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RECLAIMING KARBALA

NATION, ISLAM AND LITERATURE OF THE BENGALI MUSLIMS

Epsita Halder



This magnificent book sheds completely new light on the literary production and language choices of Bengal Muslims over three centuries, considering a vast array of texts in manuscript and printed form against the backdrop of successive waves of religious reform. *Reclaiming Karbala* shows how shifts in vocabulary, register and narrative focus need to be understood in the light of theological, political and aesthetic positions and debates. The book greatly adds to our understanding of the articulations of Muslim modernity, but also of Bengali literary modernity. The Bengal Renaissance will never look the same again.

Prof. Francesca Orsini, *Professor Emerita of Hindi and South Asian Literature, SOAS, University of London, UK*



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Reclaiming Karbala

Analysing an extensive range of texts and publications across multiple genres, formats and literary lineages, *Reclaiming Karbala* studies the emergence and formation of a viable Muslim identity in Bengal over the late-19th century through the 1940s. Beginning with an explanation of the tenets of the battle of Karbala, this multi-layered study explores what it means to be Muslim, as well as the nuanced relationship between religion, linguistic identity and literary modernity that marks both Bengaliness and Muslimness in the region. This book is an intervention into the literature on regional Islam in Bengal, offering a complex perspective on the polemic on religion and language in the formation of a *jatiya* Bengali Muslim identity in a multilingual context. This book, by placing this polemic in the context of intra-Islamic reformist conflict, shows how all these rival reformist groups unanimously negated the Karbala-centric commemorative ritual of Muharram and Shīʿī intercessory piety to secure a pro-Caliphate sensibility as the core value of the Bengali Muslim public sphere.

Epsita Halder is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, India. She was Visiting Fellow at Max-Weber Kolleg, University of Erfurt, Germany, and at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK.

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Nation, Islam and Literature of the Bengali Muslims

Epsita Halder

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To my parents

Manikarnika Halder
and
Adwaita Halder

Whether there is any definition for *jāti* in Sanskrit, I do not know. *Jāti*, in practical usage, denotes so many issues that any definite meaning is impossible to determine. In the general modern political context, it can be used as the synonym for English nation. The Muslims have a different idea of this nation or *jāti*. The uniqueness of their idea protects them as Muslims. While discussing the issues of *jāti* or nation, we need to specifically keep in mind that Muslim *jātīyatā* is not connected to any particular creed, alliance or territory. Muslim *jātīyatā* is exclusively connected to religion. All the Muslims in this world are one inseparable and indivisible *jāti*.

Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan
Presidential lecture, 3rd annual conference
Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti, Chittagong, 1918

***

Mingling my tears with Husayn's blood
I have brought this offering
Won't you place it in your heart
Won't your tears flow with mine?

Dedication page, *Maharam Śariph bā Ātma-Bisarjan Kābya*
Kaykobad, 1933

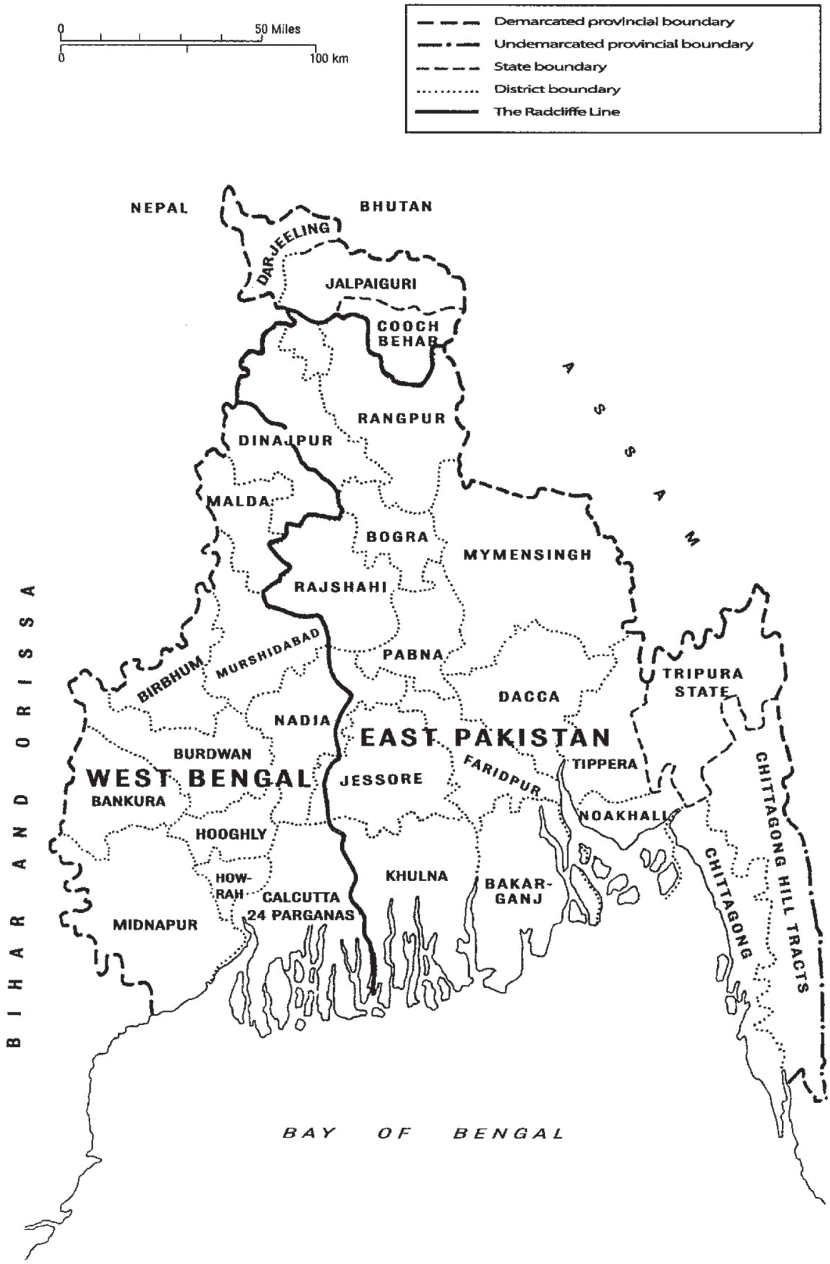


Figure 0.1 The Radcliffe Line between West Bengal and East Pakistan in 1947.



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Acknowledgements

It all began under the starry nights when my father used to tell me the story of a battle. In that story, a man was crossing a desert with his family when the enemy army blocked their way and closed the channels of river Forat. When the thirst became unbearable, the man took his child to the Forat for water. As the man got down to the dry riverbed, the enemy shot arrows at him, one piercing his son held close to his chest. Then there was a battle. The man's sons, nephews and friends, all thirsty, were killed one by one in unequal combat. At the very end, the man was killed. He was Husayn, the grandson of Muhammad. And the arid land was Karbala.

Every time the story was told, I cried with my father.

In those nights of storytelling, I did not know that all our tears were tied to history. I knew of neither Islam nor literature. The story of an overwhelmingly loving father who could not drink when he was offered water before getting killed as his family was thirsty for days emanated from my father's retelling as an ancient lore of some distant land. What remained in my memory was how the story of the other became the story of my father who was orphaned very young and left his village in East Pakistan to get enrolled in a college in West Bengal, crossing the borders all alone.

Years later, while searching for untrodden narratives for my doctoral research, I remembered my father's voice. My mother brought out a copy of *Bishad Sindhu* (Ocean of Sorrows) from our bookshelf. *Bishad Sindhu* is the first prose narrative in Bangla on the battle of Karbala by Mir Mosharraf Hossain. It was my mother's gift to my father on their marriage anniversary in 1984, almost after a century of *Bishad Sindhu*'s first publication. But my father's oratory was not exactly what *Bishad Sindhu* is. The history of Karbala appeared via many stories and many retellings.

I thank those starry nights when the story of Karbala was told and retold. When it all began.

***

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I thank my parents, Manikarnika and Adwaita, who told me, go fly. To them I dedicate this book.

Finally, beyond gratitude, I remember Satyabati, my maternal grandmother. The indomitable one, whom I carry within.

Epsita Halder
Kolkata
2023

A Note on Transliteration and Other Conventions

Inconsistency in transliteration is inevitable and confusion integral for a monograph such as this, which encompasses different historical episodes and linguistic-literary cultures ranging from Middle Bangla to standardised Bangla via Dobhāshī. This monograph undertook its journey through different periods of literary history that witnessed the growth of Bangla in multilingual contexts, with the introduction of Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords. The rationale for the adoption of Arabic-Persian words varied from the early modern period to the print era, compelling me to work out separate systems of transliteration for this monograph. This monograph uses four systems of transliteration, based on the Romanisation table provided by the Library of Congress (LOC) – Bangla, Urdu, Persian and Arabic – with a separate LOC table for each. I have, however, made a few modifications to approximate the pronunciations applicable for the various printed texts.

In order to identify the root of Sanskrit loanwords (*tatsama*) in Middle Bangla, the Sanskrit Romanisation table has been used, such as for *Śrīkṛṣṅavijaẏa*. But for the print era, *tatsama* words have been placed within the Bangla linguistic repertoire and transliterated according to their Bangla pronunciation, in accordance with the Bangla Romanisation table, such as *Krishňacarit* and *krishak*. I have used *Kāvya* to indicate the Sanskritic root of the Middle Bangla lyrical tradition and used *Kābya* following the Bangla Romanisation table for the lyrical expositions in the print era.

If the word has a Sanskrit root, *va* has been used, like *vaṃśa* or *vijaẏa* (generic name). But for an Arabic-Persian noun (*nabī*, *maktul*), the Bangla Romanisation table has been utilised. In the Middle Bangla repertoire, the Bangla Romanisation table has been employed for Arabic-Persian loanwords to indicate their domestication and the lack of any centralised Arabic-Persian system of transliteration. Following this, *Hosen* (not *Husayn*) and *Maktul* (not *Maqtul*), among others, have been used in this work. For the print era, because of an emerging consciousness on transliteration of the Arabic and Persian lexicon, Arabic, Persian and Urdu tables of Romanisation have been followed. The following abbreviations have been used throughout to indicate the relevant language, wherever needed: Ar. for Arabic; B. for Bangla; Pers. for Persian; and Ur. for Urdu.

As there are various forms of transliteration for Islamic Bangla proper names and terms of Arabic-Persian origin in the critical editions of Middle Bangla manuscripts, this monograph, to avoid confusion, has chosen the most linear form for the transliteration to remain close to Bangla orthography. For the transliteration of Bangla vowels, I have followed the regular Bangla Romanisation table, without accommodating the Prakrit orthographic specificities for Middle Bangla, to keep it simpler.

For universally known proper names (Muhammad, Aisha, Fatima, Hasan, Husayn) and place names (Mecca, Medina), I have used standardised modern forms. However, Aisha became Ayesha in the Bangla repertoire, and this monograph has kept the latter form whenever Bangla texts are concerned. Thus, two spellings for Karbala have been maintained to demarcate between the historical battle of Karbala (in standardised modern form) and its literary renditions in Bangla as Kārbālā. I have followed the system of Persian Romanisation and used *Rawẓat al-shuhadā'* instead of *Rawḍat al-shuhadā'* in the system of transliteration for Arabic. The more familiar *alim*, *namaz*, *pir*, *qissa*, *ulama*, Hanafi and *urs* have been transliterated to match their standardised modern forms.

The names of the authors and patrons of the early modern period have been transliterated following the Bangla table of Romanisation, such as Saiẏad Sultān, Muhammad Khān and Śekh Parāṇ. But all the proper names which came out in print are in the standard modern form following their preference of spellings, Jonab Ali, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Mir Mosharraf Hossain, Sheikh Abdur Rahim, Mohammad Uddin Ahmed, Mohammad Akram Khan, Saiyad Abul Hosen, etc. For the titles of the books and tracts in print, the original spellings in Bangla have been transliterated following the Bangla Romanisation table, such as *Jobdātol Māsāẏel* and *Hujjutol Momenin*, to showcase the transliteration that the authors themselves followed for the Arabic, Persian and Urdu lexicons.

As the standardisation of reformist language since the mid-19th century does not simply mark a linear Arabicisation, but has rather retained its Persianate character, this monograph has continued to follow the conventions of the *ulama* and used the Persianate *hadis* over the Arabic *hadith*, Usman over Uthman, *maẓhab* over *maḍhab* and so on, and used Persian Romanised forms for all such Persian loanwords. However, I have maintained an Arabicate *ahl al-bayt* instead of the Persianate *ahle bayt* following the preference of the reformist *ulama*. To signify the reformist group, I have used Ahl-i Hadis following the preference of the Persian and Urdu speaking north Indian *ulama*, and *Ahle Hadis*, for the Bangla periodicals, following the preferred spelling of the Bengal branch of Ahl-i Hadis. I have kept the local Persianised Faraizi in a standard Anglicised form due to its familiar presence in the available studies on the political history of Bengal, rather than the Arabic Farā'iḍi. For non-Indian and non-European scholars and poets, the table of Romanisation has

been deployed according to their Arabic or Persian-speaking status, such as Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī and Kamāl ad-Dīn Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī Kashifi. For reformers in the subcontinent who were Persian/Urdu speaking, such as Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī and Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī, the Persian Romanisation table has been followed.

Regarding conventions of dating utilised in the text, the abbreviation BS (Bangiya Shatak) has been used whenever required to indicate the Bangla calendar. All dates, which are not marked otherwise, refer to the Gregorian calendar. I have used two spellings for Dhaka and Kolkata, Dacca for pre-1971 and Calcutta for the colonial era. All English translations from Bangla in this book, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

Abbreviations

AIML	All India Muslim League
BMSP	Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā
BMSS	Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti
BPML	Bengal Provincial Muslim League
BSP	Bangiya Sahitya Parishat
CNMA	Central National Muhammadan Association
INC	Indian National Congress
KPP	Krishak Praja Party
MAO	Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College
ML	Muslim League
MLS	Mohammedan Literary Society
MSS	Muslim Sahitya Samaj
NBPS	Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti



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Introduction
Situating Karbala in Bengal

Hāẏ Kāchem calila raṇe, hāte bāndhi kaṅganā
Śire bāndhi sehrā, mehendir dāg to gela nā

Alas, Qasim goes to battle, bracelets of marriage on his wrists
A new groom he is, *mehndi* not yet faded from his palms
(Jasimuddin, *Sojan Bādiẏār Ghāt*)[1]

In his long ballad-like lyrical narrative *Sojan Bādiẏār Ghāt*,[2] iconic Bengali poet and folklorist Jasimuddin (1903–76) narrated how, in the month of Muharram, Muslims of rural Bengal sing *jārigān*, show tricks with bamboo poles and beat their chests to the rhythmic chanting of laments to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, in the battle of Karbala (680 CE).[3] *Jārigān*, a folk musical repertoire commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn, has traditionally been performed during the Muharram ritual.[4] The term *jārigān* attests to the nestling of the Perso-Arabic traditions of mourning – *āzādāri*, from Arabic *'azza* (condolence) and Persian *darī* (having) in Bengal – as *jāri*, in the indigenous ways of singing (*gān*).[5] In fact, since the early modern period, mourning over Husayn's martyrdom on the day of Ashura had become part of the religious landscape of Bengal without any overt Shīʿī orientation. For such absence of intra-Islamic rivalry in the articulation of Husayn's martyrdom in Bengal, *jārigān* has enjoyed a more inclusive audience by accommodating the Sunnis, Shīʿas and the non-Muslim agrarian people of Bengal.

Jārigān was classified as a form of Muslim "culture" in Bengal after Jasimuddin published his anthology of *jāri* songs in the revival of the Muslim folk (*lok*) heritage (*aitihya*) as an essential attribute of Bengali Muslims.[6] To be categorised as a Muslim folk song repertoire (*lok gīti*) in the Bengali Muslim public sphere of East Pakistan in the 1960s, which was predominantly Sunni, *jārigān* had to be separated from the Shīʿī commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom in Muharram. In Bengal, such attempts within the Muslim community started with the advent of Islamic reform in the early-19th century.

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In this book, I endeavour to establish that the nuances of the making of Bengali Muslim identity in the wake of territorial nationalism and colonial modernity in Bengal may be read through the negation of the Karbala-centric commemorative ritual of Muharram by the Sunni reformist *ulama* and literati. Bengali reformist ulama attempted to prohibit the physical enactment of grief during Muharram and reclaimed the battle of Karbala as part of dominant Islamic history of the Caliphate, disavowing the Shīʿī Imamate.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, the early Islamic community underwent much dissent and debate over the issue of his spiritual-political inheritance. Internal rivalries and individual parochialisms resulted in the battle of Karbala where Muhammad's grandson Husayn was killed by the army of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid, the son of Muawiya, the rival in this conflict over political inheritance. The battle of Karbala stands for the shift in political power from the Early Caliphate of the four companions of Muhammad – Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali – to the Umayyad Caliphate, which began with Muawiya.[7] The battle of Karbala is said to have led to the first schism in Islam, between the Sunnis and the Shīʿas, initiating an unresolved and perennial rift between them. The Shīʿas denied the supremacy of the Sunni Caliphate and revered a separate lineage of the Imamate as their spiritual and intercessory authority; this line started with Ali, the fourth Sunni Caliph, as the first Shīʿī Imam. The inherent denial of the Sunni Caliphate in a separate Imamate of the Shīʿas turned the commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom into political dissent directed at the Caliphate.[8]

From this contentious moment of the Karbala battle, oppression and persecution of the Shīʿas started haunting the Muslim community with intra-Islamic rivalry throughout the Islamicate world. At the divisive moment of Islamic reform in early-19th century, Bengali Sunni ulama and the Muslim literati appropriated the figure of Husayn, the martyr, by separating him from Shīʿī intercessory piety in order to affirm a pro-Caliphate sensibility as the core value of the Bengali Muslim *ummah*. To this end, they made extensive use of print culture and tried to resolve the crisis in the Early Caliphate that the battle of Karbala represented by creatively engaging with different discursive and literary genres to formulate a Husayn-centric piety.

Islamic reformist movements in Bengal unleashed tremendous creative energy towards the introduction of scriptural ideas in translation and transcreation, primarily in Dobhāshī available in print from the 1860s (see Chapters 1 and 2), to bring the fundamental tenets of Islam to the Bangla-speaking masses where the battle of Karbala became an efficacious literary trope. In this reformist ethos, the new generation of the ulama and the Muslim literati (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5) started using Sanskritised Bangla since the 1880s to connect the issues of Muslim regional identity in Bengal with the choice of language for religious reform, transterritorial belongingness and Bengali literary modernity.

By analysing an extensive range of texts and publications across multiple genres, formats and literary lineages, mainly by the Bangla-speaking *ulama* and literati, this book affirms that Islamic reform instigated a dual identification for the Bengali Muslims as both Muslims and Bengalis, which never quite followed a linear narrative. The gradual process of the emergence and formation of a viable Muslim identity in Bengal as a *jāti*/nation over the late 19th century and into the 1940s was rooted in the region. It was also inherently polemical involving debates between rival intra-Islamic reformist ideas, and responsive to the nuanced issues of linguistic and literary modernity prevalent in the broader public sphere in Bengal. The battle of Karbala became a significant literary trope in this dynamic process of identification as a regional Muslim community. Husayn-centric piety underwent multiple interpretations and generic formulations in literary adaptations in Sanskritised Bangla, which the reformist *ulama* and literati called *jātīẏa sāhitya*. In these literary endeavours, they attempted to settle the internal crisis in the Caliphate and explicate Islamic ethico-moral ideas as a pre-requisite to becoming part of the *ummah*. In this process of configuring the Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, the authors shifted formally, linguistically, generically and ideologically from the older forms of proselytising through Dobhāshī tracts and narratives. They moved away from the Dobhāshī literary repertoire, the older form of literature in a Bangla composite of Arabic-Persian and Urdu loanwords that had been the medium of writing for the first generation of reformers. By the 1880s, the new *ulama* and literati marked Dobhāshī as ineligible for articulating *jātīẏa* attributes of the Bengali Muslims and instead adopted Sanskritised Bangla as the medium for reformist religious modernity. The *jātīẏa* attributes now became endowed with pan-Islamism, and a renewed sense of regional belonging in Bengal as the Bengalis.[9] Though Bengali Muslims, by adhering to the emerging idea of Bengaliness in the public sphere, borrowed the conceptual terms *jāti* and *jātīẏa* from the (dominant) Hindu nationalistic discourse, they strategically distanced themselves from the aggressive Hindu underpinnings of the idea of *jātīẏa* to facilitate their Muslimness.

