Introduction
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The establishment of British rule in Bengal was the result of fall of Independent Bengal Nawababate of Murshidabad. During the first half of Tentieth Century, the new power and authority was not interested in introducing a lot of changes in administration by changing the old socio-political and economic order. During the 18th century and early parts of 19th century, the companies rule was the period of gradual consolidation specially in political fronts. British rule in the course of their political integration brought several socio, economic and political changes. The most important and the far reaching political changes that have taken place was the spread of modern and western and also the institutionalization of education. This led to the opening of new horizon and era which was the product of growing contacts of the people of India with west and western thoughts. The contact became more channellized through the institutionalization of modern, scientific and secular education.

The impact of the west and the desire to accept the impact resulted in the development of a new era in Bengal history and which was termed by the scholars as 'Bengal Renaissance'. The ‘Bengal Renaissance’ worked as catalyst for the modernization and subsequently intellectual awakening of Bengal. There were a lot a debates went on, in the context that whether it can be rightly called Renaissance in terms of western Renaissance. The result of this new awakening was that modern educated people became curious and also very interested in the wider world.

The Renaissance or the awakening of 19th century was moving, “On the axis of the upper structure alone, of the society, the Bhadraloks” had its obvious limitations, and one of these was exclusion of the Muslim community from its
periphery, or rather, the non-participation by the elitist Muslims of Bengal in the noble phenomenon of the new age. One of the main reasons for Bengal Muslims natural dislikeness towards Bengal Renaissance was that English education and the western ideas and culture were the motive force behind the Bengal Renaissance and the Muslims of Bengal naturally lagged behind.

Bengal had the largest concentration of the Muslims in India, inhabiting more than half of the total Muslim population of India, but position and situation of Muslims of Bengal in socio, economic and political fronts was somewhat different from those of other areas of Northern India.

In Bengal proper most of the Muslims were of indigenous origin, the language spoken by them was Bengali except few of them who were upper class Muslims spoke Persian and Urdu. According to William Hunter, by the end of 19th century, Muslims were in majority in terms of population in Bengal proper. The decline of the postion of Zamindars, and also Aimadars, and the enactment of permanent settlement, the resumption of Lakhraj lands were the principal factors for the decline of the position of Muslims in socio, economic and in political fronts. In fact just before the arrival of the Britishers and after the position and situation of Bengal Muslims and also the Muslims of Burdwan and Murshidabad district were well off. The children of well to do families of Bengal and also of Burdwan and Murshidabad were carefully educated.

With the expansion and consolidation of the British power, the positions of the Muslims deteriorated, their distress having become much more acute, than that of the other communities, and that they could not make an adjustment with the new state of things as the replacement of the Muslim rule by the British rule wounded the pride and self respect of the Muslims as a ruling race.
The most striking fact reveals out of the 1872 Census of Bengal, the first ever official census of population in systematic order that was done for Bengal proper was that Bengal Proper was primarily considered as the domain of the Hindus, was inhabited by a large number of Muslims which was not in expectation to anyone of Bengal. It was also revealed in the census that nearly half or 48% of the total population of Bengal proper were Muslims, the majority of whom lived in the marshy, low lying tracts of eastern Bengal. The area covering roughly the most of the part of central districts of Eastern part of Bengal specially the districts of Bogra, Rajshahi and also Pabna where the population were found to be most numerous and comprised upwards of 70% of the total population of the districts. 9

The concentration of Bengali Muslims in one particular region, where they happened to be educationally the most backward and in terms of their exposure to modern influences, eventually contributed to the degeneration of the society. 10

W.W. Hunter’s much published work, ‘The Indian Mussalmans’, formalized the thesis of a homogenous Muslim community. Baharuddin Bogra divided the Bengal Muslim society of the period into three principal social categories, namely the higher, middle and lower class. 11 The distinction was not merely on the basis of economic condition of the people but it was based on two major ethnic and cultural groups. According to Bogra, the first two classes were the descendants of the early Mohammadan conquerors and those of the lower class converts. 12

