitude of the ruler. In the same way revolution, evolution, correction, alteration & modification in academic & cultural spheres of human society of a certain country hinge on the thoughts and endeavour of highly educated and cautious persons having optimistic perspectives.

From 1858 to 1947 the contribution of the following personalities in regards to expansion of education among the Muslim community needs specialized remembrance.

**Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury (1863-1929) :** Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury was the most renowned among the landlords of the then Bengal. He was not only associated with politics but had a great link in the domain of social, cultural and educational spheres. He became famous as a Zamindar having a keen interest in education. He provided financial assistance

& whole hearted patronage in the publication of magazines with the name of Mihir & Sudhakar (1895), and the Pracharaka (1899). The Muslim writers were cordially encouraged by him to write many books and were given economic support to print these. He was also selected as the president of the organization named "Purbabanga o Asam Pradeshik Musalman Samity". Even he was the member of the "Abasik Viswavidyalaya Siksha Committee" which was established in 1912.

The other books and pamphlets that he wrote were "Eid-UI -Azha" (1900), Maulad Sharif (1903), Vernacular Education of Bengal & primary Education in Rural Areas.

**Begum Rokeya (1880-1932):** The Muslim society was shrouded in superstitions and orthodoxy even till the second half of the 19th century. People were under illiteracy and effects of coarseness through the exercise of the Purdah. In every aspect the Muslim women were deprived of the enjoyment of equal right with the male counterparts. In such a situation the few highly educated Muslim women who swayed the scepter for the freedom of women and the expansion of the education among them., the name of Begum Rokeya comes at the fore edge. Irrespective of being a girl of a such conservative family Begum Rokeya learnt to read the English & Bengali alphabets aims the affection of elder sister Karimunnesa. Khalil Saheb, her elder brother also had an master role in her early education. The proof of all these can be found out in the self narration of Rokeya. She wrote the following lines through her reminiscence of early life that had no conventional institutional education. "I have never been to any girls school or college. The minimal education that I have achieved is merely for the boundless affection and aegis of my elder brother. Other relatives never encouraged me in the process of learning, rather they commenced deriding and teasing through they were paid no head and I never reacted. My brother always remained encouragious in his endeavour inspire of their mocking treatment and had never desisted himself from teaching me".

Rokeya had a deep rooted eagerness for knowledge from from her childhood. She had presurevence and unending enthusiasm. She exhibited her cordial inclination to the study of native as well as foreign languages. As a result of that she became an experienced and skilled translator of the Urdu & Persian languages and a renowned prose writer in Bengali. Her husband Shed Sakhwant Hossain also had an unforgettable impact on Begum Rokeya for enhancement of her proficiencies to lead the domain of education. Mr. Hossain's companionship assistance and encouragement were very fruitful in the life of Rokeya. Through the careful conatus of husband Sakhwant Begum Rikeya was poured with glave knowledge in English & Urdu. In an attempt of widening women education Begum Rokeya established the first branch of Sakhwant Memorial school at Vagalpur with only five female students in 1990 just after five months from the demise of her husband. Then she came back to Kolkata being sick of familial derangement and here also she founded the Sakhwant Memorial school on the 16th of March 1911. She well perceived that the proper expansion of women education would shake the frightened superstitions and introvert women off and bring down a drastic praise worthy development in them. She successfully engaged herself to the extension of women education for more than two decades. The most of the Muslim &

Hindu educated women, who have manifested intelligence and development at the beginning of the 20th century, had their primal and fundamental education in the Rokeya-Sekhawant School.