To understand this complex dynamic identity formation of the Bengali Muslims through various trajectories of the Karbala trope in Dobhāshī and *jātīẏa sāhitya*, I have focused on a wide range of scriptural and literary genres, emphasising the mutual seepage between didactic and poetic tones without reading them in autonomous terms. In other words, I have not separated reformist deliberations from the issues and debates of modernist linguistic-literary ideals. By following the multiple reformist orientations and political positions of the authors and their varied linguistic affiliations and choice of genre, I argue that the deliberations of the Bengali Muslims that led to the becoming of a modern collective cannot be fully placed within the teleological narrative of the separate nation states that emerged in 1947 along communal lines. One needs, rather, to look at their efforts at religious mobilisation, aspirations for literary

excellence, capacity to channelise print culture for literary innovation and linguistic choices to claim Bengaliness and affirm Muslimness with the goal of creating a Muslim literary public sphere in Bengal. Instead of breaking down the varied ideological positions into pro-Partition and anti-Partition binaries, this book turns to other dynamic debates in the Bengali Muslim print culture of the time, debates which cannot be fully interpreted only through the lens of political intent.

To that end, it explores Bengal as a "contact nebula"[10] that stands for an arena of the reception of multilingual literary circulations across spaces and regions, not merely inscribed in the exchange between the Empire and the colonies. Simultaneously, instead of looking solely at the literary functions of the urban centres like Calcutta and Dacca,[11] this book considers intra-regional literary circulations by looking at the network of the *anjuman*s (religious-social organisations), print and periodicals, patrons and individual authors working in the districts to trace the changing contours of Islamic reform and literary modernity. Alliances between the *anjuman*s and periodicals mark a very important coalition in facilitating *jātīẏa* endeavours by the Bengali Muslims since the 1880s (see Section 3.1.2).

The ulama and the literati explored the battle of Karbala through biography, history and other modern literary genres, both in poetry and prose, with the aim to establish Islam as a superior religion and its prophet, Muhammad, as the Ultimate Prophet, and to affirm the glory of Islamic civilisation and underscore Islamic scriptures as a rational and historical system. The biography of Muhammad was supported by the biographies of the four Early Caliphs – Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali – who were the *ṣaḥāba* (Muhammad's companions), and the members of the *ahl al-bayt*, his family comprising his daughter Fatima, his son-in-law Ali, and grandsons Hasan and Husayn. In this literary sphere, Husayn's life loomed large as a carrier of the ideals that Muhammad stood for in this reformist devotional framework of ethical action. Husayn, by carrying the Islamic ideals of *ṣabr* (Ar., patience) and *shahādat* (Ar., martyrdom, sacrifice) embodied by Muhammad, became the most eligible figure to establish the ideals of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*. The era of the Prophet, reclaimed as the golden age for Islam, was carried forward by the first four Caliphs, making the Early Caliphate an essential period for writing the history of Islam. For this reason, the crisis that erupted in the Early Caliphate with the battle of Karbala, where Husayn was killed by a member of the Caliphate (the second Umayyad Caliph Yazid), had to be resolved by the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* so as to rescue Islam from the inherent contradictions in the Caliphate and secure the modern *ummah*.

The emergence and growth of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* was energised by the expanding network of print and literacy. The Bengali Muslims were drawn towards the modern norms of language and genre mostly shaped by the Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia. As they were prompted

to adhere to the Brahmo monotheistic template of Sanskritised Bangla to articulate Islamic concepts (see Section 4.2), they were attracted to literary innovations mostly devised by the Hindu nationalist authors. What followed was a very complex and dynamic process of adaptation of these linguistic and generic templates and critical rejection of the Hindu purānic figurative imaginations in linguistic metaphor and theme, where the Hindu nationalists portrayed Islamic culture and Muslim protagonists in a completely negative light. Here the *ulama* and the literati attempted to intervene in the monolithic Sanskritic Bangla by critically engaging with the scope and limits of translatability of the Islamic terms in a multilingual context. The authors offered to accommodate the Islamic religious and cultural ethos by adopting Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords in *tatsama* Bangla – their *matribhāshā* (mother tongue) – giving it a composite status as the medium of Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* to affectively and discursively imbricate ideas of Muslim *jātīẏatā* (the ethos of *jātīẏa*) (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5).[12]

The martyrdom of Husayn remains supreme in the affective cartography of Islam beyond any Sunni-Shī'a divide[13] though the battle of Karbala unleashed irreconcilable gap between the Sunnis and the Shī'as. During the Umayyad (661–750) and the Abbasid (750–1258, 1261–1517) periods of the Sunni Caliphate, the persecution of the Shī'ī Imams intensified, and the lament ritual of Ashura, meant to embody a challenge to the Caliphate, was throttled in the Islamic heartlands (see Section 2.2).[14] Centring on the persecution of the family of Husayn, a lament ritual gradually spread across the Islamicate worlds to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn on the day of Ashura. Intensely affective literary-performative elegiac traditions of the recitation of *marsīya* (short lyrical expositions) and *jungnāme* (*jangnāmā*, long narratives on battle) on the martyrdom at Karbala, composed since the 15th century, started acting as cohesive forces to bind communities with their devotional rhetoric and poetics of lament wherever Islam travelled.[15] The audience of such literary expressions consolidated as a community without any deliberate Sunni-Shī'a division across the Islamicate world, including early modern Bengal.

The Bengali Muslim *jātīẏatā* beyond the nationalist framework: A proposal

Close proximity to ritualistic devotion of the local communities and the inclusion of people with polytheistic sensibilities in Islam resulted in local variants of the religion outside the purview of the scriptures across an Islamicate South Asia. Attempts for Islamic revival and renewal began as early as in 18th century north India by marking *shirk* (polytheistic emotion) and *bid'at* (innovation) as deviations from the true values of Islam, considering such variances as the cause of the downfall of Muslims. In Bengal, reformist interventions to pull the masses practising

local variants of Islam to the central discursive template started in the beginning of the 19th century (see Section 2.1). Reformist structuring of the Muslim community in Bengal that started in the Dobhāshī attempts by the older generation of the reformers came to be connected to a newly awakened pan-Islamic consciousness by the 1880s when the new-age ulama and Muslim literati joined in. From this time, discourses on Bengali Muslim identity were variedly articulated in response to the different socio-ideational parameters like Orientalism, colonialism, Christian missionary proselytisation (see Section 3.2), the Brahmo endeavours and Hindu cultural nationalism. In this context, the Bengali Muslims strove for a national identity in the late 19th and early-20th centuries, in the complex web of ideational contacts, transculturation and manipulation of themes and generic reformulations within the literary realm of *jātīya sāhitya*.

To study these dynamic processes, my work chooses to differ from previous historical studies on nationalism and community formation by proposing to "rescue"[16] the literary history of Bengali Muslims from the nation-making narratives that seem to have monopolised any reading of the Bengali Muslim consciousness. The Bengali Muslims – the "forgotten majority" – of Bengal[17] created literary constellations by "moving out laterally" along pan-Islamic spaces and connecting virtually to the Islamic past(s). By focusing on such multiple vectors, I stress that the history of certain communities, such as that of Bengali Muslims, transcends the formative geo-political stability of the nation and can be transterritorial and transnational in its activities, by getting involved in and entangled with the histories of other regions and nations. By looking at the Bengali Muslims' adaptation of the pan-Islamic theory and affect from the vantage point of their regional location, this study departs from Benedict Anderson's idea of the transterritorially based imagined community.[18]

Studies on religious reform and nationalistic ideals in the Bengali public sphere generally talk about the internal ambivalences of nationalism and its constant exchanges with different reformist religions. These studies look at the formation of new community consciousness based on religious reform, namely Brahmoism,[19] Hindu reformism[20] and Gaudiya Vaishnavism,[21] not as autonomous processes, but as interdependent ones. Such new forms of community consciousness finally achieve a standardised status through adaptation, appropriation and cancellation of the elements of other entities in the Bengali public sphere. In these very important studies on the "provincialisation" of received ideas about nation, cultural modernity and collective identity in the Bengali nationalist public sphere, the Bengali Muslim chapter is relegated to obscurity and its exploration is urgently overdue.[22]

In studies on the connection between religious reform and community formation in other regions in the colonial Indian subcontinent, scholars generally focus on how religious reform, as a modernist endeavour, remained inseparable from political aspirations. Jose Abraham shows

this interconnectedness by discussing how Travencore-based Vakkom Mohammed Abdul Khader's (1873–1932) modernist reformist thoughts were inclined to a critical reading of European modernity and anti-imperial politics.[23] Harnik Deol studies the unexplored territory of Sikh ethno-nationalism in Punjab and offers forms of nationalism different from dominant Hindu discourses.[24] Her study discusses the implications of Sikh nationalism for modern politics as instrumental in creating distinct patterns of state formation in the imagination of Khalistan, embellished with a "separatist armoury."[25]

The formation of community identity and its multiple links with the idea of the Indian nation in political discourses is a well-researched phenomenon. Historians have attempted to negotiate with the complex connections between region and religion in the imagination of a political nation-state. In this regard, the Muslim question has been addressed in the duality of religious and secular, or unitary versus composite nationalism. Ayesha Jalal marks the persistence of a nation-centric narrative in Mushirul Hasan's study of Partition historiography. Jalal critiques Hasan's explications of Muslims in India as unidimensional "religious communalists" based on his reading of the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan by overlooking the internal contradictions in their deliberations.[26] Historians have already created a field of study by exploring different locales, institutions and groups beyond the linear and additive narrative of nation-making. In a revisionist study, Hasan himself has shown various strands in the Muslim public sphere outside the purview of Muslim communal politics aligned with the Two-Nation Theory.[27] Chitralekha Zutshi includes informal political actions along with the mainstream political endeavours of Kashmiri Muslims, thus validating other forms of negotiation of religious affiliations, regional identities, a Hindu state and the colonial political legacy. Productive studies like that of Zutshi affirm that in order to understand the contentious formation of the South Asian public sphere, one must look at the religious dimension of the community's collective consciousness. Focusing on Punjab, and by showing various internal debates and deliberations within the Muslim community itself, Ayesha Jalal proposes that the formation of Muslim identity in the wake of nationalism in South Asia is far more nuanced and complex than the prevalent idea of a linear journey towards the nation.[28]

From Mushirul Hasan to Megan Robb, scholars from different fields and orientations have attempted to dismantle the idea of causal connection between reformist Islam and linguistic (Urdu) nationalism. They have critiqued the idea that the "imagined future of Pakistan" came with the emergence of communal separatism and reorientation of Hindu-Muslim relations since the Khilafat movement as the only historical narrative available for the Muslims.[29] Barbara Daly Metcalf cites the Deoband movement to argue how the *ulama* produced other versions of modernity through Urdu print culture in the late-19th century that might

not be coterminous with the deliberations of the Two-Nation Theory.[30] The modernist movement at the Aligarh University offered an interpretation of Islam influenced by western Rationalism by its founder Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1818–98) that threw open a challenging and productive arena for religious modernities in South Asia, as Faisal Devji discusses.[31] Outside the realm of western influence as can be seen in the Aligarh movement, historians like Raisur Rahman and Megan Robb show that the reformist moorings in the *qaṣba* energised other interpretations of Islam utilising the print network to disseminate them.[32]

In this context, the uncharted history of the reformist sensibilities of Bengali Muslims offers a unique case study to show its overlaps with colonial politics while remaining not fully comprehensible through the political lens. The Bengali Muslims, at many historical conjunctures, merged with the political consciousness of nation-making, especially during and after the Khilafat movement (1919–24). But what I observe here is that the multiple cultural forms and articulations of community consciousness by the Bengali Muslims could never fuse into a definitive, closed understanding of either nationalism or the nation.[33]

This book is proposed as a timely critique of the recent essentialisation of religious identities along communal lines in South Asia by offering to read the interstitial spaces between various boundaries – cultural, reformist, linguistic and generic – in more nuanced ways. It focuses on several events, many institutions, collaborations, publications which appear to have been overlooked so far in the historiography of nation building. It intends to emphasise that not every kind of political and historical imagination can be considered equivalent to the processes of nation formation, though it may be informed and influenced by them. This book deliberately keeps the much-discussed anti-imperial politics of the Bengali Muslims in the background,[34] and foregrounds the less-discussed issues of literary innovations, connection between ideology and affect, linguistic choices and tropes of modernity within a "multilingual local geography."[35]

Karbala in the battle of Islamic reform: Pan-Islamism and the regional print network

The military upsurge (*jihād*) of the reformist Tarīqah-i-Muhammadīyya led by its founder Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī (1786–1831) against the Sikhs in the North-Western Provinces since the 1820s first brought the Bengali Muslims out of the confines of their local lives and connected them with the supra-regional reach of Islam.[36] Flocks of Bengali Muslim peasants, influenced by the rhetoric of *jihād* in the speeches of the preachers of the Patna School of Tarīqah, left their homes to join the *mujāhidīns* (jihadists) fighting in the North-Western provinces. Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī along with his close disciples was killed in the Battle for Balakot (1831) but the jihadist influence continued as an anti-British sensibility in the Tarīqah-led reformist preachings in different parts of the Indian subcontinent

including Bengal.[37] But it was the visit of the most prolific advocate of pan-Islamism, Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī (1838/39–97), to Calcutta in 1879 and the subsequent translation of his Persian speeches into Urdu that awakened the *ulama* and literati of Bengal to the modern transterritorial dimension of a Muslim identity (see Section 3.1.1). Translations of Al-Afghānī's speeches and his biography into Bangla mark the beginning of a pan-Islamic imagination of the Bengali Muslim *ummah* which, following Al-Afghānī's position, carried an anti-imperialist sentiment. The anti-British stand of the early reformist leaders of the Patna School of Tarīqah and the Faraizi movement was later discarded when the founder of the reformist Taiyuni school, Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī (1800–73), issued a *fatwā* in 1871 declaring British-ruled India as *dār as-salām* (land of peace/Islam) and *jihād* as unlawful at a conference of the Mohammedan Literary Society organised by Nawab Abdul Latif.[38] Over time, Muslims needed to shift their positions vis-à-vis the British government multiple times as they got involved with the political developments in the regional, national and international spheres and realigned themselves accordingly. Developments such as the first partition of Bengal (1905), the inception of the Muslim League (1906), a newly realised connection with the Ottoman Empire in Turkey with the Ottoman Sultan as the current Islamic Caliph and participation in the Khilafat movement (1919–24) connected the Bengali Muslims with regional, national and international politics in a pan-Islamic context.

Reconciliation between *sharī'ah* (Islamic theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tasawwuf* (mystical knowledge) by the *hadis* scholar Shah Walī Allāh Dihlawī (1703–62) initiated attempts for Islamic renewal that created a lineage across the Indian subcontinent. The Tarīqah-i Muhammadīyya, founded by Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī (1786–1831), a disciple of Shāh Walī Allāh's son Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dihlawī (1746–1824), was the first reformist school instrumental in spreading values of a 'new sober Islam' across Bengal.[39] Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī himself travelled to Calcutta, where many local Muslims formally became his disciples. His followers – appointed *khalīfas* and local disciples of Bengal – disseminated the fundamental values of Islam to the Bangla-speaking masses, which started identifying themselves as a unified religious community as they had never done before. Reformist religious authorities like Sayyid Ahmad's *khalīfa*s belonging to the Patna School, disciples like Syed Mir Nisar Ali (1782–1831), and Haji Shariatullah (d. 1840), the founder of the Faraizi movement (1819 onwards), thus ushered in the fundamental tenets of Islam to eradicate more ritualistic forms of Islamic practices across Bengal.[40] Another reformist movement, the Taiyuni, initiated by Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī, joined this polemical brigade and became the most influential strand to spread Hanafi sensibilities. Karāmat ʿAlī was a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī and of Shāh Walī Allāh's grandson Shāh Ismāʿīl al-Dihlawī (1779–1831) but shifted from their jihadist and non-*maẓhabi* position in his ideation of Hanafi reform.[41]

Since the 1860s, cheaply printed tracts written by the disciples of these reformist ulama in Dobhāshī – the behavioural manuals on *farz* and *adab* (ethico-moral codes of Islam) – brought about qualitative shifts by giving the common Muslim masses access to the Islamic scriptural tenets in their mother tongue, whether read or recited. The reformist groups, due to the differences in their interpretation of *sharī'a* and different connections with the *fiqh*, were competitive, and in many cases even hostile to each other. Ideological differences were all-pervasive between the jihadist Faraizi and non-jihadist Taiyuni, and between the Hanafi Taiyuni (with strong affiliations to the Islamic schools of *fiqh–maẓhab* that had emerged since the ninth century) and the Ahl-i Hadis (which orientated its followers directly with the Qur'an and *hadis* without the mediation of the later theological developments, that is, the *maẓhab*). Their antagonisms are well-articulated in the events of *bahas* and cheap print tracts in Dobhāshī (generally called the *puthi*) where the authors belonging to different reformist groups tried to cancel the influence of the other on the Muslim masses (see Section 2.1).[42] As the Taiyuni movement grew stronger and more influential than the jihadist Patna School of Tariqa, and the Faraizi movement became feeble, one could discern the gradual formation of a dominantly Hanafi-oriented community in Bengal. What is curious to notice, however, is that irrespective of their intra-Islamic rivalry and doctrinal differences, the reformist groups were equally invested in rejecting Shī'ī intercessory piety and vehement in attacking the commemoration of Muharram.

What remained constant in the polemic of reformist discourses was the invocation of an awe-inspiring Allah, the ethico-moral action of the individual Muslims connected with the idea of the Hereafter, a salvific discourse with either a promise of heaven or punishment in hell depending on one's worldly actions. The early modern genres of the behavioural manuals *śariẏatnāmā* and *nasihatnāmā* continued in the newly energised field of print with a new scriptural turn, which unanimously presented the absolute centrality of Muhammad as the Ultimate Prophet and saviour of Muslims on the Day of Judgement. Hanafi Reformist *ulama* of the older generation like Male Mohammad, Jaan Muhammad and Munshi Samiruddin – the followers of Karāmat ʿAlī – wrote a number of tracts in Dobhāshī on these themes which had multiple print editions from Battala, the most important print quarters in colonial Calcutta (see Chapter 2). In this shift, the more ritualistic pir-centric piety of the early modern period was replaced by a Prophet-centric piety, with Muhammad as the ideal template for Muslims to emulate. In a broader literary sense, intensely affective rhetoric and aesthetic-poetic renditions of Husayn's martyrdom became integral to the Dobhāshī print culture by offering a Husayn-centric piety complementary to a Prophet-centric one.

Connections between language, genre and print changed radically from Dobhāshī traditions with the emergence of new literary paradigms by the 1880s, as new genres and writing techniques began to be adopted

by the *ulama* and the literati. Multiple translations of the Qur'an and *hadis* started to feature in Sanskritised composite Bangla (with loanwords from Arabic, Persian and Urdu). Old genres like *śariẏatnāmā* were given new stylistic attributes (*Jobdātol Māsāẏel*, Munshi Naimuddin, 1873), while new genres like history and biography were attempted along with modern prose narratives and lyrics. Publications that came out of a more standardised print market included the history of Islam (like *Makkā-Śarīpher Itihās* [1906] and *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās* [1907] by Sheikh Abdul Jabbar), and biographies of the Prophet (like *Hajarat Mahammader Jīban o Dharmanīti* [1887] by Sheikh Abdur Rahim) and his companions. Together with these, prose narratives on the battle of Karbala (*Bishād Sindhu* by Mir Mosharraf Hossain [1887–92], *Kārbālā* by Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid [1936]) and lyrical expositions (*Kārbālā Kābya*, Abdul Bari [1912]) prepared a literary domain where the poetic-artistic liberties inherent in modern genres were exercised by these *ulama* and the literati. Dobhāshī *puthis* continued to be written and printed even at the turn of the 20th century, even as the Bengali Muslim public sphere was thriving with modernistic endeavours.