Moulvi Abdul Wali, on the other hand classified the Muslim population of Bengal into five broad categories on the basis of their supposed descent. 13
He categorized the descendants of Arabs, Mughals and Pathans or those from Central Asia who have not yet contracted marriages with any other classes at the top of the social ladder, the next group consisted of those who, although genuine sharif had contracted marriages with non-Ashraf families of their locality. The third category included those who were children of mixed marriages but succeeded in contracting marriages with the daughters of the genuine Ashrafs. The fourth category in Wali’s social classification were those ‘whose forefathers were generally non-Arabs and who emigrated into Bengal and contracted marriage with the local converts.’ The most convenient classification of the Muslim society was it’s division into four classes namely Syed, Shaikh, Mughal and Pathan.

The means to acquire education, both modern and traditional were still firmly in the hands of the Ashrafs. Their supremacy were unquestioned, the Atrap accepted it unhesitantly and only sought to emulate their social superiors, accepting their social and cultural norms and limiting their patterns of behaviour. The Census of 1901 shows that while more than 21 percent of those with claims to higher status were returned as literates, barely 2.7 percent among lower strata were so returned. Burdwan and Murshidabad also had great concentration of the immigrant Muslims (Ashrafs) among all the districts of Bengal.

The numerical representation or percentage representation in terms of Muslim population of these communities could not be estimated in terms of perfection. This could not be explained in detail because of the absence of any dependable data and partly due to observatories of definition. Khondekar Fuzli Rabbi in his study took particular care to identify many of the Ashraf families of Bengal whom he found scattered all over the country.
Khondker Fuzli Rabbi suggested that the districts of Murshidabad, Burdwan, Hoogly, Malda, Rajshahi and Bogra which had the largest concentration of aimas (lit, is subsistence or maintaince, rent-free land granted by a Muslim ruler) had the biggest concentration of immigrant families, or Ashraf Muslims. The total proportion of Muslims who claimed foreign ancestry or who were Ashrafs on and around 1872 were 1.52 percent.

The British People encouraged English Education exclusively and discouraged Muhammedan and Hindu studies because they wanted the pupil to become Christian. They looked upon their exclusive encouragement of English as a step toward conversions. One of the reasons for the Muslim backwardness in education as it had been pointed out by professor Azizur Rahaman Mallick in his book, “British Policy and Muslims in Bengal” was Muslims lack of foresight. “For the Hindus it was sentimentally much easier to switch from the study of Persian to the study of English which means forsaking one language for other”.

For the Muslims particularly the aristocrat and the urban sections of them who in the nature of things were to take initiative in educational and in other matters. It means the abandonment of what was their own language and literature for those of the foreigners who had turned the table on them. The higher class Muslims of Bengal wanted their sons and daughters to be educated in Muslim Law and National literature as Muslims considered education as Din-i-Ilm. The Muslims of Bengal never thought of educating their wards in modern education in order to interpret it as economic terms. The education reports for 1845-46 and 1846-47 shows that Muslims representation in some of the institutions and colleges was nil. The reasons as it has been pointed out by Prof. Azizur Rahaman Mallick in his book “British Policy and Muslims in Bengal” that Muslims were discouraged to take admission and the high level of admission test for entrance
examination. The creation of Hooghly Mohsin College in 1835 out of Mohsin endowment fund failed to attract a large number of Muslim students and according to memorandum of Mohsin fund of 1850 AD out of 409 students of the college only 5 were Muslims.

It has been referred in the education commission report of 1850 that small proportion of Muhammedan teachers in Government institutions, the unwillingness of Government educational institutions and offices to accept the council and cooperations of the Muslims, numerous small faults in the departmental system, the comparatively small progress in real learning by the students in the governmental schools are the factors for non-promotion of education. The practices of well-to-do families to educate their children at home are some other major factors which were responsible for backwardness of Muslims in educational front. The scenario held quite same for the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan.

