

Muslim Sahitya Samaj (1926-1938): The Origin and Evolution of an Intellectual Organization in Dhaka

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Abstract

The Muslim Sahitya Samaj is a modern literary organization that began in Dhaka in the 1920s and lasted twelve years. It typically promoted research, published journals, and held scheduled meetings where essays were presented and discussed. Contrary to many other literary organizations in Bengal's intellectual history, the Sahitya Samaj launched a more powerful vocal movement of *buddhir mukti* or "Emancipation of Intellect," meaning rationalism under universal (not specifically Islamic) ideals of 'freedom of thought' and 'liberation of expression.' It was the most unique and striking expression among some twentieth-century Bengali-speaking Muslims before Indo-Pakistani independence. If historians argue that Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore, two stalwarts of the Bengal Renaissance, were inspired by "British Orientalism," then the radical, rational humanist Bengali-speaking Muslim intellectuals were inspired by British Orientalism through Roy and Tagore. Why did this movement begin in Dhaka? This paper argues that Dhaka city in the 1920s fulfilled some significant infrastructural growth and development crucial for the rise of a classy intellectual group who, through networking, were pioneering the origin and evolution of such a vast organization, Muslim Sahitya Samaj, that launched the emancipation of intellect movement.

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Keywords

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Introduction

The *buddhir mukti* (Emancipation of Intellect) movement of Bengali-speaking and Bengali-writing Muslim intelligentsia is virtually unknown in the scholarship of Muslim historiography in the West. This movement was the most unique and striking expression of rational humanism among twentieth-century Bengali Muslims before Indo-Pakistani independence. The movement began in Dhaka in 1926. Its intellectual motto was: *jnan jekhane simabaddha, buddhi sekhane arashtha, mukti sekhane asambhab* or "Where knowledge is restricted, there the intellect is inert, there freedom is impossible." The movement's central organization was Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS) in Dhaka, and its views were published in its Bengali journal, *Shikha*. The movement's motto, *buddhir mukti*, was conceived by Kazi Wadud (1894-1970) and emphasized by his influential associate, Abul Hussain (1897-1938)

This essay traces the origin of MSS in Dhaka, including developments leading up to its formation and details of its foundation. The MSS was not founded in Dhaka merely because Wadud and Abul Hussain happened to be employed in Dhaka city and founded an organization there. The essay demonstrates that voluntary intellectual associations sprang up and operated in Dhaka when Wadud and Abul Hussain came to work in the city. These associations were the outcome of English education that British rule had extended to Dhaka city, a crucial example of which was the establishment of Dhaka University in 1921. The essay argues the origin of MSS as a by-product of Dhaka University and an outgrowth of some informal Bengali intellectual network

of *addas* (conversational circles) through which Wadud and Abul Hussain had developed a relationship with Dhaka *bhadraloks* before the MSS was founded.

Urbanization of Dhaka and Extension of English Educational Facilities

Dhaka city's British-based civic and educational facilities began in the nineteenth century. By the Sepoy Mutiny (1857), the British had established the Dhaka Government College and Dhaka Collegiate School (Hunter, 1973, p. 137). Dhaka College was founded in 1841, but before the college, an English high school opened in 1835. Despite these early developments, the city's educational facilities required considerable attention by the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, "The Dacca [now Dhaka] College has been starved, the professors have been few and underpaid, and progress has languished" (Molla, 1981, p. 160). However, the partition of Bengal (1905) brought significant development to the city's education facilities. Before the opening of Dhaka University in 1921, the government had funded an engineering college, a medical school, a teacher's training college, and seven English high schools (Hussain, 1957, p. 13-15).

The development of Dhaka College during the partition years 1905-1911 was an example of improved educational facilities in the city. The college staff increased from twelve in 1906 to thirty in 1911. Among its thirty academic staff, twelve were qualified in Europe (Molla, 1957, p. 168).²¹ The college building was extended with a group of "architecturally harmonious buildings, nobly planned and executed" (Molla, 1905-1911, p. 170). The college's physical facilities included laboratories, student hostels, residential quarters for teaching staff, a library building, and a hall. The latter was named Curzon Hall after the Viceroy Lord Curzon. Honors and M.A. classes were

¹The principal of the college was Mr. Archbold. A. Macdonald, M.A., B.Sc., of Glasgow University taught physics. J.M. Bottomly, B.A. (Oxford) was a teacher of Mathematics. For detail See, M.K.U. Molla, *The New Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam*, p.168. Mahmud Hussain, "The Cultural Life of Old Dacca," *Pakistan Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 1, 1957.

opened in many subjects at Dhaka College. The library facilities were improved to support graduate courses. Clubs, including one for cricket and a "literary and debating society," were started. H.R. James, Principal of Presidency College, remarked on the beautiful transformation of Dhaka College: "The Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam are to be congratulated on the liberality with which they have carried out the design for a residential college (Dhaka College) on a great scale" (Molla, 1905-1911, p.172). The growth of the academic institutions of Dhaka was one reason that the Calcutta University Commission of 1917 recommended a university for Dhaka. The Commission noted that Dhaka College was the "best equipped among all *mofussil* (district town) colleges, with an admirable site in Ramna to form a nucleus of a new university" (Ahmad, 1991, p. 263).

One of the finest achievements of Dhaka College was its teaching staff, who informally socialized with students. This led to an easing of the traditional hierarchy of teacher-student relationships. Dr. Mahumud Hussain, who was then a student at Dhaka College, wrote:

I have found, in general, European teachers very magnanimous and humane. Once, it so happened that Mr. Turner, who succeeded Mr. Archbold as Principal, was playing football with us. While playing, my classmate Sailen Chatterjee received an injury. Before realizing what had happened, I saw Mr. Turner running to Bungalow at top speed and running back to the playground in two minutes with a big basin of water...He then gave Sailen first aid and sent him to the hospital.... (Hussain, 1957, p. 15)

Mahmud cites many other examples where Dhaka College teachers broke down rigid hierarchical barriers with students. We shall see soon that Dhaka University's rules and regulations also have informalized teacher relations with students. Wadud and Abul Hussain, who were teaching at

Dhaka College and Dhaka University, would maintain these informal relations in their *addas*, in the publication of journals, and in the rules of procedure of the MSS.

Under British rule, the physical facilities of Dhaka city also improved. During the late nineteenth century, the British constructed roads, railways, and telegraph lines that connected the town's wards and the city with the outlying regions and Calcutta (Hunter, 1973, p.108). The Dhaka municipality was founded in 1864 and was continuously engaged in: "developing areas...by filling the low-lying parts" of the city. In 1870 the British moved the administrative headquarters of Dhaka from an old fort to a new building constructed on Johnson Road in the new urbanized neighborhood of Dhaka. Nazia Hussain, an urban historian of Dhaka, stated that Dhaka was the only city in India where electricity and water were "gifts and not the result of municipal or government enterprise." These two civic facilities were gifts of the Dhaka Nawabs, cost-free initially to the citizens of Dhaka municipality (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 213).² At the close of 1935-36, Dhaka had 1,066 electric and 865 kerosene lights. All the public roads surrounding the government buildings and educational centers glittered with electric lights (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 213). The city's law-and-order situation was tightened by employing one police officer for every 35 adult male citizens (Hussain, 1980, p. 213).

The census reports recorded steady growth in the population of Dhaka city. In 1872 the city's population was 69,000, and in 1921 it jumped to 119,000 (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 198), an increase of slightly more than 82%. The highest growth rate was recorded between 1905 and 1911, when Dhaka was "reincarnated" as the administrative capital of East Bengal. The city's population increased by 21%, from 90,000 in 1901 to 109,000 in 1911. The growth rate was not

² Nazia Hussain, "The City of Dacca, 1921-1947," p. 213. Nazia mentions that generosity of the Nawabs for providing the capital costs of the two schemes was not without reason. It was a recognition of favors granted by and hoped for from the British government.

so rapid after Dhaka returned to being a divisional sub-capital of Bengal in 1911. However, population growth continued in the city. Dhaka city had been traditionally known as the “city of the mosque.” Yet, in 1901-41, Hindus outnumbered the Muslim population.³

The Emergence of Dhaka *Bhadralok* ("gentleman") and Their Activities

The physical, educational and administrative facilities led to the emergence of a visible group of Dhaka *bhadralok*. Rajat Sanyal, another urban historian of Dhaka city, gave statistical evidence of *bhadralok* of the Dhaka district (including Dhaka city): “In 1901, in the district of Dacca, 2778 persons were engaged in the teaching profession, 285 in clerical services, 280 in legal professions, and 168 in medical professions” (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 263). Nazia Hussain gave evidence of the *bhadralok* population of Dhaka city: “Dhaka city had 128 *vakils* and pleaders of which 2 were Muslims in 1905” (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 209). In 1911, this figure increased to 144, of which 3 were Muslims (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 209). The Calcutta (now Kolkata) University Commissions (1917) had given statistical evidence of the *bhadralok* of Dhaka division and Trippera. The two divisions, according to the Commission, “supplied 7,097 out of a total of 27,290 students of Calcutta University.”⁴ The *Thacker's Indian Directory* listed

³ Census	Hindus	Muslims
1901	51,000	41,728
1911	59,994	47,295
1921	69,145	49,325
1931	79,906	57,764
1941	129,223	82,921

Religiously, all the city's wards were not completely segregated: "Three wards were predominantly Hindu; in ward 2 they formed 76.1 per cent, in ward 3, 75.9 percent, in ward 1, 68.8 per cent, of the inhabitants. Two wards were almost equally divided between the Hindus and Muslims. Hindus formed 52.4 per cent in ward 7, and 50.0 per cent in ward 5. Muslims predominated in wards 4 and 6 where only 31.4 percent and 36.8 per cent respectively were Hindus." Nazia Hussain, "The City of Dacca, 1921-1947," pp 200-203.

⁴ Calcutta University Commission, IV (1917), cited by Rajat Sanyal, "Protiva and Shikha: Two Faces of Literary Culture of Early 20th Century Dhaka," p. 263.

267 pleaders in Dhaka in 1921 and 967 in 1931 (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 209). In 1921, the Dhaka district had 2,593 male and 93 female teachers working in colleges and schools. The figure steadily rose to 3,430 males and 352 females in 1921 and 4,354 males and 498 females in 1931 (Ballhatchet & Harrison, 1980, p. 210). The religious-communal composition of Dhaka *bhadralok* was overwhelmingly Hindu.

