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## **Arabic Studies in North Bengal: Origin and Development**

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### **Abstract**

*Entire Bengal came under Muslim rule long after the invasion, made by Bakhtyar Khalji. North Bengal was such a region which came first under the Muslim rule. Gour, Pandua, Ekdala and Devicote of North Bengal had been the capital cities as well as the centres of Muslim arts and culture for centuries. Arabic was the leading language and medium of higher education of that time. So, Arabic studies started with the establishment of first madrasah by Bakhtyar Khalji at Gour. Later on many institutions were established in the form of makhtabs, khankahs and madrasahs in different parts of Bengal. During the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the British period most of the traditional institutions were destroyed due to different policies made by the British rulers. Later on reformation of madrasah education as well as Arabic studies started. After the independence of India Arabic studies has got its momentum got its momentum and not confined in makhtabs and madrasahs. It has entered the arena of modern schools, colleges and universities.*

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The Arabs had the trade relations with the Indians since the ancient time. Even in the pre-Islamic era they used to visit the Malabar Coasts and Sri Lanka for their trade and commerce. After the emergence of Islam in the Arab peninsula, the Arab Muslims travelled various parts of the world for their mission of preaching Islam. The Arab merchants and travelers became the bearer of new religion along with their Arabic language and began to preach Islam wherever they went. At the same time they led political invasion in the different parts of the world. One can see three phases in the spread of Muslim rule into the Indian sub-continent. The first phase is the conquest of Sind and Multan by Muhammad bin Al Qasim in 712 A.D. In the second phase Amir Sabuktigin and his son Sultan Mahmud repeatedly invaded India but he did not integrate any place except Lahore to his Sultanate of Ghazni. The third phase started with the battle of Tarain when Muhammad Ghuri defeated Prithviraj Chauhan and established his Indian kingdom and made Delhi his capital. This third phase of conquest continued unabated until the whole of the sub- continent came under Muslim rule. The Bengal conquest of Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji is a continuation of this third phase. Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji defeated Laxman Sen and established his kingdom with Gour as capital in 1205 A.D. and with a very short time the Muslim power extended to the other parts of Bengal. After this victory, Bengal became familiar with the Muslims and

their culture as well as Arabic language. Since then Arabic studies is functioning in Bengal. The term 'North Bengal' is used for the northern part of West Bengal which is separated by the river Ganges from the South Bengal. It comprises of seven districts: Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Coochbehar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda. This paper is devoted to discuss the origin and development of Arabic studies in North Bengal.

**Arabic Studies in North Bengal during the Muslim Period:** Since the beginning of Islam, the Muslims had given priority for acquisition of knowledge and learning because of the instruction of holy Quran and Prophet Muhammad. The revelation of Quran started with the word *Iqra* or read<sup>i</sup>. Prophet Muhammad announced that he had been sent as a teacher for whole mankind.<sup>ii</sup> He also said that seeking knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim men and women<sup>iii</sup> and its acquisition and collection are considered to be desirable from whatever source it may be achieved.<sup>iv</sup>

In the initial stage of Islam, mosques were considered to be the main centre for education along with their original purpose as places of prayers to Allah. In the later periods madrasahs were set up in the towns, cities and other important places under the patronage of the rulers, nobles and well-to-do persons for imparting knowledge in the different branches of education as well as Islamic sciences. The Muslim conquerors carried with them the tradition of their predecessors to the countries conquered or ruled by them. Bengal is not an exception in this respect. The Khalji Turks who conquered the Lakhnawati kingdom of Laksmāna Sena also brought with them the rich cultural heritage of their own country to Bengal.

Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji, the first Muslim ruler of Bengal, established mosques and educational institutions in the beginning year of his reign. Minhaj said that after making Lakhnawati as capital, Bakhtyar Khalji built mosques, madrasahs and *khankahs*<sup>v</sup>. Minhaj also praised Sultan Ghiyas-ud- din Iwaj Khalji for building a number of *Jami* and other mosques<sup>vi</sup>. The later Muslim rulers also followed their predecessors and established a series of mosques, madrasahs and *khankahs* in different parts of Bengal.

Besides the capital Lakhnawati, Dewkut, Narkuti identified with Natore (presently in Bangladesh) and Madisa Santush identified with Mahisantosh (presently in Bangladesh), Dhaka, and Murshidabad grew as administrative units in the early period. From the accounts of *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* it is reasonable to note that all these places had educational institutions in the forms of mosques, madrasahs and *khanqahs* to impart learning to the people of their respective localities. Gradually in the successive periods Gour, Pandua, Ikdala, Qasbah Tabrizabad, Deotala,<sup>vii</sup> devikot (presently in Uttar Dinajpur), Ghoraghat (presently in Bangladesh), Satgaon (presently in Bangladesh), Sunargaon (presently in Bangladesh) and Chatgaon (modern Chittagong of Bangladesh) seem to have grown as cities and urban settlements. These places definitely provided educational facilities for the people of their respective areas.<sup>viii</sup> Due to non-existence of any structural complex it is not possible, in the long lapse of time, to locate madrasahs definitely in particular places. One

may trace some madrasahs or institutions of learning from the epigraphs and literary sources.