To define education Rokeya said, "The ability to read few books or to compose one or two stanzas of poems in merely enables us to have the equal rights of the civilized citizens. Education should both be subjective and outward. Begum Rokeya pioneered the propagation of women education with unending valiance and steadfast confidence. Barrister MD. Rasul, Maulanti Sued Ali and a number of contemporary leading personalities highly applauded Rokeya's initiation of establishing schools. In the same way few aspensers also have distinguished criticised her. Irrespective of persistent despondencies, negative comments and financial crisis the schools advanced towards excellence. The school received a grant of Rs 71 from the govt in the month of April 1912. Selfless social service and extraordinary impetuosity for education brought Rokeya earnest felicitation and admiration from Sorojini Naidu in 1916. She ceaselessly endeavoured to the smooth and hazard free management of the school for a long period of 18 years to take it to the top excellence. It was the first school for girls in Kolkata where women were given vantage of learning various languages including English. Gradually the school stepped forward from primary to the secondary standard.

**Nawab Faizunnesa Choudhurani (1834-1903):** The zamindar of Homnabad in Tripura, Faizunnesa Choudhurani had a keen interest in academic surface. Few people subsist perennially in the history of humanity for ages out of their majestic activities. Faizunnesa was extraordinary among those great ladies. She emphasised on the elevation of education in society as well as on the development of women education through the study of English. So in one way she made the learners familiar with traditions by exercising Arabic, Urdu & Persian languages and on the other she cordially welcomed the newly spheres through learning English and thus she zeroed in on to prove the perfection in the Islamic culture and civilization. She was the harbinger to the foundation of women education. In the contemporary period the Muslim community was lagging noticeably in regards to education and in All Indian backdrop the touch of modernity to them was quite unthinkable. Sir Syed Ahamed Khan had an important contribution for developing education among the muslims. He established Aligarh Mohammed Anglo - Oriental college. At most at the same period Faizunnesa in her own financial assistance and endeavour set up Faizunnesa Girls' High school in English which was situated in Kumillah. She also established four more primary schools in her own territory. The other academic institution that was founded in 1899 by Faizunnesa is Kumillah Victoria College. Other than these she took economic assistance from her own daughter to set up 'NAWAB Faizunnesa and Badrunnesa High School' for boys. Faizunnesa had a boundless contribution to the propagation of Madrasha education by the side of expansion of modern education. The Islamic College (1943) which was later renamed as Nawab Faizunnesa Govt. College (1982) was initially the Khoyejia Madrasha founded by Faizunnesa herself. In addition to educational development she also became famous for establishing charitable clinics and a specialist women care centre. In her own

initiatives Faizunnesa Zenana Hospital was established in Kumillah in 1893 and it was managed by herself. Suitable hostels for girl students were also arranged by her and she provided scholarships from the revenue she used to earn from her own areas of administration.

**Syed Ahamed Khan (1817-1898):** Sir Syed Ahamed Khan is one of the most remembered personalities in the British ruled India and was renowned for propagating newly ideas in social cultural and political segments. For the fact that Mr. Ahamed initiated his activities centering round Aligarh, the actions conducted by him were known as the Aligarh movement, Mr. Ahmed commenced his career as a servant of British Govt during the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. As a reward to his adhesion to the British Syed Ahmed Khan achieved advantages in different strata and instead of targeting these achievements to personal nourishment, he took the pledge of all round development in the Muslim community. He felt sorry for the deplorable state of contemporary Muslim society and flawlessly perceived the key to their backwardness as their religious orthodoxy and apathy to modern western education. The British rulers brought an end to the Mughal dynasty and monopolized the power of ruling resulting the resentment of the muslims. So, from the very beginning they showed their indifference to the British civilization and culture and thus they got lagged both from academic and administrative aspects. On the other hand the Hindu people welcomed the British and learning their language availed multitudinous opportunities even in the administrative process. Naturally the Muslim people recoiled in every sphere.

In such a doleful state of the Muslim community Mr Syed Ahmed emerged as a saviour to them. He published "The Causes of the Indian Revolt Mohammad' and tried to substantiate the revolt as ' a Hindu enterprise'. He propagated the Wahabis to be anti British in attitude. Syed Ahmed attempted to convince the British on behalf of the Muslims that the Muslims were not against them from the core because no reference had been there in the Quran about antagonism to the British. Ahmed published the magazine ' Mohammedans Social Reformer' so that the British counts Islam, the religion as a newer and a more liberal doctrine.