Urdu print culture took a prolific shape, especially after the Indian Rebellion in 1857, and encompassed various regions from the western to the eastern parts of India with developing distribution centres. The Bengali Muslims utilised its full potential in order to gain access to the Islamic scriptural repertoire in Arabic and Persian via Urdu, which is quite evident in their list of citations. In the Urdu literary-political sphere, terms like *qawm*, *millat* and *watan* were employed to capture pan-Islamic and regional forms of belonging.[43] But even after the Khilafat Movement, the Bengali Muslims in general neither adopted these Urdu terms to signify their multiple belongings between the transterritorial and the region, nor Urdu literary models in the formulation of *jātīẏa sāhitya* (see Sections 3.1 and 3.1.1). The recovery of the past, as a nationalist endeavour of Muslim reformist authors, was almost equivalent to similar endeavours in the Hindu nationalist literary sphere. But the Muslim sense of civilisational loss and conceptualisation of *jātīẏatā* as means to recovery differed markedly from its Hindu counterpart (see Section 4.1). With the imagination of a homeland in Arabia and a motherland in Bengal, the Bengali Muslims in the last decades of the 19th century perceived the glory of the time of Prophet Muhammad and the Early Caliphate as tied to a sense of Muslim *jātīẏatā* that was integrally transterritorial. There was an attempt in Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* to reconcile with the sense of loss by adapting multilingual sources from different temporalities in a bid to reclaim the glory of Islam.

Within the criterion of the *jātīẏa*, the linguistic-literary domain became what Paul Brass marks as a "multi-symbol congruent" with diverse practices and categories, which Francesca Orsini discusses in the context of the Urdu-Hindi divide in the early-20th century.[44] Hindu nationalist Sanskritisation and Muslim multilingualism offer many instances of the

multi-symbol congruent in the broader context of Bangla language and literary sphere. The Orientalist efforts at Fort William College in Calcutta to revive the purer forms of Sanskritic religions paved the way for the imagination of a purer form of Bangla.[45] Heavily Sanskritised Bangla, moulded in the hands of Sanskritist modernists like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–91) and others,[46] was subsequently standardised as *sādhu bhāshā* in Hindu nationalist endeavours with the inclusion of derivatives from Sanskrit words (*tatsama*) and the conscious elimination of Arabic and Persian loanwords.[47] Here, the multilingual dimensions of the Bengali Muslim experience, embodied in their ideation of a composite Bangla, can be read as a critique of a relatively monolinguistically stable "we-consciousness"[48] of Hindu cultural nationalism. This was accomplished through the creative and affective thematisation of Islamic tropes and generic innovations in Sanskritised (composite) Bangla by the Muslim authors which eventually subverted any monolithic idea of the inherent Hindu-ness of Bangla language and literature.

Karbala in the Islamicate world: Between the "Universal" and the "Local"

As a literary trope, the battle of Karbala embodies and acts as an explication of various political, devotional and ritualistic situations across the Islamicate world where Islam has taken multiple shapes and forms.[49] The "Karbala complex," as a universal template of martyrdom,[50] can be deployed here to shift the concerns of the scholars of religion, history, anthropology and literature from the old Islamic world (the central Islamic countries spatially marked as "Nile to Oxus"), to the "abundant actualities" of Islam in different parts of the world.[51] The compositions of Karbala poetry started dispersing from the heartlands of Islam into different Islamicate regions since the late 15th century onwards as the Shīʿī Safavid Empire flourished in Iran. They continued to carry the historically ingrained significance of Husayn's martyrdom in the literary and ritual articulations in disparate lands where Muslims travelled and settled. At the same time, the embeddedness of the Karbala complex in the history of the Islamic Caliphate was redefined in the local imaginations, and new aesthetic and poetic values were added as new narratives on the Karbala were composed. The *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'* (The Garden of Martyrs), composed by al-Wāʿiẓ Husayn Kashifi (1436/37–1504/05), a *qazi* (judge) and Sufi master of the Naqshbandiyya *silsilah* in Timurid Iran, at the beginning of the 16th century, is considered to be the first full-length narrative exposition of the genealogy of Islamic martyrdom to reach different parts of the Islamicate worlds. *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'* chronicled the numerous instances of martyrdom in the history of Islam, beginning with the death of the prophets. Following the deaths of the earlier prophets, it described the significance of the death of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, the Early Caliphate, Muhammad's daughter

Fatima, followed by the martyrdom of the battle of Karbala, and concluded with the deaths of the rest of the Shīʿī Imamate. It is difficult to map the exact trajectories of the reception of *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'* in the vernacular Islamicate regions, especially in Bengal, because in many cases the authors of the retellings of the Karbala battle did not specify their source texts. The capacity of *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'* to traverse wider fields to reach regional literary imaginations can be still deduced from the thematic arrangements of certain early modern Karbala texts in various regions, including Bengal. Later on, since the 19th century, when stating the source texts became a reformist necessity for the authentication of Islamic discourses in Bengal, Kashifi's *Rawẓat* was often mentioned by the reformist authors of the Kārbālā narratives, writing both in Dobhāshī and *sādhu* Bangla, among various other sources.

Scholars of the anthropology of Islam have emphasised the reading of regional variants of Islam against a centralised template of theology and *fiqh*. They have grappled with attempts to understand the common set of resources shared by Muslims to affirm their Muslimness at disparate ends of the Islamic world, such as Clifford Geertz has done in his readings of Islam in North Africa and Java,[52] at a time when it has become difficult to deploy the "Islamic" as a monolithic qualifier to signify the vast spatial spectrum between Islamicate worlds as varied as Morocco and Malaysia.[53] When both the interpretive models of Islam – one, a conglomeration of myriad regional variants of discursive and ritualistic traditions, and the other a central universal template – prove inadequate, ambivalence becomes the most productive entry point to parsing the layers and nuances of the Islamicate world.[54]

The renditions of the battle of Karbala in early modern Bengal display multiple poetic and thematic innovations which help to situate the narratives in the existing Bangla literary repertoire (see Sections 1.1 and 1.1.1). The authors, seeking to formulate devotionalism for the Prophet and his family and his *ṣaḥāba*, nestled their poetry in the rhetoric and aesthetics of the Bangla translation of the Sanskrit epics – the purāṇas – and narratives composed on the sacred figures of the Hindu pantheon. Seeking to overturn the idea of Islam as a foreign religion coming down aggressively from above with the aim of religious conversion, so prevalent in the Orientalist-nationalist rhetoric, historians proposed such literary practices as attesting to a syncretic idea of Indian Islam that had spread from below since the 13th century.[55] The idea of syncretism in the scholarly discourses based on the variations and adaptations of polytheistic rhetoric to express devotionalism in Islam was critiqued by a revisionist historiography. The complex processes of adaptations which were previously considered to be syncretic were, rather, as Tony K. Stewart suggests, meant to search for literary equivalents in the Bangla poetic-theological repertoires invested in establishing Islamic values in early modern Bengal.[56] In this new framework, the frontiers of the Islamicate world also pulled themselves towards the core, as was clear from the

literary efforts of the Sufi poets who attempted to establish Islamic ideals and doctrinal subjects in early modern Bengal. This centripetal energy started to intensify in Bengal most formally during the time of Islamic reform, beginning in the early 19th century. But the curious thing, as observed in detail in this book, is that the attempts to align the loosely ordained local Muslim communities with the core Islamic values during Islamic reform, articulated in *jātīya sāhitya*, remained inherently susceptible to the local poetic, linguistic and cultural contexts of modern Brahmo and Hindu Bengali literature.

From the relentless attacks on the commemoration of Muharram by the Sunni reformists in their various literatures to discourage the common Sunni masses from engaging in the intensely physical mourning rituals for Husayn, it is evident that Muharram could not easily be categorised as an exclusive Shīʿī ritual in Bengal till the 1940s, as recorded in this book. The participation of both the Sunnis and Shīʿas in the commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom, Sunni reformist attacks on Muharram and, as a response, the internal codification of the Muharram ritual by the Shīʿī reformist clerics – all these contradictory and conflicting impulses gave Muharram a contentious character across South Asia.

Multiple interpretations of the processes of Islamisation can be discerned in different South Asian regions, which are very difficult to accommodate within a single explanatory framework. Two broad strands of thought on the processes of Islamisation in South Asia may be revised by engaging with the functioning of the Karbala complex in literary articulations. In the first strand, proposed by historians like Francis Robinson, the prevalence of orthodox scriptural institutional forces "eats away" at the heterodox-heteroprax dimensions of lived Islam in South Asia.[57] The continuation of the lived practices of Muharram, with its mass participation across classes and Muslim groups, says otherwise. Then again, the sensory physical ritual of Muharram cannot be fully identified as heterodox-heteroprax owing to the internal codification of Muharram-centric rituals by the Shīʿī clerics in the Urdu-speaking milieu of north India since the 19th century. Such hegemonic codifications belie the other theorical strand of the coexistence of the orthodox and the heterodox as the essential ethos of Indian Islam that historians like Imtiaz Ahmad have dwelt on at length.[58] In the appropriation of a Husayn-centric piety, from its journey from lived Shīʿī intercessory piety to the Sunni reformist repertoire, a new and dynamic idea of Islamisation beyond Ahmad's ideas of coexistence of the orthodox and the heterodox in separation can be discerned. Again, as far as reformist literature is concerned, there is no unidirectional shift from orality to print, ritualistic to scriptural, intercessory to *sharīʿati*, physical to meditative, heterodox to orthodox as Robinson proposes. Contradiction remains integral to the processes of Islamisation, formalisation of reformist ideas, creating ambivalence at the core of Sunni reformist discourses as articulated across literary genres.

The actors of Bengali *ummah*: Problems with categorisation in the province

The dual participation of the *ulama* and the Muslim literati in formulating the parameters and poetics of *jātīẏa sāhitya* is compelling material for literary historians to redefine the Bengali Muslim public sphere. In *Reclaiming Karbala*, I reassess whether the idea of the middle class as harbingers of modernity, an idea propelled by the hegemonic western modernity, is adequate to understand the formation of the Bengali Muslim *jātīẏatā* (the ethos of *jātīẏa*). By emphasising the multiplicity of reformist orientations, educational backgrounds and social locations of the individual actors, and their position in the multilingual literary network as receivers of the existing models of language and modern genres, this book will offer a more nuanced reading of the agents of Islamic reform and literary modernity in Bengal since the late 19th century.

Anxiety over the inadequacy of material and methodology to read the "non-elite" (religious) consciousness that grew with the advent of Islamic reform in Bengal was shared by Rafiuddin Ahmed[59] and Gautam Bhadra.[60] Ahmed historicises an array of reformist tracts to show how a loose collective of oral or semi-literate agrarian communities living in the remotest corners of these "swamp" lands suddenly woke up to a new community consciousness.[61] Bhadra proposes that the consciousness of being *krishak* (peasant) as a class and that of *dīn* (faith in Islam) were intertwined and overlapping.[62] However, in readings such as that of Bhadra, the non-elite sources remain a separate field of study and are not explored as part of the broader framework of intra-Islamic reformist exchanges within multiple literary spheres.

Marxist historians have critiqued Ahmed for not contextualising religious consciousness in terms of class.[63] But if agency in the regional jihadist insurgencies led by Titumir or Haji Shariatullah is understood as class struggle between the landlords and the Muslim peasantry (as in Marxist historiography)[64] or counter-action of the subaltern against the elite groups (Subaltern Studies),[65] *jātīẏa* sensibilities of Bengali Muslims get lost in the fixed binary categories.[66] Though Ahmed did not employ class as a category, he has defined the formation of vertical social groups according to their varied access to scriptural ideas between the *ashrāf* (high-born), *atrāf* (low-born) and *ajlāf* (local convert) social groups. Pradip Datta's corrective Marxist historiography of Ahmed's work looks at the emergence of the "peasant improvement" as a new theme in the cheaply printed religious tracts,[67] where class is articulated along with multiple other social locations for the peasants, specifically focusing on their religiosity.[68] Datta's important critical study, however, does not observe the presence of different social groups in the devotional public sphere, and, while discussing the agrarian masses addressed in the improvement tracts, he does not distinguish between land for cultivation and land for sacred establishments (see Section 3.1.2). In his binary scheme

of the landed as patrons and the peasants as receivers of improvement discourses, Datta does not read economic improvement as entrenched in *farz* (Islamic moral improvement) and the idea of the Hereafter that Bhadra has earlier underlined.[69] Thus the question remains: how does one perceive social agency in reformist and literary terms in individuals who came from traditional agrarian families but became part of the tertiary economic sectors after receiving some formal education? How does one discuss their connections with traditional scriptural education? How should we discuss agency, aspiration and religious authority while taking into consideration the generic-linguistic innovations ushered in by reformist authors in the literary public sphere of Bengal? These are some of the provocative questions that I engage with in this book.

Talal Asad, in his anthropological study of Islam, notices the persistent efforts of the "orthodoxy" to bring in unifying principles of *halal* (allowable) and *haram* (not allowable) in everyday local contexts in order to consolidate an *ummah* along the singularity of Islam as a discursive tradition (the Qur'an and the *hadis*).[70] Asad develops an understanding of orthodoxy-as-power (local authorities) bringing forth such central discursive alignments which remain sensitive to location and are interpretive in nature rather than becoming a universal and singular form of orthodoxy.[71] What is Islamic is explained according to the functioning of the orthodoxy in the local contexts, according to Asad. However, a study of the immediate response to this ideation, that is, a comparative study between the orthodox reformist discursive sources, the pan-Islamic ideals and their regional articulations and appropriation in Bengal, has not been attempted in my exploration of the multilingual literary contacts in Bengal. I have, instead, explored whether a study of the multiple literary renditions of the trope of Karbala can be studied as an extension of Asad's ideas in defining the possible connections between a central orthodoxy and local expressions of power. *Reclaiming Karbala* attempts to understand whether the multiple renditions of the Karbala narrative, susceptible to transterritorial, national and regional moorings, can explain how such diverse local practices of power by the orthodoxy are contextually embedded (in Bengal, and territorially in India) but yet cannot be fully reduced to the specific local material conditions.

Asad's understanding of orthodoxy as the agents of reformist change limited itself to the binaries between orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy and prescriptive and non-prescriptive, as studied by historians like Shahab Ahmed.[72] By discussing Islamic philosophers and Sufi thinkers, Ahmed proposed the idea of "extrapolative authority" and spoke of practices informed by their discourses like (Islamic) art, music, poetry and others as a critique of Asad's idea of Islam as a discursive-prescriptive tradition.[73] By looking at the adaptation of the Karbala trope by the *ulama* and the literati, I read reformist agency that kindled extrapolative functions to create *jātīẏa sāhitya* across an array of genres ranging from the discursive to literary. *Reclaiming Karbala* studies the literary activities of authors

coming from different echelons of the Bengali Muslim society and their forms of power struggle in the Bengali public sphere over the issues of Islamisation, public language and literary modernity.[74] The varied poetics of the articulation of these experiences make the study of orthodoxy in Bengal so complex and vibrant as a case study. Moreover, orthodoxy here represents a myriad of class and other social orientations within the Bengali Muslim community which did not monolithically or naturally "evolve" to become a unilinear orthodox Muslim elite group or a middle class. Literary activities like the translations of the Qur'an, *hadis*, new didactic manuals, treatises on ethico-moral codes, biography, history and prose-poetry attest rather to the presence of a spectrum of authors and readers who populated the multiple literary spheres in Bengal. These authors often came from agrarian roots but had different connections with traditional professions, different ranks in the pre-colonial Persianate social systems and varied educational experiences (governmental and traditional-scriptural) with their graded exposure to multilingual literary resources in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, standardised Bangla and sometimes English. Their participation in Islamic reformist literary activities takes us beyond the binaries of rural-urban, elite-subaltern or landlord-peasant in the field of Muslim *jātīẏa*.

The local and the multilingual literary contexts

Multilingual

Islamic reform envisaged deliberate Arabicisation reflected in the titles of the *namaz* manuals (*Miphtāhul Jannāt bā Beheśter Kunjī*, Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī, 1865 translated by Samiruddin Ahmed), *farz* and *adab* treatises (*Bedārol Gāphilīn*, Munshi Samiruddin, 1867) and treatises of *fiqh* (*Ahkāme Śariā o Machlāẏe Jaruriẏā*, Jaan Muhammad, 1871) by the authors of Dobhāshī and the new generation of *ulama* who opted for Sanskritised Bangla (*Jobdātol Māsāẏel*, Munshi Naimuddin, 1887). But the search for equivalents to Islamic concepts in Sanskritised Bangla and a relentless debate over the limits to translatability of the Islamic concepts were nuanced with their constant negotiation with the modern poetic devices and generic values of Sanskritised Bangla. At the same time, Islamic reform in Bengal and the formation of *jātīẏa sāhitya* can hardly be discussed as an encounter between Sanskritised polytheistic Bangla and Islamic Arabic due to the multilingual nature of the appropriation of the varied resources in Arabic, Persian and Urdu and also in Bangla and English. Further, a diglossia of a Sanskritised Bangla (Hindu) and an Arabicised Bangla (Muslim) cannot explain the inherent multilingualism of the Bengali Muslims. The choice of Persian loanwords became deliberate and specific to the new reading practices that brought the *sharīati* repertoire, composed both in Arabic and in Persian, to the reformist generations, old and new alike. Arabic texts continued to be received

in Persian translations along with the original. With the emergence of Urdu as the new "public language" in north India in the 19th century through the proliferation of Urdu print networks, prose and periodicals, it gradually started to replace Persian as the language of translation for the Bengali Muslims.[75] The Urdu literary network that started with the printing of Urdu texts (adaption or translations of the Persian classics) in the Hindustani Department at Fort William College in Calcutta (since 1801) finally became prolific in Bengal. Texts in multiple genres carrying Islamic reformist ideas were being published by the indigenous Urdu presses in north India after the 1857 Revolt (like the Naval Kishore Press from 1858)[76] and circulated in various other regions like Bengal. The recirculation of texts in Arabic, Persian and Urdu in Bangla through acts of adaptation and retranslation attests to forms of multilingual experiences among the Bengali Muslim readership. In the course of these events, the status of Urdu changed from the time of the early reformist preaching to the later period of print. From the medium of instruction for itinerant preachers of Tarīqah, the Patna School and Taiyuni, Urdu gradually emerged as the most viable interlocutor in the multilingual experience of *jātīya sāhitya*, ushering in new productive connections with north Indian reformist ideas, literary modernity and print networks. Multilingualism and the debates over translatability of Arabic and Persian into Bangla and the efficacy of Urdu as an intermediary language in the formation of *jātīya sāhitya* became a significant part of discussions on the Bengali Muslims' linguistic affiliations and identity. For *jātīya sāhitya,* the Bengali Muslims chose Sanskritised Bangla as their mother tongue and public language, triggering much argument within the reading community about the ideal form of multilinguality of Bangla for the Bengali Muslims. The Bengali Muslims' diverse attempts to own Bangla as their mother tongue prompted mixed reactions from the Hindu public sphere according to the choice of Sanskritised and Arabic-Persian lexicon by the Muslim authors.