Even if some of the students from Muslim community were represented in modern educational institutions they were the sons of zamindars and Aimadars and sons and daughters of the urdu speaking elites. Inspector lodge reporting on the state of education in mofussil towns in parts of eastern Bengal specially Chittagong and Bakerganj and Dacca on and around 1845 stated that bulk of the students were the sons of Zamindars, Talukdars and also from the wealthiest sections of the Hindu and Muslim Community.

Prof. Rafiuddin Ahmad in his book “Bengal Muslims: A Quest for Identify from 1816 to 1905 A.D” stated that the policy of segregate education keeping Makhtabs and Madrashas apart from main stream education was also the principal factors for the non-development of modern education among
Muslims in Bengal. The Policy of the British State Agency before 1871 was not to encourage Muhammedan system of education was also the important factor for the non-development of modern and scientific education among Muslims in Bengal. Prof. Mohar Ali criticized the British policy in his book ‘History of Muslims in Bengal’ and he stated that “the appropriation of Mohsin Trust Fund for General English Education and the neglect of the Calcutta and Hugli Madrasa were the result of Government’s changed attitude”. It was also mentioned in his book that “the affairs of Calcutta and Hugli” Madrasas were deliberately allowed to decay so as to create a situation in which the continuation with the existing courses of studies would be impracticable, thus making it both necessary and easy to recognize them”. The steps towards reformation of Calcutta and Hugly Madrasa and fear of secularization of Calcutta and Hugly Madrasa greatly antagonized the Muslims of Bengal.

Though there were lack of interests towards acceptance of modern education among Muslims in Bengal but few of the Muslim organizations including Muhammedan literary society, Central Mohammedan Association and also few educated elites specially the newly emerged Muslim elites greatly put emphasis for the promotion of modern and western education.

The newly emerged educated elites were the products of renaissance and reformation movements. The kind of work that has been done in the process of emancipation and liberalization of intellects was more of an individual than that of organizational effort. The rationalistic and humanistic ideas of renaissance was brought into Bengali Muslim mind by Abdur Rahim who was called “Dahri”.
The efforts towards reformation of ideas and beliefs that was existed in Bengali Muslim Society in the 19th Century specially in the last quarter of 19th century was greatly shown by Dilawar Hossain. Dilawar Hosain wrote many books and essays specially one book with the title "Essays on Muhammedan Social Reforms" greatly contributed in bringing ideological changes and contributed much in the emancipation of intellect", in the Bengali Muslim Society. Many of the organizations specially the literary society of Bengal popularly known as "Muslim Sahityo Samaj" and spokes magazine "Shikha” put great emphasis on emancipation of intellect.25

The most important and strong supporters of Muslim Sahiya Samaj were the new educated Muslim elites of Dhaka University and the teachers from affiliated colleges, some of the great teaches of Dacca University, Dacca intermediate College and Islamic intermediate college specially Mahmood Hasan Moula!i Abdul Hossain, Gazi Motahar Hossain, A.K. Ahmad Khan, A.F. Rahman greatly supported “Muslim Sahitya Samaj” and wrote quite a handful of articles with the issues concerning emancipation of intellects and ideal based on the principle of Mutazilaites.25 Muslim Sahitya Samaj and its members were greatly influenced by the idea of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Kamal Ataturk, Roma Ronald and Persian poet Sadi.27

The newly educated elite Muslims of Bengal and others contributed much in the development of modern education and free ideas. The newly emerged elites of Bengal though contributed much in the development of education among masses of Bengal specially Muslims of Bengal. A report prepared by “Madrasa Committee” appointed by Governor of Bengal suggested that majority of Asraf and upper Class families of Bengal were not ready to
admit children of lower classes in Calcutta Madrasa and wanted to retain it for the education of upper class Muslims.

Education specially modern and secular education was considered to be the monopoly of the sons and daughters of Zamindars. The General Report on the Public Instruction of 1871 reveals the fact that most of the parents of the students were middle class landloards and sometimes big businessmen. Even till the end of 19th Century modern education was confined to the houses of rich families. But the female education even in such families did not improve.