The Dhaka *bhadralok* were expressive people. Since the late nineteenth century, they had established several intellectual associations and published Bengali journals and newspapers. From 1847-1905, the Dhaka *bhadralok* published 76 Bengali newspapers or periodicals (Mamoon, 1987, p. 148-151).⁵ In the years 1831-1930, Bengali Muslims from Dhaka city published a total of 14 Bengali Muslim journals (Anisuzzaman, 1969).

The Dhaka branch of the Brahma Samaj was established in 1846. W.W. Hunter recorded activities of the *Samaj* in Dhaka:

The Brahma (sic) Samaj was established in Dacca in 1846 and has steadily increased its members and influence. Up to 1857, its meetings were held in the houses rented for the purpose, and from that time to 1869, in the place of a native gentleman, a deputy magistrate of the district, and a leading member of the Samaj....There are about a hundred regular subscribers to the Samaj, who pay from six shillings to five pounds per annum to meet current expenses, and a thousand ordinary members, or sympathizers, comprising nearly all the English-speaking Hindus of Dacca. (Hunter, 1973, p.58)

⁵ In the years, 1857-1900, the total number of Bengali newspaper-journals was 905. The total number of newspaper-journals published from East Bengal was 241. The first East Bengali newspaper-journal, *Rangpur-bartabaho*, was published from Rangpur in 1847. See Muntassir Mamoon (ed.), *Unish Shatake Bangladesher Sangbad-Samayikpatra*, Vol. II, No.1-2 (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987), pp. 148-151.

Brajasundar Mitra, a poor but educated *bhadralok*, was the founding secretary of the Brahmo Samaj in Dhaka. In one report sent to Calcutta, Mitra reported that Dhaka Brahmo Samaj was founded in a "hostile environment." For the "first three months, it had to maintain secrecy about its meetings."⁶

Keshab Candra Sen's effort turned the Brahmo Samaj in Dhaka into a well-knit organization. Keshab visited Dhaka in November 1865 and arranged "regular social prayer for the followers of Brahmoism" (De, 1974, p. 133). In March 1869, Keshab again visited Dhaka and founded "Brahmo festivals." On March 18, 1869, he delivered a lecture in which he said: "Brahmo Samaj is a power" (De, 1974, p. 133). In December 1869, Keshab visited Dhaka for the third time and founded a Brahmo Mandir. A ceremony marked the occasion for two days.

Amalendu De wrote:

The Nawab of Dhaka, several Englishmen, and respectable Bengalis graced the occasion with their presence As a result of his visit, the sphere of influence of the Brahmo Samaj was extended. Being inspired by Keshab Sen, 36 men of Dhaka embraced Brahmonism on December 7. At that time, one simple-hearted energetic young Muslim also embraced Brahmoism, and Brahmos cordially received him. (1974, p. 134)

The *Dhaka Brahmo Samaj* served as a model for the structure and arrangement of intellectual associations in Dhaka. For the first time, the Brahmo Samaj established an agreement to publish an intellectual newsletter or journal by a voluntary association. In 1846-1847, two

⁶ Rajat Sanyal, *Voluntary Associations and Urban Public Life in Bengal, 1815-1876* (Calcutta, 1980), p. 211. Sanyal writes that a report was written by Brahmo Samaj secretary, Brajasundar Mitra, for Calcutta Brahmo Samaj to be published in *Tattwabohini Patrika*. The report is reprinted in Benoy Ghosh (ed.), *Sanyaik Patre Banglar Samaj Chitra*, II (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 504-507. For an early development of Brahmo Samaj movement in Dhaka, see also, Shibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalin Banga Samaj* (Calcutta, 1957), pp. 231-234. Upadhyay Gourgobinda Ray, *Acarjya Keshab Chandra*, I (Calcutta, 1938), pp. 284-297.

Bengali journals were published by Dhaka Brahmo Samaj: *The Dhaka Prakash* and *Dhaka Bijjapan*. After Keshab's visit in 1869, the Dhaka Naba Bidhan Sabha published a Bengali journal in 1870 as *Bangabandhu* (Friend of Bengal). The journal survived thirty-seven years. Its founding editor was Banga Candra Roy. Some of its editors toward the end of the journal were: Kailash Candra Nandi, Barada Kanta Hawlader, Iswar Candra Sen, Durgadas Roy, and Girish Candra Sen.⁷ Most of the editors were born in Dhaka and educated at Dhaka college.⁷

The journal, *Bangabandhu*, had started a new format. It printed a saying of Keshab Candra as the motto of the Naba Bidhan Sabha on the front page: "1) one thought, one belief, one way of life, one mother and one father; 2) lacking faith in the people/person of [any] religious community is the same as lacking faith in religion [as such]"⁸ The English supplement of the journal, *New* (1925), the journal of Abul Hussain, and later *Shikha* (1927-31), the MSS journal, followed a similar arrangement, although the messages differed.

The *Naba Bidhan Sabha* and its journal were two sources that spread radically new religious ideas in Dhaka. The journal addressed Muslims with a friendly term: *mussalman bhrata* or Muslim brothers (Mamoon, 1987, p. 185). Amidst an anti-British outcry of some leading journals⁹ owned by Hindu *bhadralok* in late nineteenth-century Dhaka, *Bangabandhu* stood solidly behind British rule.¹⁰ A radical religious manifesto of the Naba Bidhan Sabha was regularly

⁷ For example, Banga Chandra Roy was born in Dhaka, educated in Dhaka College and he was teacher in Dhaka Pogoj School. Kailash Nandi was born in Tripura, but educated in Dhaka College.

⁸ 1--*Ek mat, ek bishvas, ek rakam pranalite cala, ek ma, ek bap.* 2--*dharm sampradayer lok'ke abishvas kara ar dharme ke abishvas kara ekay.* *Bangabandhu*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3 (May, 1903), p.1.

⁹ See for example, *Hindu Hitaishini*, Vol. LXXV, No. 38 (August, 1875); Vol. LXXVI, No. 21 (May, 1875); Vol. LXXIX, No. 1 (December, 1878); Vol. LXXVI, No. 24 and 32 (June 1876); Vol. LXXVII, No. 9 (February 1877). *Dhaka Gazette*, Vol. LXXXX, No. 42 (October, 1890). *Garib*, Vol. LXXX, No. 40 (September, 1888).

¹⁰ On occasion of Jubilee Celebration of Queen Victoria's fifty-year reign in India, *Bangabandhu* published a special article. The title of the article was "*Jubilee uplakshe Naba Bidhan Mandire Bishesh Prathanna* or 'special prayer on occasion of Queen Victoria's jubilee.' The conclusion of the article writes: "Oh! mother (Queen Victoria) you have brought great welfare in India. During fifty-year British rule, the welfare that you have brought for Indians, we do not want to explain these from our sinful mouth.... Mother, we are sick and stupid. Yet, remaining under your feet, the

published in *Bangabandhu*. For example, on May 3, 1903, *Bangabandhu* posted a religious sermon on the front page entitled *Buddhir Ishvar*, or 'God of Intellect.' The sermon stated:

Oh! Great father! Oh! Lover of children! Love is Yours; salvation is Yours; many of us know about it. But we do not know that knowledge (jnan) is Yours, intellect (buddhi) is Yours....We believe that You have been infatuated with mercy. You are shining. Who does not believe this? But one thing strikes our mind...there are some faults in your knowledge (jnan) and intellect (buddhi). Nobody says it, frankly, but everybody believes it. If we had faith that You have such an intellect (buddhi) that could guide human's practical life very well, then we would have firm faith in You...If humans apply their mind (buddhi) daily in their useful life, they can run a practical life better than You.... (Das, 1903)¹¹

The radicalism of Naba Bidhan Sabha spread among the English-educated *bhadralok* of Dhaka. We have noted above that some Hindu *bhadralok* of Dhaka were converted into Brahmoism. A few followers of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj were also converted into Naba Bidhan Samaj. Bijoy Krishna Gosami was an example of the latter type. In 1888 Gosami published a note in *Bangabandhu*:

Whatever is the truth that is Brahmo religion.... Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Naba Bidhan Samaj, Adi Samaj, Hindu Samaj, Christian Samaj, Mussalman Samaj, I am a servant of

'great queen' (*maharani*), we also bless a happiness of your children." *Bangabandhu*, March 1, 1887, in Muntassir Mamoon (ed.), *Unish Shatake Bangladesher Sangbad-Samayikpatra*, p.63.

¹¹ *He prampita, he shantanbatsal, prem tomar, punya tomar iha amara aneke jani; kintu jnan tomar, buddhi tomar iha jani na.... Amara mani tumi dayate matta hayecha, punya ujjal hayecha; e ke na mane? Kintu ekti katha mane lage...ekta katha mane na--jen tomar jnane, budhhite kichu truti ache; mukhe keha bale na bate, kintu mane e rakam samskar ache; jadi bishvas karitam, je tomar eman buddhi ache jahate amader samsar tumi khub bhala kare calate para, ta hale amara sarbbsva diye tomake bishvas karitam...Manush nitya jadi buddhi khatiyे samsar calay, tomar ceye bhala calate pare.* See Durgadas, "Bishay Buddhir Ishvar" published in *Bangabandhu*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3 (May 3, 1903), p. 1.

the servants of all samajes. I have no samaj of my own. All samajes are my samaj.

Wherever there is any amount of truth, that is my Brahmo religion.¹²

Other *bhadralok* of Dhaka city observed, enjoyed, participated in, and supported the Brahmo Samaj but did not change their caste-based religion. Hunter noted: “Collector (of Dhaka) believes that many students who are...*Brahmos*, when at college, become good Hindus when they returned to their country homes” (Hunter, 1973, p. 58). This observation is not incorrect. Many Hindu editors were supportive of the Brahmo movement. For example, *Garib* (poor) started as a journal of the Hindu Sabha. Later the journal turned out to be a defender of the Brahmo movement of Dhaka, but again it returned to a Hindu stand (Mamoon, 1987, p. 374). Kaliprasanna Ghosh was born into a conservative Hindu family and edited a Hindu journal, *Bandhab*. Later he was attracted to the Brahmo Samaj movement and edited one of its journals, *Shubhasadhini*, but he returned to Hinduism again (Mamoon, 1987, p. 374). The *Naba Bidhan Sabha* thus created a radical element in the Dhaka intellectual environment. It set a precedent of religious innovation on which other *bhadralok* could start a movement of radical religion-social thought. Wadud, Abul Hussain, and many others frequently visited Naba Bidhan Sabha before they founded the MSS. We will see shortly that Dhaka had other sources of radical rationalism.

