CHAPTER I

SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATION IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BENGAL DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A. The Society

India, during the later part of the nineteenth century, was under British rule. During the period under review, British administration in the country had been seen at its gradual vici­situde. 1858 is a very significant year in the realm of Indian history through which the Government of India passed from the East India Company to the Crown of England. Around eighteen hundred and fifteens, the Company's rule in India was shaken to its found­ation following the outbreak of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, popu­larly called the first war of independence.1 Though the rising was suppressed by the troops of the East India Company, this suppression itself had exposed the weaknesses of the British admi­nistration in India so distinctly that after a few months, in 1858 India's administrative power got vested in the Crown of England.2

Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan was born at such a time when the Sepoy revolution had failed; and one after another, the Faraiizi

1 A Dictionary Of Indian History: Sachchidananda Bhattacharya. Calcutta University, 1967, p.164.
movement led by Haji Shariátullah and Abús Subhán, the Mujáhid revolution, initiated earlier by Sayyid Ahmad of Rai-Bareli, (1786-1831), and of late led by Shahid Titumir, the Fáqir movement of Maimansingh, The 'Jam iatu Ta'awunia' (i.e. co-operative society) headed by Maulana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri and the like turned into a mass revolution. The British rulers wanted to crush into these movements in order to perpetuate their rule over the country and to make the people subservient thereby. The English rulers held the Muslims responsible for the Sepoy mutiny. So, with respect to the Muslims, they followed a policy of suppression in all walks of life, and favoured the Hindus, particularly in Bengal. Commentators say that this was the beginning of the 'Divide and Rule' theory. Besides these, there were other movements too, either religious or ethnic. The Kuka movement of Punjab, the Birsa movement of Chotanagpur, the indigo riots of Bengal, or the Wahhabi movement, were all contemporary or near contemporary to some extent. Those movements proved that people were suffering from social and political injustice: human values were being devalued during the period of British regimen in India.

Reference may be made here to the Faraizi movement,


started by Haji Shariatullah (died in 1837) in East Bengal with the object of restoration of Muslim rule over India after driving out the Britishers. Side by side his religious reforms, he campaigned against the Jamindars for their oppressive tax policy. The movement gained strength under the leadership of his son and successor Dadu Mian (1819–1862) who became a force to be reckoned with. He inspired Muslim peasants to join his movement. Under his individual effort Dadu Mian administered justice and punished the guilty. He was arrested by the government in July 1857 and confined into the Alipore Central Jail as a state prisoner. While Dadu Mian was leading the movement in Faridpur and its adjacent areas, Mir Nasir Ali, better known as Titu Mir or Titu Mian, a resident of Chandpur, the disciple of Sayyid Ahmed Shahid, whom he had met at Mecca in 1822, was preaching Wahhabi doctrines at Barasat (1827). Titu Mir and his disciples marched to Purnea, a district of Bihar, and declared that the British Raj was over. The British authorities sent well-equipped troops and artillery to crush the rebels who fought bravely. Titu Mir was killed in action, and thus became Shahid (i.e. martyr in Islam), and his lieutenant Ghulam Rasul with 350 soldier-followers was taken prisoners. Later on, Ghulam Rasul was sentenced to death and 140 of his companions were condemned to various terms of imprisonment. The first organized attempt to drive out the British and

restore therein the Muslim rule was made by the Wahhabis under the leadership of Sayyid Ahmad of Rai Bareli (1786-1831). This movement spread throughout the country particularly in Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, the Punjab and in the North-West Frontier provinces. It continued for about half a century (1820-1870) with the active support of the villagers and peasants who generally donated money out of their meagre savings and volunteered their services for getting rid of the foreign rulers. Other important leaders of this movement were Ahmadullah, Inayat Ali, Vilayat Ali, Rafiq Mandal and others. In the government records there are references to some Hindus who also participated in the movement. The Wahhabis continued their struggle even after the death of Sayyid Ahmad in 1831 with the active help of Ahmadullah, the Deputy Collector of Patna, Yahya Ali, the elder brother of Ahmadullah, Muhammad Shafi, Muhammad Jafar, Abdul Ghaffar, Ilahi Baksh, Mian Jan and other leaders. The discovery of some seditious correspondence by the British intelligence Branch led the government to state trials of Ambala in 1864, Patna in 1865 and of Malda in 1870. Most of the accused were transported for life. The great Indian leader, Bepin Chandra Pal called the Wahhabi trials as "the first baptism in freedom's fire." Its influence over indigo revolts in Bengal is full of evidence.