Ronit Ricci's concept of an "Arabic cosmopolis," inspired by Sheldon Pollock's idea of a "Sanskrit Cosmopolis,"[77] maps the diffusion of Arabic as the sacred language of Islam and its influence on local Arabicised languages and literary cultures across the Indian Ocean.[78] Ricci refers to a wide range of instances in which Arabic influenced local languages like Tamil, Malay and Javanese, often combining with them rather than replacing them.[79] Ricci's notion of an Arabic cosmopolis includes the very important moment of the "vernacularisation" of Arabic by charting out processes of Islamisation through the translation of Arabic texts, namely *sawāl* literature, a generic type that establishes the superiority of Islam using patterns of argument. But if we follow her interpretation of literary networks in Tamil, Malay and Javanese, we risk overlooking the Turkish and Persian literary networks that developed across the Bay of Bengal.[80] Going beyond Ricci's two-tier linguistic model of the Arabic-vernacular, other scholars have preferred the term Persianate, again coined by Marshall Hodgson, to study Persianate literary cultures.[81]

Such studies deprovincialise Persian beyond Iran and position Persian as a "transregional contact language"[82] at the contact zones of language-cultures across the intersecting geographies of Eurasia.[83] But this model too, while mapping the "sufficiently robust localization of Persian,"[84] does not adequately address the simultaneous presence of Arabicate networks that in most cases spread via the Persianate literary networks in South Asia. The literature of early modern Bengal, where authors claimed that they were composing their texts on/after *some* Persian text (often unnamed) – which could be a *qiṣṣa* in Persian (like ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*, 15th century) or *Rowẓat ash-Shuhāda* by Kashifi, or a Persian translation of the Arabic Islamic repertoire, like *Kāsāsol Āmbiẏā* (*Qiṣāṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*) – may be posited as an instance of "multiple diglossia" between Arabic-Persian and Bangla.[85] Heẏāt Māmud's mention at the beginning of his *Jaṅgāmā* of some "Ārbī-Phārsī" sources for Husayn's martyrdom not only clubbed Arabic and Persian as one language group by creating a diglossic situation between Arabic-Persian and Middle Bangla, it also blurred any ideological distinction between Arabic and Persianate repertoires otherwise prevalent in the Islamicate world.

Such a lack of distinction in the early modern period was reflected in a dual-lingual nomenclature of a composite language register like Dobhāshī (two-languages) in the 18th century. But during the time of Islamic reform, in the last decades of the 19th century, especially in the context of the translation of the Qur'an, Arabic and Persian were finally decoupled to expose different values for Arabic and Persian for the Bengali Muslims. Though Arabic was marked as *jātīẏa bhāshā* and the language of Islam (*dharma bhāshā*), Persian, along with newcomer Urdu, continued to represent Islamic linguistic identity (see Section 5.1.1). However, in the translation of the Qur'an (annotated) into Bangla, an inherently ideological separation was made between Arabic (as the carrier of the Divine word) and Persian (as another Muslim language for scriptures). In the translation of the *ʾāyat* (Qur'anic verses, sing. *ʾāyah*), the "untranslatable" Islamic concepts were kept in Arabic without using Persian, whereas Arabic and Persian (and sometimes Urdu) were used in the translation of *tafsir* and annotations added by the translator. Translations of the Qur'an to Bangla were preferred from the Arabic original, not from Persian or Urdu. The translators felt that Islamic concepts could only be transferred from Arabic into Bangla by approximating them through a multilingual and multi-textual reading of different *tafsirs* and *hadis*. The multilingualism of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Sanskritised Bangla was more nuanced than it seems, as multilinguality was not only achieved in instrumental linguistic terms, but in multiple forms – lexical, thematic-intertextual and authorial aesthetic choices, among others.[86] Like the translators of the Qur'an into Bangla, the authors of early Islamic history, biography or the battle of Karbala in standardised Bangla cited long lists of references before or inside the texts (see Sections 1.2.2 and 4.1.1). The reading list itself was multilingual, encompassing source texts

in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Bangla, sometimes even English. Such multilinguality became an essential ideological device to affirm the authenticity of Islamic themes and the author's eligibility to deal with those themes to create *jātīẏa sāhitya* (see Section 3.1).

The time-space of the local Karbala

Region has recently become a very important analytical category to study Islam. According to Shahab Ahmed, "the expansive, capacious and contradictory values accrued by Islam in the various instances of its reconceptualization"[87] can be mapped across regions, from locale to locale. The conceptualisation of the region/locale as case studies rectifies the "ethnic" and "linguistic" privilege inherent in terms like Perso-Turkic or the "Persianate world." Ahmed proposed the "Balkans to Bengal complex," to detract from the continued centrality of the Arabic discourses. This conceptualisation helps to direct attention to the varied constructions of Islamic meaning and value throughout the Persianate worlds. The nuances of "locally polyglot regions"[88] in Ahmed's formulation, as a critique of the unilinear universal ideas of Islamicate Persianate cultures, underscore both the historicity and spatiality of a multilingual Persianate local. According to him, the locally-polyglot regions can be understood through the polyphonic Ottoman elite class, or that of a Mirza in the Mughal period with his fluency in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hindi.[89] It may be observed that in Ahmed's formulation of the multiplicity of space, designed to understand the particularities of Islam, its multiple negotiations with other religions in other (religiously plural) locales still remain underexplored. Nile Green marks the foreclosure of the possibilities of the Persianate worlds as trans-regional zones of "language contact" in Ahmed's work[90] and emphasises the particularities of Islam in such zones. Green proposes another reading of the Islamicate world by developing an idea of the Persianate as a conglomerate of the zones of "language contact" discernible through multiple modes of cultural exchange at the frontiers of the Persianate world. Drawing upon Green's work, it may be said that it is possible to recognise and re-examine different frontiers within the Persianate world, going beyond the nationalistic parameters – linguistic, locational, social, cultural and religious – and exploring ambivalent spaces. It is possible to engage with the interstitial spaces of various kinds of boundaries within a public sphere, or multiple public spheres within one.[91] Here, to reimagine the frontiers where cultural exchanges are taking place, Ahmed's idea of the polyglot elite can be productive if applied to the vernacular and local multilingual context of Bengal with another understanding of the elite, different from his own.

We might observe here the linguistic flexibility of polyglot religious authorities (mostly Sufis) in the intersecting arenas of multiple knowledge systems. In the late 19th century, the versatility of authors in Arabic,

Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit and Sanskritised Bangla, and sometimes English, led to the creation of a literary field of crisscrossing ideas, multi-directional translations and mutual exchanges of aesthetic poetic norms, once again taking us back to the idea of polyglossia as an attribute of regional Muslims. Thus, the formulation of *jāti* as the modern Bengali *ummah* and the growth of *jātīya sāhitya* to articulate the making of Bengali Muslims become such important nodes of exploration of a linguistic-ideational contact zone beyond the East-West transcultural activities.

The outline of the book

The chapters in this book are arranged thematically and not chronologically. However, the thematic shifts over time did create a chronological alignment with the broader socio-political and ideational changes in the late-19th and early-20th century Bengal.

In Chapter 1, I trace the changes in textuality upon the entry of the theme of Karbala into print culture from the domain of the oral-scribal of the early modern period. Here, I have engaged with the generic and thematic study of the Karbala narratives in Dobhāshī in connection with the growth of Sunni reformist sensibilities of Islam in Bengal. I show that while the performative and sensory nature of Muharram was rejected as un-Islamic in the reformist agenda for its connection with Shī'ī intercessory piety, the devotionalism around the battle of Karbala was given a scripted form in Dobhāshī by the traditionalist generation of reformist *ulama*. In this chapter, I propose to chart out the unique ambivalence between orality and print, reading and listening, the didactic and the entertaining, and ritual action and reading in the full array of the Dobhāshī repertoire. This chapter discusses the formal techniques employed by the authors in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts so as to incorporate them into the reformist literary grid.

Chapter 2 discusses the literarisation of reformist ideals in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts. By drawing on references from reformist cheap print tracts and Kārbālā narratives in Dobhāshī, I show how the traditionalist reformist *ulama* cancelled Muharram by marking it as a Shī'ī ritual and thereby appropriated the affective charge of the battle of Karbala as one of the elements of reformist sensibilities. In this chapter, I have discussed how the themes of reformist Islam like *namaz*, pro-Caliphate sensibilities and a devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* were introduced in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts and a Husayn-centric piety achieved by focusing on Husayn's *sabr* and *shahādat* as the two basic virtues of Islam. I emphasise here that it is not only the colonial categories of representation, but also the indigenous ones, derived in conjunction with local religious sensibilities that contribute to Muslim modernity.

Chapter 3 contextualises how a new generation of the *ulama* and literati, by collaborating in public life since the 1880s, conceived *jātīẏatā* as the qualifier for their collective identity and developed a modern Muslim

literature – *jātīẏa sāhitya* – in Sanskritised Bangla across various new genres. This chapter explores how the new socio-religious institutions, known as *anjuman*s, along with the proliferating periodicals, contributed to create *jātīẏa* sensibilities in the Bengali Muslim public sphere. It locates the Bengali Muslims between pan-Islamic and regional sensibilities and introduces readers to the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. It marks how the authors put forth *jātīẏa sāhitya* as a modernist counter-discourse to Christian missionary proselytisation and attempted to restore the honour of Islam. I have inaugurated here the argument on how the Bengali Muslims entered into larger multilingual literary experiences mostly mediated by Urdu discourses. This was achieved through multiple kinds of reception of varied sources in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English, and also of themes and genres drawn from standardised Bangla literature.

Chapter 4 records the process of consolidation of a new historical consciousness pertaining to the time of the Prophet and the Early Caliphate by focusing on two modern genres, history and biography. It reads the ideological implications and relevance of the two genres as explored by the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* with the intention of reclaiming the glory of Islam. This chapter suggests a reading of how the aesthetic-poetic values of *jātīẏa sāhitya* were formed through the highly complex creative adaptations of Brahmo and Hindu literary repertoire, and through a rejection of polytheistic sensibilities and Hindu nationalist thematic arrangements. It analyses how Islamic history and biographies of the sacred figures of early Islam, now attested with the authenticity of the scriptures and new generic devices, were also framed against Orientalist, Christian missionary, colonial administrative and Hindu nationalist discourses. Here, the battle of Karbala was chosen as the vantage point of Islamic history to resolve the internal crisis related to the prophetic succession, thereby to affirm a pro-Caliphate sensibility. By studying a wide range of books on history and biography, this chapter discusses how they became the two ideal genres in Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya,* poised to reclaim the superior values of Islam and inculcate a sense of glory among the Bengali Muslims.

By tracing the very challenging and creative overlaps between Islamic reformist sensibilities and the ideals of literary modernity, Chapter 5 points to the aspirations of the Muslim authors of the Karbala narratives working within the reformist environment. It marks how the Bengali Muslim literati proposed a composite Bangla with Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords to resolve the internal contradictions that arose with the adoption of Sanskritised Bangla as the public language for the community. These authors creatively aligned aesthetic-poetic issues with reformist logic and ushered in multiple models for literary modernity to accommodate Islamic reformist values. By following the multiple thematic and generic innovations of the authors, this chapter aims to show how they attempted to prepare Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* as the carrier of pro-Caliphate sensibilities, and also the importance of a Husayn-centric

devotion in their innovative renditions of the Karbala which helped consolidate a modern Muslim community.

Why this book now?

Bengal's deep-rooted entanglement with the history of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent (1947) turns any discussion on the formation of the Muslim collective identity in the colonial period into a study of communal separatism.[92] This book is an intervention in the field that seeks to bring out the multiple experiences of the Bangla-speaking Muslims on the teleological journey towards the making of nations. However, *Reclaiming Karbala* does not claim that religious functions and literary-cultural articulations can remain unaffected by such an important political endeavour. Instead, it argues that Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* was closely informed by the anti-imperialist sensibilities and struggles in the subcontinent or across international borders at that time.

At the present moment in South Asia, where identities are getting unambiguously marked by communal borders, and vice versa, this book proposes a critique of the linear identitarian politics based on the ground on territorial nationalism. Indian Muslims are being placed in the insider-outsider rhetoric and cornered as the ultimate Other by the staunch discourses of aggressive Hindutva. This book reminds the readers about multiple other forms of spatial and affective belongingness besides the ones territorially marked and explained in terms of religious separatism, and about the other definitions of nation and nationalism, by focusing on the history of the Bengali Muslims.

Secondly, this book marks the uncomfortable and unyielding gap between the public sphere and religion in traditional historiographies and joins the scholarship that looks into the formation of the South Asian public sphere from the vantage point of religion and religious ethos. To achieve this, *Reclaiming Karbala* neither marks Islam as a unitary category in the articulations of the reformist authors in *jātīẏa sāhitya*, nor advocates for the concept of regional literature as the site of embedded local truths about Islam. It explains *jātīẏa sāhitya* as a body of specific but dynamic attempts that brought in the foundational central tenets of Islam through rival intra-Islamic interpretations inherent in the very specific regional and national contexts of Bengal. Furthermore, by looking at doctrinal Islamic discourses and literature with reformist sensibilities as arenas of intra-Islamic power struggles and as counter-narratives to the different hegemonic discourses prevalent in colonial Bengal, this book locates the arguments of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* as an integral part of the Bengali public sphere. Through the doctrinal-literary activities of the authors, multiple public spheres of the Bengali Muslims may be observed as emerging and developing, crisscrossing each other, fully or partially approving or disapproving the other(s), and critiquing the hegemonic idea and function of a unitarian public sphere dominated by Hindu nationalist ideas.

In order to bring together these disparate yet interrelated strands, I have analysed a vast array of unexposed and unexplored literary material across several genres related to the battle of Karbala which help construct Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*. In doing so, both religion (Islam) and literature stand recontextualised and redefined as analytical categories, not from the perspective of a pre-ordained discourse of Western modernity, but in the ways the indigenous *ulama* and Muslim literati envisaged them to make a Bangla-speaking *ummah* a modern collective identity.

Notes

1 A couplet from *jārigān*, quoted in Jasimuddin, *Sojan Bādiẏār Ghāt* (Calcutta: Gurudas Chattopadhyay & Sons, 1933), 21. The title literally means the river wharf named after Sojan, the Bādiẏā.
2 *Bede* (bādiẏā in lyrical form, also a regional variant) refers to a nomadic ethnic group of Bengal, equivalent to the gypsies. The *Bede*s traditionally live, travel and earn their living in and around the river.
3 In that battle, Husayn's sons, nephew Kāśem (Qasim, the son of Imam Hasan), and brothers and companions were killed along with him. In the quoted *jārigān* couplet, the mourning for a newly-wed Qasim foretells his martyrdom.
4 In course of time, other Islamic and local social themes were included in the repertoire of *jāri*, which has now become a distinct folk performance form.
5 For a detailed discussion of *jārigān*, see Mary Frances Dunham, *Jarigan: Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1997).
6 Jasimuddin, *Jārigān* (Dhaka: Kendriya Bangla Union Board, 1968).
7 For a detailed discussion of the Prophet's time and the Caliphate, see Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Early Caliphate* (London: Aḥmadiyya Anjuman Ishā'at Islām, 1983); and Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphate: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London: Pearson Longman, 1986).
8 For an understanding of the battle of Karbala, see Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols in Modern Iran* (Seattle & London: Washington University Press, 2004).
9 Swarupa Gupta redefines the idea of Hindu nationhood in late colonial Bengal by studying the intersection between three main conceptual arenas of identity formation – *samaj* (social collectivity), *jati* (a multidimensional term signifying birth, caste, race, tribe and nation), and *desh* (sub-region/region/province/country). She observes how ideas about nationhood drew on pre-existing indigenous unities embedded in the collective units of the past, and the imagination of a harmonious social order with "Aryan" social values. See Gupta, "Samaj, Jati and Desh: Reflections on Nationhood in Late Colonial Bengal," *Studies in History* 23, no. 2 (December 2007): 177–203, accessed August 25, 2019, doi: 10.1177/025764300602300201
10 As a spatial metaphor to understand cross-cultural exchanges, Karen Laura Thornber has proposed "literary contact nebulae" by engaging with Mary Louise Pratt's idea of "contact zones." But Thornber expands Pratt's idea of contact between the West and the Rest by looking at the supra-regional cultural experiences where literature acts as the most productive site of greater reciprocity. For her artistic realms like literature "are characterized

by atmospheres of greater reciprocity and diminished claims of authority than those of many other (post)imperial spaces." Thornber, *Empire of the Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p3.

11 Neilesh Bose focuses on Calcutta and Dhaka in his discussion of the Muslim literary elite. Bose, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

12 Orsini talks about the standardisation of language as a new attempt to connect it to the community identity and discusses how both the Hindu and Muslim nationalist consciousness congealed in the diversification of Hindi (Devanagari script) and Urdu (Persian script), respectively, as public languages. She observes that such linguistic diversification was religiously ordained and resulted in marked differences in the corresponding literary cultures. Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

13 David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

14 See for more details, Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Harvard: University of Harvard Press, 2002).

15 Syed Akbar Hyder discusses the spread of the Karbala commemoration ritual in South Asia. See *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

16 Prasenjit Duara's critique of the straitjacketing effects of western ideas of modernisation and the evolution of the nation-state remains a very important reference. Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

17 The idea of the Muslims as a forgotten majority is discussed by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 62 f.n.

18 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1983).

19 David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

20 Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Charles Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016 [1964]); Karl Baier, "Swami Vivekananda. Reform Hinduism, Nationalism and Scientistic Yoga," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 5 (2019): 230–257, accessed February, 4, 2022, doi: https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-00501012; and Peter Heehs, "Bengali Religious Nationalism and Communalism," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 1997): 117–139, accessed February, 4, 2022, www.jstor.org/stable/20106452

21 Varuni Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya: Vaishnavism and Cultures of Devotion in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

22 Since its inception, Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of European assumptions about disenchanted space, secular time and sovereignty as the only axes to

mark and map modernity in the third world where the capitalist transitions are considered lacking remains much influential. Chakrabarty has proposed how the idea of European modernity can be renewed and recharged with views and ideas from the provincial margins. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

23 Jose Abraham, *Islamic Reform and Colonial Discourse on Modernity in India: Socio-political and Religious Thought of Vakkom Moulavi* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014); and Bernard Bate, *Protestant Textuality and the Tamil Modern: Political Oratory and the Social Imaginary in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

24 Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in South Asia: The Case of Punjab* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

25 Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in South Asia*, 151.

26 Ayesha Jalal, "Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of 'Communalism': Partition Historiography Revisited," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1996): 681–689, accessed February, 11, 2017, www.jstor.org/stable/312987

27 Mushirul Hasan, "Memories of a Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India's Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 41 (October 10–16, 1998): 2662–2668.

28 Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

29 Ali Usman Qasmi and Megan Robb, eds., *Muslims against the Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

30 Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

31 Faisal Devji, "Apologetic Modernity," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2007): 61–76, accessed July 24, 2021, doi: 10.1017/S1479244306001041

32 M. Raisur Rahman, *Locale, Everyday Islam, and Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

33 This study is informed by Peter van der Veer's critique of nationalism. van der Veer shows that nationalism which proposes to homogenise all the varied traditional templates makes them teleological in bearing the fruits of modernity.

34 Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal, 1905-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).

35 Francesca Orsini discusses the numerous, often fractured, and non-overlapping worlds of literature to study world literature from the perspective of multilingual societies. She highlights multilingualism as a context for the regional and transnational literary field. "The Multilingual Local in World Literature," *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 4 (2015): 345–374, accessed June 16, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-3327481

36 William Hunter, *The Indian Mussalmans* (London: Trübner & Company, 1872), 100; Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 39–59.

37 For a discussion on such Islamic missionary sensitisation, see Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*.

38 Referred in Ibid, 51–52.

39 M. Reza Pirbhai defines "new Islam" or the "new Sober Path" as movements initiated by reformers like Shāh Walī Allāh as part of a broader attempt cutting across Islamicate regions to codify Islamic law. M. Reza Pirbhai, *Reconsidering Islam in a South Asian Context* (Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 119–173, 269–291.

40 Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*.

41 In Sunni Islam four interpretive schools within *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) emerged in the 9th and the 10th centuries that analysed and resolved issues related to *sharīa* through formal debates. The major four schools are Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. The foundation of Tariqah theology is based on pre-mazhabi engagements with the Qur'an and the *hadis* repertoire.

42 James Wise, "The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* LXIII, pt. 3, no. 1 (1894): 53–54, 58; Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 72–92.