On inscriptional evidence it is held that a madrasah was built at Triveni in Hoogly district of West Bengal in the reign of Rukn al-Din Kay-ka'us (1291-1301 AD) under the patronage of Qadi Nasir in 698 AH/1298 AD<sup>ix</sup>. Another epigraph inserted in the northern side of Zafar Khan's tomb at Triveni reveals the fact that a madrasah known as *Dar al-Khayrat* or the house of benevolence was built in the same locality during the reign of Shams al-Din Firuz Shah (1301-1322 AD) of Bengal under the order of Khan Jahan Zafar Khan in 713 AH/1313 AD.<sup>x</sup>

An inscription of the reign of Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah (1474-1481 AD) was procured from the debris of Darasbari mosque<sup>xi</sup>. It records the erection of a *Jami* mosque by the sultan in 884 AH/1479 AD<sup>xii</sup>. The plan of the Darasbari Mosque conforms to it's being a *Jami* mosque. As it is called Darasbari by the local people, it is, therefore, possible that arrangement for education was provided in the precincts of the mosque. A few yards away on the east side of the mosque had been unearthed the site of a structural complex which could be taken for a madrasah building on the evidence of an inscription discovered from its debris in 1973. It can be presumed that Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah had started the construction of a *Jami* mosque with the provision of arrangement for learning and a separate madrasah in the same locality which is known today as Darasbari.<sup>xiii</sup> The *Jami*' mosque was completed in 884 AH/1479 AD while the madrasah building was finally completed in the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah in 909AH/1503-04 AD.<sup>xiv</sup>

Another epigraph of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah (1493-1519 AD) dated 1<sup>st</sup> Ramadan AH 907/10th March, 1502 AD<sup>xv</sup> records in clear term the erection of a madrasah by the order of the sultan. The inscription slab was found by Westmacott on the enclosure wall of a little mosque, north-west of English Bazar police station in the district of Malda, but no trace of a madrasah could be found nearby. It is, therefore, probable that the epigraph was taken to that place from somewhere else. Westmacott and Blochmann are of the opinion that the slab may have belonged to some madrasah, the ruins of which exist in Gour.<sup>xvi</sup> Stapleton, on the other hand, suggests that the inscription slab must have been brought from some madrasah either that at Darasbari or that at Belbari.<sup>xvii</sup> It is mentioned above that the madrasah of Darasbari was stated in the reign of Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah and was completed in the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah in 909 A.H./1503-04 AD as mentioned in the inscription. So this madrasah could be located at Belbari at Gour.<sup>xviii</sup>

The Navagrama inscriptions of Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah (1442-1459AD) dated AH 858/1454 AD indicates the existence of an academy for learning in the Khittah Simlabad<sup>xix</sup>. Though the contents of the epigraph do not clearly mention the existence of a madrasah but the use of terms *ulama* (teachers) and *muta'allimun* (students) indicate the existence of a madrasah in that area. The epigraph, therefore, indirectly indicates the establishment of a mosque and madrasah as separate institutions in that administrative unit. On the evidence of this inscription one may presume that a madrasah was set up in the headquarters of Khittah

Simlabad during the reign of sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah of Bengal by Ulugh Rahim Khan, the executive head of that administrative unit.<sup>xx</sup>

A madrasah seems to have been built at Bagha<sup>xxi</sup> in the *Husayn Shahi* period. An epigraph which was fixed above the central doorway of the mosque at Bagha, records the erection of this *Jami* mosque and a madrasah by sultan Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah (1519-1531 AD) in AH 930/1523-24 AD.<sup>xxii</sup>

Mawlana Taqi al-Din Arabi established an educational institution at Mahisantosh (presently in Rajshahi district of Bangladesh) possibly in the middle of the 13th century A.D.<sup>xxiii</sup>. In the successive periods of Bengal Sultanate this place was further developed and patronized by the Muslim rulers of Bengal. This madrasah attracted students from other parts of this subcontinent.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Pandua was one of the capital city as well as centre of spiritual and cultural activities of the eminent sages and *sufis* of the Muslim period. The *khanqahs* of the *masha'ikh* at Pandua provided education for the people of the locality. In this respect the name of Hadrat Nur Qutb Alam can be mentioned. He was an eminent *sufi* of the time. He built a great madrasah and a *maristan* or a hospital at Pandua. Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah made land-grant for these institutions.<sup>xxv</sup>