Muslim intellectuals of Dhaka did not organize any particular movement against the Brahmo Samaj in Dhaka. Two Muslim intellectual associations were established in Dhaka in 1879 and 1883, the Samaj Sanmilani and Mussalman Suhrid Sanmilani or Dacca (Dhaka) Mohammedan

¹² *Jaha satya tahai Brahmo dharma.... Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Naba Bidhan Samaj, Adi Samaj, Hindu Samaj, Khiristiya Samaj, Mussalman Samaj, ami sakal samjer dasanudas amar kona Sampraday nai athaca sakal Sampradaya amar. Jekhane jatatuku satya seitukui amar Brahmo dharma... Bangabandhu*, June 1, 1888. Muntassir Mamoon (ed.), *Unish Shatake Bangladesher Sangbad-Samayikpatra*, pp. 97- 98.

Friends Association.¹³ The founder of the two associations was Mawlana Obedullah Al-Obedi (1834-86). Obedi was a principal of Dhaka Madrasah (now Islamic Intermediate College).¹⁴ He was also the first Muslim Bengali to translate Rammohun's *Tuhfat-Ul-Muwahhidin* into English. The Suhrid Sanmilani was founded on February 23, 1883, and continued until 1886-87. It had an executive committee, a president, and a general secretary. In its last year, the association had 102 members (Qayum, 1967, p. 34). The president, the vice president, and the association secretary were Dhaka College graduates. In the first Annual Report (1883), the general secretary said the objectives of the *Mussalman Suhrid Sanmilani*:

The purpose of this sabha (meeting) was an all-around improvement of the Muslims of Bengal. But due to a lack of support from the local people, this high ideal was dropped. Now society has restricted its purpose to spreading ideas for Muslim female education in Bengal. (Qayum, 1967, p.34)

The association selected books for Muslim women so that they would read these books and appear in the examination conducted by the association. (Qayum, 1967, p.31)¹⁵ It needs to be discovered what books the association selected. However, the association privately arranged to write a book for the education of Muslim females: *Tuhfat-ul-Moslemin* (n.d.) or a 'Gift to Muslims.'

¹³ See for detail, Syed Murtaza Ali, *Obaidullah Al-Obaidi Suhrawardy* (Dhaka, 1965). Mohammad Abdul Qayum, "Dacca Muslim Suhrid Sanmilani," in *Mahe Nao* (April 1967), pp. 27-32 Khondkar Sirajul Huq, "Bangali Mussalmaner Jagarane Muslim Sahitya Samajer Bhumika," in Mohammad Faruk (ed.), *Bhasha Sahitya Patra*, Vol. XI (1983), pp. 33-70. Mohammad Habibullah, "Sekaler Graduate," in *Masik Mohammadi* (January-February, 1941), pp. 283-284.

¹⁴ Obedullah Al-Obedi was grandfather of Husain Shahid Suhrawardy. Suhrawardy was one-time Prime Minister of Pakistan.

¹⁵ This private arrangement of the examination was based on five rules: i) any Muslim female of Bengal can sit for the examination; ii) the medium of the test is either Bengali or Urdu; iii) the place of examination is at home (*antapur*), under the supervision of a guardian of the examinee; iv) the examiners of the oral test shall be selected with a consent of guardian of the examinee; v) for the test, no help is allowed to be taken from any book or from the guardian. See Mohammad Abdul Qayum, "Dacca Muslim Suhrid Sanmilani," p. 31.

It was written by Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmad (1862-1933), a Calcutta-based neo-orthodox Muslim intellectual. (Qayum, 1967, p.34) Mawlana Obedi's leadership in the association is dubious, as his name is not listed in the first executive committee of the association. (Qayum, 1967, p.29)¹⁶ The sessions of the association were held only in Dhaka Madrasah. In the declaration of the first year, the association stipulated that its purpose was nothing without or beyond Islam:

Oh, brothers! Religion is the only essential of human life. Only for this religious matter is the human called the human. Like a diamond, nothing without its bright light exists in human life, and the human body is separated from religion. Muslims are always ready to sacrifice their lives for faith.... There is nothing dear to a Muslim except religion.... We humbly appeal to Muslim brothers of all positions and groups to help this organization and its activities, which the holy rules of Mohammadi approve.... (Qayum, 1967, p. 31-32)

The association lasted only a short time. One significant cause for its decline was a shortage of funds.

Up to the foundation of MSS (1926), five Muslim journals had been published in Dhaka.¹⁷ These journals were short-lived, and none proposed any program against the movement of Brahmo Samaj. The Muslim journal *Paril Baratabaha* (edited by Anisuddin Ahmad) was published in a village in Dhaka. *Islam Suhrid* (edited by Sheikh Abdus Sobahan) was published in 1906 and

¹⁶ The members of the Executive Committee, as listed in the First Annual Report of the Dacca Mohammedan Friends Association (1883), were: Maulabi Hikmat Ali--President; Maulabi Abdul Majid--General secretary; Maulabi Hemayet Uddin--Assistant secretary; Maulabi Johadar Rahman--Assistant secretary; Maulabi Makbul Ahmad---Treasurer; Maulabi Azad Ali--district representative; Maulabi Madacheb Ali--district representative; Maulabi Syed Hazrat Ali--district representative; Maulabi Fazel--district representative; Noazesh Ali--district representative; Maulabi Mohammad Chadek--district representative. The list is cited by Mohammad Abdul Qayum, "*Dacca Muslim Suhrid Sanmilani*," p.29.

¹⁷ These journals are: i) *Paril Bartabaha* (1874), ii) *Islam Suhrid* (1906), iii) *Bhaskar* (1920), iv) *Ainul Islam* (1923), v) *Samsari* (1924). See Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Banglar Samayikpatra 1831-1930*, pp. 4, 123, 291, 392, 394.

lasted until 1907. The *Bhaskar* (edited by Nurul Islam Kasimpuri), the third journal, published in 1920, was again a "short-lived" journal. The "Zahed Islam Mission" journal, *Ainul Islam* (edited by Ainul Islam), declared its purpose:

We want an education from a truthful puritan Islam. We want the unity of simple faithful persons. Therefore, seeking the truth is our highest aim. Human society is our field of cultivation. Hazrat Mohammad is our ideal cultivator. And faith is our capital....

(Anisuzzaman, 1831-1930, p. 393)

The fifth journal, *Samsari* (edited by Syed Abdul Karim), aimed to improve the "health and home economics" of Muslims (Anisuzzaman, 1831-1930, p.394).

The Hindu Sabha of Dhaka had also failed to suppress the Brahmo movement. Kashi Kanta Chattyopadhyay, a conservative Hindu and a lawyer of Dhaka, established the Hindu Dharma Rakshini Sabha, or Association for Protection of Hindu Religion. In the same year, Kasi Kanta published Sabha's intellectual journal, *Hindu Hitaishini*, edited by Harishcandra Mitra. (Mamoon, 1987, p. 367) The journal continued its publication up to 1887. Kashi Kanta was hostile to the Brahmo movement of his anti-British intellectual stand (Mamoon, 1987, p. 73-77). He was also hostile to the Brahmo Samaj because his son, Syama Kanta, had become a Brahmo (Mamoon, 1987, p. 367). Despite an anti-Brahmo slogan, the journal could not wage a significant intellectual battle against the Brahmo Samaj. Its emphasis on Hinduism was on a return to the *kulin* ideal in Hindu society (Mamoon, 1987, p. 95).

Late-nineteenth-century Dhaka also witnessed other intellectual associations that promoted a more liberal view.¹⁸ These multi-functional associations were established for the avowed purpose

¹⁸ Some of these voluntary associations are recorded in W. W. Hunter's, *Statistical Account*, V, p. 117. Others are recorded in *Bengal administrative Report*, 1876-77, cited by Rajat Sanyal, *Voluntary Associations and Urban Public Life in Bengal*, pp. 211-212.

of social reforms. Four associations of Dhaka declared as their objective "improvement of knowledge in the field of literature." Three others advocated: the "cultivation of knowledge and reformation of character" (Sanyal, 1980, p. 264). Apart from an Indo-European learned society, the Dhaka (Dacca) Institute, these small voluntary associations were controlled by Hindu *bhadralok*.

In 1910 the Hindu *bhadralok* of Dhaka city founded the Dhaka Sahitya Parishad¹⁹ or Dhaka Literary Society. A year later, the Parishad published a journal, *Protiva* [*Pratibha*, 1911] or Genius. The Parishad and *Protiva* [*Pratibha*] were founded by some teachers of Dhaka College and Jagannath College with a clear objective:

The object of this association (Dhaka Sahitya Parishad) is to take care, through various means, of the cultivation and improvement of Bengali and literature. The Parishad will not be involved, in any way, in politics, social reforms, or religious reforms. (Sanyal, 1980, p. 265)

The Parishad did not involve itself in issues of religious reform. It published many essays on Bengali language and literature, Sanskrit literature, and English literature. Several Sanskrit works were translated into Bengali, including Kalhana's classic *Rajatarangini* and Bhasa's dramas. While some attention was given to India's historical subjects, the regional cultures outside of Bengal were ignored (Sanyal, 1980, p. 266). The Parishad gave systematic attention to "antiquities, Bengali language, sociology of Eastern Bengal and collection of manuscripts and oral literature." (Sanyal,

¹⁹ Rajat Sanyal, "Protiva and Shikha: Two Faces of Literary Culture of Early 20th Century Dhaka." Sanyal is probably the first historian who has done research on *Protiva* and *Dhaka Sahitya Parishad*. His information is based on the proceedings of the *Dhaka Sahitya Parishad* as well as on the writings published in the volumes of *Protiva*.

1980, p. 266) The Parishad and *Protiva* were not forums for ordinary Bengalis. *Protiva* was published essentially for intellectual *bhadralok*:

No short stories, or so-called poems, entertaining ordinary people are to be published in the *Protiva*. On the other hand, it makes an effort to awaken the intellectual faculty of the readers so they can realize where [their] place on earth is. Their attention is drawn to the question of what we were and will be[.] It will continue to make such endeavor to [the] utmost. (Sanyal, 1980, p. 266)

The Parishad was mainly an organization of teachers, lawyers, government officials, and landlords. There were no visible student members of the Parishad. Nor was there any female member who read a paper in any session of the Parishad or participated in the discussion.²⁰ (Sanyal, 1980, p. 268) Muslims were not represented in the Parishad.²¹ The association, therefore, was an organization of Hindu *bhadralok* of elite professions. The Parishad built a typical modern organizational structure. It had a constitution, a president, and an executive committee. No indication that members were elected to hold positions in the Parishad. The members of the Parishad met monthly, annually, and at times in special meetings.