The position and situation of the Muslims of district Burdwan was more or less similar to that of other districts of Bengal. Though situation was not so bad as it was in Natore, Pabna, Sirajgunje and Rajshahi districts of eastern part of Bengal. The Muslim population of the Burdwan district varied from 17 to 19 per cent during the period of study. Burdwan has a long history of immigration of Muslims from Central Asia, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. But the majority of the Muslims of the district were local converts and the Ashrafs who had contracted marriages with the local converts. The Ashraf and Sharif Muslims of the district were granted Aimas, Lakharaj lands and also rent free lands by the erstwhile Nawabs of Bengal. These Muslims were concentrated in Burdwan Town, Selimabad, Kalna Town, Saspur, Ketugram, Kusumgram and also in Mongolkote. According to Adam's third report Burdwan district had well developed system of Islamic form of education. According to the same report there were altogether 93 Persian schools and 3 formal Arabic schools existed in the district during this period.

These schools were maintained by the Local Aimadars and Lakharaj land holders. The number of Persian schools that was existed in the district was far
more great in numbers than the other districts of Bengal specially Murshidabad, Rajshahi, Chittagong which had larger concentration of Muslims than Burdwan. With the change of the state system these institutions started decaying and there was decay of the Muslims in socio-economic and political fields. With the coming of the British people a lot of institutions came up with the initiative taken by Missionaries and the Maharaja of Burdwan. But until the end of 19th century, Muslims of the district could not bear the fruits of these institutions which were chiefly engaged for the promotion and propagation of modern education. Burdwan Christian Missionary High School, Burwan Raj School and Katwa Kashiram Das Institution, were the pioneers in the, promotion of secondary education in the district. The Muslims started taking interest only during the last quarter of 19th century. Even if these institutions could do something positive for the Muslims it only could do so for the upper class Muslims of the district. The lower classes specially the rural Bengali speaking Muslim masses of the district could not take the advantage of modern education. The Burdwan Raj College, the only college established for the promotion of collegiate education could do little to the Muslims in the development of higher education. It could do something only after the first decade of the twentieth century. These institutions and the initiative taken by Muslim legislators specially Md. Abul Kasem and Mr. Abul Hashim took initiative got the causes of the modern education helped, in the improvement of literacy among the Muslims in the district.

As far as literacy of the district is concerned, it was 17.30% in 1941 while average literacy among Muslims in the district was 14.8% which was marginally lower than the district average.\(^{31}\)
On and around 1910 AD, district Burdwan had 78 Makhtabs and Koran schools. The most important Koran school was Raigram Madrasa. The Makhtab at Katwa Bagane para worked as one of important centre of Islamic learning at Katwa town. The growth and the spread of modern education in the district produced many educated elites. Infact, these elites who are the product of modern education had tremendous contribution in the development of nationalized politics. Majority of the western educated Muslim elites of the district were not influenced by the separatist policies of the British Government. These elites never supported communalism and always propagated the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity. The most important and prominent leaders of the district were Maulvi Muhammed Iasin and Mr. Abul Kasem. The other important leaders of the district were Mr. Abul Hayat, Molla Zahid Ali, Abdul Qadir and Kachi Mian. The participation of the Muslims in the Civil Disobedience Movement was great specially when the leaders like Syed Sahidullah, Muhammed Iasin, and Abdus Sattar took active part. Mr. Abdus Sattar was an important worker of “Barddhaman Zila Ryot Association”. The contribution of Qazi Nazrul Islam was immense in bringing ideological changes of the Muslims of the district. With the onset of Non-Cooperation Movement all across India, the movement was spreaded also in the district with different mode of actions like picketing and jail Bhoro Andolon. Muhammed Ismail from Katwa took active part in non-cooperation movement in the district. The Muslims of the district condemned the Rowlat Bills as the most ‘Cruel and Unjust Acts’ of despotism which were sure to rouse discontent among the peaceful members of all communities.

The Great Muslim leader of Burdwan, Mr. Abul Kasem, urged the leaders and people of the district “to sink all differences and present a united front
against these ‘murderous bills’ and if these bills be passed into law “to be ready to have recourse to passive resistance”. The sense of All India Hindu-Muslim Unity was created even among the Muslims of Katwa, Kalna and Asansol Sub-divisions.