It has been mentioned earlier that mosques were one of the major unit of learning during the Muslim rule. Usually pupils took their primary education from maktabas and maktabas were run by the *Imam* of the mosques. This system of education is also found during the present age in the Muslim locality. The historical records prove that hundred of mosques were established during the Muslim reign in the Indian sub-continent in general and Bengal in particular. One can mention the names of such mosques which were established in North Bengal during the Muslim rule. Great Golden Mosque is one of them. It was established by Sultan Nasrat Shah in 1526 AD. It is situated in the ancient city of Gour 10 miles away from Malda Town<sup>xxvi</sup>. The Lattan Mosque is another one. It was established during the reign of Usuf Shah in Gour in 1475 AD<sup>xxvii</sup>. Small Golden Mosque was built during the reign of Alauddin Husain Shah. It is in the southern corner of Gour<sup>xxviii</sup>. Gunmant Mosque was erected in 1484 AD in Gour less than half a mile to the west of the Lattan Mosque<sup>xxix</sup>. Jahaniyan Mosque was established in the ancient city of Gour in 1538 AD during reign of Ghiyasuddin Muhammad Shah<sup>xxx</sup>. Apart from these there are also some mosques such as Chamkatti Mosque<sup>xxxi</sup> Pithawali Moque<sup>xxxii</sup>, Rajbibi Mosque<sup>xxxiii</sup>, Darasbari Mosque<sup>xxxiv</sup> etc. in the ancient city of Gour. Pandua was another ancient capital of Bengal. One can mention the names of some mosques, situated at Pandua. The Adiana Mosque was most remarkable mosque during the Sultanate period in Bengal. It was erected by Sikandar Shah between 1364 and 1374 A D at Pandua<sup>xxxv</sup>. The Jami Mosque of Pandua was erected by sultan Alauddin Ali shah in 1342 AD<sup>xxxvi</sup> and repaired by Shah Niamatullah of Firojpur, Gour in 1664 A D<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Here it can be noted that the Khankah of Shah Jalal was adjacent to this mosque<sup>xxxviii</sup>. Qutub Shahi Mosque is another important mosque of Pandua which was built in 1582 AD<sup>xxxix</sup>. From the historical record of the Muslim period in Bengal one can find that

the mosques had played a vital role for the spread of education. So it is presumed that these mosques mentioned above must have had educational facilities in their premises.

It has been tried to give a brief description of important madrasahs and educational seminaries located in North Bengal from the epigraphic, literary and other sources. This leads one to realize that madrasahs and educational seminaries were opened in almost all the administrative headquarters of Bengal in the Muslim period either by the Muslim rulers, their deputies or by the individual *sufi*. It is already mentioned before that North Bengal was advanced in every section including education than any other parts of undivided Bengal because the two capital cities i.e. Gour and Pandua were situated in North Bengal. So it is presumed that there were many educational institutions in the name of mosques, *maktabs*, madrasahs and *khankas* during the Muslim period in North Bengal. But it is very difficult to determine the content and course of education accurately in the educational institutions mentioned above in the Muslim period. Analyzing the materials from various sources, one may give some ideas about course curricula which were followed in those institutions. The Muslim children, as beginners, started their primary course in the *maktabs* and these *maktabs* were generally attached to the mosques. Qur'an, Hadith and *Fiqh* formed the main subjects of study in the *maktabs* and mosques of Bengal at the primary level. Arabic being the language of the Qur'an should have been learnt by the students. It can be mentioned that Persian, being the court language, was similarly given importance for study in the *maktabs* and mosques in the elementary courses.<sup>xi</sup>

The students after completion of the primary education in the *maktabs* and mosques would proceed to the madrasahs for higher education. The madrasahs provided higher education for the advanced students. Advanced learning would, no doubt, be a continuation of the primary education. It is, therefore, possible that an analytical study of the Qur'an and Hadith formed the principal part of the advanced courses. *Tafsir* of the Qur'an and *Tashrih* of the Hadith belonged to this category. The madrasah founded and maintained by Ghiyath al-Din A'zam Shah (1392-1410 AD.), a Bengal sultan in 813 AH/1410-11 AD at al-Makkah near Umm-i-Hani gate provided teaching for the students of four schools of Muslim jurisprudence.<sup>xii</sup> One may, therefore, come to this conclusion that an advanced study of *fiqh* also formed one of the main subjects of study in the madrasahs of Bengal. Besides these subjects, other sciences such as logic, arithmetic, medicine, alchemy, geometry, astronomy and others were also taught in the madrasahs. Though of later period, the statement of Abu'l Fadl confirms this. He wrote;

Every boy ought to read books on morals, arithmetic, agriculture, mensuration, geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household matters, government rules, medicine, logic, higher mathematics, science and history, all of which may gradually be acquired.<sup>xiii</sup>

The madrasahs for advanced studies kept provisions for all these subjects for the students. But they were not required to study each and every subject. There had been different grades of madrasahs on the basis of the subjects taught in them.