The religious-communal composition and arrangement of the associations and journals of Dhaka were evident. The Naba Bidhan Sabha was essentially a religious organization. Despite its radical religious doctrines, the Naba Bidhan Sabha did not write a self-critique of Brahmoism. The Sabha's *Bangabandhu* journal published only essays supportive of the Brahmo faith. A survey of the articles published by the journal for one year shows that most essays were apologetics on behalf

²⁰ Rajat Sanyal writes, "One important matter to be added is that women did not feature prominently in the *Protiva* except for a few women poets, one of them being Kusum Kumari Debi. Her poems appeared in the *Protiva* when she was twelve years old." Rajat Sanyal, "Protiva and Shikha," p. 268.

²¹ Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad's some collections of puthi literature were published in *Protiva*, Vol. VIII, No. 8.

of the Brahmo religion. These essays featured, for example, the doctrines of Brahmo religion, prayers of Keshab Candra, critique of Bijoy Krishna Gosami, festivals of Brahmo religion, etc. One journal essay asked: "Why Naba Bidhan Sabha should not maintain any relationship with the opponents (*Naba Bidhan birodhider sange jog raksha kara ucit nay ken*)?" (Mamoon, 1887, p. 360-362) The communal orientation of associations of the Muslims was also evident. Hindus were not active and visible members of any Muslim association in Dhaka. Apart from a lone Hindu intellectual, who gave a lecture in one session, the Dhaka Mohammedan Friends Association was exclusively composed of Muslims. The MSS and *Shikha* would be a breakthrough in this regard.

Establishment of Dhaka University

Dhaka University was established in 1921 to compensate the Muslims of Eastern Bengal for the loss they incurred due to the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911. The Chancellor of Dhaka University, Lord Lytton, said in the first-degree convocation (1923) that Dhaka University was "designed as a splendid imperial compensation" (Rahim, 1981, p. 191-192). J.P. Hartog, the first vice-chancellor of the university, made similar observations: "Dacca (Dhaka) University scheme is intended to provide extended education opportunities to the Muslim community in Bengal" (Rahim, 1981, p. 191). This rhetoric that the university had been founded for a specific group, the Muslim community, was intended to satisfy the Muslim political leaders in Bengal. The political leaders, specifically A.K. Fazlul Huq, ceaselessly demanded in Bengal Legislative Council the extension of educational facilities for Muslims.²² Dhaka University was not created to

²² See, A.K. Fazlul Huq's speech on the Budget for 1913-1914. See also Sirajul Islam, "Fazlul Huq Speaks in Council," *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, Vol. I (1976), pp. 131-205.

cater to the needs of the Muslim community or well-to-do classes.²³ The former stipulation was changed to "Bengali student" (Stapleton, 1921, p. vi) by the Calcutta University Commission (1917), which drafted the early ordinances of Dhaka university. The Government of India rejected the latter (Stapleton, 1921, p. ii).

Impact of Dhaka University: Collegial teacher-student relationship

Dhaka University opened on July 1, 1921, and began a new phase of the teacher-student relationship. The university constructed three residential hostels, or halls, for students: Dhaka Hall, Jagannath Hall, and Salimullah Muslim Hall. Following the system of Oxford and Cambridge, academic and administrative headship of a hall were combined in a position called the provost. During the early years of Dhaka University, the provost was always a senior professor at the university. The early ordinances of the University of Dhaka defined the purpose and functions of a hall:

Hall and the classroom would be the center of intellectual life. The students and teachers form part of one community, working for one purpose and helping each other to a common end.... Proper education can only be obtained--[by]the training of mind, body, and character; the result, not a book, but humankind.²⁴ (Sen, 1981, p.5)

²³ H.E. Stapleton, Special Officer, Dhaka University, told at the Social Service Exhibition, Dhaka, on March 11, 1920: "The Committee's (Sir Robert Nathan Committee) scheme for a 'Well-to-Do-Classes' College was cut down to the provision of simply a Hostel..." See, Sir Robert Nathan Committee Proposal on Dhaka University cited by H.E. Stapleton, "A University in the Making," published in *The Dacca Review*, Vol. April-May, 1921, p. ii. For social background of Muslim students of Dhaka University from 1920s to 1940s, see, Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.), *Dhaka Vishvabidyalay o Purbbabangiya Samaj* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993), pp. 39, 42, 49, 51.

²⁴ Report of the Calcutta University Commission 1919 IV, cited by Rangalal Sen, "*Jagannath Haller Itihas o Prayata Pradhyaksha Prasanga*," published in Narendra Nath Bishvas, Rangalal Sen, Ajay Kumar Ray, Shantinarayan Ghosh and others (ed.) *Basantika* (Dhaka: Jagannath Hall Diamond Jubilee publication, 1981), p. 5.

The passage thus indicates a "corporate life" of students and teachers at Dhaka University. Early ordinances of the university also authorized provosts to establish collegial relations with students and organize *Chatra Samsad*, or Student Union. (Sen, 1981, p.5) In 1923, Professors Ramesh Candra Majumdar (History) and Naresh Candra Sen Gupta (Law) guided students to form the *Dhaka Vishwabidyalay Kendriya Chatra Samsad* or Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU). It was an elected body whose concern was to look after the welfare of students.²⁵ (Philips and Wainwright, 1970, p.371) Early ordinances of the university stipulated that the DUCSU's three key positions (president, vice-president, general secretary) be held by the provosts of the three halls. During the 1925-26 academic year, R. C. Majumder, provost of Jagannath Hall, became president of DUCSU. Mamtazuddin Ahmad (provost of Muslim Hall) and A.K. Mukherjee (provost of Dhaka Hall) were vice presidents and general secretaries of the DUCSU (Sen, 1981, p.19). Collegial relations between teacher and student were thus mandated and fostered by the ordinances of Dhaka University.

Students were also free to organize their *Samiti* or association. In its early days, the university's teaching staff was crucial in guiding students to form associations and journals. Professor Naresh Sen Gupta sponsored *Praci* or Orient (1923), a monthly literary journal published by some students of Jagannath Hall. A Hindu student edited the journal. Yet there is a column entitled: "Muslim world." Abul Fazal, a future activist of the *buddhir mukti* movement, published his first journalistic article in *Praci*. (Fazal, 1968, p. 113) Sen Gupta had personal contact with Tagore and requested Tagore to write a poem for the first issue of *Praci*. Tagore wrote a poem for *Praci*: "Risen oh! ancient Orient" (Fazal, 1968, p. 15).

²⁵ Altaf Hussain, an early leader of the DUCSU, was a leader of Pakistan movement in Dhaka University in the 1930's. See Mahmud Hussain, "Dacca University and the Pakistan Movement," in C.H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright (ed.), *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970) p. 371. DUCSU played, however, a leading role in an anti-Pakistan movement, 1969-71.

Sen Gupta also sponsored another private student association, *Chatra Seba Samgha* (1923-40), or Voluntary Organization of Students. The organization was dedicated to imparting education among lower-caste Hindus in Dhaka. R. C. Majumder, provost of Jagannath Hall, invited Tagore in 1924 to see this project. In 1925, Tagore sent a representative of Shantiniketan, Kali Mohan Ghosh, to observe this project (Fazal, 1968, p. 16-17). During the terrorist movement in 1930, police officers sought permission from Professor Majumdar to raid Jagannath Hall. Majumdar, who respected terrorist leaders saying "You are makers of history, I am a mere writer" (Fazal, 1968, p. 23) refused the permission from the police. At another time, when a hall student was arrested and police ordered him to walk to police headquarters, Majumdar intervened. He told the police officer: "Let him hire a transport to go to the *thana* (police office); I shall pay the fare" (Fazal, 1968, p. 23).

This pattern of a collegial relationship with students was a precedent that Abul Hussain developed before the foundation of MSS. Abdur Razzak, then a student of Dhaka university and now a National Professor of Bangladesh, said in an interview:

In those days, most students had close and frequent contact with teachers such as Abul Hussain and Kazi Mutahar Hussain. These teachers provided the morale to the whole show. It was not important what they said in class. They needed to lead a life devoted to the students. Their lifestyles were critical in building respect for learning among students. (Karim, 1993, p. 112)

Abul Hussain's principal activity during the years just before MSS was to involve students in journalistic and associational works. His earliest effort was to publish a Bengali journal, *Tarun Patra* (1925), or Letter of the Young [heart]. The design and the motto of *Tarun Patra* set the pattern for *Shikha*. Below is the title of *Tarun Patra*: "If truth has power, then advance with the

fearless mind." (Kadir, 1976, p. 419) Pramatha Choudhury, editor of a radical humanist journal, *Sabuj Patra* (published from Calcutta), commented on *Tarun Patra*:

Respected Suniti Kumar Catyopadhyay has recently introduced me to a monthly journal. The journal's name is *Tarun Patra*, and its origin is Dacca. The journal aims to enlarge new thoughts beyond our everyday view of food. In other words, its purpose is to inspire youth an appetite for cultivating new thinking and knowledge.... After I read this, I was happy and astonished that this was a journal of some young Bengali Muslims! (Choudhury, 1925, p. 267)

The journal's first editorial argued: "To obey some rules, prohibitions, customs, and precedents without knowledge is not only a blunder but a serious fault" (Kadir, 1976, p. 420).