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1 Role of Indian Muslims: P.N. Chopra ed. p.V.
2 Ibid.
'A statistical account of Bengal' is an exhaustive as well as voluminous work of William Wilson Hunter which illustrates the topographical, ethnic, agricultural, educational, administrative, medical and other aspects of the districts of Bengal which may serve as a basis for the investigations throughout India of the days under review. Around 1875 there were two hundred and twenty-five districts in the whole of India. Bengal and Assam comprise of fifty-nine districts administered under Lieutenant Governors and Chief Commissioners respectively with an area of 248,231 square miles and a population of 66,856,859 souls.¹ Bengal and Assam comprised one-third of the entire population of British India during the period under review. Calcutta was the capital city of India and remained same till 1911. The city of Calcutta contained a population of 4,47,601 souls of which 299,857 were male and 147,744 female. In Calcutta Hindus formed majority. They were 65.1 per cent; while Muslims formed 29.7 per cent. The Christian community, comprising of European and native both, were 4.8 per cent. Buddhists were .2 per cent and other denominations were .3 per cent. According to the Census of Bengal 1872, distributions of Muslims and Hindus in Bengal proper runs follows:

Divisions Percentage of Hindus Percentage of Muslims Total Population

Burdwan 85.3 12.7 7,286,957
Presidency 50.9 48.2 6,545,464
Rajshahi (including Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling) 37.0 56.0 9,939,680
Dacca 40.4 59.1 9,517,498
Chittagong 29.6 67.4 3,444,874

Total: 49.2 48.0 3,67,34,473

The Hindus, as shown above, were the most numerous section of the community. As a community, Muslims were overwhelmingly rural in character and they contributed only a fraction of the urban population. Even in the urban centres of Dhaka and Chittagong, located in predominantly Muslim districts, they were very much in a minority; Hindus accounted for 67 per cent of the total urban population in Bengal proper. Such differences in the degree of urbanization between the two communities reflected some basic dissimilarities in their respective life-style, outlook, social as well as economic character.

Equally significant is the pattern of distribution of Hindus and Muslims in the various professions. Wherever the

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1 Vide, Census of Bengal 1872: General Statement IB. pp. XXXII-XXXIII.

Muslims formed the bulk of the population, as in eastern Bengal, they belonged predominantly to the cultivating classes, while land-holding, professional in the higher posts and the mercantile occupations were dominated by the high-caste Hindus. More than 90 per cent Muslims were returned in the census of 1881 as belonging to agricultural or lowly service groups. Of the agricultural population, again, only a handful could be classified as non-cultivating land-owners; the vast majority were returned as actual tillers of the soil. For example, in the district of Backergunj, Muslims formed 64.8 per cent of the total population but owned less than 10 per cent of the estates, and paid less than 9 per cent of the total land revenue. So was the case in most other districts, particularly in eastern and northern Bengal. There were some exceptions also; as for example, in the northern district of Dinajpur the Muslim jotdar class was said to be the 'socially supreme' in the countryside. The Noakhali Settlement Report says of the Muslim cultivators of that district that many of them have risen to become middle-men, howaldars and talukdars, and a few even jamindars. Power and status in the society for the most part rested with the Hindus though the Muslims were, in some places, numerically in a stronger position.