As for the cultivation of Arabic studies few points are also mentioned here for consideration. Hundreds of epigraphs are found in North Bengal. Most of them are incised in Arabic. Grammatical mistakes are hardly seen in the text of the epigraphs. Quotations from the verses of the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet in the epigraphs prove the fact that learned persons in these religious sciences were available in Bengal.<sup>xliii</sup> The madrasahs and the educational institutions of Bengal, as mentioned above, bear witness to the existence of *ulama* who had profound knowledge in Arabic language and Islamic sciences. The courses taught in the madrasahs laid emphasis on Arabic language and literature. The translation of *Amritkund* by Qazi Rukn al-Din Samarqandi in Arabic at the capital Lakhnawati in the time of ‘Ala al-Din’ Ali Mardan Khalji and the transcription of *Sahih al-Bukhari* by Muhammad b. Yazdan Bakhsh in three volumes at Ikdalah in the time of ‘Ala al-Din Husayn Shah lead one to resume that Arabic study was encouraged under Muslim rule in Bengal.<sup>xliiv</sup> Apart from this it may also be mentioned here that Islam was the state religion during the Muslim rule in Bengal so, the administration of Bengal was to be run according to the *Shariah*. The *Diwan al-Qaza* or the Department of Justice testifies to the fact that administration of Muslim Bengal like other Muslim countries was being run broadly on the basis of the *Shariah*. The sources of Muslim law are four that are al-Quran, al-Hadith, *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. The persons in charge of the department of justice and other important departments of the government were expected to achieve proficiency in Arabic. Otherwise they would not understand properly the implication and interpretation of laws as embodied in the holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.<sup>xlv</sup> This also indicates to the fact that the educational institution imparts Arabic studies during the Muslim Period in Bengal. The system of education and the course curricula of the madrasahs were so standard that many foreigners praised these. Scottish Missionary William Adam highly appreciated the standard of Arabic higher education introduced during the Muslim period in his report. He said that the whole of the curricula of Arabic madrasah was incorporated very precisely, with the research based materials of metaphysic to achieve high quality of knowledge for the students<sup>xlvi</sup>. British Scholar Sleeman also highly appreciated higher education of Muslims and said that the manner in which the advancement of education that happened among the Indian Muslims happened in only a few communities of the world. They were getting their instructions through Arabic and Persian medium as were our students through Greek and Latin<sup>xlvii</sup>.

From the above discussion it is cleared that maktabs, mosques, madrasahs and other educational seminaries were established in various parts of Bengal. These seminaries had opened the door of education for all. This step also facilitated the Hindus, irrespective of their status in the society. The Persian was the court language. So the job seeking people either Hindus or Muslims needed to get proficiency in Persian study. Hence it seems probable that some maktabs or schools might have provided arrangement for teaching Persian to the Hindus. They might have been, therefore, allowed to enter into these madrasahs to study Persian as well as Arabic.<sup>xlviii</sup> In this context the name of Raja Rammohon Roy, great social reformer of India can be mentioned. He achieved proficiency in both the Arabic and Persian languages.<sup>xlix</sup> This leads one to realize that madrasah

education as well as Arabic studies was not confined within the Muslims. A large number Hindus took part in this educational system.

In this connection the remark of Adam's report is very important. It says;

The Persian schools are nearly as much frequented by Hindus as by Mohammadans, for the Persian language is considered as a requisite accomplishment for every gentleman, and it is absolutely necessary for those who are candidates for offices in the court of law.<sup>1</sup>

If this was their attitude to Persian education in the 19th century under British colonial domination, it is reasonable to mention that during Muslim rule the Hindus received Persian education in greater number from the Maulavis in the maktabas at the primary level to equip themselves for the jobs.

From the above discussion it is presumed that *maktabas*, mosques, madrasahs and other educational seminaries were established in a large number in Bengal in general and North Bengal in particular. These seminaries had played an important role for the spread of education. Persian was the court language. So Persian must be taught in that time but Arabic was not far behind. The system of education proves that Arabic studies began at the initial period of the Sultanate period. This also indicates to this fact that Arabic language was given much importance for a subject of study in North Bengal.

**Arabic Studies in North Bengal during the British Period:** British Period started in India in general and Bengal in particular with the defeat of Siraj ud-Doula in the battle of Plassey in 1757 AD. The British in the form of East India Company got her supremacy over Bengal, Behar and Orissa after that victory and gradually made her control over the other parts of India within half a century. The British ruled India up to 1947 AD. So the term 'British Period' signifies the time between 1757 and 1947 AD. The British ruled India about two hundred years. On the cessation of political power many changes had been happened during the British period. The economic conditions of people of Bengal in general and Muslim in particular became worst and it affected the traditional education system because the educational institutions were normally run by the Muslim rulers, land lords, amirs and courtiers. During the British period Muslim ruler amirs, courtiers and nobles lost the administrative and economic support and they faced great difficulty even for their livelihood. As a result, the source of income of the madrasahs and maktabas narrowed and at last these institutions ruined. W. W. Hunter said, "The first of them, the Army, is now completely closed. No Muhammadan gentleman of birth can enter our Regiment"<sup>li</sup>. According to Hunter the second support of the muslim aristocracy was the collection of the land revenue<sup>lii</sup>. In-fact most of the zamidar<sup>liii</sup> (landlord) were Muslim nobilities. The British introduced various policies to set aside zamindari (landlordship) of the Muslims. The Permanent settlement introduced by Cornwallish was the last strike to snatch the zamindari (land lordship) from the Muslim. It was noticed by W.W.Hunter and he wrote;

The Permanent Settlement, However, consummated rather than introduced this change. It was in another respect that it most seriously damaged the position of the great Muhamadan houses<sup>liv</sup>

W. W. Hunter further said;

With regard, therefore, to the first two great sources of Muhammadan wealth, viz. the Army and the higher administration of the revenues, we had good reasons for what we did, but our action has brought ruin upon Muhammadan Houses of Bengal. We shut the Musalman aristocracy out of the army because their expulsion was necessary to our safety<sup>lv</sup>. This was the mentality of the British against the Muslim at that time. As a result, Muslim nobility, Amir, land lord etc. were fully destroyed.

The condition of the farmers and the weavers were worse than the other Muslim families. Overall the socio – economic condition of the Muslim of Bengal became very bad. W. W. Hunter rightly said, “The Province (Bengal) with which I am best acquainted, and in which, so far as I can learn, the Muhammadans have suffered most severely under the British Rule”<sup>lvi</sup>.