He was highly enthusiastic in spreading western education among the Muslims to have help and backing of the British govt and to parallel the Muslims with Hindus. He tried to convince them that the Quran was not against their western education and culture. He assured them of the benefits of welcoming the British and accepting western education. Being influenced in these thoughts, Ahmed translated the valuable and important Urdu Books into English in 1860's and established an association known as ' Scientific Society' in the purpose of distributing these translated books among the Muslims. In his own expenditure he founded an English school in 1864. He came back in India from England in 1874 and established Aligarh Anglo Oriental college modelled after the oxford and the Cambridge University and it is presently marked as the Aligarh Muslim University. The way Hindu college played a significant role in the Hindu revivalism in the 19th century, Aligarh Anglo Oriental College also in the same way became the centre of Muslim Renaissance. The motive behind the establishment of this college was according to Sir

William Muir to "set to work of gather together the means whereby the obstacles which beset our people might be done away and an end might be brought to their barbarism and overism from the acquirement of the modern sciences and useful languages, by which a man rises from the nadir of worthlessness to the zenith of knowledge. '

The above mentioned endeavour taken by Mr Ahmed to the enrichment of the Muslims has been highly condemned. In Indian history he has been remarked as the protagonist of separatism for his initiatives were merely for the political causes and were totally against the Hindus. Bipin Chandra has gone against the above negative remarks and said, "the educational reformations implanted by Sued Ahmed had no Communalistic perspectives". As a proof he cited that the science society which was established in 1860's was built taking financial assistance even from the Hindus and the number of Hindu students & professors were more than from other religions. Thus it can be concluded that Sir Ahmed Khan was not a believer in communalism.

What Raja Rammohan Roy did for the upliftment of the Hindu community fifty years ago, Syef Ahmed did almost the same line of actions for the development of the Muslims fifty years later. If Rammohan Roy is attributed with the little of a social reformer, then for the same kind of activities, designating Sued Ahmed Khan as a separatist is not only illogical but indecent also.

**Syed Amir Ali (1849-1929):** In the 2nd half of the 19th century Syed Amir Ali was the brightest star among the educated constellation to bring about a drastic attention in the tumbled down Muslim community by enhancing their acceptability to the British rulers. He was well acquainted as an erudite and as a fluent orator and was also associated with politics. His connection with vernacular education, culture and politics intestified after the establishment of central National Mohammedan Association in 1878. Amir Ali was also a member of the Asiatic Society set up in 1784. He had a primal objective of the all round development in the Muslim society and for that he was forced to take part in various kinds of confrontations. Mr Ali unfurled the demands of his community in a legal and constitutional format not by any conflict but by abiding by the fidelity to the rulers. He had a deep rooted credence in the proliferation of accidental education among the community for its aggrandizement. Not only that, he also expected more amount of employment from the Muslims in the govt jobs. Evidences of these issues are there in the letter written to the personal secretary of the viceroy on 10 the march of 1884. The letter goes like this... " the unequal distribution of state paronage is the most important question of all, it has given rise to the greatest discount and bitterness of feeling, and will continue to do so unless govt emphatiatey lay down the principle that at least one third of the state employee should be reserved for Mohammedans"

Amir Ali was far above the communal narrowmindness. He widened his assistance to Surendranath Bandopadhya for the grand success of the conference of the Indian national congress held in 1885 in Kolkata. Later he became a compassionate patrinizer of the Muslim League set up in 1906. Amir Ali thought that the reason behind the dilapidation of

the Muslims is mainly their digression from following the ideas of the Islamic religion. He believed that the revival of the Mahamedan would only be possible if they could dignify the Islamic religion and follow the footprints of Hazarat Mohammad.