1 The Bengal Muslims ... p.2.
2 The Bengal Muslims ... p.3
Muslims in India, particularly in Bengal during the period under review, formed a single religious community according to their usual practice. They were treated as such by most government agencies and by the urban leaders and politicians of the time. In fact, it is the Muslims through the ages of the world, who constitute the only homogeneous group of people having a common religious language and belief of their own. The variation was also prevailed; socially the muslim community was split up into well-defined and, in many ways, mutually exclusive groups; culturally, the elite and the mass ethos were poles apart.¹ The Urdu speaking as well as the Bengali speaking Muslims or the elite and the peasantry class of Muslims were something peculiarly different in their cultural aspects. 'The two strata of Bengal Muslim society represented two distinct streams of Muslim culture, the one "foreign" to Bengal, the other of indigenes origin. The former was hostile to all local associations, the latter was closer to the land — its language and cultural traditions. In their names, dress and manners, the two groups differed fundamentally.'² Despite of all such discriminations, many a times it has been seen that a Bengali speaking Muslim youth got married with an Urdu speaking Muslim girl and vice versa. But sometimes, the other major barrier to integration

¹ The Bengal Muslims ... p.6.
² The Bengal Muslims; 1871-1906 ... p.6.
was the existence of a variety of religious sects, viz. the Hanafis, the Shafis, the Barelis or the Wahhabis and so on. New religious movements led only to further fragmentations and to fresh antagonisms within the community. The Muslim community in Bengal was thus in every sense a fragmented society. The community could have been described at best as 'an aggregate of believers'.¹ Noteworthy, excellency of the Ashraf over the Atraf, or of Urdu speaking over Bengali speaking has had not been recognized in Islam. In Islam all are equal from the birth point of view. God says, "O mankind! we created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you."² Classification of the Bengal Muslims were made into several categories: the Arab descendants or the A'jam ones, the Ashraf and the Atraf or the Mughal Ashraf (i.e. Urdu speaking) and the lesser Ashraf (i.e. Bengali speaking) were the major discriminations prevailed in the Bengal Muslim society. Bahruddin Bogra, around 1885, divided the Bengal Muslim society of the period into three principal social categories, namely, the higher, the middle, and the lower classes. It referred primarily


to the two major ethnic as well as cultural groups that constituted the Muslim society of the time. According to Maulana Abdul Wali's classification, it recognizes the basic fact that racial purity or trans-Indian origin was still of vital importance in the social stratification of the Bengal Muslims in the late nineteenth century although the bulk of the population were local converts. In practice, the social stratification was affected thereby in a different way by the concept of racial origin. There was another tendency, prevalent in the nineteenth century, amongst the Bengal Muslims, as elsewhere in the subcontinent, was to divide themselves into four distinct racial groups, e.g. Sayyid, Shaikh, Mughal and Pathan. Many Mughal Muslims, for example, also used such honorifics as Sayyid or Shaikh in addition to their racial appellations. On the other hand, a bitter conflict between the Shi'as and the Sunnis was prevailed in the society. The famous philanthropist Haji Muhammad Muhsin of Hooghly belonged to Shi'a cult. Many Calcutta Muslims considered Sayyid Amir Ali unsuitable for representing the Bengal Muslims because he was a Shi'a. All the Bengal Muslims used to exchange their daily views mostly through Bengali and few in Urdu. The greater portion of the Muslim population in Bengal belonged to the non-Ashraf categories, and generally to agricultural groups and other certain lowly services. Amongst the occupational groups Muslims were engaged in Kunjra (vegetable dealers), Kalu (oil-pressers), jolaha (cotton cleaners), Kasai (buchers), hajjam (barbers) mehtar (scavengers).

1 The Bengal Muslims ... p.9.
Nagarchi or Bajadar (drummers) and so many occupations. Despite of all such caste-system and distinction, there was a basic strength in the Muslim society; because these occupations were not based on the scripture or on any item of basic faith in Islam.  