In spite of Government opposition and obstructions, a fairly complete hartal was observed at Burdwan. The kind of atmosphere that was created in the district provided a huge platform for peace, amity and tranquility within the society. The Muslims of the district greatly took part in electoral process in the district board and also in local boards. The representation of the Muslims in the local and village self-government addressed the issues, concerned with several socio-economic problems. The Muslims of the district, believed that as because Muslims were generally backward in economic field, the better representation of the Muslims in the self-Governing institutions would present any further financial pressure on the poor of the community. This was further exempted by a motion brought to amend the Bengal Village Self-Government Act.

Abul Kasem and other political leaders talked much about the rights of the ryots, reduction of taxes and increase in the number of Muslim holidays through their representation in Bengal Legislative Council from Burdwan division but as far as female franchise is concerned Mr. Kasem opposed the amendment motion brought to clause 3 of the proposed Bengal village Self Government (Amendment) bill of 1934 in which Government desired to extend the voting rights to the women in case of the election of Union Boards.

Murshidabad is one of the Muslim majority districts of western part of Bengal which had suffered the most in terms of backwardness in education. During the early part of 19th century, the position and situation of the Muslims of
Murshidabad district specially Murshidabad town, Lalbagh, Roshnaiganj were far more better than any parts of Bengal. The position and situation of the Muslims of Murshidabad deteriorated in socio-economic and political front due to the loss of powers of Bengal Nawabate of Bengal in Murshidabad. The position and situation of education in Murshidabad during the first half of 19th century was described by Mr. William Adam in his third report. The third report of Mr. William Adam provides the information that there were well developed system of indigenous vernacular education and well developed system of Islamic form of education specially Persian and Arabic schools. The third report of William Adam provides the information that there were altogether 62 Bengali vernacular schools, 5 Hindi schools, 24 Sanskrit schools, 17 Persian schools and 2 Arabic and 2 English schools existed in the district. The Muslim representation in Bengali vernacular schools in the district, on and around 18355 was low as out total 1081 students in these schools, 82 students were Msulims.39

As far as primary and indigenous education were concerned before 1844 AD, nothing substantial steps were taken for the development of elementary and primary education. It is only after 1844 AD, Lord Hardinge, the then Governor General brought a resolution to start Government Primary Schools in the district.40 Hardinge plan for education though proved to be successful as it produced an ideal atmosphere for the development of vernacular education in the district.41 Though Wood’s Despatch talked much about the development of primary secondary levels of education but it could do little for the improvement of vernacular education.42 The position of the elementary vernacular education did not improve even during 1860s.
Infact for the promotion of vernacular and elementary education, a lot of grant-in-aid schools were established in the district on and around 1856. The other grant-in-aid indigenous schools were established in the district in 1864.\textsuperscript{43}

Annual Administrative report of 1874-75 provides an insight into the number of students in the all kinds of institutions during the period. The decline of the number of students in different educational institutions had been explained by the fact that the inflation of 1877-78 AD, the floods of 1879-80, the overflow of Padma, Bhairav and Bhagirathi rivers caused havoc in the economic condition of the district. In 1901, Murshidabad became the Muslim majority district. The official census of 1911 provides the information that 52.9\% of the population of the district were Muslims.\textsuperscript{44} The most striking figure reveals out of the fact that in 1911, 9\% of the Hindus whereas 3\% of the Muslims were literates in the district.\textsuperscript{45}

The literacy of the district was 2.81\% in 1931.\textsuperscript{46} The most important Centre of learning for the Muslims during the second half of twentieth century was Nizamat College of Murshidabad. Nizamat College was chiefly engaged in promotion of education among the sons of Nawabate family members of the Murshidabad town.