Abul Hussain owned and financed the journal, and most of its radical articles were written by him in a column, "*Patheya*." The journal's editor was Mohammad Fazlul Karim Mallik. Mallik was a unique symbol of religious pluralism. Mallik attracted the attention of Muslim Hall students. The office of *Tarun Patra* was within the campus and near Muslim Hall. The two undergraduate students of the Muslim Hall who regularly visited the *Tarun Patra* office were Abul Fazal and Abdul Kadir. Kadir was a "beloved student of Wadud and Parimal Kumar Ghosh" (Islam, 1987, p.11) of Dhaka College. The mentorship of Wadud and Parimal inspired Abdul Kadir to search for a new meaning of knowledge. He involved himself wholeheartedly in the literary activities of Dhaka College. One of the self-composed poems he published in the college magazine was titled "*Mukti*" or "Freedom." Young Abdul Kadir was impressed by Mallik's religious pluralism. Abdul Kadir wrote: "By birth, Mallik was a Hindu, Hariprasad Mallik. First, he was converted to

Christianity; then he was converted to Islam (Shahidullah converted him²⁶) (Islam, 1987, p. 126), and again to Christianity, and finally, he went back to Hinduism" (Kadir, p. 420). Abul Fazal wrote in his memoirs why Muslim Hall students were attracted to the *Tarun Patra* office:

In those days, all of us new writers knew Fazlul Karim Mallik. We called him Mallik dada (elder brother Mallik). He loved literature like a maniac. Simultaneously, he could write poems and literary essays.... In his personal life, he got a taste of three religions. Yet we never heard a religious belief from him. We never saw him practicing any religious ritual. Literature was his only addiction. From this addiction, he cared very little for his children and wife. He could not give them good food, and sometimes he could not even pay his house rent. Yet, Mallik spent hour after hour with us. We forgot our time, place, and energy when he discussed literature. He was addicted to literature, and those of us who gathered around him also fell into this addiction to literature. (Fazal, 1968, p. 126)

Abul Fazal published his first literary essay, "*Matribhasha o Bangali Mussalman*," (Mother tongue and Bengali Muslim) in *Tarun Patra* (Vol. IV). In the same volume, Abul Fazal reviewed Abul Hussain's *Banglar Balshi* (Peasants of Bengal, 1921). These works elevated Abul Fazal's position in *Tarun Patra*. Abul Hussain appointed him as assistant editor of *Tarun Patra*. Probably no salary was given to Abul Fazal, yet the employment of an undergraduate student as an assistant editor gave him valuable experience in editing journals. Abul Hussain also enhanced young Abul Fazal's literary reputation. Abul Hussain wrote and published articles in *Tarun Patra* under Abul Fazal's name.²⁷

²⁶ Rafiqul Islam, *Abdul Kadir*, p.126.

²⁷ One example was Abul Hussain's article, "*Itihaser Bhaugalik Bhitti*" or 'Influence of geography on History.' The article was published under Abul Fazal's name in *Tarun Patra*. See Abdul Kadir (ed.) *Abul Hussainer Racanabali*, p. 426.

As an assistant house tutor of Muslim Hall, Abul Hussain established informal relations with students. Muslim Hall itself published only a formal journal of the Student Union. Abul Hussain privately organized some "progressive students" and brought out a hand-written wall journal, *Pataka*,²⁸ or 'Flag' in 1926. Abul Hussain edited the journal, but his name was not published. The journal was published under a student's name, A.M. Taheruddin. Taheruddin was a favorite student of Caru Candra Bandyopadhyay, a radical teacher at the Bengali Department of Dhaka University. Caru babu's frequent remarks included: " I am not a Hindu. I have no place in Hindu society. Because I worship facing to the west, the Hindus of my village have isolated me."²⁹ The motto of *Pataka* was a little poem printed at the top of the journal: "What is fear, what is dread? We will conquer all the barriers."³⁰ The first editorial of the *Pataka* explained its objective:

We have grown new passion among ourselves. We want to be dynamic. We want to re-examine our lives, ask questions, and demand an answer from ourselves: Where are we? In which direction will we go? If Muslim Hall supports us, our 'flag' will cross the boundary of the Muslim Hall, and everybody will one day honor us. (Hakim, 1990, p. 6)

By invitation from Dhaka University (1924), Rabindranath Tagore visited Dhaka on February 7, 1926. Tagore's visit further intensified Abul Hussain's relationship with students. In 1922, the university invited a French humanist, Sylvain Levi, a Professor at the College de France in Paris. On February 22, 1922, Levi gave a guest lecture on "Eastern Humanism." (University of

²⁸ The copy of this hand written journal was published by Syed Abul Maqsd of Bangladesh News agency. See Abul Hussain, "*Pataka*," in Syed Abul Maqsd (ed), *Astitva*, Vol. I (1986), pp. 61-66 and *Astitva*, Vol. II (1990), pp. 6-8.

²⁹ Abul Hussain, "*Pratham Barsha Dvitiya Adhibeshan*," April, 4, 1926, unpublished. See *Sabhar Samkshipta Karjya Bibarani* or 'Muslim Sahitya Samaj Proceedings' or MSSP p. 14.

³⁰ "*Sakal badha karba jay, kisher dar, kisher bhay?*" Abul Hussain, "*Pataka*"(1926), in *Astitva*, Vol. I (1986), p. 62.

Dacca, 1925) Tagore gave three speeches at Dhaka University, of which DUCSU organized two, and Abul Hussain organized the third in Muslim Hall (Fazal, 1968, pp. 140-145).

For a grand reception to Tagore, Abul Hussain involved all Executive Committee members of the Muslim Hall Student Union. He formed a seven-member student committee for the decoration of the hall. The two undergraduate students of the committee were Mohammad Eusuf and Bilayet Ali Khan. (Hussain, 1990, p. 7) Later these two students would become active members of the MSS. The Muslim Hall students were excited that Tagore would visit their hall. At first, they decided that Tagore would be given a reception only by an 'address of welcome' Shortly before the visit, enthusiasm for Tagore had reached such an extent that students wanted to drink tea with Tagore. Abul Hussain endorsed this love of students for Tagore. He arranged money so that students could have tea with Tagore.³¹ Under Abul Hussain's leadership, Muslim Hall students gave a grand reception to Tagore. Abul Fazal describes this event in his memoir:

The reception was arranged in the large dining room of the Muslim Hall. From the university's main entrance to the Muslim Hall, the road was covered with flowers of all types. The room was turned into several flower gardens with little birds in the cage. The students were excited and forgot that Rabindranath would not like these little birds in a cage. When Tagore entered the Hall, students showered upon him in a rain of flowers.... Tagore entered the Hall with his son Rathindranath and his wife, Pratima Devi. The vast audience gave a standing ovation.... The poet's chair was decorated with so many flowers that one could hardly see the chair. The second round of flower showering upon Tagore

³¹ Abul Hussain wrote: "On the occasion of Rabindranath's visit, great excitement had begun among students in Muslim Hall. The Hall Union members decided at first to give an address of welcome. Subsequently their respect for Tagore was more excited. The students decided to arrange a tea-party for Tagore. But there was very little money in the Union Fund. So, we decided to raise funds from donation of students. The entire expense of tea-party was raised in one day." See, Abul Hussain, "*Pataka*," reprinted in Syed Abul Maqsd (ed), *Astitva*, II (1990), p. 7.

began when the poet took his seat.... I have never seen such a magnificent reception in my life. (Fazal, 1968, pp. 144-145)

Abul Hussain read an address of welcome. He capitalized on a crowded gathering to launch a manifesto of the buddhir mukti movement for the first time. The crowd was composed of elite intellectuals as well as hundreds of students. In the reception address, Abul Hussain first paid rich tribute to Tagore. He identified Tagore with the motto of *buddhir mukti* ("Emancipation of Intellect"). His purpose was to appeal for the support of "*Rabindra(a)nuragis*" or 'lovers of Rabindranath' to support the MSS that had been born only a week before Tagore came to Dhaka. We cite a paragraph of his "Address of Welcome to Tagore:"

Oh! Conservatory of World learning! 'Njan jekhane simabaddha, buddhi sekhane arastha, mukti sekhane asambhab' ("Where knowledge is restricted, there the intellect is inert and their freedom is impossible"); you, having understood and felt this motto in your heart, have arranged a dynamic program for acquisition of world knowledge in Shantiniketan. Let us be inspired by your ideals of the conservation of world knowledge so that we can go beyond the narrow boundary of shastra, time, nation, and country to accept all humanity's contributions as our own. Your immortal advice, 'non-co-operation in the world of knowledge is death,' we will never forget so long as we live.³²

In 1927, Abul Hussain founded a radical organization in Muslim Hall, the Al-Mamun Club. Its secretary was Naziruddin Ahmad, a brilliant student of history at Dhaka University. On the club's opening day, Abul Hussain read an article, "*Al-Mamun*," that highlighted the rational

³² Abul Hussain, "*Kabi Samrat Acarja Rabindranath Takhurer Dhakay Agaman Uplakshe Muslim Hall Chatrabrinder Abhinandan*," Abdul Kadir (ed.), *Abul Hussainer Racanabali*, p. 288. For Rabindranath's speech in Muslim Hall, see Abul Hussain, "*Muslim Halle, Rabindranather Abhibhashan*," *Abhijan*, Vol. I, No.1 (1926), pp. 16-18. For Wadud's comment on Tagore's speech, see Kazi Abdul Wadud, "*Mlan Samasya*," *Saogat*, Vol. VI, No. 12 (1929), pp. 850-851.

thought of Mutazilites during the reign of Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mamun.³³ The club was open to all students. The Purdah-birodhi Samgha, (Fazal, 1968, p. 162) or Anti-Purdah Association, of Dhaka University used Al-Mamun Club as a forum. In 1927, the Purdah-birodhi Samgha formally received a Muslim female student, Miss Fajilatun Nesa. Fajilatun was the only Muslim female graduate student of Dhaka University in 1927. She broke *purdah* in the university by refusing to wear a *borka* or a black ankle-length veil (Fazal, 1968, p. 163). As a result, Fajilatun was taken by the Samgha as a symbol of Muslim *nari pragati* (Woman's progress) (Fazal, 1968, p. 163) in reply to the reception, Fajilatun read a lengthy written paper on the "Urgency of education for Muslim females"(Fazal, 1968, p. 163).

Impact of Dhaka University: Freedom of Expression

Freedom was one of the precious objectives for which Dhaka University was founded in 1921. The Calcutta University Commission (1917) granted the University the right to have "autonomy" while drawing its financial support from the government. The Commission wrote, "By autonomy, we mean neither irresponsibility nor freedom from all constitutional restraints. But without a certain degree of freedom, we do not think the University of Dacca can ever become a living and healthy organism" (Stapleton, 1921, p. iv).