During the Muslim period maktabas and madrasahs were run by the Muslim rulers, land lords and well to do persons. The other source was tax free properties (lakheraj). Willim Adam said that every landlord recruited teachers for the learning of the neighbouring poor students. There was not a single landlord or headman of the village who did not recruit any teacher for learning of the students<sup>lvii</sup>. W .W. Hunter also said; “Every great Musalman House in Bengal maintained a scholastic establishment in which its sons ant its poorer neighbours received an education free of expense”<sup>lviii</sup>. But on the cessation of political power, the Muslim rulers, amirs, courtiers and nobles lost the administrative and economic support and as a result the source of income for the maktabas and madrasahs narrowed and that education system faced great difficulty and was ruined. In this context, W. W. Hunter said “Hundreds of ancient families were ruined, and the education system of the Musalmans, which was almost entirely maintained by rent-free grants, received its death-blow”<sup>lix</sup> Besides Pandit Jawaherlal Nehru rightly said;

When the British seized power in Bengal, there were a very large number of muafis that is tax-free grants of land. A vast number of elementary schools of the old type subsisted on them, as well as some institutions for higher education... the muafis were resumed and the old holders were ejected, and the schools and colleges lost their endowments and a vast number of teachers and others connected with them were thrown out of employment.<sup>lx</sup>

From the above discussion it is evident that in the first half of the British period the traditional institution that is maktabas and madrasahs which imparted Arabic studies were destroyed due to lack of fund. At the same time, Muslim had to face many formidable changes along with the general animosity of the British rulers. They had to counter the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries. The *Ulema* and the masses rose to the occasion and established a series of madrasahs throughout the country. In this regard the



name of Darul Uloom, Deoband (1866), Mazahirul Uloom, Shaharanpur(1866), Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema Lucknow(1994) and Madrasah Baqiatal Salehat, Vellore (1883) can be mentioned. Though late, Bengal was not far behind. A series of madrasahs were established in Bengal such as Jamia Mazharul Uloom Batna (1889) Malda, Madrasah Sumaiya al-Islamia (1904) Malda, Haripur Jamia Islamia (1905) Malda, Madrasah Rahmania Majlispur (1905) Uttar Dinajpur, Madrasah Darul Uloom Budhia (1907) Malda Darul Uloom Husainia Khuniagachh Jatigachh (1910) Uttar Dinajpur, Al-jamiatul Arabia Ahmadiya Kasibari (1911) Uttar Dinajpur, Darul Uloom Dhantola (1911) Uttar Dinajpur, Jamia Faizia Haqqania (1913) Malda, Rathinathpur Islamia Madrasah Imdadul Quran (1938) Dakshin Dinajpur, Madrasah Darul Uloom Husainia (1947) Coochbehar etc.

Persian language was in existence till 7th March on 1835 in the Law Court it was unavoidable for the Company Government to produce intellectuals in Persian language. Under this condition, in 1780, the Governor General Warren Hastings established the “Calcutta Madrasah” for the first time on its own expenditure based on appeal raised by a group of distinguished Muslims.

The necessity of madrasah education for government officials ceased when English was declared as the language of law courts in 1835 and as the medium of instruction in place of Persian in 1837. The East India Company in this country wanted to form a servile and docile class from amongst its people, who would only look to their vested interests. During this time tremendous debate and discussions initiated in respect of the future of such education. The Government stopped financial help for madrasah education in all levels after it declared English as the medium of instruction and recommendations from different quarters were raised to stop Persian education. Besides, thousands of Muslims youths, having had madrasah education, became unemployed after English had become the state language and a psychology of non-cooperation with the Government developed in the mind of those youths.

In 1854, in the Wood’s Despatch it was recommended to affiliate the eminent madrasahs of the country with the universities, but Calcutta University did not take madrasahs under its control. As a result, madrasah education was cornered again and the Muslims were deprived of modern higher education for a long time.

At last the New Scheme of Madrasah Education was introduced in 1915 by the initiatives of Moulana Abu Nasar Mohammad Waheed, I.E.S., the renowned educationist and administrator and the then Principal of Dacca Senior Madrasah. In this system English, science and social science were included along with Arabic and Islamic Studies. Later the term ‘the New Scheme of Madrasah Education’ had been changed to High Madrasah Education System. But the Government did not affiliate the Calcutta Madrasah in ‘New Scheme Madrasah Course’. Hence the followers of Calcutta Madrasah course were identified as the ‘Old Scheme Madrasah’.

The report of the Director of Public Instruction (1934-35 & 1941-42) that in 1934-35 the numbers of new scheme course high and junior madrasahs recognized by the Bengal

Government were 583 and total numbers of students were 57,169<sup>lxi</sup>. In 1941-42 the numerical figure of madrasah increased to 724 and students to 80,540<sup>lxii</sup>. Simultaneously, the prosperity of Old Scheme of madrasah education survived in a competitive way with the new scheme. As per report of the Director the numerical figure of old scheme madrasahs, followers of Calcutta Madrasah, was 130 and of their students were 10,252 in 1934-35<sup>lxiii</sup>. During 1941-42 the numbers of old scheme madrasahs and students were 309 and 22,209, respectively<sup>lxiv</sup>. As far as North Bengal is concerned there were 11 madrasahs of New Scheme and 2 madrasahs of Old Scheme during the British period<sup>lxv</sup>.