Renaissance movement had already been started in Bengal during the period under review. Bengali literature had paved the way for that upheaval. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), Maulavi Muhammad Na'imuddin (1832-1907), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), Mir Musharraf Husain (1847-1911), Mirza Muhammad Yusuf 'Ali (1858-1920), Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859-1931), Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941) and Sayyid Abul Husain M.D. (1862-1938) were among the Bengali writers worth mention. These writers were social reformers too. They tried to reform the society from the religious point of view of their own. In order to publicize their message they also took up different periodicals.

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1 The Bengal Muslims ... p. 20.
B. The Leadership

A major hindrance for removing any of the 'barriers' that had fragmented the Bengal Muslim community was the absence of an effective leadership, dedicated to organize the masses and motivate them with a common ideal thereby. Actually the community had no leader worth the name in the nineteenth century except a disorganized body of the Mullahs who could lay some claims to represent the masses. The Mullahs were those who lead the Muslims through the congregational prayers, viz. Friday prayers, Idd prayers, Janaza prayers and daily five-time collective prayers. Moreover, these Mullahs used to verdict for the religious problems and situations in form of Fatawa. Otherwise, the Mullahs had no clear-cut concept about political as well as economic ideals of Islam. All the British rulers used to formulate rules and regulations from religious view-points of their own.

Individuals, like Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893), or Sayyid Amir Ali (1849-1928), or Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) — the pioneer in Anglo-Oriental Muhammadian College at Aligarh movement, or Badruddin Tayyibjee (1844-1906) — the founder of Anjuman-i-Islam at Bombay, who professed to represent the community, had an extremely narrow social base and were often leaders 'ex-officio' rather than by virtue of any popular support

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1 The Bengal Muslims ... p.35.
or mandate. Some of them perhaps had a better understanding of the problem than others but most were men with more ambition than ability and saw their future in terms of pleasing the British rather than in pursuing an independent line which might be of benefit to the 'community'.

Except for a handful of educated people the community itself was hardly organized for any political action. The dominant sections of the community were in close touch with the government and enjoyed a measure of political importance. They did not think it necessary to seek the support of their poorer co-religionists, they relied absolutely on government patronage and upon their own social status for continued dominance in society. Both Nawab Abdul Latif and Sayyid Amir Ali traced their descent from the lands of Arabia, and both served the government with 'distinction': moreover, they were no friends of each other. In the ultimate analysis, however, the contributions of these individuals to the general welfare of the ordinary Muslims were equally unimpressive, and so uneffective. These individuals were closely associated with the aspirations of a handful of urban Muslims whose immediate object was to obtain for themselves a larger share in government jobs and higher education. Neither of them were inclined to look beyond the orbit of their

2 The Bengal Muslims ... p.35.
own privileged society. Latif's Muhammadan Literary Society, founded in 1863 by Nawab Abdul Latif and Amir Ali's 'Central National Muhammadan Association', founded in 1878 by Sayyid Amir Ali were little more than exclusive social clubs designed to draw the government's attention to the social and educational needs of the privileged.¹ The others whose claims to leadership were equally based on their own social status and British patronage. Nawab Amir Ali Khan Bahadur (1810-1879), native of Patna but later on settled in Calcutta, Nawab Sayyid Amir Husain of Bihar, a Deputy Magistrate by profession, Khan Bahadur Abdul Jabbar, a pro-Latif leader who served in the Bengal Legislative Council three times in 1884, 1886 and 1893, claimed descent from an ancient stock of the Arabs, served the government for more than thirty years as a Deputy Magistrate, honoured by the British with titles of Khan Bahadur and Nawab — all claimed as the Muslim leaders. Among others, mention may be made of Maulavi Wajid Ali Khan Panni, Sayyid Nawab Ali Choudhuri, Maulavi Abu Ahmad Ghaznavi, or Sayyid Shamsul Huda who rose to prominence as leaders of the community either because of their position as Muslim landlords or as faithful servants of the government.²