43 For a discussion of Urdu nationalism, see, Kavita Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014).

44 Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*, 23.

45 Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay, *Bānglā Bhāshātattver Bhūmika* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1974 [1934]); and Sumanta Bandyopadhyay, *Uniś Śataker Kolkātā o Saraswatīr Itar Santān* (Kolkata: Anustup, 2008).

46 Badruddin Umar, *Iśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar o Uniś Śataker Bāṇgalī Samāj* (Kolkata: Chirayata Prakashan. 2001).

47 Poromesh Acharya, "Development of Modern Language Text-Books and the Social Context in 19th Century Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 21, no. 17 (April 26, 1986): 745–51, accessed March 12, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/4375604; Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, *Bāṃglā Bhāshār Bhut-Bhabishyat* (Kolkata: Ababhas, 2003); and Umar, *Iśvarchandra Vidyāsāgar*.

48 Amalendu Guha, "Nationalism: Pan-Indian and Regional in a Historical Perspective," *Social Scientist* 12, no. 2, Marx Centenary Number 3 (February 1984): 42–65; 52, accessed June 23, 2022, https://doi.org/10.2307/3517093

49 "Islamicate" is a term developed by Marshall Hodgson in a monumental socio-historical conceptualisation of Islam as a religious culture which has spread far and wide, beyond its doctrinal core, to be embraced by various civilisations, locales and people. The use of Islamicate instead of Islamic is perhaps more useful to understand the complex network of religion, region and identity created wherever Islam has travelled or resided. Hodgson's distinction between Islam as faith and Islam as culture is expressed through the term Islamicate, where Islam takes the shape of culture rather than strictly remaining a matter of doctrinal faith. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Vol. I, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 59.

50 Hamid Dabashi coined the term 'Karbala complex' as "an implicit semiological system" that emerged by defining the principal function of injustice (*mazlumiyyat*) and martyrdom (*shahādat*) in Shī'a doctrinal and political history. Dabashi then charts out its complex growth in the history of Shī'īsm. He maps how the hidden allusion of the Karbala complex and the intense universal transversalism of its principle attributes were appropriated across cultures – Islamicate or otherwise - to define and interpret various moments

of crisis. Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (*Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011),* 73-101.

51 William Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993 [1962]), 145.

52 Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

53 John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

54 For insightful discussions of this tug between the universal and local, see Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); John R. Bowen, "What is Universal and Local in Islam?" *Ethos* 26 (1998): 258–261, accessed March 15, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/640679; Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, "Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam," *Marburg Journal of Religion* 4, no. 2 (December 1999), accessed March 15, 2019, https://doi.org/10.17192/mjr.1999.4.3763; and Sandria Freitag, "Ambiguous Public Arenas and Coherent Personal Practice: Kanpur Muslims 1913–1931," in *Shari'at and Ambiguity in South Asian Islam*, ed., Katherine P. Ewing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 143–163.

55 Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

56 Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory." *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 260–287, accessed May 12, 2016, https://as.vanderbilt.edu/religiousstudies/people/documents/Stewart_In%20Search%20of%20Equivalence.pdf

57 Francis Robinson, "Islam and Muslim Society in South Asia," *Contribution to Indian Sociology* 17, no. 2 (1983): 185–203.

58 Imtiaz Ahmad, *Ritual and Religion among the Muslims of India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1981).

59 Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

60 Gautam Bhadra, *Imān o Niśān*: *Uniś Śatake Bāṃlār Krishak Caitanyer Ek Adhyāẏ* (Kolkata: Subarnarekhā, 1994).

61 Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 41.

62 Bhadra, "Introduction," in *Imān o Niśān*, 1–19.

63 Sumit Sarkar, "Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants: Bengal 1909–10," in *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 96–111.

64 Narahari Kaviraj, *Wahabi and Faraizi Rebels of Bengal* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1982).

65 Bhadra, *Imān o Niśān*.

66 Sumit Sarkar opened a discussion along these lines in *Beyond Nationalist Frames*.

67 P. K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

68 This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

69 Bhadra, "Introduction," *Imān o Niśān*, 1–19.

70 Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1986), 11, 14–17.

71 Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 1–30, accessed June 10, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/20685738
72 Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 272, 274.
73 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 283.
74 In this context, a very important mapping of intra-Muslim contests between the Barelvi and Deobandi reformist groups may be consulted as a case study. See Sher Ali Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2020).
75 For a detailed discussion of the emergence of Urdu as a public language, see Francesca Orsini, *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011); *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*; Datla, *Language of Secular Islam*; and Megan Robb, *Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers, and Urban Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 2021).
76 Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007).
77 Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Postmodern India* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); and, Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011).
78 Ricci, *Islam Translated*.
79 Ricci makes a distinction between the Sanskrit and the Arabic cosmopolis by arguing that the proliferation of cultural productions in the Arabicised domain was integrally religious, unlike that of Sanskrit *kāvya* where religion did not always carry such value.
80 Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image,* 247–253.
81 The cultural cohesiveness of this geographical "zone" and "phase" of Islamic civilisation was described by Hodgson using the term Persianate. According to him, this was a set of "cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration" (Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. II, 293). By "Persianate", Hodgson meant an Islamic or Islamicate context, in which Persian and Islam had political and cultural dominance, and notes that in the High Middle Ages Islamic cultural life had come to be divided more or less sharply into two geographical zones and this division became more marked after the Mongol conquest. In Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, North Africa, and the Sudanese lands, Arabic continued to predominate as the literary tongue even where it was not the spoken language. From the Balkans to Turkestan and China and southern India and into Malaysia, Persian became the standard literary language among Muslims, and with Persian came a whole tradition of artistic and literary taste.
82 Primarily coined and conceptualised by Fragner, Persian as a "transregional contact spoken language" was reformulated in the context of a Persianate world by Brian Spooner and William I. Hanaway. They describe Persian as a social practice available mostly in a written form. See *Literacy in the Persianate World Writing and the Social Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). Knowledge of Persian did not necessarily entail the ability to speak the language and did not necessarily take place

in a Persophone public sphere. Persian cosmopolitanism can thus be understood as a culture of Persographia, or reading and writing in Persian. This is discussed by Nile Green, *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a European Lingua Franca* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 5.

83 Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, London, & England: Harvard University Press, 2012).

84 Green, *The Persianate World*, 28.

85 Francesca Orsini discusses in detail the north India literary culture in the multilingual context by describing how in the long-15th century, diglossic relations developed in north India between Persian and other *bhāshās* (vernacular). See Orsini, "Traces of a Multilingual World: Hindavi in Persian Text." In *After Timur Left*, eds., Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 403–436.

86 Francesca Orsini and Pankaj Jha have talked about how the presence of such multilinguality can be traced even in an apparently monolingual literary formation, as in the case of north Indian literary cultures. Orsini, "How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 49, no. 2 (2012): 225–246; and, Pankaj Jha, *A Political History of Literature: Vidyapati and the Fifteenth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

87 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?* 83.

88 Ibid, 84.

89 Ibid, 84–85.

90 Green, *The Persianate World*, 6.

91 Ibid, 6.

92 For a detailed discussion, see among others, Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal: 1905-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divide: Hindu Communalism and Partition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994); Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali: 1943–1947* (New Delhi, California, London: Sage, 2005); Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India 1947–1967* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007); Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais, eds., *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Anwesha Roy, *Making Peace, Making Riots: Communalism and Communal Violence: Bengal 1940-1947* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018) to name a few.

1 Mapping Karbala from Orality to Print

Prologue

Little did Heẏāt Māmud (1693–1760), a *qāzi* trained in the Qadiriyya Sufi *silsilāh* in the late 18th-century Rangpur district, know that the *puthi*s[1] he copied by hand to attain the blessings of Allah would eventually be sold to a publisher by his heirs. The printed version would be registered under the Copyright Act of 1894 by publisher Abed Muhammad to prevent other publishers from earning money by reprinting them without paying Abed for the copyright.[2]

Besides a Kārbālā narrative named *Jaṅgnāmā* (1723), Heẏāt Māmud composed two treatises on the ethico-moral code of Islam, *Sarbabheda Bānī Kāvya* (literally, a discourse on the differences in comprehension, 1732)[3] and *Hitajñāna Bānī Kāvya* (beneficial knowledge, 1753) based on various Persian source texts, and finally wrote on the lives of the Islamic prophets from Adam to Muhammad in *Āmbiẏā Bānī* (Discourses on the Prophets, 1757), a rendition of *Qiṣāṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Life Stories of the Prophets).[4] The entry of Heẏāt Māmud's scribal *puthis* into print introduces us to a multiplicity of issues generated by a shift from early modern religious and poetic sensibilities to the domain of Islamic reform in the 19th century facilitated by print. By initiating a discussion of early modern Kārbālā narratives (17th and 18th centuries), their language and intertextual relationship to other Islamic and non-Islamic texts and genres, and then moving on to the linguistic changes and shifts ushered in by Dobhāshī authors within print culture, this chapter highlights multiple ambivalences that Karbala narratives revealed at the threshold of orality and print. Through a critical revision of the binaries of aural and printed, popular and elite, as well as the narrative-affective and the homiletic-doctrinal forms in the Dobhāshī repertoire, this chapter introduces the new Sunni renditions of the Karbala before analysing them further in the next chapter.

With the advent of newer literary networks facilitated by print, publication and distribution, the patterns of indoctrination and poetics of religious affect changed.[5] My aim in this chapter is to propose a framework of study to map these shifts, from the overtly localised idioms in texts like

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Hitajñāna Bānī Kāvya to more doctrinal *namaz* manuals and treatises on the Hereafter, from the early modern Karbala devotionalism to a Karbala-based indoctrination in Dobhāshī facilitated by print with newly structured sensibilities surrounding the Islamic *ummah*. Here I mark the ambivalence of popular piety as textualised in various genres, starting from the *adab* treatises to the Kārbālā narratives, where the performative aspects of listening and ritual actions without being eliminated were internalised in the Dobhāshī texts as one of the attributes of a structured form of reformist religiosity. While the physicality of Muharram mourning of the Shīʿas was vehemently opposed, the practice was not altogether eradicated. Instead, the enactment of grief was now considered a legitimate reformist affective response to the deaths of important Islamic figures, from Muhammad to Hasan and Husayn via the Early Caliphate, and literarised in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives.

1.1 Creative application of Islamic ideas in early modern Bengal

At the outset, it can be productive to gain a sense of how Sufi and Muslim court poets in early modern Bengal began to translate/transcreate from Arabic-Persian or *bhāshā* literatures as part of a Sufi supra-regional network. This can help create a context for the discussion of the multiple renditions of the Karbala trope from the late-19th to the early-20th century and understand how they introduced Islamic ideas through the strategic and creative adoption of Arabic and Persian concepts in Bangla, mostly choosing equivalents from the latter. It is to be remembered that even though early modern Bengal was a prolific site of cosmopolitan literary cultures, not everything was happening in association with the court. In this section, I initiate a discussion of the basic attributes of the 17th to 18th century literary spheres, focusing on the following renditions of the Karbala battle – *Maktul Hosen* by Muhammad Khān (Chittagong, mid-17th century), *Imām Vijaẏa* by Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān (Chittagong, late-17th century),[6] *Saṃgrām Husan* by Hamid (Sylhet, early-18th century),[7] *Jaṇgnāmā* by Heyāt Māmud (Rangpur, 1723)[8] and *Jaṇgnāmā* by Garibullāh (Hooghly, mid-18th century, in Dobhāshī).[9]

The revitalised Perso-Arabic culture of the Turkic courts was brought to India by the Ghaznavids in the late 11th century.[10] The Ghuris, another Turkic confederation, replaced the Ghaznavids in Khurasan and set up Muslim rule in Delhi, whilst Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji, a Ghurid military general, initiated the Sultanate rule in Bengal as early as in 1204. From that time onwards, Bengal became an important site for the development of Persianate–Arabicate Islamicate culture, one in which itinerant Sufis were more effective in the dissemination of Islamic ideas than court *ulama*.[11] The Sufis creatively transformed the Arabicate and Persianate themes received through the Persian literary networks into

Islamicate genres in Bangla. In this regard, Sufi *pranaẏopākhyān* (love narratives/romances), *ṣīra* (the life stories of the prophets of Islam) and Kārbālā narratives all were replete with Sufi orientation and inclination. The Sufis, through their performances and discourses, disseminated Islam across Bengal, with or without courtly patronage.[12] Thanks to them, the philosophical works of Sufi masters like Ḥāfiẓ-e Shīrāzī, Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, Farīd ud-Dīn ʻAṭṭār and ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī travelled eastward, mobilising newer literary networks as they were translated or adopted into various vernacular languages, like Sindhi, Punjabi, Avadhi and Bangla.

In north India, during the long 15th century, between Timur's invasion and Humayun's return to India in 1555, scholars have observed an illustrious production of *bhāshā* literature as cosmopolitan vernacular.[13] In Bengal, too, as political forms consolidated, the proliferation of translations/transcreations from Arabic-Persian and Sanskrit, and compositions in Bangla can be discerned in the 16th century expanding transregional literary networks. In fact, the translation of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārāta* into Bangla began just as the Hussain Shahi dynasty (Sultanate period, 1494–1538) expanded eastwards, encompassing the Chittagong area. Chittagong emerged as an important regional literary centre with the patronage of the regional court. Translations of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārāta* into Bangla provided literary templates to be adopted by the newer generation of authors in Chittagong. The *Parāgalī Mahābhārata* by Kavīndra Parameśvar (1515–1519) and *Chuti Khānī Mahābhārata* by Śrīkar Nandī (1520) were commissioned by Paragal Khan and his son Chhuti Khan.[14] Together with these translations of the Sanskrit epics, the adaptations of several Arabic and Persian texts into Bangla under courtly patronage helped Bangla emerge as "the cosmopolitan vernacular" in the local governor's court.[15]

A new rhetoric of Islamic devotionalism began to take shape through constant exchanges with the Gauṛdiya Vaishnava and Nātha philosophies, and Muslim poets borrowed freely from the Bangla translations of the Sanskrit epics to create their lexical framework.[16] Śāh Muhammad Sāgīr (15th century), the author of *Iusuph-Jalikhā* and the first poet to have written on Islamicate themes in Bangla using references from the stories in the Qur'an, hailed from this region too.[17] Sāgīr described his poetry as being derived from the composite *purāṇ-Korān* paradigm[18] and inscribed this new textual formation within a Sanskrit aesthetic framework, while also borrowing freely from the Vaishnava devotional repertoires to articulate Qur'anic and Sufi mysticism in Bangla.[19] Saiẏad Sultān (1550–1648), one of the most important Sufi sheikhs from the Chittagong region, composed the first narrative on the life accounts of the prophets ending with Muhammad in Bangla along with the Sufi-Yogic treatises.[20] In the last section of his *Nabīvaṃśa* (a compilation of the life accounts of the Islamic prophets), named *Rasul Vijaẏa* (the life accounts of Muhammad), Sultān posited Muhammad as an icon

comparable to Krishna, who had already become part of the literary imagination in Bengal through Mālādhar Basu's *Śrīkṛṣṇavijaẏa* (1473–1481), a Bangla adaptation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* composed at the court of Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459–1474) in Gaur. It is very possible that the Bangla *purāṇa* that Kabīndra Parameśvar, the author of *Parāgalī Mahābhārāta*, refers to and describes as being read and enjoyed every day by Parāgal Khān in his 'court' as a provincial governor was this particular *Śrīkṛṣṇavijaẏa*. Islamic ideas spread by the allure of the narrative. Tales of the prophets, the birth and life account (*mawlid*), military exploits (*maghāzī*) and ascension narratives (*mir'aj*) of Muhammad, and the martyrdom of his grandsons Hasan and Husayn were thus rendered in the local poetic-aesthetic templates based on the puranic and epic themes.

In this competitive religious environment, as Tony K. Stewart observes, Sufi authors like Ālī Rājā constantly searched for equivalents of Islamic themes and concepts in their local religious counterparts and incorporated them into their translations. At the same time, the choice of local Bangla (deśī-bhāsh) as a non-Islamic language by Sufis (like Śāh Muhammad Sāgīr, Saiẏad Sultān and Ālī Rājā) and other religious scholars like Ābdul Hākim (1600–1670) for the Islamic themes was fraught with the inherent tension of committing sin (pāp). Disclaimers were ubiquitous in the beginning of Bangla Islamic puthis by the authors. Discussing Ābdul Hākim's long apology, Thibaut d'Hubert underlines that the localisation of Islamic themes and tropes does not necessarily mean a departure from the Arabic-Persian literary system. All these literary activities of searching for equivalents in Bangla simultaneously hints at the cultivation of Arabic and Persian in the regions from where these authors were composing and reciting their long poetic expositions to spread the Islamic ethos in Bangla.[21] Stewart's interpretation of these literary attempts, like Ālī Rājā's *Āgama* and *Jñānsāgara*, as the "creative application of doctrine to real life,"[22] is equally relevant in the understanding of the lexical and generic elements present in renditions of the battle of Karbala.

Saiẏad Sultān declared in *Rasul Vijaẏa* that how he wrote about Muhammad to replace the devotion of his local audience for Rama and Krishna with devotion towards Nabi Muhammad. From the mid-17th century onwards, the next generation of Sufis and Sunni educators, like Śekh Parāṇ, Śekh Nasrullāh and Ābdul Hākim, composed texts that offered ethico-moral codes of Islam and behavioural prescriptions. Such texts bear evidence to the gradual familiarisation of Islamic ethical codes translated through local customs. The genres of *śariẏatnāmā* and *nasihatnāmā* were instrumental in elaborating the notions of ethico-moral codes (*dharma*) differentiating between right/piety (*punya*) and wrong/sin (*pāp*), and were mostly framed in those texts in the format of Sanskritic ethical treatises. Such texts emerged from different regions of eastern Bengal – Chittagong, Comilla (Tippera), Noakhali and Sylhet – which were connected externally to the broader Islamicate worlds via trade routes, and internally via political mobilisation and Sufi itinerancy. These

stories and forms of storytelling became the most important resource in negotiations with the existing local devotional landscape to carve out a new space for Islam by these authors, who did not necessarily connect with or produce Islam as part of a political enterprise.