For the development of madrasah education many boards are formed such as the East Bengal Secondary Education Board (1921), the Board of Islamic Intermediate and Secondary Education Dacca for High Madrasah Education (1922) and the Central Madrasah Examination Board for Senior Madrasah Education (1927). These boards also conducted the Madrasah Examinations till 1947 AD. As per recommendation of the Moazzamuddin Committee (1946), the Central Madrasah Examination Board was converted to the Madrasah Education Board, Bengal and after the independence of India it was renamed as the West Bengal Madrasah Education Board in 1950 AD. Once again in 1994, the Board had been given the status of a statutory autonomous body by passing the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education Act 1994 (West Bengal Act, XXXIX of 1994) in the West Bengal State Legislature<sup>lxvi</sup>.

From the above discussion it is evident that in the first half of the British period the traditional institution that is makhtabs and madrasahs which imparted Arabic studies were destroyed due to lack of fund. But in the second half of the British period especially after the Sipoy Mutiny (1857) many madrasahs were established in new form throughout India. Bengal was not an exception. A series of madrasah were established in Bengal. In case of north Bengal, district of Malda and Uttar Dinajpur were quite advance than the other districts. On the other hand British government also established senior and high madrasahs in the form of Old and New Scheme. So at the end of the British period madrasah education as well as Arabic studies got momentum in its development.

**Arabic Studies in North Bengal after the Independence of India:** India got her freedom from the British rule in 1947. After the independence of India one can see a change in every respect of life such as agriculture, industry, education, science and technology etc. Many schools, colleges and universities were established to speed up the education of the nation. Besides many madrasahs government aided and non-aided were also established. It has been earlier mentioned that Government of West Bengal has formed West Bengal Madrasah Education Board in 1950 AD. Once again in 1994, the Board had been given the status of a statutory autonomous body by passing the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education Act 1994 (West Bengal Act, XXXIX of 1994) in the West Bengal State Legislature<sup>lxvii</sup>. A series of high and senior madrasahs have been established in West Bengal in general and North Bengal in particular. At the same time hundreds of Qaumi madrasahs have been established in North Bengal. In British period high madrasahs were called as new scheme madrasahs and senior madrasah were called as old scheme madrasahs. Arabic studies were not

confined only in madrasahs. There are many government and government aided schools colleges and university where one can learn Arabic language and literature. Here it may be mentioned different types of institutions which impart the learning of Arabic language and literature.

**Arabic Studies in High and Higher Secondary School:** At high school level Arabic is taught in classes seven and eight as third language. At the same time Sanskrit is also taught as third language. Arabic and Sanskrit teachers are appointed for this purpose. Students may choose either Arabic or Sanskrit as their third language. School management has the right to opt Arabic or Sanskrit or both the language for classes seven and eight. So it can be said that Arabic is taught as an optional subject. At higher secondary level Arabic is also included by the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education. Here Arabic is taught as a classical language and as an optional subject. Coming from any stream and without having a basic knowledge of Arabic, students may opt for Arabic as their main subject in higher secondary course.

**Arabic studies in High Madrasah Education System:** Two types of high madrasahs are found in West Bengal. The madrasah running from class V to class VIII are called Junior High madrasah, the madrasah running from class V to class XII are called High madrasah. The syllabus and subjects taught in high madrasahs are same as that of school education system except two subjects that are Arabic language and Islam *Parichay* (Islamic theology). The certificate of High Madrasah Examination (class 10th standard) is equivalent to *Madhyamik Pariksha* of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and is recognized at the national level. Students passing out from here are not only eligible for admission to all Higher Secondary level schools throughout the country but also may go for any stream they like. When classes eleven and twelve are added to any high madrasah, it becomes higher secondary madrasah. Then the upgraded madrasahs follow the syllabus of West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education for higher secondary course and Arabic becomes an optional subject at higher secondary level as it exists in the higher secondary schools.<sup>lxviii</sup> There are 123 madrasahs in high madrasah education system in North Bengal. 92 out of 123 madrasahs are high madrasahs and 31 are junior high madrasahs<sup>lxix</sup>.

**Arabic studies in Senior Madrasah Education System:** Two types of senior madrasahs are found. The senior madrasahs which are running from class I to class X are called *Alim* madrasahs and the madrasahs from class I to class XII are called *Fazil* madrasahs. In addition to Arabic and Islamic Theology (Hadith, Tafsir and Fiqh) Language, Social Science & Science subjects like Bengali / Urdu, English, Mathematics, Life Science, Physical Science, History and Geography are also taught at *Alim* level (10th class standard). At *Fazil* level (12<sup>th</sup> standard) Bengali/Urdu, English, Arabic and Theology are compulsory subjects. The students are also offered the opportunities to choose two elective subjects from social science group available in the concerned madrasah<sup>lxx</sup>.