To sum up, Muslim leadership in Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century had very little to do with the aspirations of the masses. The above mentioned leaders hardly

¹ The Bengal Muslims ... p.36.
² Ibid. p.37.
deserved the honour for which they aspired. They were not in touch with the Muslim community at large, but only with a few rich men. However, it was a matter of controversy that how these elite leaders, with such limited contact with the local Muslims, succeeded in mobilizing popular support in their scramble for power and competition with the Hindu elite at a later period and why the ordinary Muslims agreed to lend their support to a class of men with whom they had virtually nothing in common.

\[1\] The Bengal Muslims \[\ldots\] p.37.
C. The Education

Islam has always laid great stress on the necessity of knowledge. The very first words with which the Quran was revealed were associated with learning\(^1\), and the very first thing which Adam was made to do was to learn the 'names' of God which gave him superiority over the angels.\(^2\) There are a number of Quranic verses which stress the importance of learning. Needless to say that Islam has set a high ideal regarding education and learning, principally aiming at a right way of thinking and living, proper understanding of what makes or mars the human soul, and building up a healthy mind free from mundane desires. Learning has been defined as the highest attainment of humanity. Over the centuries role of the Mosques on imparting knowledge, elementary in character, beneficent to both the worlds — this mundane world and the world hereafter, has been recognized.\(^3\) The subjects taught in the Mosques were being Islamic literature (comprising of Quran and Hadith), grammar, elementary arithmetic, theology, history, logic, astronomy and the like. Later on, in India some separate Madrasahs (with status of college and school) came into existence on recommendation of the Indian Education Commission (1882). The

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1 Holy Quran, Surah al-Alaq, Verse 1 to 5.
2 Vide, Holy Quran, Surah al-Bakarah, Verse 33.
Maktabs, the Khanqas and other private circles of studies did also play a very important role in imparting education, apart from general formal institutions for learning, prevalent in the nineteenth century India. In Mughal India, there were elaborate edifices built for housing colleges and similar institutions of higher education. Such prominent mosque-cum-madrasahs and madrasah buildings existed in the metropolitan city of Delhi and other provincial capitals at Gaur, Pandua, Jaunpur, Mandu, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Fatehpur Sikri, Shahjahanpur, Rampur, Mathura, Varanasi, Bareilly, Bilgram, Ghazipur and at other places of India.\(^1\) Apart from these, almost every village having a concentration of Muslim population had at least a small madrasah. The bigger towns had several madrasahs to cater to the local needs as well as those of the neighbouring parts. In the first part of the eighteenth century some reforms in the curriculum were carried out by Shah Waliullah Muhaddith Dihlavi (1702-1763) on Muslim education in India. In the large British regime of nearly one and a half century India got some esteemed institutes of learning, viz. Madrasah Alia Calcutta established in 1780,\(^2\) Calcutta Fort William College (1900), Presidency College Calcutta (1817), Hindu College of Calcutta,

\(^1\) Centres of Islamic learning in India: Ziyauddin A. Desai. New Delhi: Govt. of India; 1978, p.9.

better known as Sanskrit College (1824), Calcutta Medical College (1835), Bengal Engineering College at Shibpur, Howrah (1856), Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras (1857) and so on. Besides these there were many primary schools, the Toles meant for Sanskrit studies and the Maktabs for Islamic learning scattered all over the country.

The second half of the nineteenth century India, particularly Bengal witnessed a greater awareness among the Muslim intelligentsia for their educational problems, specially the curriculum. English education in India, during the period under review was not merely a means to acquire knowledge or to develop one's moral as well as intellectual faculties. It was the key to the government employment and a passport to literate professions. At that time there was a 'Fatawa' prevalent among Indian Muslims debarring them from 'English education'. Therefore, the Muslim masses did not dare to receive such education lest a Muslim receiving it would become a Christian and would be expelled out of the Muslim society. So the case was with the Bengal Muslims. In Bengal the earliest beneficiaries of the

English Education System were mostly the high-caste Hindus who recognized the material advantages that it offered and flocked to the new institutions eager to grasp the new opportunities opened up. By the mid-nineteenth century English education had taken a firm root in the Bengali Hindu society; the class rooms in colleges and schools were overflowed with the children of the bhadralok. Thus Muslims showing aversion to such English education, lagged behind for many a decades.