A limited autonomy from governmental control was implemented at Dhaka University. The highest executive body of the University, the Dhaka University Court, was elected by the university's registered graduates. Members of the Court elected the provosts. The vice-chancellor

³³ The article was first published in Bengali journal *Jayati*, Vol. I, No.1 (1930). The article is reprinted in Abdul Kadir (ed.), *Abul Hussainer Racanabali*, pp. 252-262.

had his vote and a casting vote to elect a provost.³⁴ In those days, the dean's office was selected, but only senior professors with high academic standings were appointed. P.J. Hartog, the first vice-chancellor of the university, stood against any discrimination of students, teachers, and officeholders for any beliefs and practices:

It shall not be lawful for the University or any of its authorities from now on provided to adopt or impose on any person any test, whatever of race, religious belief, or of profession, to entail him to be admitted as a professor, teacher, or student of the university, or to hold any office therein or to graduate thereat or to enjoy or exercise any privilege thereof, except where the such test is expressly provided under this act or the statutes of the university made thereunder, or as may be defined in Trust Deeds.³⁵

The act was fully implemented during the early decades of the university. The university teachers were appointed based on merit rather than race and religion. The university began with a 60-member, highly qualified teaching staff, of which 45 were Hindus, 11 were Muslims, and 4 were Europeans. (Rahim, 1981, p. 194) H.E. Stapleton, Special Officer of Dhaka University during the 1920s, described a motto of freedom and humanity that the university expected from its students:

The visions will be vouchsafed to the student of his inherent oneness with humanity--a oneness that Wilberforce has pointed out transcends and overflows the isolation of personality.... He will be face to face with the conception that...we have only to unite

³⁴ In 1932, Shahidullah was a contestant for the position of provost in Muslim Hall. Shaihidullah got seven votes while his opponent got eight votes. Vice-chancellor, Professor G.H. Langley, elected Shahidullah by his own vote as well as the casting vote as the president of the meeting. See News Report, "Dr. Shahidullah Appointed Provost of Dacca Muslim Hall," *The Mussalman*, February 20, 1932.

³⁵ Dhaka University, Philip Joshep Hartog Papers, Vol. I, Hartog's Memorandum No. 59, unpublished, see British Library, MSS, EUR, 221.

ourselves by loving service with our fellow men...to attain bodhi (enlightenment), to obtain mukti (salvation). (Stapleton, 1921, p. viii)

Several examples show that teaching staff and students enjoyed and exercised freedom at Dhaka University. Muslim hall students had refused to give entry into the hall to Sir Abdur Rahim, a communal political leader of the Bengal Legislative Council. (Karim, 1993, p. 39) Similarly, A.F. Rahman, provost of Muslim Hall, recognized students' "academic freedom" to practice and express their beliefs. In 1925, Muslim Hall students arranged a debate on a radical topic. The event has been described by a Muslim student leader who organized this debate:

For the first time in the Muslim Hall, I arranged a debate on a topic: 'Bolshevism is the only hope of mankind.' The opponent group, led by Professor Ayer of the Economics Department, took the opposite. The vice-chancellor, P.J. Hartog, gave a lengthy speech against Bolshevism. The opponents could not refute our argument. The overwhelming majority of the panel issued a decision in favor of us. As a result of this decision, the University administration was scared of the 'sedition' movement on the campus. Sir A. F. Rahman was undaunted by this fear and told us: 'the Hall Union is a students' union, and they must have academic freedom.' (Hussain, 1945, p. 313)

Sir A. F. Rahman took a leave from the university in 1927. He took a new job as secretary of the 'reform committee' of Aligarh University. At this time, Wadud and Abul Hussain knew Rahman. Abul Hussain worked as a house tutor of Muslim Hall, while Rahman was provost of the Hall. Additionally, Rahman was a secretary of the reception committee of the MSS in 1926. As vice-chancellor of Dhaka University in 1935, Rahman served as president of a General Session of MSS. Rahman said his opinion about the MSS in 1926: "Muslim Sahitya Samaj is a movement of new dynamism. It is simply a symptom of a new renaissance in our society" (Rahman, 1926, p. 2).

Intellectual freedom had existed in Muslim halls before it became a stronghold of MSS. Professor A.F. Rahman (History)³⁶ symbolized secularism in the hall. He was popular among Hindu and Muslim students. When a Hindu provost of Jagannath Hall took leave, Hindu students of Jagannath Hall insisted that Sir P.J. Hartog appoint Rahman as their provost (Rahman, 1945, p. 295). Rahman usually opposed any Islamic orthodoxy in the hall. One of Rahman's students wrote:

While he (Rahman) was provost, the number of the be-namaji (non-praying) students in the Hall increased faster than the namaji (praying) students. As a religious person, Shahidullah (one of the house tutors of the Hall) was so excited that he strictly imposed five-time prayer as compulsory for every student. As a result, students broke into two groups: namaji and be-namaji. After a lengthy debate between the two groups, the matter was referred to the provost. Sir A.F. Rahman solved the issue diplomatically: 'After the whole day, you go to sleep. What is a guarantee that this sleep is not your eternal sleep? Can you take care of yourself when you are asleep? Should you not, then commit yourself to the care and will of your Lord before you retire to bed.' (Khan, 1945, p. 301)

Rahman's mild but diplomatic reply did not help the praying group, who wanted an Islamization program in Muslim Hall. The non-praying group was united firmly. They demanded that meals be served as usual during Ramadan in the dining room (Ali, 1928, p. 206). They

³⁶ Born in 1889 in West Bengal, Rahman was educated at Oxford and London University. For a few years in the 1910s, Rahman taught history at Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College. In 1921, Rahman joined Dhaka University as Reader in History Department. In 1924, he was elected as representative of Dhaka University to the Bengal Legislative Council. In 1934, he was appointed as vice-chancellor of Dhaka University. In 1937, he was appointed as a member of the Indian Civil Service Commission. In 1942, Rahman was knighted. Rahman died on March 24, 1945. For biographical information on Sir A.F. Rahman, see Mizanur Rahman, "A.F. Rahman," *Jagaran*, Vol. IV No. 9 (1945), pp. 294-295. B.C. Ghosh, "Jibani," *Jagaran*, Vol. IV No. 9 (1945), p. 297. Abul Khayer Ahmad Khan, "Smriti-Kanika," *Jagaran*, Vol. IV No. 9 (1945), pp. 299-301. Mohammad Shahidullah, "Sir A.F. Rahman," *Jagaran*, Vol. IV No. 9 (1945), pp. 304-305.

discussed with Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah that religion is purely private and personal. Shahidullah compromised to the extent that they should declare themselves sick, and then they would be allowed to eat privately.

The non-praying group was not satisfied. They petitioned the university's chancellor to keep the dining hall open during Ramadan. Under the chancellor's instruction, Sir A.F. Rahman temporarily calmed down the rebellious student group. The new provost, Mahmud Hussain, made Ramadan compulsory for Muslim students of the Hall. The non-praying group challenged this arbitrary decision of the provost and filed a case in the civil court against Dhaka University for violating students' freedom of religious beliefs (Ali, 1828, pp. 203-214). The decision of the court is not known to us. Nevertheless, the formation of a non-praying group, a willingness to eat during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, and finally filing a case in the civil court for safeguarding freedom against Islamic injunction was a classic example of Muslim *bhadralok's* radicalism in Dhaka University, before the MSS was founded. For example, a rebellious student of the Muslim Hall, Khan Mohammad Aatur Rahman, even wrote an essay in which he drew picture sketches of *maulabis* who were intolerant and brought torture to freedom of expression.

Several reasons can account for the radicalism of the non-praying group. One can see that the group had fully utilized the religious freedom that P.G. Hartog had stipulated for Dhaka University. Second, though we have no evidence to prove Abul Hussain's specific influence on the group when the group emerged, Abul Hussain was one of the house tutors and published in *Tarun Patra* several radical essays that were critical of Islam. For example, Abul Hussain wrote in one of the articles of *Tarun Patra*:

You recite the Quran and Hadith wonderfully, yet your mind will remain dry. The recitation will satisfy your tongue and ear, but your mind will remain hungry.... Performance of

religious formalism will not give you the truth. If there is no life in religious formalism, it will wear down your body, and you will not go to the path of truth.... Have you not seen people snooze in prayer in the mosque and preaching in milad? Can we achieve reality through these?³⁷ (Kadir, pp. 3-12)

The group's rebellion could also be explained as due to the popularity of Brahma Samaj among students of Dhaka University. Communist leader, Girish Chandra Nag, said in a speech in Jagannath Hall in 1930: "Students, in general, had a leaning towards Brahmoism, which was making headway in East Bengal"(Sen, 1981, p. 23). Abul Fazal, an undergraduate student of the Muslim Hall, was a regular visitor to the Brahma *mandir* in Dhaka. The location of the *mandir* was in Bidhan village, which was in the neighborhood of Muslim Hall. Abul Fazal wrote: "Every Saturday, there were speeches and songs in the *mandir*. I used to go there frequently because there was no restriction upon the non-Brahmos to enter the *mandir*. Therefore, many non-Brahmos, like me, enjoyed those functions" (Fazal, 1968, p. 168).

Means of Informal Intellectual Exchanges: *Addas*

Wadud and Abul Hussain were like immigrants in Dhaka city in the 1920s. Wadud came to Dhaka in 1920, and Abul Hussain in 1921. They had no roots in the town. They owned no property and had no near relatives in Dhaka. Yet, within six years of their arrival in Dhaka, they founded a significant, meaningful, unique intellectual association. For the formation of the MSS, Wadud recalled the years 1920-26 as the years of "preparation." Wadud wrote to Abdul Huq, a writer who edited Wadud's writings in the 1970s:

³⁷ Abul Hussain, "Satya" or "Truth," Abul Hussain (ed.) *Tarun Patra*, Vol. I (May-June, 1925). See also Abul Hussain, "Ahamika," *Tarun Patra* Vol. I (April-May, 1925); "Agganubartita," *Tarun Patra*, Vol. I (June-July, 1925). The three articles are reprinted in Abdul Kadir (ed.), *Abul Hussain Racanabali*, pp. 3-12.

Your evaluation of the Shikha is good, but you had yet to write anything about Abul Hussain and my preparation during the years before the publication of Shikha--that makes your essay incomplete. To know Abul Hussain's preparation, look at Tarun Patra (1925). Understanding my preparation is less complicated, and I can answer your questions. (Huq, 1983, p. 9)

Wadud prepared to build many informal intellectual circles or *addas* in Dhaka.

Characteristics of Intellectual *Addas* in Dhaka

The general meaning of *adda* in a Bengali context is an informal means of thinking and communicating through group conversation. *Adda* is one of the typical socio-cultural experiences in the intellectual life of a Bengali. The primary cohesion among participants of an *adda* is not ordinarily based on kinship relations. The intellectual *adda*, or *budhijibider adda*, in Bengali society, is formed when formal relationships, for example, a conventional relationship among professional colleagues or a formal association of teacher-student or peer relationship among students is further extended into an informal relationship, e.g., as among companions or friends. The informal relationship grows further through frequent casual meetings or *addas*. Unlike formal voluntary associations, an *adda* has no fixed agenda. An *adda* has no set time, place, membership, subscription, constitution, or schedule. Nevertheless, many *addas* in Bengal have developed into formal voluntary intellectual associations or have published some of the finest Bengali journals.