The class 10th level examination in Senior Madrasah Education System namely *Alim* examination is also equivalent to *Madhyamik Pariksha* of West Bengal Board of Secondary

Education. The students pass out from these senior madrasahs may opt for Higher Secondary level education in any higher Secondary schools under West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education and they may continue their higher studies in Senior Madrasah Education System pursuing theology along with others up to University level. The *Fazil* (10+2) examination under Senior Madrasah Education System is equivalent to Higher Secondary (10+2) examination of West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education. There are 26 senior madrasah in North Bengal. Three out of twenty six madrasahs are *alim* madrasahs and 23 are *fazil* madrasahs.<sup>lxxi</sup>

**Arabic Studies in Higher Education:** There is a continuous process of Arabic studies from primary to post graduate in North Bengal. In graduation Arabic language and literature are taught. There are 10 colleges where Arabic is taught. There are two courses that is general course and honours course. Eight colleges offer both courses and three colleges offer only general course. Out of 11 colleges 7 colleges are in Malda namely Malda College, South Malda College, Kaliachak College, Gour College, Gajole College, Samsi College and Chanchal College. There are 2 colleges in Dakshin Dinajpur namely Dewan Abdul Gani College and Jamini Mojumdar Memorial College and one college is in Coochbehar namely Sitalkuchi College.

There are three universities in North Bengal namely University of Gour Banga, University of North Bengal and Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University. But University of Gour Banga only offers Arabic in P.G. course. Department of Arabic of University of Gour Banga is functioning since the establishment of the university in 2008. Intake capacity of this department is 100. Research programs for pursuing M.Phil. and Ph.D. degree are also going on.

**Arabic Studies in Qaumi Madrasah:** These types of madrasahs are established, run and maintained by the people of that area or the organizations. These madrasahs are not given any type of help by the government. Salary of the teaching and non teaching staff, fund for classrooms and hostel, free books etc. are maintained by the donation of common people of the Muslim society. Apart from these, students are provided free food, free lodging and medicine if they need. The students in the madrasahs are coming commonly from poor and middle class families. Presently some students whose parents manage to pay for their food and lodging but this amount is very low in comparisons to modern institutions.

Most of the madrasahs of North Bengal are only for boys. There are also girls' madrasahs but very few in comparisons to boy's madrasah. Generally madrasahs are residential but local students frequent at the primary level. There are 298 qaumi madrasahs in North Bengal. Most of the madrasahs follow the syllabi of senior madrasah but not the same. In case of general subjects such as Bengali, English, Mathematics, social studies it is similar but in case of Arabic it is quite advance and vast<sup>lxxii</sup>.

There is a miss conception in the society that madrasah imparts religious and theology based education to a particular religion but this is not true. The term 'madrasah' is Arabic word which means educational institution or school imparting education to all irrespective

of religion, caste, creed and gender. The government aided madrasahs of West Bengal are open to all. Children from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds, disadvantaged, minority communities, landless and children with disabilities or special needs, irrespective of gender are enrolled to these madrasahs. Any person irrespective of cast, creed and gender may be appointed as teacher of the madrasah (including Head of the institution), non-teaching staff and members of the Managing Committee. At present 17% students and 11% teaching and non-teaching staff of High Madrasahs and significant numbers of the member of the Managing Committee are non-muslims. In few Madrasahs muslim students are minority namely i) Orgram Chatuspally High Madrasah (Burdwan) ii) Kasba M.M. High Madrasah (Uttar Dinajpur) iii) Chandrakona Islamia High Madrasah (Paschim Midnapore) iv) Dabra High Madrasah (Hooghly) and v) Sagar Moniruddin High Madrasah (South 24 Pgs.). Another remarkable fact is that a good number of students in a Senior Madrasah namely Panditpur Islamia Senior Madrasah in the district of Murshidabad are non-muslim.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Apart from this some madrasahs where head masters are non muslim. In this connection the name of Kadamtala High Madrasah<sup>lxxiv</sup> of coochbehar, Chanderkuthi High Madrasah<sup>lxxv</sup> of Coochbehar, Shalmari Nuchhumia High Madrasah<sup>lxxvi</sup> of Coochbehar and Batna High Madrasah<sup>lxxvii</sup> of Malda may be mentioned. At the same time the teachers are also minorities in some madrasahs such as Kadamtala High Madrasah. Here ten out of seventeen teachers are non Muslims<sup>lxxviii</sup>. These are the secular characteristics of any educational institution and at the same time these refute the forecast that madrasah imparts theology based education to a particular religion.

Learning of Arabic started with the establishment of madrasah by Bakhtyar Khalji at Gour, Malda and it spread all over Bengal within a short time. Arabic was studied as a subject and it became as the medium of higher study. Although the traditional institutions were ruined due to lack of fund during the first half of british period but Arabic studies did not abolish. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the British period many institutions of Arabic learning were established all over the country. After the independence of India Arabic studies got its speed. Hundreds of madrasahs have been established in North Bengal. Arabic is not confined in maktabas and madrasahs but also reached schools, colleges and university in North Bengal. After passing out from these institutions many students are working in the maktabas, madrasahs, schools, colleges and universities. Some of them are working in the Arabian countries. So now a day Arabic is not taught only for religious purpose but also for getting jobs and communication. So learning of Arabic becomes a means of earning and a language for communication.