The movement in favour of Western education started among the Muslims very late in the nineteenth century. In the meantime, a sizeable English-educated Hindu middle class had already developed. There had been a growing feeling among the Muslims about inadequacy of the prevalent curriculum, the 'Dars-i-Nizami', which itself was modified at its source, the Madrasa-i-Aliya-i-Nizamiya Firangi Mahal at Lucknow, where the course was divided into broad faculties of literature, Higher Studies, Theology, Utilitarian Sciences, and Languages. A few new institutions signifying this awareness of the need for change and intended to meet the aspirations of cross-sections of the community were established; as for example, Darul Ulum at Deoband in 1866, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (which later attained the status of a University) in 1875, the Nadwatul Ulama at Lucknow in 1894. In 1876 Badruddin Tyabji founded the 'Anjuman-i-Islam'
at Bombay which in many ways equals 'Aligarh' in importance in the educational field.¹

In India there were some important centres of Islamic learning, run over the later half of the nineteenth century. Northern India possessed Darul Ulum Deoband, ranked as the greatest institution of its kind in Asia and perhaps, second to the famous Al-Azhar University of Egypt.² This great seat of Islamic learning has had an unrivalled place in modern India amongst Muslim religious institutions. Haji Muhammad Abid Husain with the support of some eminent scholars founded it in 1866 at Deoband in Sahranpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Nadwatul Ulama Lucknow, established in 1894, Darul Ulum Firangi Mahal Lucknow, established in 1693, Muzahirul Ulum Saharanpur, established in 1866, Jamiah⁴ Qasimia Muradabad, founded in 1879, Jamia Mazharul Ulum, Varanasi, established in 1893 and Madrasah Aminiya Delhi which was incepted in 1897 were prominent in imparting Islamic knowledge. Western India had one important seat of Islamic learning and that was Jamia Saifiya of Surat, incepted in 1813. Eastern India had also several eminent seats of learning. Among them mention may be made firstly to Madrasah Alia of Calcutta, founded in 1780. Central Madrasahs of Dhaca, Hooghly, Rajshahi,

¹ Role of Indian Muslims: edited by P.N. Chopra. p.6.
² Centres of Islamic learning ... p.19.
³ In Arabic 'Jamiah' means University.
Murshidabad and that of Chittagong worth mention. The Madrasah Alia of Calcutta, popularly known as Calcutta Madrasah, a celebrated institution presently run by the State Government was established under orders of the then Governor General, Lord Warren Hastings. It has since been not only one of the very few leading institutions in the eastern part of the country, but also had the unique distinction of being, in addition to a teaching institution itself, an affiliating body for the various large and small Madrasahs of Islamic learning in undivided Bengal. Its principal also acted as the Registrar of the Central Madrasah Examination Board, which conducted three examinations, namely, Junior (Alim), Senior (Fazil) and Title (Mumtaz), respectively, after six, eight and ten years' study. Later on, in 1900, Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan passed Fazil (i.e. F.M. — Fakhrul Muhaddithin) examination from this Madrasah Alia of Calcutta.

Southern India had not lagged behind in respect of spreading knowledge. The Jamia Nizamia was established in Hyderabad by Maulana Muhammad Anwarullah Khan Fazilat Jang, a great savant of his time, in 1866. This Madrasah has been the principal centre for Islamic learning in southern India.