Many intellectual *addas* existed in Dhaka during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. One good example was the '*Pragati adda*' or '*Progressive adda*.' One participant of this *adda* was Buddhadeb Basu, a scholar and an academic graduate from Dhaka University. The *Pragati adda* originated in the Dhaka University cafeteria in the 1920s, as Basu relates:

Compared to our education in the university (Dhaka University), the facility of our cafeteria was inferior. Situated in one corner of the University, the cafe was a shanty place filled with worn-out furniture. It was here that we ate our lunch and drank tea. It is here we met our friends---Tonu (later, Professor Ajit Kumar Dutt of Dhaka University), Amal (later, Professor Amalendu Dutta of Calcutta and Aligarh Universities), Parimal (later, Professor Parimal Roy of Dhaka and Delhi Universities). Hour after hour, we spent here in addas and drank tea and talked about literature, Bengali society, and politics. (Basu, 1981, p. 89)

The *adda* gave itself a name in 1926-27, *Pragati adda*, or Progressive Group. They also published a literary journal, *Pragati*, edited by Budhadeb Basu and Ajit Kumar Dutta. Centered on this journal, *Pragati*, the *Pragati adda* in 1940 crystallized into a formal voluntary association, Pragati Lekhak Samgha or Progressive Writers Association. (Gupta & Karim, 1994, pp. 50-54) Detailed evidence is not available, yet there is a reference that the *Pragati adda* knew Abul Hussain and Wadud. Basu had been a student of Wadud at Dhaka Intermediate College. In 1926, 'rebel poet' Nazrul Islam came to the opening session of MSS. Basu snatched Nazrul away from Abul Hussain's house and brought him to *Pragati adda* (Rahman, 1991, p. 78).

Another *adda* was regularly held in the house of Mohitlal Majumdar, a teacher at the Bengali Department of Dhaka University. Shukumar Ray was a student of Mohitlal, yet Ray regularly attended the *adda* held in his teacher's house. Ray described this *adda*:

I have studied Bengali literature and attended many addas (in Dhaka city). But no adda had overwhelmed my thought so much as the adda held in the house of Professor Mohitlal Majumdar. Usually, the adda was born in the evening and participated in by students, teachers, professional writers, and scholars of literature. In the addas, night after night,

Mohitlal discussed the writings of Rabindranath, Bankim, Madhusudan, and Debendranath Thakur on the one hand and recited poems of English poets of the romantic age on the other. (Ray, 1981, p. 95)

We are curious if *addas* in Mohitlal's house were ever transformed into a voluntary association. But Mohitlal, in the 1930s, played an active role in the MSS.

The *Addas* of Kazi Wadud in Dhaka

Wadud organized an *adda* with Kazi Mutahar Hussain in Dhaka city in 1920. Mutahar Hussain was a 'demonstrator' for the Physics Department of Dhaka University, and Wadud was a teacher of Bengali literature at Dhaka Intermediate College. Wadud was also a childhood friend of Mutahar. Mutahar wrote:

In childhood, I met Wadud every year when he came to the village during summer vacations. At that time, I was a rustic village boy, and he was a well-dressed and intelligent city babu....The village boys flew small kites; he flew a big kite....Yet he loved me...because he believed some intelligence was still left in my brain.... (Hussain, 1984, pp. 358-359)

In 1920, Kazi Wadud renewed this informal relation of childhood friendship with Kazi Mutahar in Dhaka. The two Kazis rented a house in Dhaka and lived with their families for four years (to 1924). Mutahar was a physicist, a good singer, and a renowned chess player. Wadud developed both these hobbies of Mutahar in *addas*. (Hussain, 1984, p. 362) This friendship with Mutahar brought Wadud into informal contact with many other intellectuals of Dhaka University. For example, Professor R.C. Majumdar and Mohammad Shahidullah knew Mutahar. Mutahar was a

"favorite student of Satyen Bose," again a good friend of Professor Majumdar. Mutahar described one incident in which Professor Majumdar expressed intimacy with Mutahar:

Ramesh babu once organized a cultural function at Jagannath Hall. For some reason, I was late for that function. Ramesh babu immediately sent a student to my home. When I reached the function, there was no vacant seat in the male spectator's area. Ramesh babu directed one student, 'seat Kazi saheb in a vacant seat in the area of female spectators because he (Kazi) is the ladies of the ladies. (Hussain, 1992, p. 28)

Mutahar's familiarity with Shahidullah, however, was based on kinship. Mutahar wrote: "By matrimony; Shahidullah was my maternal father-in-law (*baibahik samparke Shahidullah amar khalu svashur haten*)"(Hussain, 1992, p. 29).

Wadud cemented the informal contacts with Professor Majumdar and Shahidullah that he initially established through Mutahar. At the same time, Wadud organized literary *addas* in his home, *Johara Manjil*, where many professors, including Professor Majumdar, frequently participated. S.N.Q. Zulfiqar Ali, a Bengali civil servant, participated in *addas* in Wadud's home. Ali wrote:

Frequent literary *addas* were held in Wadud's home, *Johara Manjil*, Dhaka. The participants usually read essays and self-composed poems. I have been introduced to many intellectuals in these *addas* S.N. Maitra (principal, Dhaka Intermediate College); Dr. Kalika Ranjan Kanungo (Professor of Bengali, Dhaka University); Caru Candra Bandyopadhyay (Assistant Professor of Bengali, Dhaka University); Kazi Mutahar Hussain; Stayen Bose; A.F. Rahman; R.C. Majumdar and Haridas Bhattycarjya (Professors of Dhaka University). I have noticed and respected one characteristic of Wadud in these *addas*. He never thought himself inferior to these high-profile Dhaka University professors. He never thought he

was only a government college teacher, and they were high-profile intellectuals of Dhaka University. In the addas, Wadud spread his ideas to these intellectuals through conversations and debates. (Ali, 1982, pp. 78-79)

Wadud's home was not the only place of *adda* in Dhaka. Wadud took Mutahar to Anwarul Kadir's home, where he met Abul Hussain (Rahman, 1988). Anwarul Kadir (Professor of Logic) was a professional colleague of Wadud at Dhaka Intermediate College (Islam, 1981, p. 252). This formal professional relationship between Wadud and Anwarul Kadir soon developed into what Wadud called: *bandhubar Anwarul Kadir* (Wadud, 1990, 323) or great friend Anwarul Kadir. What had transformed this formal relationship into an informal friendship is challenging to establish. Perhaps it is an inherent social trait of Bengalis to mix freely and frankly with strangers if they sense some similarity of feelings.

Anwarul Kadir's daughter, Zaheda Rahman (now residing in Dhaka), and son Hamidul Kadir (now residing in Calcutta), confirmed for me (1993) that Wadud frequently visited their home in Dhaka. In 1928, Kadir was transferred from Dhaka to Noakhali. The departure of his friend saddened Wadud. He wrote in his diary:

Today my *bandhubar* is leaving. I have not had as much friendship with anybody as with him. Pramatha (Pramatha Sarkar, Professor of Economics at a college in Calcutta), Niren (Nirendranath Roy, Professor of English at a college in Calcutta), Afzal (Afzalul Huq, editor and publisher in Calcutta) were my good friends. But with Kadir, I have a relationship of heart, more organic, the kind of relationship I have with my children and a few relatives. (Wadud, 1990, p. 324)

Wadud met Abul Hussain at Anwarul Kadir's home because Abul Hussain was a frequent visitor at Anwarul Kadir's home. We have noted that Anwarul Kadir was a school teacher of Abul

Hussain. Anwarul Kadir's financial subsidy and paternal care supported young Abul Hussain's secondary education. At that time, young Abul Hussain addressed Kadir, *baba*, or father. After many years, they met again in Dhaka. Abul Hussain continued to call Anwarul Kadir *baba*, although Abul Hussain held a higher professional rank at Dhaka University. Anwarul Kadir, like a father, advised his son and asked Abul Hussain to complete a law degree. After Abul Hussain completed the degree of M.L.A. and obtained a distinction, he "touched the feet" of his *baba*, Anwarul Kadir.³⁸ At a family level, Abul Hussain's children were like brothers and sisters of Kadir's daughter and son. Hamidul Kadir frankly admitted that his father, Anwarul Kadir, did not develop a habit of writing because Anwarul Kadir's view was: "Socrates did not write!" Abul Hussain inspired Kadir to write and read articles in MSS sessions.³⁹ Abul Hussain inspired Anwarul Kadir to edit these articles and publish a book. The book was published in 1934 under *Amader Duhkha* (1934) or 'Our Sorrows.'

Wadud's informal acquaintance with Abul Hussain at Kadir's home was gradually cemented. During 1924-25, Wadud, Abul Hussain, Kadir, and Kazi Mutahar Hussain had "closed-door meetings" in Kadir's home.⁴⁰ We need to find out what they discussed in these *addas*. Zaheda told me that she was young and could not enter that room. Wadud's *adda* with Abul Hussain was extended outside of Kadir's home. Together, they spent hours watching 'folk dramas and songs' (*jatra gan*) in Dhaka. They visited and enjoyed the songs of the Brahmo Samaj of Dhaka (Wadud, 1990, p. 307). Wadud's respect for Abul Hussain's ideological stance further strengthened this informal companionship. Wadud wrote in his diary:

³⁸ Interview with Zaheda Rahman, Dhaka, May 5 1993, unpublished.

³⁹ Interview with Hamidul Kadir, Anwarul Kadir's son, Calcutta, June 23, 1993, unpublished.

⁴⁰ Interview with Zaheda Rahman, Dhaka, May 5 1993, unpublished.

He (Abul Hussain) is committed to the well-being of [Muslim] society. But how stupid Muslims are that they could not follow Abul Hussain....Abul Hussain wants to present himself in the Muslim community as an exemplary instance of devotion, dedication, and bravery. But Muslim society does not understand a single word of Abul Hussain. They also think he is an enemy of Islam and the Muslim community. Of course, ordinary people are like this in every society, but none is so 'perverse' as the Muslims. I do not blame them too much if they do not understand me. But Abul Hussain's thought is so clear that, except for blind people, everybody should understand each of his words. This blind and stupid (ahammak) Muslim society is probably fit to be destroyed.⁴¹

Wadud's support of Abul Hussain's radical stance continued as long as Wadud lived. Specifically, in MSS sessions, Abul Hussain was allowed to read most of his radical personal essays, and Wadud was one of their vocal supporters. In 1926, shortly after MSS was founded, Wadud published his book, *Naba Parjay* or 'New Step.' Wadud respectfully acknowledged the following: "This book's title, '*Naba Parjay*,' is given to me by my respected friend, Professor Abul Hussain" (Wadud, 1926, p. 3).