Amir Ali could not imperge the state of doleful, downtrodden Muslims through his vast activity because his communication with the common people got slacked after he became the justice of the high court. Even the Muslims could not channelise the magnaninity of such a great person towards the way of their development and progression. In commemorating the contribution of Amir Ali, Abdul Hamid Khan Yousufjoyi wrote, what would I newly express about the sagaciousness, wisdom and benefaction of honourable Amir Ali for his own people ? He was a high thinker and a prolific figure in the field of ploitics. The awesome expressions and ideas that have been reflected in the life of Mohammad and in spirit of Islam, it can undoubtly be doubted whether any one even after the centuries would be capable of having such achievement effort and care"

**Syed Wahed Hossain (1870-1934):** Wahed Hossain was a famous intellectual person and had enthuium in diverse aspects. He acquainted exceptional reputation among the intellectuals in Kolkata for his indomitable will power and vast impetus in action. He was the secretary of the Kolkata Mohamaedan Union and Bangiya Pradeshik Musalman Siksha Samit. Mirza Abdul Fazul commented in ' Nava-Noor' -- " success to some extent can be expected from the hard labour he is doing for the well being of his down- trodden Muslim Society. He is a man who deserves cordial congratulation from the community " In his sole initiation and management the Muslim girls Madrasha was established in Kolkata in 1897. It was the first among the girls' schools. Not only in establishing schools but in the field of publication of books also his part is praiseworthy. The books he published were Talim-e-Urdu and the other one was Islamic religious book in English language. He was honoured as 'Anathanathadev' from the university of Calcutta for writing the empirical article related to law. The three articles he published are (I) Theory of Sovereignty in Islam (1931), (ii) Administration of Justice in Mughal India, published in 1932 and (iii) Labour legislation in British India (1937).

**Abdul Latif (1828-1893):** Two eminent persons enacted a very significant part in bringing about rebirth to miserable state of Muslim community in India specially in Bengal at the opening period of the 2nd half of the 19 th century. They are none other than Shed Amir Ali and Abdul Latuf. Abdul Latif is noteworthy for widespreading of education and development of the Muslim society. The principle of administration in British India was changed after the Sepoy Mutiny. Though the Sepoy Mutiny was brought to action by the people of both the Hindu and Muslim religions. the govt to some greater extent blamed the Muslims for their role in it. It seemed to them that the Muslims out of their deprivation and despondencies had caused the revolt. This set of people once again may partake in such type of insurgencies if they were not given the proper opportunities. So the British govt formed a committee in the middle of 1880's for expanding modern education and thus developing the Muslim culture and society. The members of the committee were G.C Paul, Nawab Abdul Latif, Barrister Syed Amir Ali and N. Phillip.

Abdul Latif strove throughout his life for the expansion of occidental education among his own community and it became the leading object of his historical efforts. The reverberation of these issues is prominent in his own words. He said, "The moment I started working for the common people, the Muslims were incapable of intermingling with the western people. They turned themselves away even from the people of Hindu community. I myself was finally able to transform their attitude and mentality after endless efforts.

In the context of reconstruction of Calcutta Madrasha in 1853, Abdul Latif emphasised on the necessity and importance of injecting English language among the Muslim students in parallel to the study of Persian language. Mohamaddan Literacy Society was established in the month of April of 1863 through the active enterprise of Abdul Latif. The object of his society was to familiarise the aristocratic Muslims with modern literature and science through speech, discussion and such other performances. Speeches were given in Urdu, Arabic, Persian and in English languages in the monthly conferences at the Kolkata residence of Abdul Latif. It is worth mentioning that the invitation by the society for such interactive programme was responded by very few people of the city and most of the participants were from the high class Persian Muslims. Scholars and scientist used to deliver valuable lectures in the annual meeting of the society in the town hall and people specifically the Muslims found keen interest in science and in other related topics of discussion. Thus a new way opened up in their mental faculty for the acceptance of newly learnt western education.