Through the narrative and linguistic improvisation, the battle of Karbala placed Hasan and Husayn as integral to the Prophetic life and extensions of Muhammad's lineage, and thus offered a strong grounding for devotionalism. Through the framing of the *ahl al-bayt* in an affective language of intimate devotionalism mostly derived from the Vaishnavite *bhakti* paradigm, Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, son-in-law Ali and his grandsons Hasan and Husayn were domesticated in Bengal as the sacred figures of Islam. In Bāhrām Khān's *Imām Vijaẏa*, when Bibi Chalimā, Muhammad's surviving wife, laments over the deaths of Hasan and Husayn in the fields of Karbala, her love for her grandsons is expressed through Vaishnavite rhetoric of ornamentation and ecstasy surrounding the vision of the beloved. "Hasan Husayn they are, unparalleled beauty in the three worlds, where shall I go now to get a glimpse of them?"[23] When Bāhrām Khān described the beauty of the faces of Hasan and Husayn as moons and their mouths as lotuses,[24] Husayn's palms as red as a lotus and his lips as pomegranates,[25] he used familiar aesthetic metaphors of Sanskrit poetics meant for polytheistic gods, especially Krishna. Hasan's musical abilities reminded Bāhrām Khān of Kāmadeva, the Hindu god of Eros. As in Muhammad Khān's *Maktul Hosen*, in Hāmid's *Saṃgrām Hosen* too, the episodes of the battle of Karbala, at many places echoed the descriptions of the Kurukshetra war in *Parāgalī Mahābhārāta*. In the Kārbālā texts, the arrangement of weapons, soldiers, animals and the whole set of actions resembled a language with familiar alliterations, metaphors and affective expressions. It was an era of sheer literary improvisation intended to domesticate Islam through these iconic characters exemplified by such familiar poetic equivalents, both lexical and systemic. Another such example is of Bāhrām Khān's Husayn, who plunges into the war remembering Allah's wish for his sacrifice armed with Muhammad's headgear[26] and the *gāndīva* - Arjuna's bow in the *Mahābhārāta*[27] - in his hands, adding resonances of the war sequence in the *Parāgalī Mahābhārāta*.[28]

Such shared linguistic-thematic literary phenomena or linguistic hybridity resulting from Islam's "encounter"[29] with polytheistic sensibilities and Vaishnavite poetics cannot be defined as simple syncretism, as religious historians like Tony K. Stewart have observed.[30] Rather, one needs to consider the complex issues of language and category formations in early modern Bengal to understand the amalgamation of ideas and rhetoric beyond the interpretive models of syncretism. The creative and strategic search by the Muslim authors for dynamic equivalents in "locally available terminologies" to articulate Islamic ideals makes literary translation a productive field to comprehend the processes of Islamisation.[31]

Following the legacy of Saiẏad Sultān, Muhammad Khān and Bāhrām Khān relied upon the Brajbuli of Vidyāpati's (the eminent polyglot courtier poet of Mithila, eastern Bihar, 1380–1460) Vaishnavite lyrical repertoire to compose their Kārbālā narrative poetry. Some Arabic-Persian words were retained, but the overall poetic formulation was mediated by the aesthetic-poetic charge of Vaishnavite poetry and of the Sanskrit epics translated in Bangla. Dynamic equivalents were selected from the existing puranic, Natha and Buddhist repertoires.[32] In comparison, Arabic and Persian loanwords grew in number in the Islamic literary repertoire (instructional manuals) by the 18th century. *Jaṇgnāmā* and *Āmbiẏā Bānī* of Heẏāt Māmud exemplify similar linguistic inclinations. Later, Śāh Garibullāh (1670–1770) wrote in Dobhāshī. He hailed from the region of Hooghly, a major centre of Islamic knowledge from where many authors were writing following Garibullāh. Such linguistic reorientations hint at the growing consciousness of community across knowledge centres like Chittagong, Rangpur, Sylhet and Hooghly by the 18th century, which was markedly different from the literary instances of the 16th and 17th centuries.

1.1.1 Karbala in the Bengal region

As already mentioned, the battle of Karbala as the sequel to Muhammad's life created an Islamic devotional ethos for local audience by offering to them a set of sacred figures representing Islamic values and affect. After Saiẏad Sultān's death, his disciple Muhammad Khān (1580–1650) fulfilled his Sufi master's wish by composing *Maktul Hosen* (1646), which Sultān wanted to compose but was unable to (Figure 1.1: a page from a manuscript of *Maktul Hosen*, 1646, by Muhammad Khān).

All authors writing on Islamic themes between the 16th and 18th centuries, both Sufis and ulama, were Bangla-speaking polyglots, unlike the Persophone literary elite of the previous era who had been recipients of courtly patronage.[33] The Kārbālā authors often held positions in the local administration.[34] Bāhrām Khān was the son of the vizier of the local administrator of Chittagong; Muhammad Khān was born in the family of the Hussain Shahi administrators (Parāgal Khān) in Chittagong; Heẏāt Māmud was a *qāzi* (legal jurist) in Rangpur. With their exchanges with Arabic and Persian Islamic scriptural literature, connections with the local Sufi sheikhs, and varied degrees of versatility in Sanskrit and Bangla literature (reflected in their aesthetic-thematic choices), these poets created a more demotic and localised version of cosmopolitanism than that adumbrated by Sheldon Pollock' idea of the cosmopolitan vernacular.[35]

Each text cites the author's Sufi teacher in the invocation, attesting to a localised regional Sufi literary network beyond the Sufism of brotherhood. Saiẏad Sultān referred to his pir Śāh Husain as his initiator-master. Like him, the Sufi-oriented authors, after the *hamd* and *na'at*

(sections in praise of Allah and the Prophet, respectively), and praises for Muhammad's companions and *ahl al-bayt*, hailed the figure of their respective Sufi masters. Further, blessings from the sheikh or the *pir*, all from the local regions, were sought time and again at the narrative closure of every section as well as in the *bhanitā* – the signature phrase in which the author mentions his own name as the composer of the text. Muhammad Khān referred to Saiẏad Sultān, Bāhrām Khān referred to Saiẏad Āsāduddin as their respective pirs. Heẏāt Māmud allotted a separate section to hail his master, who had taught him every kind of *rāga* and *tāla*, even though he did not name him.

Along with the Kārbālā narratives, these authors wrote *puthis* on Sufi tales of love and ethical prescriptions – two very important literary

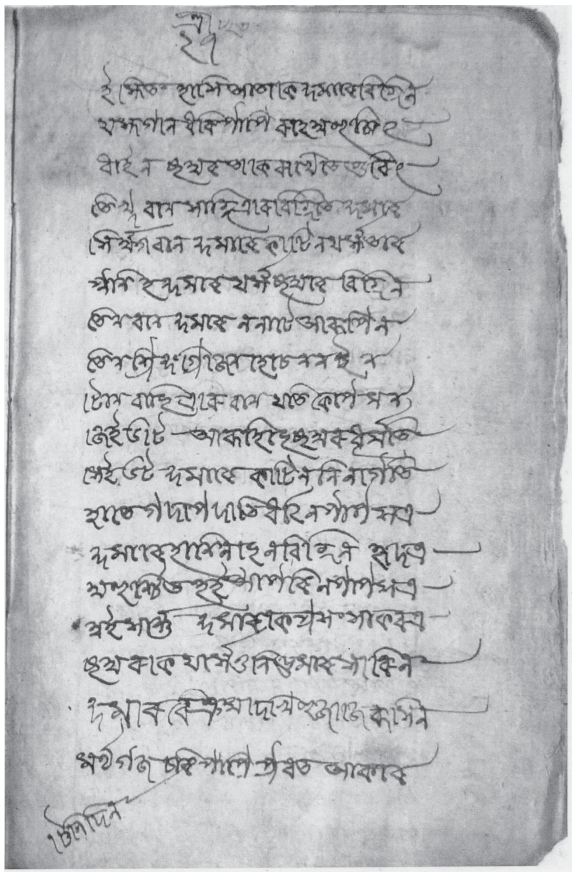


Figure 1.1 *Maktul Hosen* (1646) by Muhammad Khān, Folio no. 347, manuscript no. 555, Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad Collection, Dhaka University, Dhaka.

genres in the spread of Islamic thoughts. Bāhrām Khān, for example, told a Sufi tale of love *Lāẏlī Majnu*, while Muhammad Khān chose a didactic *Satyakali Vivāda Saṃvāda* (argument between the two puranic eras, Satya and Kali; 1635). Didactic texts on themes pertaining to customary laws and behavioural codes like the *Śariẏatnāmā* (1749), *Musār Sawāl*, *Hidāẏtul Islām* by Nasrullāh Khondakār and *Hitajñānbānī Kāvya* (1753) by Heẏāt Māmud mark the process of translation/transcreation from Persian into Bangla. Other texts, such as *Nasihatnāmā* by Śekh Parān (1550–1615), *Saẏatnāmā* by Muzāmmil (17th century), *Kiphāẏtul Musallīn* by Śekh Muttālib (1595–1660), *Tophā* by Ālāol (1600) and *Fakarnāmā bā Mallikār Hājār Sawāl* by Śekh Śerbāj Coudhurī (17th century) were attempts to establish Islamic tenets in the local context. What all these authors did – by placing Islamic themes nestled in local idioms, or deriving ethico-moral principles from elite Sanskrit texts or local customs which were made equivalent to Islamic codes – can be described as "improvisation," to use Stewart's term. These authors employed all kinds of genres – *premopākhyān*, *ṣīra,* didactic manuals and Kārbālā narratives – utilising the persuasive capacity of the narrator to bring forth religious ethical norms and introduce Islamic cosmological values, Sufi ideas and an affective connection with the Islamic sacred characters, in order to orient their listeners along Islamic lines. The affective narratives of Kārbālā, thus, do not stand as a separate and purely narrative genre, but ought rather to be considered an integral part of a literary grid that Sufism-oriented poets with exposure to doctrinal Islam put together. Even though in the more descriptive Kārbālā narratives one cannot find the direct tone of indoctrination of the didactic manuals or the deep knowledge of Sufi cosmogony or the *sharī'ati* ideas of the *ṣīra* (like *Rasul Vijaẏa*), the emotional charge of the battle of Karbala was extremely effective in consolidating the audience/literary community as an affective community bound by devotion towards Muhammad and his family while centring on the martyrdom of Husayn. Most of the Kārbālā authors of early modern Bengal engaged themselves in didactic writing as religious authorities and they chose the theme of Karbala to exploit the power of narrative persuasion to orient people with Islamic values.

As thematic sequels to the *Rasul Vijaẏa*, all these Kārbālā texts argued that Muhammad's capacity to sacrifice his grandsons as an act of redemption for the sins committed by his *ummah* qualified him as Allah's Prophet. By extension, Husayn's capacity to sacrifice himself for the *ummah* made him the ideal martyr. In these narratives, in a general thematic format, Muhammad's love for his grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, acted as the deterrent to his Prophetic path, as it made him no different from an ordinary grandfather. The angel Jibreel was sent by Allah as an intermediary to reveal to Muhammad the untimely deaths of his grandsons and test his capacity for sacrifice. It was the day of

Eid when Jibreel descended on the house of the Prophet. His was not a wealthy home, for the Sufis believed in the wealth of Muhammad's heart instead. Being poor, Fatima could not give her sons, Hasan and Husayn, festive clothes. Muhammad asked Fatima to take out two garments from the closet. When Jibreel saw that Hasan chose the green one and Husayn red, he disclosed to Muhammad that Hasan would be poisoned and Husayn would be slain decoding the colours. This knowledge caused Muhammad enormous pain which he had to suppress so as to transcend the level of ordinary human beings. Muhammad's capacity to sacrifice his grandsons as a redemptive act for the sins of the people of his *ummah* (though the sin is never specified) offered people an affective connection with Islam. For the active presence of members of the *ahl al-bayt* and the *ṣaḥāba* in these episodes of Islamic history leading to the battle of Karbala, the story of early Islam became efficacious to familiarise the readers with a Prophet-centric piety.

The relevance of the members of the *ahl al-bayt* and the *ṣaḥāba* continued in Dobhāshī texts and then in the *jātīẏa sāhitya* written in Sanskritised Bangla. However, since the advent of Islamic reform, it was the crisis in the *ummah* during the Early Caliphate that resulted in the battle of Karbala that became the new thematic concern. Initially in Dobhāshī *puthi*s and then in *jātīẏa sāhitya*, the political turbulence - the early Caliphs getting assassinated one by one amid internal strife and the Umayyad Caliph Yazid instigating the killing of Husayn – was addressed as the core crisis of the *ummah* (see Section 2.2 for Dobhāshī and Section 3.4 for *jātīẏa sāhitya*).

To find the Arabic-Persian sources of the Kārbālā narratives composed in early modern Bengal, one needs to explore the *maqātil* repertoire, which has so far mostly remained outside the purview of academic discussions. *Maqātil* as a generic name (literally, place of slaughter or execution in Arabic) came to indicate martyrdom narratives, or more specifically the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his companions.[36] *Maqātil*, as a genre, drew upon *akhbār* literature (historical accounts) on the martyrdom of Islamic figures belonging to the Alid legacy (Hasan and Husayn) in the first four Islamic centuries.[37] The Arabic *maqātil* repertoire of the first four centuries of Islam on Alid martyrdom formed the basis of a large body of literature that emerged during the Safavid era in Iran.[38] Among the many *maqātil* texts, Husayn Wā'iz Kashifi's (d. 1504) Persian *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'* (The Garden of Martyrs) has remained the *maqātil* text that circulated the most in the Islamicate world.[39]

The available manuscripts of the Kārbālā narratives of early modern Bengal, like the manuscripts of other genres, do not refer to their "original" source text, though sometimes their titles give their source away. For example, the title of Muhammad Khān's Kārbālā narrative, *Maktul Hosen*, attests to the presence of the *maqātil* genre in contemporary

literary circulation. At other times, authors explicitly reveal their source. For example, one poet of the Kārbālā narratives Hāmid, writes:

> Maktul Hosen nāme ek kitāb āchila
> Sei mate Saṃgrām Husan pānchālī racilu
>
> There was a book called *Maktul Hosen* …
> I composed my poetry on it in rhymed couplets.
> I named it Sangram Husan
> (Hāmid, *Saṃgrām Husan*)[40]

However, he does not name any author.[41] Heẏāt Māmud says, "the stories about Imam's martyrdom are written in Arabic-Persian" (*Imāmer kathā āche Ārabī-Phārsī*) and frequently talked about some original *kitāb* (book) as his source text, which sounded like the generic idea of a source repertoire.[42]

This general "unfixity" of the "original" text(s) in early modern literary sources[43] offers "all evocable prior texts,"[44] or "an aggregate of remembered and half-remembered prior texts, which are there to be invoked"[45] as source texts, without narrowing down to identify the singularity of source text(s). During this process of "acquisition" of prior texts, "previously unknown materials became prior texts, adapting to their changed circumstances," as qualified by Ronit Ricci.[46] Since the beginning of the print culture in the mid-19th century informed by Islamic reform, such unfixity of source texts was not entertained anymore and authors started to authenticate their narratives on the battle of Karbala by providing a list of source material (see Section 1.2.2 for Dobhāshī and Section 4.1.1 for *jātīẏa sāhitya*). But for the authors of the Kārbālā it was the domestication of the Prophetic figures through the choices of equivalents from the available literary repertoire that was more important than specifying the exact Arabic-Persian sources. Horizontal intertextuality within the Bangla literary field, that way, was a very important literary tool for them to situate prophetic figures in a relatable context.

1.1.2 Translation/Rewriting[47] as intertextuality, narrative as speech act

One can find the intertextual roots of themes in *maghāzī* (mainly the military exploits of Prophet Muhammad) literature, like the description of war in the Kārbālā repertoire, in translated Sanskrit epics such as *Parāgalī Mahābhārāta*. *Nabīvaṃśa-Rasul Vijaẏa* show linguistic references which testify that Saiẏad Sultān read the *Parāgalī Mahābhārāta*. Linguistic resonances and shared thematic sections in descriptions of martial valour can be found in Kārbālā narratives like *Maktul Hosen* and *Imām Vijaẏa*. It can be deduced that the field of reception of the poetics of *Parāgalī*

Mahābhārāta expanded further via the *Nabīvaṃśa-Rasul Vijaẏa* and became stock reference for the Kārbālā narratives.[48]

Kabīndra Parameśvar, *Parāgalī Mahābhārāta*:
Chidra pāīẏā māre Bhīm bajrasama guru
Duryodhan rājār bhāṇgila dui uru
Dui uru bhāṇgiẏā paṛhilā Duryodhan
Ārtanāde purilek prithibī gagan
Prithibī upare jena parbat khasilā
Mohaścita Duryodhan bhūmite paṛhilā
Trasta haila gajarājī śuniẏā mardan
Bheriśaṇkha tumul bājae ghana ghan
Bhīmsene mārilā nṛpati Duryodhan
Bhalo gadā juddha kailā Bhīm Mahājan
Mṛgendra mārila jena mahāmati gaja
Bhaṇgiẏā paṛilā jena purandar Dhvaja
(*Parāgalī Mahābhārāta*)[49]

Bhim shot an arrow as heavy and robust like thunder/The twin thighs of King Duryodhan were shattered/ he fell in unbearable pain/His shrieks filled up the earth and heaven/Duryodhan fell, the battle ground shuddered/like on the earth a whole mountain collapsed / the elephants were scared, their cries rose/conch shells and trumpets were blown without a pause/Thus Bhimsen killed Duryodhan/what a hero was he, this Bhimsen/as if a deer killed a mighty lion/ as if a fort was demolished in a moment

Saiẏad Sultān, *Nabīvaṃśa*:

Bṛsha saṇge juddha kailā Nājir durjaẏ
Phiri phiri ran kare samare nirbhaẏ
Rudhire bahae dhārā śarir ujālā
Jehena śobhita ache pārijāt mālā
Kruddha hai Nājir māhendra bān eṛe
Bṛsher aṇgeta giẏā sei bān paṛe
…
Bṛsher nidhan dekhi Kājib kumār
Nikalilā mahābīr rana karibār
(Saiẏad Sultān, *Nabīvaṃśa*, 228)

What a fight he fought Nazir the indomitable /no one could match him, Nazir the unshakeable/ his body glistened with oozing blood/as if he was wearing a garland of red flowers/angry Nazir shot a mighty arrow/ it pierced Bṛsha, what a throw/now after Bṛsha was felled/the great Kajib emerged on the battlefield.

Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān, *Imām Vijaẏa*:

> Ārohilā bīr gāṇḍīb laiẏā hāte
> Mṛgendra calila jena gajendra badhite
> Khubikar aśvabar nacae medinī
> Alakshite nāt kare jena subadanī
> …
> Rachuler priẏa nati Ālīr kumār
> Cali gelā mahāmati rana anusār
> (Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān,
> *Imām-Vijaẏa*)[50]
>
> Now the hero emerged with *gāṇḍīva* in his hand/as if the deer went to kill the mighty lion/the horses galloped to the beats of the battle/as if celestial women were dancing in glee/the beloved grandson of the Prophet, the son of Ali/Husayn, with his mighty conscience, emerged on the battlefield.

The resemblance to *Parāgalī Mahābhārāta* in the settings of the battles, the motive, functions and patterns of action that arrange them in one singular literary field is conspicuous, and strengthened by the recurrence of words and phrases and themes. The heroes of Arabia are embellished with the weapons of the Kurukshetra, like *māhendra bāṇ*, *gadā* and the *gāṇḍīva*. Similarly, the blood oozing out creates a garland of the flowers *pārijāt*, found in Hindu heaven *swarga*, the galloping of war horses matches the sounds of unseen celestial dancers, among others. The use of this poetic-aesthetic style and language domesticates the heroes of another land, and transforms their tales into affective tales of the native land of Bengal.

Articulating Islamic concepts in a local rhetoric was an aesthetic strategy already deployed by Saiẏad Sultān in *Nabīvaṃśa* and repeated by Muhammad Khān and Doulat Ujīr. In Doulat Ujīr's *Imām Vijaẏa,* Allah is called *Bidhātā* (the Creator), emulating the Upanishadic *Brahmaṇ*. Muhammad is hailed as an expert of the four Vedas and the ecstasy of devotional love for Muhammad and Husayn is similarly nestled within the familiar rhetoric of Vaishnava devotionalism.[51] In *Imām Vijaẏa*, when Husayn is martyred, his wife Sahrbanu, in a fit of uncontrollable tears, can be seen wiping vermilion off her forehead, and breaking bangles and removing her necklace and other ornaments adorning her fingers and nose, acts usually performed by Hindu wives when widowed in Sanskritic poetic renditions.

> Satī nārī Sāhābānu ati bikalita tanu
> Dharaṇīte kāndaẏe gaṛāiẏā
> Ākul māthār keś bāul malin beś
> Saghane hānaẏe nija hiẏā
> Tejilā kaṇṭher hār khasāilā alaṃkār
> Muchilek sither sindur

Bhaṇgilā haster chuṛi angurī phelila guṛi
Beśar karila puni dur
(Bāhrām Khān, *Imām-Vijaẏa*)[52]

However, the poetics of equivalents to express unfamiliar Islamic ideals, mostly informed by Vaishnavite, Natha or Buddhist equivalents, as Tony Stewart rightly alerts, cannot be considered to have created a syncretic religious domain.[53] Rather, Kārbālā narratives, just like the prophetic life stories, and Sufi philosophical traditions, exemplify encounters between Islam and different indigenous religious traditions without any "ontological shift" in Islam.[54]

The contribution of the *maqātil* genre in the creation of a local Muslim community in early modern Bengal can be better understood if the Kārbālā texts are viewed as speech-act texts.[55] The unique capacity of the Kārbālā texts to merge "listening" of recitation with "acting" out the mourning of Imam Husayn's *shahādat* necessitates a reconsideration of the distinction between reading and performing.[56] The representation of the events in the life of the Prophet and then of his grandsons arouses sympathetic feelings, which make the text inherently performative, since remembering the events constitutes an action. The emotional account turns listening into a disciplined act of mourning. Such listening qualifies as *adab,* which contemporary religious authorities attempted to habituate their audience with Islamic behavioural codes in creative and narrative ways. The recitation did not remain confined to the domain of the diegetic – that is, narration – but rather became action in itself, binding the orator and the listeners into a literary community participating in a ritualistic performance. The *maqātil* genre, thus, expressed "the psychological realisation of mourning as an action,"[57] and not just the action-in-itself.[58] When the Kārbālā narratives were composed later at the time of Islamic reform, there were various additional oratory engagements, considered to be generic attributes in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts, that made reading them an ethico-religious act (See section 1.3).