## Notes and References:

<sup>i</sup> Al-Quran, Chapter No 96, Verse No 1.

<sup>ii</sup> *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Kitab al-‘ilm, (Karachi. Nur: Muhammad L ibrary), P 36.

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*, P 34

- iv *ibid.*
- v Minhaj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Tran. Major Raverty (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1881, Reprint New Delhi, 1970) P 151.
- vi *ibid.*, P 161.
- vii Ikdala, *Qasbah* Tabrizabad and Deotala were important administrative unit during the sultanate period. Presently these are situated in the district of malda.
- viii A K M Yaqub Ali, *Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate*, <http://www.bmri.org.uk>
- ix *ibid.*
- x *ibid.*
- xi Darasbari, a locality of ancient Gour, now in Bangladesh.
- xii A K M Yaqub Ali, *Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate*, opt. cited.
- xiii *ibid.*
- xiv Abid Ali Khan-*Memories of Gour and Pandua*, edited H.E. Stapleton (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot), P 77.
- xv *ibid.*, PP 157-158.
- xvi *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1870 P 303
- xvii Abid Ali Khan, *Memories of Gour and Pandua*, opt. cited, P 157
- xviii A K M Yaqub Ali, *Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate*, opt. cited.
- xix Khittah Simlabad was the part of ancient Goar. Now it is in Bangladesh.
- xx A K M Yaqub Ali, *Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate*, opt. cited.
- xxi Bagha is now 25 miles away of Rajshahi town in Bangladesh.
- xxii A K M Yaqub Ali, *Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate*, opt. cited.
- xxiii A Rahim, *Social and cultural History of Bengal*, P 180.
- xxiv A K M Yaqub Ali, *Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate*, opt. cited.
- xxv *ibid.*
- xxvi Abid Ali Khan, *Memories of Gour and Pandua*, opt. cited. P 45.
- xxvii *ibid.*, P 72.
- xxviii *ibid.*, P 79.
- xxix *ibid.*, P 85.
- xxx *ibid.*, P 92.
- xxxi *ibid.*, P 69.
- xxxii *ibid.*, P 75.
- xxxiii *ibid.*, P 76.
- xxxiv *ibid.*
- xxxv *ibid.* P 127.
- xxxvi *ibid.* P 100.
- xxxvii *ibid.*
- xxxviii *ibid.*
- xxxix *ibid.* P 120.
- xl M.R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965), P 11.  
A.R. Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), P 12.
- xli Ziauddin Desai, *Some new data regarding the pre-Mughal Muslim rulers of Bengal, Islamic Culture*, Vol. XXXII, Hyderabad, 1958, P 200.
- xliv Abul Fadl, *Ain-i-Akbar*, vol.I, Tr. H. Blochmann. ( Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal), P 279.

- xliii A K M Yaqub Ali, *Arabic and Persian Studies under Bengal Sultanate: An Appraisal*, opt. cited.
- xliv *ibid.*
- xlv *ibid.*
- xlvi James Long (edited) *Adams report on Vernacular education in Bengal and Behar (1835-1838)*, (Calcutta: Home Secretariate Press, 1868), P 215.
- xlvii W.H.Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollection of an Indian Official*, Vol. II, ( London: J. Hatchard & Sons, 1893), PP. 270-271.
- xlviii A K M Yaqub Ali, *Arabic and Persian Studies under Bengal Sultanate: An Appraisal*, opt. cited
- xliv <http://www.culturalindia.net>
- <sup>1</sup> James Long (edited) *Adam Report on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Behar*, opt. cited P 74.
- <sup>li</sup> William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, (California: Sani H. Panhawar, 2015), P 94.
- <sup>lii</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>liii</sup> A zamidar or land lord was responsible to collect the tax and deposit to the treasury of the govt.
- <sup>liv</sup> William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, opt. cited P 102.
- <sup>lv</sup> *ibid.* P 104.
- <sup>lvi</sup> *ibid* P 99.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Adam First Report, opt. cited P 55.
- <sup>lviii</sup> William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, opt. cited P 115.
- <sup>lix</sup> *ibid* P 116.
- <sup>lx</sup> Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, ( New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994) P 318.
- <sup>lxi</sup> *Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1934- 1935*, (Calcutta Bengal Secretariat Press, 1936), P 27.
- <sup>lxii</sup> *Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1941-1942*, (Calcutta Bengal Secretariat Press, 1943), P 26.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> *Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1934-1935* opt. cited, P 27.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> *Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1941-1942*, opt. cited P 26.
- <sup>lxv</sup> This is prepared on the basis of collected data from District Project Officer, Sarva Shiksha Mission of all districts of North Bengal.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> <http://www.wbbme.org>
- <sup>lxvii</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>lxviii</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>lxix</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>lxx</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>lxxi</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>lxxii</sup> This is prepared on basis of collected datas and materials from the madrasahs of North Bengal.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> <http://www.wbbme.org>
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> Data collected from madrasah dated 06/06/2017
- <sup>lxxv</sup> Data collected from madrasah dated 06/05/2017
- <sup>lxxvi</sup> Data collected from madrasah dated 06/05/2017
- <sup>lxxvii</sup> Data collected from madrasah dated 18/07/2017
- <sup>lxxviii</sup> Data collected from madrasah dated 06/06/2017