A strong Rabindra-admiring *adda* existed in Dhaka city in the 1920s. Wadud entered this *adda*, called Vishva-Bharati Sanmelani (1924), or Vishva-Bharati *adda*. The *adda* was first begun by Manoranjan Dhar. Manoranjan was a cultured Hindu bhadrakalok as well as a business person. Inspired by Tagore, he opened a bookstore in Dhaka city. The store was not far from Dhaka

⁴¹ *Tini samajer kalyan can--sei tar aradhya. Kintu mussalman ki ahammak--ei loktir katha ektuo bujhte pare na....Samajer samne emani ekti tyager emani ekta sahaser dristantao tini pesh karte can. Kintu mussalman tar e kajer etatuku artha bujhla na--shudhu tai nay, takei tara bhabe dharma o samajer satru bale. Abashya sadharan manusher sab deshei ei cehara, kintu hayta eta 'perverse' (English phrase is Wadud's) keau nay. Amake jadi na bojhen tabe besi dosh dite pari na, kintu Abul Hussainer samajpriti eta suspastha je andha bhinna ar sabari najare para ucit. Sei andha, ahammak, mussalman samaj hayta dhvamsa haye jaoyar jogya. Kazi Abdul Wadud, Nana Katha, p. 327.*

University and Kazi Wadud's house. To attract customers to his shop, Manoranjan organized an *adda* of the intellectuals in his shop. Abul Fazal has described the *Vishva-Bharati adda* in Dhaka:

The *Vishva-Bharati Sanmelani* offered an excellent opportunity to those who moved purposefully to Dhaka city to include themselves in some *addas* for literary activities. The bookstore of Manoranjan Dhar was named *Bani Mandir* (temple of words). And underneath the store's name was written: 'here are available books of Rabindranath, Sarat Candra, Nazrul Islam, and books of many more modern writers.' We began to visit this shop every evening. After I got a taste of the literary activity of the shop, I became a member of *Vishva-Bharati Sanmelani*. (Fazal, 1968, pp. 137-139)

The Bani Mandir was also one of the distributors of Wadud's book, *Naba Parjay*, I & II (1926, 1929). Wadud participated in this *adda* because it largely centered on the life and thought of Rabindranath Tagore. The regular self-styled 'secretary' of the *adda* was Parimal Kumar Ghosh. Parimal was a colleague of Wadud and a Professor of English at Dhaka Intermediate College. In many meetings of this *adda*, Wadud also met Caru Candra Bandyopadhyay. Caru was a specialist on Rabindranath in Dhaka University. In 1924, Wadud had given three talks on Rabindranath (Wadud, 1927) in three consecutive *Vishva-Bharati addas* in Dhaka. The *adda* had also arranged a staging of Tagore's drama, *Falguni*. Wadud also took a role in the drama along with many other intellectuals of Dhaka city, including Dhaka Intermediate College professors (Fazal, 1968, p. 139).

We noted Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Dhaka in 1926. On February 14, 1926, the Vishva-Bharati *adda* arranged a small meeting in honor of Tagore in Apurba Kumar Canda's house. Canda was Wadud's colleague at Dhaka Intermediate College. Wadud, Professor R.C. Majumdar, and a few other elite intellectuals of Dhaka were invited. (Fazal, 1968, p. 147)

Abul Fazal was also invited because of his close association with *Vishva-Bharati adda*. The reception arrangement of the meeting followed the typical Hinduized way. The two Muslim participants accepted this arrangement without questions. Abul Fazal noted this reception arrangement in his memoir:

I looked behind and saw Kazi Wadud entering the adda. A Hindu woman outside the door received Kazi Wadud by pasting a mark of 'scented wood' (chandan) on his forehead. The woman was doing the same to everybody who was entering. I took a relaxed breath. After all, I am not the only one. Kazi saheb was a lecturer, and I was a mere student.... (Fazal, 1968, p. 148)

Abul Hussain knew R.C. Majumdar. Professor Majumdar was the Dean of the Faculty of Arts who recommended Abul Hussain for an appointment at Dhaka University. Abul Hussain also knew Professor A.F. Rahman because Abul Hussain was one of his assistant house tutors in Muslim Hall. However, no evidence is available to determine if Abul Hussain had converted these professional relationships into informal ones in *adda*. However, there is evidence of Abul Hussain's causal relationship with Khan Bahadur Abdur Rahman Khan. Khan was Secretary of the Dhaka Board of Education. Abul Hussain's influence on Khan was responsible for the latter's participation in the MSS. Rahman Khan's biographer noted: "Abul Hussain respected Rahman Khan as a *murabbi* (respected senior) because he was a friend of Anwarul Kadir." (Saklayan, 1990, p. 47) Rahman Khan wrote in his autobiography, *Amar Jiban* (1964), that his informal relationship with Abul Hussain had brought him to participate in MSS:

In 1928, he (Abul Hussain) told me that 'you have to be president of this session of the Dhaka Muslim Sahitya Samaj....I refused by giving him several reasons. But he (Abul Hussain) did not listen. I therefore agreed and became a president. (Khan, 1964, p.144)

By involving Dhaka *bhadralok* in informal intellectual networks, Wadud and Abul Hussain were ready to form a formal voluntary intellectual organization. We do not know precisely when and in which *adda*, if any, they decided to start the Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS). Nonetheless, after the MSS was formally founded, the students and intellectuals of Wadud's and Abul Hussain's informal networks were the first batches of its members.

Foundation of Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS)

The MSS was founded formally in the afternoon (4 p.m.) of January 17, 1926. The foundation was preceded by a formal meeting held in Muslim Hall. The meeting was presided over by Mohammad Shahidullah and was participated in by four key individuals: Wadud, Abul Hussain, and two students, Abdul Kadir and A. M. Taheruddin. The foundation meeting lasted only a short time, which gives the impression that the actual decision to found the MSS had already been taken in *addas* to Wadud. The MSS was not based on a clear ideological consensus. This is clear from a disagreement in the foundation meeting. Shahidullah argued that the purpose of MSS is to create: "Muslim literature for safeguarding Muslim culture" (Hussain & Bandopadhyay, 1926, p.3). Wadud disagreed saying, "This organization (MSS) would make no distinction between East and West Bengali literature" (Hussain & Bandopadhyay, 1926, p. 3). The divergence of ideals was thus clearly visible at the very foundation of MSS.

Conclusion

The foundation of the MSS and publication of *Shikha* originated in Dhaka, not simply because Wadud and Abul Hussain were working in Dhaka in the 1920s. Since the late nineteenth century, a solid intellectual climate and context of voluntary intellectual associations have existed in Dhaka.

These were direct and indirect results of British policies for developing Dhaka city and Bengali communication patterns. British rule pursued two fundamental policies in Dhaka: urbanization and extension of English educational facilities. As a result, a newly educated *bhadralok* community grew up who were founders and participants of modern intellectual associations in Dhaka.

The establishment of a university in Dhaka by British rule directly contributed to the formation of MSS and the encouragement of similar intellectual initiatives. Among notable influences of Dhaka University upon the formation of MSS, this essay has emphasized two factors: i) Dhaka University tended to break down the hierarchy of formal relations between teacher and student, and ii) Dhaka University recognized and supported freedom of thought and expression. The former, encouraging more intimate informal relations between teachers and students, was further developed by the rational humanist teacher Abul Hussain, who welcomed Tagore to Dhaka University with his students. This causal relationship mode induced many students to join their teachers in MSS. The MSS maintained that informal collegial relationship in its organizational structure, debates, editorship of *Shikha*, and other social activities.

The freedom of thought that Dhaka University advocated had its predecessors, like the freedom to criticize and innovate in religion and society exhibited by *Naba Bidhan Sabha* in its standpoint of radicalism in late nineteenth-century Dhaka city. Freedom of thought was also implicit in the religious pluralism of Dhaka *bhadralok* editors and the students of Dhaka city. Conservative and traditional interests in Dhaka before the 1930s could not initiate and sustain any effective movements against liberal and rational humanist viewpoints. The racial and religious freedom of Dhaka University, rightly or wrongly interpreted by some teachers and students, provided a supportive milieu on the university campus for intellectual initiatives culminating in MSS and *Shikha*. Early ordinances of freedom of thought at Dhaka University had enabled a

radical 'non-praying group' to exist even in Muslim Hall. Furthermore, Abul Hussain was able, based on the freedom of thought of Dhaka University, to publish a radical journal *Tarun Patra*, a radical Al-Mamun Club, and finally, MSS on campus.

The structural pattern of many journals and associations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Dhaka had also influenced the shape of MSS and *Shikha*. The example of a masthead used by *Bangabandhu* (journal of Naba Bidhan Sabha) was also visible in *Tarun Patra* and later in *Shikha*. Likewise, the Dhaka Sahitya Parishad had a president, general secretary, executive committee, and annual meetings, i.e., a structure very similar to what would be utilized by MSS.

Wadud, for his part, built on the intellectual ethos and pattern of *addas* that existed in Dhaka. The *adda* network helped Wadud to have informal intellectual exchanges with the *bhadralok* of Dhaka city. These *bhadralok* and students of Wadud's and Abul Hussain's *adda* circles were the first cadres of people who joined the MSS. For example, six intellectuals out of the seven stalwarts of the *buddhir mukti* movement and the MSS had been associated previously with Wadud's and Abul Hussain's *addas*.

The MSS and *Shikha* were forums founded by Muslims. Yet, unlike many Hindu, Muslim, and Brahma associations and journals in Dhaka, a parochial and religious exclusiveness was foreign to the MSS and *Shikha*. This is evident in MSS's definition of membership, composition, resolutions, rules of procedure, intellectual activities, and contents of its journal, *Shikha*. In none of the areas was discrimination imposed because of religion, gender, or professional status. Deliberation of MSS shows that radical Muslims of MSS were critical of Islam and Muslim society in several respects. This gave birth to an intellectual polarization between 'Islamic liberals' and

'radicals' in MSS, and communal political pressures beyond the Samaj--led to the demise in the mid-1930s.

The essential contribution of the MSS was not its advocacy of any particular viewpoint. Its unique gift provided a framework within which a range of divergent views could be expressed and mutually assessed in orderly discussion and debate. The topics of essays ranged from Bengali Muslim literature, society, and religion-cultural life. But the ways of thinking about these Muslim topics were deliberately structured to be diverse and critical. One significance of calling the association a Muslim Samaj was that this would demonstrate that one could be Muslim and still engage in free and open debate on topics of concern to Bengali

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