The Muharram ritual manifested the performative dimension of *maqātil* literature to the fullest. The culture of mourning might have started to travel with immigrant Iranian Shīʿas in the 16th century and sent ripples across the oceans and lands to reach the local Muslim communities, who became familiar with a Husayn-centric piety.[59] There are no obvious clues in the texts themselves from which one can deduce whether these texts were integral to the Muharram calendar or recited independently, or exactly when the recitation of such texts became a part of Muharram commemoration. Only the instructions in Heẏāt Māmud's *Jaṇgnāmā* indicating when it was to be recited solo and when in chorus reveal that the narrative was recited as a part of Muharram. That one later scribe changed Heẏāt Māmud's title from *Jaṇgnāmā to Jārijaṇgnāmā* (in the print version) is enough to explain the incorporation of Māmud's texts into the *jāri* repertoire.[60]

With the establishment of the commemoration ritual of Muharram, these literary communities gradually turned into ritual communities of

mourners.[61] However, in the spread of Karbala-centric devotion, we can discern no Sunni or Shīʿa bias in Bengal till the beginning of Islamic reform in the early-19th century. All the authors of the Kārbālā narratives praised the four companions of Muhammad (*ṣaḥāba*) without prioritising Ali, the first Imam of the Shīʿas. In Heẏāt Māmud's *Jaṇgnāmā*, for example, after Husayn's death, all the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition come down to earth to lament. In this collective of mourners, Muhammad, his wife Aisha and his four companions are joined by thousands of *firishtas*. There is a separate section on the mourning of Ali and Fatima, but they appeared as the grieving parents of Husayn. Ali's presence here did not create any exclusive Shīʿī 'Alid-piety.

Bāyu bege kubyākhān rahe āsi sehi sthān
Fatemā nāmila mahi tale
Hāẏ hāẏ bali āsi putra kole kari basi
Kānde Bibi hiẏā jara jara
Kon aparādh kāje tomāke raṇer mājhe
Śir kāti badhilā parāṇ
Ār bā se kon doshe gamishṭa Khāreji roshe
Kātiẏāche hasta dui khān

Fatima rushes to the field as quick as the wind
She descends on the earth lamenting
Alas O my son dearest, holding Husayn in her embrace
She cries as her heart is breaking
O my dearest son what had you done
That the enemy severed your head
What else was there that your arms were slashed
O my dearest precious son beloved
(Heẏāt Māmud, *Jaṇgnāmā*)[62]

Even at Shīʿa centres like Murshidabad, where Shīʾīsm was the state religion under the Shīʿa nawab, or in Dhaka where there was a marked concentration of Shīʿas, Muharram continued to remain an inclusive ritual space without any Sunni-Shīʿa antagonism, accommodating Hindus from the agricultural and artisanal groups. Not only do Portuguese travellers confirmed the absence of any Sunni-Shīʿa bias in Muharram commemoration, 19th-century autobiographical writings also reported on the participation of rural Hindu and Sunni communities in the ritual even in the first few decades of the 20th century.[63]

As this chapter shows, the identification and othering of the Shīʿas by Sunni reformist groups in Bengal and the complete separation of a Karbala-centric devotion from Shīʿī intercession became the prerequisite to reclaim Husayn as one of the core ideal figures of Islamic reform. The physical dimensions of mourning – like the carrying of the *tājiẏā* (*ta'ziyeh*, Ar., the replica of Husayn's coffin) and lament rituals like the *majlis,* with physically expressive articulations – were not permitted to

be performed anymore while grief for the martyr was textualisd in Sunni reformist piety.

1.2 Dobhāshī: The language of the popular

The assimilation of Arabic, Persian and Hindustani words intensified in regions like Chittagong, Rangpur, Sylhet and Hooghly through the more conscious literary activities of religious authorities in the 18th century. Literary historians like Qazi Abdul Mannan have marked a cosmopolitan use of the Perso-Arabic elements in Bangla since this period as Dobhāshī.[64] In major political centres during the Bengal Sultanate and the Mughal rule, where Persian-speaking elite migrants had settled since the fall of the Safavid Empire – such as Murshidabad, Hooghly and Dacca – the assimilation of Persian and Hindustani words increased too. Mannan describes Dobhāshī as "mixed diction" comprising Arabic, Persian and Hindustani loanwords (verbs and pronominal forms) and colloquial Bangla. He has observed that it first appeared in the compositions of Persianate Hindu poets, many of them Brahmins (like the 18th-century poet Bhāratcandra [1712–1760]),[65] which Muslim authors in the later period adapted and elevated to a fine art.[66] But it was at the end of the 18th century that Dobhāshī emerged as a distinct literary language in Hooghly in the compositions of local authors like Shāh Garibullāh (1670–1770) and his successor, Saiẏad Hāmzā (1755–1815), to spread Islamic knowledge on various themes. With the help of their writings through the 18th century, Dobhāshī evolved as a language, assimilating more Arabic-Persian and Hindustani words and gaining currency with Muslim authors of lower Bengal in the 19th century as a lingua franca. The diction/idiom of the language earned and a communal status by getting categorised as "Musalmani Bangla" by Reverend James Long in 1855 in his *Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works* who employed it to denote numerous printed tracts written in Dobhāshī.[67]

After Urdu replaced Persian as the new colonial cosmopolitan vernacular and began to be used in the law courts and administrative offices of the Bengal Presidency after 1837,[68] not only did Hindustani/Urdu words grow in number in Dobhāshī, Urdu itself became the language of religious pursuits, including translation, thanks to the prolific interlocution of the Urdu-speaking reformist preachers of north India in Bengal and their close association with the emerging classes of local religious authorities in the first decades of the 19th century. When their disciples, the first generation of reformers in Bengal, started to translate/write Islamic texts, their obvious choice of target language was Dobhāshī, which, however, they described and understood as "Bangla." When Jaan Muhammad, a prolific reformist author of Dobhāshī, mentioned in his multi-edition *Hakikatacchālāt* (*Ḥaqīqat as-Ṣalawat*, Ar., or The Truth of Prayer, 1869) that it was Maulavi Abdul Jalil of Hooghly, a disciple of Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī, who started writing *sharīati* texts in Bangla, he actually meant Dobhāshī.[69] Indeed, some literary historians have suggested that the local Bangla-speaking reformers continued to transfer Islamic texts from

Arabic-Persian or Urdu into Dobhāshī for the Bangla-speaking masses, lending Dobhāshī the curious status of "translatorial Bangla."[70]

There is a lacuna in the study of the literary system of Dobhāshī in the available history of Bangla literature. The colonial linguist J. F. Blumhardt included authors of the 16th to 17th centuries, such as Saiẏad Sultān, in his list of exponents of "Muhammadan Bengali," flattening the complex literary changes between the Chaitanya period and the age of Dobhāshī in 18th century.[71] Such categorisation brought further confusion, noticeable in Mannan's inclusion of medieval literature in the category of Dobhāshī.[72] The Orientalist-colonialist anxiety seemed to loom large over the study of language, and linguist George Grierson described Dobhāshī in 1855 as "a mongrel of Bengali and Urdu," accusing it to be devoid of aesthetic taste. James Long, who categorised Dobhāshī as having "neither grammar nor vocabulary,"[73] readily judged it as the subaltern alternative, the boatman's language.[74] Suniti Kumar Chatterji, on the other hand, considered "Musalmani Bangla" to be a more instrumental and contrived language, as he recognised it as the "Maulavi's reply to the Pandit's *sadhubhasha*" devised to counter Fort William College's preference for a Sankritised register as the ideal form of Bangla language. However, Chatterji's observation on Musalmānī Bangla, conceived only in linguistic terms and specific to class identity, obliterates the possibility of any study of Dobhāshī's connection with the complexities of the Muslim literary sphere. Chatterji's explanation that "[t]he literature in [Musalmāni or Dobhāshī] Bengali has no merit and some of the deathless tales of [Persia and Islam] … have been ruined by the hack versifiers of Calcutta and Chittagong in rendering them as jargon"[75] looks down on Dobhāshī as a case of communal (lack of) taste. Such a stand pre-empts the possibility of reading the nuanced social dynamics of Bengali Muslim identity formation, with the literary repertoire written in Dobhāshī as one of its most significant sites of production. According to the recent historiography, Dobhāshī emerged in the late 17th century around Hooghly and later became the lingua franca of print culture in the early reformist period.

Since the 1880s, the authorities of standardised print and literary genres, namely preachers, authors, editors and critics, created an irreconcilable gap with the Dobhāshī repertoire to formulate a distinct form of literary modernity of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. But Dobhāshī genres reveal curious facts about the literary modernity that emerged and developed in the Bengali Muslim public sphere.

Polyglot linguist Muhammad Shahidullah (1885–1969) brought an interesting turn to the discussion in 1917 by emphasising Dobhāshī's centrality to the living literary tradition of the Bengali Muslims with its immense capacity to reach the common masses.[76] Shahidullah wished that someone like his professor and mentor Dineshchandra Sen (1866–1939), the prominent literary historian who had begun a detailed study of the medieval ballads in his *Baṇgabhāshā o Sāhitya*, would write a history of the Dobhāshī *puthi* to truly understand the "pulse of the Bengali Muslims."[77] But Shahidullah's position did not get many enthusiasts in

the following generation of literary historians. For Muhammad Enamul Haq, the use of Dobhāshī was determined by class, and, following James Long, he considered it the lingua franca of the peasants and other Muslims belonging to the lower Muslim professional classes.[78] Dobhāshī was further categorised by literary historians such as Sukumar Sen and Ahmed Sharif as inadequate, both in terms of aesthetics and intellect.

What these historians, other than Shahidullah, seem to have overlooked, however, is the crucial position occupied by Dobhāshī, whether in its rejection or inclusion, in the debates within the Muslim public sphere over the choice of an appropriate language to represent a Bengali Muslim identity in terms of religious modernity. Nor has there been any mapping of the internal struggles of Dobhāshī as a literary system, and the attempts to transform it into a viable and contemporary expression, which the authors continued to actively engage with as late as in the 1940s.

But Shahidullah's proposal to reconnect with Dobhāshī reveals a very crucial formulation of the Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa* identity. Dobhāshī here stands for a linguistic-cultural system signifying how regional Muslimness had taken shape when the tenets of early print culture as exemplified in Dobhāshī continued to coexist with modern Bengali Muslim literary activities. At a time when Dobhāshī stood for a frozen and ineligible past, or a domain of the non-elite other not viable for modernity, the formulations of Dobhāshī as integral to Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, put forward by Shahidullah, exposed the ambivalence in the formulations of the modern. In effect, it serves to bring back the position of the non-elite, folk and the popular as actors of modernity, making the definition of the Bengali Muslim literary modernity a very layered and contested domain (see Section 5.1.3).

The negation of Dobhāshī was unanimous in the arena of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Both Mohammad Abdul Hakim, the editor for the Hanafi *Islām Darśan,* and Mohammad Abdul Hakim, a contributor to *Āhle Hādis*, rejected the possibility of Dobhāshī as the vehicle of the *jātīẏa*. Both rejected Dobhāshī for the absence of an evolved grammar and standardised phrases and idioms.[79] Hakim, of *Āhle Hādis,* dismissed it for its lack of "functional value" (*byābahārik mūlya*) as compared to standardised Bangla. In an article entitled "Ābāhan" (Invocation), he scorned Muslim authors for lacking the literary talent to render Islamic themes beyond religion, in effect advocating for a literature that will have strong poetic innovations necessary to embody Islamic essences – the literature that the *ulama* and literati called *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Hakim said emphatically, "[t]he dispossesed Muslim returns blindly to religion to protect his very existence. The Muslims without any talent valued only Dobhāshī, the language of religion, and thus neglected everything else" (*Sarbaswahīṇ Musalmān āpnār astitwa rakshār janya diśehārār nyaẏ dharmmer pathe pratyābritta hailen; pratibhāhīṇ Musalmān ekmātra dharmma bhāshākei sār-sarbaswa kariẏā ār yābatiẏa bishaẏkei upekshā pradarśan karilen*).[80] He felt that Muslims, since the fall of Persian as the royal language in Bengal, had nurtured an "immature infant" ("*aprāpta-baẏaska śiśu bhāshā*"), the Musalmani

Bangla (Dobhāshī), as their language of religion (*dharmabhāshā*). He explained in the same article how, in the absence of any Muslim counterpart, the Hindu intelligentsia had hegemonised history, literary traditions and language of Bengal, and a suitable alternative of Dobhāshī might illuminate the historical truth about Islam and the Muslim community. Hakim here echoed the ethos of the time by reclaiming Sanskritised Bangla as the language through which the Islamic *jātīẏa* could be truly spelt out. The other Mohammad Abdul Hakim of *Islām Darśan* put the same claim over Bangla dismissing Dobhāshī as the medium of *jātīẏa sāhitya* due to its being a folk and oral language.

1.2.1 From recitation to print: At the threshold

Since the beginning of the reformist movements, rituals like *urs* (veneration of the grave of the Sufi pir upon his death anniversary), *milad* (celebration of the birth of Muhammad) and Muharram, which had developed in the early modern period, were also vehemently critiqued by the reformers as un-Islamic, and as expressions of *shirk* and *bid'at*. When reformers offered the Prophet's life as a codified template of Islamic socio-moral norms, the folk version of *milad* was structured and presented as one of the reformed rituals. As reformist Islam had scriptural Sufism as one of its basic components, exemplified through the organised learning of four major schools of Sufism – Suhrawardiyya, Qadiriyya, Nakshbandiyya and Chishtiyya - and treatment of the reformist masters as exponents of those schools, *urs* was gradually codified to some extent in Bengal in the popular Hanafi reformist efforts (see a discussion on Pir Abu Bakr of Furfura Sharif in Section 3.1.2). However, the commemorative grieving ritual of Muharram remained wholly prohibited for its ingrained connections to Shīʿī intercession without any possibility of reconciliation.

A discussion of the ambivalent position of Dobhāshī *puthis* between oral sensibilities and print can be a productive entry point to look into the enmeshedness of orality and print, unfixity and fixity and the enchanted experience in religion and the rational interpretation of Islam in connection with literary modernity and sobriety (reformist consciousness) in the Bengali Muslim public sphere. In the standardisation of the religious discourses exemplified in the Karbala-centric sensibilities, the ambivalence between reading and listening, print and performance, scriptural authentication and affective responses continued even during the climactic standardisation of print and modern literary endeavours. Such ambivalence was an inevitable outcome of the dynamic religious processes of reformist religious mobilisation in the Bengali Muslim public sphere, which continued in a more structured print culture when *jātīẏa sāhitya* was being written in standardised Bangla.

Around the Battala area (Chitpur) in Calcutta, a magnificent hub of printing presses emerged in the early-19th century and gave rise to

a rapidly proliferating and cheap print culture, a pattern soon to be replicated in several quarters in Dacca. Due to the eclectic range of themes that the genres encompassed, and the poetic devices that the genres exploited to cater to the masses, cheaply printed tracts and treatises in Dobhāshī, generically called the Battala *puthi*s, represent a unique set of sub-cultural expressions in the Bengal public sphere.[81] Heẏāt Māmud's *Jaṇgnāmā*, now circulating with the new title *Jarijaṇgnāmā,* and Shāh Garibullāh's *Jaṇgnāmā* were the two scribal manuscripts on the Karbala martyrdom from the 18th century published in early print culture. An interface between the performative (reading-listening and the ritual) and the printed word defined the attributes of print culture when performance genres and manuscripts – like musical drama, ballad, *dāstān*, or *qiṣṣa* – began to be printed.[82] Community listening practices of the oral-scribal culture continued as printed books were read aloud to a community of listeners, who were often semi-literate or illiterate.[83] The manuscripts of *Jārijaṇgnāmā* and *Jaṇgnāmā* entered print without much textual alteration, causing Stuart Blackburn to observe that "print did not produce new books, only more old books."[84] In the printed texts after sections composed in *paẏār* or *tripadī*, a segment of one couplet/triplet was titled *dhuẏā* (refrain) to mark its choric repetitive function when read out/ sung. In these sections in *Jārijaṇgnāmā*, the narrative did not progress in terms of events, but rather through reiterative utterances like: "Alas (hāẏ hāẏ) Allah be praised a thousand times/ who can possibly express thy grace"[85] (the closest equivalent for hāẏ is alas) or "Alas who can fathom Allah's wish/ He made Muhammad sacrifice,"[86] or "Alas Allah, Nabi the Prophet, sacrificed his grandsons that was in his fate."[87] These utterances serve the purpose of involving the community in a consensus of faith. Like Heẏāt Māmud's *Jārijaṇgnāmā*, Garibullāh's *Jaṇgnāmā* also has detailed references of *rāga*s and *tālas* for the sections written in *paẏār,* attesting to the oral function of the printed scribal manuscripts in the early print culture.

After these two authors of the pre-print literary history, this orality-print ambivalence continued as the distinct ethos of the Dobhāshī repertoire even when print culture assumed a more standardised form in the late 19th century. To map the multiple tenets of the Dobhāshī narrative tradition as connected to Islamic reformist ethos, this chapter and the next one discuss the following Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives: *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* by Jonab Ali (1882),[88] *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* by Muhammad Munshi (1900),[89] *Sacitra Gaňje Śahide Kārbālā* by Saad Ali and Abdul Ohab (first publication date unknown, but presumably between 1900 and 1912, *Śahide Kārbālā* in short),[90] *Dāstān Śahide Kārbālā* by Muhammad Eshak Uddin (1929, *Dāstān* in short)[91] and *Ādi o Āsal Chahi Baṛa Jaṇge Kārbālā* by Maulavi Qazi Aminul Haq (1939–1942, *Jange Kārbālā* in short).[92]

All these authors with their reformist zeal turned the Kārbālā narratives of 18th-century Dobhāshī (of Garibullāh) into scripturally authenticated versions of Islamic poetic discourses. These authors who wrote from the

districts and were published from the print quarters of Battala and then Dacca marked a supra-regional reformist literary network. Jonab Ali and Muhammad Munshi were from Hooghly, Muhammad Eshak Uddin was from Rangpur and Qazi Aminul Haq from Chittagong. It is curious to notice how these older centres of Islamic learning and literary production of the early modern period were now being energised by new reformist ulama writing in Dobhāshī. Jonab Ali, a disciple of Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī, wrote on multiple themes – *Nāmāj Māhātmya* (The Glory of Prayer), *Fajilate Darud* (The Superiority of Salutation), *Jiẏārate Kabar* (To Visit the Grave), *Jaṇge Khaẏbar* (The Battle of Khoyber) – charting out the Hanafi discursive and narrative efforts for a more structured indoctrination of the Muslim masses. Responses of the Dobhāshī authors to the ethos of modernity are sometimes discernible. When Qazi Aminul Haq was writing in the wake of the Second World War, the demography of Islamic reform had already changed with the participation of the *ulama* and the literati engaged in *jātīẏa sāhitya* (see Sections 3.1 and 3.1.1). There were internal structural changes in Aminul Haq's writing style and themes. Though the authors of Dobhāshī never claimed their position in the burgeoning discourses of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, Dobhāshī repertoire changed considerably internally as a lexical format and a repertoire, continuing to thrive as late as in the 1940s.