The performance of the students from Nawabate family was not good and the Nizamat College could do little for the promotion of education among the family members of the Nawabs of Murshidabad. During the mid of 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Krishnath College was established for the promotion of modern and scientific education among the inhabitants of Murshidabad. During the first half of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Muslims participation in the matter of education in the district was satisfactory specially in Arts department.
The development of education had tremendous contribution in the development of nationalized politics in the district and it produced a common platform for Hindu-Muslim unity within the district. The people of different parts of Murshidabad district actively took part in antipartition and Swadeshi Movement. The students of Nawab High School specially Muslim students observed morning for 5 days from the 6th September to 8th September, 1905 in protest against the partition of Bengal. Nawab Wasif Ali Mirza played great role in maintaining communal harmony within the district. Khilafat Movement had tremendous effect in the minds of the Muslims of the district. Maulvi of Kachubari and Moulavi Abdul Aziz were two of the great leaders of the district who took active part in the promotion of Khilafat and non-cooperation movement within the district Volunteers of the non-cooepration movement were entrusted with the work of spreading spinning wheels and establishment of cottage industry. Muslim legislators of the district specially Abdus Samad who represented Murshidabad in Bengal Legislative Council demanded inclusion of a Muslim member in Education through nomination for the betterment of education among Muslims in Murshidabad. The development of modern education produced consciousness among Muslims in all across Bengal and this led to the rise of nationalized politics.

The Muslim owned periodicals specially Masik Muhammadi greatly criticized the British rule and put forwarded the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity for long term struggle. The Swadeshi and boycott movement could not wholly rouse the sentiments of the larger section of Muslim masses is well explained by Rabindranath Tagore in his Presidential speech of the Bengal provincial conference of Pabna in 1906. The Muslims were also serious for Khilafat cause and in 1919, Khilafat Non Cooperation Movement was spreaded all across
Bengal. Boycott and hartal were observed as the plan of actions during non-cooperation movement.

The labourers, tenants and ryots were organized for a non-violent non-cooperation against British Rule. A lot of National Schools, Colleges and Madrasas were established and the Government run schools, colleges were boycotted. Modern education also helped in rising consciousness and exercising rights of the Muslims. The Muslims of Bengal were very anxious of securing employment in executive, subordinate and lower subordinate posts. The Muslim legislators of Bengal demanded special reservation of seats in police services and subordinate services. The Muslim legislators specially Mr. Abul Kasam demanded reservation of certain number of seats in local bodies, district boards and in different ministerial offices. The education specially modern, technical, vocational and professional education got developed among Muslims during last decades of first half of 20th century.
References

2. Bose, N.S., *The Indian Awakening*.

3. Ibid.

4. Zamindars were larger or large landed aristocracies.

5. Aimadars: Those were landed aristocracies of eastern Bengal who were granted Aima (rent free land) on and around Ajoy-Bhagirathi rivers of western part of Bengal.

6. Permanent settlement – Revenue settlement on the basis of 10 year time period done by Lord Cornwallis.


8. Education Commission Report (1882), The Education Commission had considered the “racial pride, a memory of bygone superiority and lost power” as major factors behind Muslim Indifference to English Education, p. 483.


12. Ibid.


14. Ibid.

16. Census of India (1901), viii, Subsidiary Table V, pp. 305 (The figures are for the Presidency of Bengal).


18. Ibid.


21. Ibid.

22. General Committee of Public Instruction, 1845-86, App. 4, pp. cl-cii.


27. Ibid.


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Census of India, 1941, published by the Manager of Publication, Delhi, p. 45.

33. Ibid.

34. ‘Chirovidhrohi Deshnayak’, Amlesh Tripathi, Anandabazar Patrika, 23rd February, 1996.

35. Ibid.

36. The Mussalman, 14 February, 1919


40. General Department, Education Branch, No. 64, 31 August 1857, No. 20, 26 September 1848, No. 4, 11th May, 1849.

41. General Department, Education Branch No. 79, March, 1885, p. 57.


44. Census of India, 1911-12, District Murshidabad.

45. Census of India, 1911-12, District Murshidabad.

46. Census of India, 1931-32, District Murshidabad

47. ‘Amrita Bazar Patrika’, dated 8th September, 1905.