The chief member of the council of education, Mr. J.R Calvin requested Abdul Latif for his important suggestion regarding the study of English among the Muslim. In accordance with his suggestion the department of Anglo-Persian was opened up in Calcutta Madrasha at the very beginning of the year 1854, Latif had performed an active play for the nourishment of the deprived Muslims for a vast span of time by utilizing the profuse amount of dividend from the fund of Nazi MD. Mahasin. The Mahasin episode got rid of further complications by the sole initiative of Mr. Latif and a great many of scholars were established using the finance from the fund. He was selected the fellow of the university of Calcutta in 1863. He is ever remembered in the history for his benevolent activities like creation of the post of marriage registrar. For the unemployed youths, reserving the interest of the Muslim students important certification in commission for education and drastic reformation of Calcutta Madrasha. Not only that Abdul Latif had a meeting with the then Governor General Lord Mayo for wide spreading education among the Muslims and he pin pointed to the indifference of the govt regarding that issue. Lord Mayo's speech about the role of Abdul Latif in the development of Muslim education is highly commendable. He said, "Through the Mahamaddean literacy Society Abdul Latif has been capable of opening up the eyes of knowledge and the people not only of Bengal but also entire india. He has created in them an immense interest to gather knowledge from science and English language. Even by expressing his high profile thoughts he has interested a true conviction in them about their real wishes."

Abdul Latif spoke out a lengthy article about the problems of Muslims in their education on 30th January, 1868, in his second conference of Bengal Social Science Association which was formed in 1867. The article pointed on the learning of the western education for establishing the rights of the Muslims. Latif opined that education must be expanded among them keeping in mind the primal structure of the Muslim social system. However the govt. expressed its grief acknowledging the fact of crawling of the community back in academic platform. Lord Mayo, a representative of the govt. cordially felt upset and he prayed for suggestions from the states for bestowing enthusing among them. He forced upon the govt. to provide the Muslim students chances for higher education. As a result of students got opportunities to learn English in Presidency College in 1873. All the hindrances in the ways of education for the Muslim students were shaken off when the new building was constructed in Presidency College on 27th February of 1873 by Lord Northbrook.

**Mosharuff Hossain:** The few highly educated Muslims who exhibited their eminence in the practice of literature at the fag end of the 2nd half of the 19th century, Mosharuff Hossain was the most famous among them. He was born at Chiura village and Choudagram police station. Knowledge and education to him were the matters of limitless appreciation. Among his contributions in the domain of education, his contemplation in the study of literature needs a special referece. He financially contributed to the establishment of Islamic college in Calcutta. Conferring of the Liton scholarship to the meritorious learners in Dhaka University is mainly due to the donation of Mosharuff Hossain. He spent fifty thousand rupees to establish an English medium high school in the name of his wife Faizunnesa at his own village Chiura.

**Maulana Akram Khan (1868-1968):** Maulana Akran Khan was a celebrated scholar. He had his education from Madrasha and showed his versatility even in the sphere of politics. He had stead fast disrelish to religions and orthodoxy. He exerted to wipe all superstitions off from religion and wanted to make its basement firm depending on logically. In his context Anisurjaman had stated: " Akran Khan was more progressive to the old fangled and to some extent coservative to the modernists. He has criticised the Muslims for their reluctance to have modern education, uninterested ness to trade and commerce and indifference to the practice of politics. Akram Khan made few significant remarks for the abolition of all sorts of negative thoughts among the Muslims.

- (1) He never considered the system of earning interest from banks to be sinful thoughts it was obnoxious in the Islamic religion.
- (2) Through long discussion in the essay 'Samaksya Samadhan' he attempted to prove that practicing fine arts such as music was not at all anti Islamic.
- (3) Rationalists Akram Khan comments- "We need to pay complete concentration to the Quaran Shariff for writing the true biography of prophet Hazarat Mohammad. The true and logical ideas would be accepted and administered gleefully. We will cast away those which are unapproved and baseless.



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