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1 History of Madrasah education ... by Dr. M. Rahman, p.75.
2 Centres of Islamic learning in India: Ziauddin A. Desai. p.49.
3 Vide preface p.XX in Maulana Akram Khan — a versatile genius: Abu Jafar.
even in the present times. During over a century, this institution has produced a large number of scholars not only from South India but also from other parts of the country and abroad. Though initially, like Deoband, it was run on public subscription, it later on received munificent grants from the Nizam's Government, and was patronized by the Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Uthman Ali Khan. The Jamia has a proposal for affiliation of large and small religious madrasahs in the region, a college of religious education for ladies, centres for 'commentary' and 'tradition', a bureau for research on present day problems, and publication of a journal. Madrasah Baqiatu-Salihat of Vellore, Tamil Nadu was started in 1883 by Maulana Shah Abdul Wahhab Qadiri, a renowned scholar and saintly person of his time. In its life of over a century, this Madrasah deserves a credit of spreading Islamic learning not only in South India but also in South-East Asia. The Madrasah Muhammadi of Madras, founded in 1891, is another important seat of Islamic learning in the south. The library of this Madrasah has a rich collection on Manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Islamia Arabic and Tibbi College, established in 1896 at Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh, unique in its character, deserves mention. Students from all parts of South India including Malabar and Cochin, and also

1 Centres of Islamic Learning in India. p.55.
2 Ibid, p.59.
from some South-East Asian countries are being awarded with Degrees every year after 1923 as its curriculum was re-oriented that year. At present this renamed Islamia Arabic College is affiliated to the University of Madras.

Amongst the Academies prevailed in the later part of the nineteenth century India, mention may be made to the Dairatul Maarifil-Osmania or the Osmania Oriental Publications Bureau which was founded in 1888. Its object was to collect, preserve, edit and publish rare and hitherto unpublished works on subjects connected with Islamic learning, particularly those written during the first centuries of Islam, that is to say, during the 6th - 14th centuries of the Christian era. The stress was on such works representing the richest literary, cultural, religious, philosophical and scientific expression of the Arabic-speaking or Arabic knowing mind throughout the Islamic world. The ‘Daira’ has published, since its inception, scores of rare and valuable classics of Arabic language running into hundreds of volumes. The Dairatul Maarif of Hyderabad through its publication service of Arabic classics related with Islamic and scientific subjects has placed ‘India on the world map of foremost publishers of Arabic classics of Islamic and scientific subjects’. Few public libraries, like, Library of the Asiatic

1 Centres of Islamic Learning in India, p.97.

2 Ibid, p.88.
During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Government of India was given a unitary form of organization. Education, like every other subject, thus became a direct central responsibility and the provinces merely acted as the agents of the central authority. In 1870, a scheme of decentralization was introduced under which education became a 'provincial' subject with some limitations e.g. certain fields like legislation for Universities were continued as the exclusive concern of the Government of India and in most other fields, general powers of supervision were reserved with the Government of India whose sanction was required for all major decisions. In the long history of education under British India, there were some educational councils and commissions. During the period under review, Indian Education Commission or Hunter Commission of 1882 was prominent. This was commissioned mainly to enquire into that how much of the principles of Despatch of 1854 had been materialized and to suggest such measures as the

Commission might think desirable. The Despatch of 1854 had led the missionaries to believe that they would ultimately provide with all the educational needs of the country. In so far the general demand for religious education was concerned, the ranks of the missionaries were soon strengthened by other groups. The Brahamo Samajists, the Prarthana Samajists and the Arya Samajists, the new sects among the Hindus, also demanded religious education in schools on the lines of their own faith; the orthodox Hindus who, in the earlier period, had fought against the new education altogether now gave up that fight and began to demand that the new schools should combine instruction in the principles of Hindu religion with Western science and literature, in the case of Hindu children; and the Muslims who were now coming under the modern system of education insisted that the Quran should necessarily be taught to Muslim children. In short, there was, by 1882, a general feeling among several sections of the people that the policy of secular education should be abandoned and that religious education should be provided to each child in the principles of his own faith. Such a proposal could not obviously be accepted by the Commission on administrative and financial grounds. The Commission, therefore, reiterated the necessity of keeping all government schools

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2 Ibid.
secular. The missionaries, therefore, lost their demand that Christianity should be taught in all government schools, even the modified demand that each child should be taught his own religion, was rejected. The policy of secular education in government schools was upheld once more, and in spite of all attacks, continues to hold the field even today.

Indian education system during the second half of the nineteenth century was not merely a means to acquire knowledge, or to develop one's moral as well as intellectual values; rather it was 'the key to government employment and a passport to literate professions.' As earlier stated, in Bengal the foremost beneficiaries of the system were mostly the high-caste Hindus, who recognized the material advantages that the system offered, flocked to the new institutions eager to grasp all the new opportunities vouchsafed by the colonial rule. Although opposition, to the new education, was noticed from the orthodox Hindus, the overall response of the Hindu gentry was marked with great enthusiasm. 'By the mid-nineteenth century English education had taken a firm root in Bengali Hindu society; the class-rooms in colleges and schools now overflowed with the children of the Bhadralok.' Consequently, the Muslim masses lagged far behind. Movement in favour of Western education

1 The Bengal Muslims ... : Rafiuddin Ahmed. p.133.

started among them by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and others very late in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, a sizeable English-educated Hindu middle class had already marched ahead. Dr. Rafiuddin Ahmed observed, "Hence the anxiety of the Muslim elite and their efforts to extract at least some concessions from the government to counterbalance the advantages gained by the educated Hindus. The growing rivalry between the two communities was further aggravated by all this."¹ The resulting inquiries revealed that it was primarily in Bengal that the Muslim education had suffered most. Bengal was the classic example of Muslim backwardness in education.² It was generally argued that the Muslims were less nimble than the Hindus, so to seize the opportunities offered by Western education and less quick to adapt themselves to changing conditions under British rule. While the Hindus were crowding English schools and colleges, the Muslims sat apart wrapped in the memory of their traditions and held back by the conservatism of Islam. Hunter blamed the system as a whole for the miserable condition of the Muslims; he wrote:—

"The truth is that our system of public instruction which has awakened the Hindus from the sleep of centuries and quickened their inert masses with some noble impulses of a nation, is opposed to the traditions, unsuited to the requirements, and

¹ The Bengal Muslims ... p.133.
hateful to the religion of the Musalmans." But Islam itself never had debar any of its adherents from collecting knowledge out of any country or language alike. Islam has had no business with such 'conservatism' which would be proved detrimental to worldly human progress. Rational modernity and Islam are one and integrated. There had never been contradiction between Islam and rational modernity. Whatever contradiction, prevalent in the society, is due to incorrect and immoral interpretation of the doctrines of Islam. Needless to say that Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan was a co-ordinator between Islam and rational modernity.  

The Muslims' educational problem was their abnormally low share at the higher levels of education: the higher the education the rarer were the Muslims. This was partly due to the economic depression of the upper class Muslims as the previous Permanent Settlement (1793) of land revenue and the resumption proceedings deprived many Muslim families of their livelihood. The educational statistics on the lower classes of both the communities, during the period suggest the same conclusion. The poorer Muslims who could afford to give their children some education would either send them to a village

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'Pathshala' or a 'Maktab.' The choice of an institution often depended not on any explicit preference but simply on physical proximity. It was in the Pathshalas alone that the rudiments of accounting, writing and other practical educations were imparted. The Maktabs were primarily concerned with making children memorize 'suras' from the Holy Quran and teaching them Persian and Arabic tales through the medium of Urdu. At high school course, a Bengali Hindu student had to read only three languages, Bengali, English and Sanskrit; while a Muslim boy or girl, who took the same course, had to read as many as five languages, namely, Bengali, English, Arabic, Persian and Urdu.\(^1\)

This was, in short, the social, economic, political and educational situation of the country, specially of Bengal when Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan was born in a Bengali Muslim family.