In fact, Jonab Ali and Muhammad Munshi continued to write narratives as scribal manuscripts while their manuscripts went through multiple print editions.[93] Jonab Ali finished writing the manuscript of *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* in 1882 and Muhammad Munshi finished his *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* in 1900. Jonab Ali's *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* was published from Battala in 1882 as soon as he had finished his manuscript, and reprints started to appear from 1883 onwards.[94] Similarly, within 12 years of the composition of his manuscript (1912), Muhammad Munshi's *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* enjoyed 10 successive print editions.[95] From these instances, it might be observed that the history of *jātīẏa sāhitya* cannot be configured as an evolutionary literary history from a Dobhāshī past to a Sanskritised modern sensibility. Rather, multiple temporalities and literary choices persist within a broader and multifarious public domain where different coexisting micro-literary groups overlap, contradict and influence each other.

The structural forms of the Kārbālā narratives in the 18th-century Dobhāshī repertoire changed in the 19th century as reformist authors attempted to give Kārbālā poetry the format of a religious narrative. Previously, only the (*paẏār* or *tripadī*) had been specified for the sections, which were loosely arranged thematically. However, in 19th-century Dobhāshī texts, after traditional sections like the *hamd*, *na'at*, praises of the *ṣaḥāba*, the *ahl al-bayt* and occasionally of the pir, references were added to the name of the local patron and peers. Narratives were now arranged in thematic sections marked as *baẏān* – a term signifying statements in the discursive tradition of Islam, especially in the *tafsir* tradition – highlighting the standardising impulse of Islamic reformist

sensibilities. Some examples are: "The *baẏān* (*bayān*, Ar.) on Husayn goes from Mecca to Medina" (Muhammad Munshi, no pagination),[96] "The *bayān* on the death of Hazrat Fatima,"[97] "The *bayān* on Hazrat Husayn goes to the battle."[98] Other sections were titled *raoẏāẏet* (riwāyet, Ar.), in which the narrator summarised the incidents in a didactic manner and proposed forms of ethical actions. In some texts like Muhammad Munshi's *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, there are sections titled *hādich* (*hadis*). Munshi added five consecutive sections categorised as *hādich* between Husayn's death and the heart-wrenching episode where Husayn's head was carried, impaled on a spear. Now, unlike in the early modern period, the signature line with the name of the author, which now appeared at the end of each section (*baẏān*, *raoẏāẏet* and *hādich*), was always accompanied by a list of references that the author claimed to have consulted. This gave the poetic narrative the status of scriptural discourse and religious commentary (see Section 1.2.2).

The submission of the *ṣaḥāba* to Muhammad, the figure of the Prophet and his speeches, and the affective bonding with the *ahl al-bayt*, framed as scriptural matters, enabled these Kārbālā texts to actively disseminate the instructional values of Islam (*adab*) in the form of a tale, acted as a narrative complement to the instructional *adab* repertoire. Repeated references to *hadis* not only validated the narrative situations of Karbala scripturally but also made the *hadis* an easily accessible scriptural source attained through the narrative.

These texts invoked a literary community, an *ummah*, by addressing the readers as a collective of listeners – *dindār* (someone with *din* or faith in Islam), *mumin* (someone with *iman*), *nekjāt* (born of righteous action sanctioned by the scriptures), etc. As Saad Ali addressed his listeners in *Śahide Kārbālā*, "*Tārpare ki haila ohe Mosalmān/raoẏāẏet mate śuna jībanī dāstān"* (Oh Muslims, learn what happened later in this biography-tale/that I tell you according to the riwāyet).[99] Thus, the narrator turned the act of private reading of print culture into community-listening within the dynamics of Islamic reform. The narrator addressed his audience, oriented them with Islamic values, and authenticated his narratives as drawn from scriptural sources. By engaging his audience in reading some epithet from the *hadis* or uttering the praise of Muhammad or the *ahl al-bayt*, he emulated the performative criteria of *waʿẓ* – where an individual preacher orients an audience into a religious collective by stating the scriptural tenets of Islam with further elaborations. Thus, these Kārbālā texts acted as tools for preaching, while configuring the tenets of popular Islamic piety through persuasive narratives, all of which related to Muhammad's last days and afterwards. The martyrdom of Husayn was interwoven in the series of deaths starting from Muhammad and his daughter Fatima, including those of his four companions. Sometimes the narrative, like that of Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab's *Śahide Kārbālā*, started with the life stories of the Abrahamic prophets. The authors, by aligning the legacy of the prophets (*Qiṣaṣ ul-Anbiyā'*) with Muhammad, claimed a

"historical" genealogy by narrating the last days of Muhammad, and the deaths of Fatima and the *ṣaḥāba* and Hasan and Husayn, ending with the exploits of Hanifa – the half-brother of Husayn (Ali's other son by Bibi Hanafiyāh), who attempted to avenge the brutality inflicted on Husayn's family in the battle of Karbala.[100]

In the Kārbālā texts, the narrators usually added a separate couplet repeated after every episode, which is a eulogy of the *ahl al-bayt*. Generally, these couplets were in Urdu, transcribed into Bangla or often printed in Urdu script. Refrains like "*Rachule pāk par bhej aye Khodā darud o chālām/ Ālī Fātemā Hāsān Hosen pār bhi mādām*" (O Khoda, we send our salutation to Prophet Muhammad, salutation to Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn too)[101] were meant to be repeated by the audience. This participation of the audience as a chorus prompted by the narrator-reciter (as indicated in the text) elevated the narration/reading of the Kārbālā texts to the status of a *waʿẓ* gathering.

Reformist tracts, *namaz* manuals, treatises on the Hereafter and narratives on the battle of Karbala – all of these were very popular in the newly emerging field of print culture, and contributed towards making print a profitable business. In this money-making venture, the publishers affirmed their authoritative presence in the text. One example of this is Haji Muhammad Soleiman, the Dacca-based publisher of Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab's Kārbālā *puthi*, who vouched for *Śāhide Kārbālā,* which he published as "the biggest and only authentic version of the battle" in a special signed introduction. In the highly commodified domain of print, the same Haji Muhammad Soleiman declared that he had bought the copyright from the previous publisher Haji Abdul Gafur to reprint this out-of-print *puthi* since there were no authentic versions of the battle of Karbala available in the market. Thus, the publisher's ability to bring back, posthumously, the literary excellence of authors who were no longer alive reaffirmed his position as the authority in the new knowledge retail market.

In a system where publishers owned and distributed printed texts, piracy and plagiarism were inevitable. Most of Garibullāh's *puthis* were printed and reprinted with other authors' names by several publishers. His *Jaṇgnāmā* was published under the name of Yākub Ālī by several publishers in editions which ran out of print several times. All the *puthis* written by Garibullāh were thus subject to the conditions of unfixity and lack of authenticity that characterised the early Battala print-market. That there was so much confusion around the authorship of the *Jaṇgnāmā* might prove its enormous popularity among readers and its substantive viability in the market. This uncertainty led literary historian Ahmed Sharif (1921–99) to presume that "the first part of the *Jaṇgnāmā* was written by Garibullāh and the last part was by Mohammad Yākub." This is due to the fact that in some of the available *puthis*, Garibullāh's *bhanitā* appears in the first part whereas Yākub Ālī's *bhanitā* appears in the second part.[102] Sometimes, Yākub Ālī's *bhanitā* outnumbers Garibullāh's to such

an extent that Abdul Gaffar Siddiqi, another historian of Bangla literature, even has to claim that the *Jaṇgnāmā* had originally been written by Yākub Ālī, not Garibullāh.[103] The same *Jaṇgnāmā* was also published under the name of Shifiuddin in 1877 from Calcutta.[104] Several editions of Yākub Ālī's *Jaṇgnāmā* were also published by a Hindu-owned press.[105] Thus, the presence of the author's name inside the text, in the *bhanitā* or other sections, did not in any way establish his authority on the process of production and dissemination, nor the immediate monetary profit accrued from it.

After the introduction of the Press and Registration of Books Act in 1867, the publisher's claim over the printed material was formalised so as to minimise piracy.[106] Paradoxically, while the declaration of the possession of copyright by the publisher technically added another kind of fixity, there was no scope for the author to claim ownership over the text till authors started to identify themselves more clearly inside the text by inventing individual poetic styles or including their conscious narratorial voice, thereby thereby stamping their individuality on the text. This phenomenon was mostly discernible in a print culture facilitated in standardised Bangla.

1.2.2 How cheap, how scriptural: The internal ambivalence of Dobhāshī

In mainstream literary historiography, an exclusive non-elite orientation of Dobhāshī is imagined, which was seemingly untouched by modernist impulses. This position can appear rather problematic if we take other factors related to production and consumption into consideration. Although a repetition of poetic formula in metre (*paẏār* and *tripadī*), as well as the use of metaphors and stock thematic arrangements (in *bayān*, *raoẏāẏet* etc.), continued, Dobhāshī authors seem to have developed an inclination towards the literary changes of their times and responded to them as well. As already mentioned, Dobhāshī *puthis* continued to be written and printed-reprinted simultaneously while Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* took shape as a site of contestation with the thriving polemic on Muslim modernity, defying the claim of an evolutionary Muslim literary historiography. Muhammad Munshi finished *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* in 1900, which had its tenth edition within 19 years.[107] Saad Ali and Abdul Ohab's *Śahide Kārbālā*, published in the 1910s, enjoyed multiple editions within 10 years of its first publication.[108] These authors must have had considerable success in the market to have their Kārbālā texts reprinted continuously for the next few decades. Muhammad Eshak Uddin's *Dāstān* (1929) and Qazi Aminul Haq's *Jaṇge Kārbālā* (between 1939 and 1945)[109] were written as testimonies to a steady and thriving Dobhāshī tradition contemporaneous with the modern literary genres.

Similarly, the price list of the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* and their volumes confirm that they cannot be relegated to the sub-cultural domain of Battala as a cluster of cheap prints of slim tracts. Muhammad Eshak

Uddin's *Dāstān,* for example, was divided into seven *bālām* (chapters) with 622 pages and priced at Rs 7, a considerable sum for 1929. Saad Ali and Abdul Ohab's *Śahide Kārbālā*, divided into four *daphtar* (chapters) with 525 pages and priced at Rs 6.50, continued to be published till the 1940s. These Kārbālā *puthis*, which came into circulation in the 1880s, were thorough and thick with scriptural references to a number of *hadis*, *tarikh* and Sufi theoretical texts, and thus clearly presupposed an implied audience with exposure to such referencing practices who, moreover, were capable of buying these highly priced volumes.

What is remarkable to note is how these reformist authors attempted to separate and save a Husayn-centric piety from the ritualistic physicality of Ashura mourning by formulating a newer script for the Karbala battle. For this, they had to bring the Kārbālā literary repertoire of early modern Bengal out from the unfixity of prior texts and authenticate it with fixed references that print could now (conceptually) offer. Jonab Ali, Muhammad Munshi, Eshak Uddin – all of them included scriptural citations.[110] References to the sources gradually became more structured and detailed.[111] Jonab Ali mentioned six prior scriptural texts, including the Sufi anecdotal text *Latāẏeph Āshrāphī* (*Lātāīf-e-Ashrafī*, Persian) by Ashraf Jahangir Simnani (1287–1386) of the Chishtiyya and Qadiriyya orders, *Sowāhedān Nabuẏat* (*Shawāhid an-Nabuwwat*, Persian) of Maulana Jāmī (1414–92) and Ānsāre Śāhādāten (*Ansār-e Shāhadatain*, Arabic*)*, said to be the testimonials of Khuzaima ibn Thābit du'sh-Shahādatein al-Ansārī (d. 657), one of the companions of Muhammad.[112] Muhammad Munshi referred to *Latāẏeph Āśrāphi* and *Ānsāre Shāhādāten*. Eshak Uddin referred to more than 12 scriptural texts that he had used as source and reference, which included Sufi theoretical treatises like *Kāshph al-Māhjub* (*Kashf al-Mahjub* of 'Alī al-Hujwīrī, Persian, 11th century), a seminal commentary on the Qur'an titled *Al-Kashshaf* by al-Zamakhshari (Arabic, 12th century), *Latāẏeph Āśrāphi*, *Rahat al-Kulub (Rahatul Qulub*, Persian) and a *malfuzat* by Chishtiyya sheikh and scholar Niẓām ad-Dīn Awliyā' (1238–1325) about his meeting with his *murshid* (master) Sheikh Farīd ad-Dīn. Munshi's references also include other *tafsir*s, Sufi tracts and narratives on Husayn's martyrdom, but inadequate transliteration of the titles sometimes makes it difficult to accurately identify all the prior texts.

With the translation of the Qur'an and *hadis* from Arabic-Persian originals into Bangla since the 1880s, a system of transliteration developed for Arabic and Persian words, including the titles of the source texts, approximating the original and standardising loanwords both in print and for pronunciation in standardised Bangla. However, popular print still carried the volatility of transliteration (for example, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' was referred to as pir Neja Maddi by Jonab Ali in his *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*) as loanwords did not go through similar standardisation in Dobhāshī due to the oral nature of scriptural teaching and an audience whose oral sensibilities did not demand the referential exactitude essential in script culture.

But the authors compensated for any lack in exactitude by developing a system of direct references in the texts themselves by using the persuasive voice of the narrator, like Eshak Uddin in his *Dāstān* directly extoling his audience to, "Listen to the names of the books, O Muslim brothers, on which I have composed my *dāstān*," leaving no space for ambiguity.[113] He categorised his narrative as a *dāstān* (meaning tale in Persian) but did not assign it fictional status.[114] Rather, as a reformist *alim* he intended to assign his narrative with a newly derived Persian generic name, while actually equating it with the Arabic *riwāyat*. With this, he turned the literariness and poetic charge of the Persianate cultures into the newfound sensibility of Arabicisation. But from the patterns of transliteration, which mostly followed the Persian and then an overtly Urdu system, it can be observed that most of the Arabic originals were read in either Persian or gradually in Urdu translations.

The systems of authentication – like the narrators' claim that their narratives belonged to the *hadis* repertoires ("this is what was written in the *hadis*")[115] – developed simultaneously in standardised Bangla. Both strove to foreground, in their Kārbālā narratives, Muhammad's capacity to sacrifice his beloved grandsons to save the *ummah* from inevitable doom and emphasised the importance of his companions, the *al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* – the rightly guided (first four) Caliphs. Now, thematically speaking, the *ahl al-bayt* and the *khulafā' rāshidūn* together served to resolve the inter-Islamic tension between the Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt* (as the origin of Shīʿī Imamate), the rift that Shīʿī religiosity was founded upon.[116] The divide between the Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt* – between governance and the family – needed to be resolved to secure a majority Hanafi Sunni *ummah*, now being signified as *jātī* in the modern lexicon when the author opted for Sanskritised Bangla (see Section 2.2 for Dobhāshī and Section 4.5 for *jātīẏa sāhitya*).

Though the Dobhāshī authors and authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* shared a similar reformist concern for authentications, the Dobhāshī tradition represents a categorically different paradigm by not having the deliberate genric and linguistic agenda of *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

The Dobhāshī authors considered the act of writing about the battle of Karbala as an ethico-moral action of Islam in itself to bring the audience to collective listening of the episodes of the Karbala and turn their collective listening into a form of mourning.

1.3 Oral forms, scripted format: Whatever happened to the performative?

The various metres of verse, namely *dwipadī paẏār* (rhymed couplets of 14 syllables) and *tripadī* (a lengthier form of three couplets) used in the Kārbālā texts since the early modern period into the Dobhāshī paradigm in print signify various registers of narration. Authors even assigned different sections of the texts to different layers of oration and physical

engagement. Max Stille, in his study of *paẏār* in Sāgīr's *Iusuph Jalikhā* observes that (two line) *paẏār*, when used in the narrative, is descriptive and carries diegetic values, whereas the *tripadī* (three line) carries mimetic values (generally enactment of action, but here, internal monologue of characters). This indicates the possibility of different aesthetic responses prompted by the alteration of metre.[117]

Among the authors of 19th century writing in Dobhāshī, the diegetic mode composed in *paẏār* remained the general narrative tool. Jonab Ali declared at the beginning of *Śahide Kārbālā* that his long narrative poem was a "*paẏār prabandha*" (a narrative in *paẏār*), and he never took recourse to *tripadī*. The expressive capacity of the narratorial voice in *paẏār* in this text expanded to report the narrative situations while at the same time authenticating them as belonging to the written scriptural tradition of Islam. It delivered the speeches of the characters, and instructed the audience on all the basic Islamic ethico-moral codes through narrative situations as well as in separate sections. Gradually, the narrative of Kārbālā was rearranged to minimise speech and reorient the reports of the events so as to maximise their expressive potential. Generally, these Dobhāshī texts began with the details of the circumstances around Muhammad's death followed by the deaths of Muhammad's daughter Fatima, and the four companions Usman and Ali. Each narrative section was called *ophātnāmā* (tale of death) and depicted intense forms of grieving for the deceased. In them, narrative reportage would usually unfold with Fatima and his first four Caliphs grieving over Muhammad's death and then progress to successive occasions of grieving over the deaths that followed. In the process, these showed the formation of an intense affective bond among the members of the *ahl al-bayt* and the Early Caliphate (See 2.2.2). Thus, Husayn's death came not as a singular act of *shahādat* but fell into a lineage of deaths culminating in his martyrdom. The narrative voice in the diegetic mode bound the community not only with Husayn, like in the early modern narratives, but also with the family of Muhammad and his Caliphate. These texts posited therefore a Husayn-centric piety that was inalienably tied to Muhammad, the *ahl al-bayt* and the Caliphate.

Muhammad Munshi, in his volume of *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* (1900), composed a *choupadī*, perhaps to demonstrate his poetic ability to create dramatic effect at the point in the narrative when Jibreel reveals the impending deaths of Hasan and Husayn. From this and other instances of the use of metres in several texts, we can see that the rhyme schemes – *choto paẏār*, *chutki chanda*, *laghu tripadī* or *coupadī* – became a matter of stylistic choice for individual poets rather than a standardised template that the poet followed to maximise aesthetic response.

Such poetic choices opened up the possibilities of other kinds of aesthetic responses than simple descriptions of the events, as exemplified by Saad Ali and Abdul Ohab, in their collaborative *Śahide*

Kārbālā. The authors wrote two different sections which they called "*tarjumāt ānsāre āsh-shāhādātein*" (the translation of the testimonials of Shahādatein al-Anṣāri) on the cover of their volume in order to conjoin their compositions and create a composite narrative. In Saad Ali's part of narration, the very affective devotion of *hamd* and *na'at* section is composed in *tripadī*, followed by a testimonial of grief in the voice of his *kalam* (reed pen) in the same metre. Saad Ali ended the *hamd* and na'at section by mentioning that he is "*ummed oẏār*" (hopeful, *ummīd var*, Pr.) to receive "*sāphāt*" (heavenly reward, *ṣifa*, Ar., *ṣifat*, Pr.) by writing this *puthi*. In the following section, composed in *payār*, the poet addresses his audience, authenticates his narrative and articulates the pain of remembering the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. He claims quite unambiguously that the members of the *ummah* can attain *saoẏāb* (blessings from Allah, *sawab*, Ar.) by shedding tears for Husayn's martyrdom. He offers his tears as compensation for not having been present at the battle of Karbala to sacrifice his life while fighting the enemies of Husayn:

> Galā sukāila merā kāndite kāndite
> Bali hāẏ āmi kai chinu sei oktete
> Āmi jadi hājer rahitum sei dine
> Galā kātaiẏā ditum Kārbālā maẏdāne
> Loṛhe kāpherer sāthe hārāitum jān
> Emāmer pare āmi haitum korbān
> Hājer nā chinu āmi dast Kārbālāẏ
> Sei din gojāriẏā gela jadi hāẏ
> Āji thorā kede lei emāmer dāẏ
>
> Alas, I could not fight in the field of Karbala
> To save Husayn I would have offered my head
> I would have fought with the *kafir*, Husayn's enemy
> I would have sacrificed my life after Husayn like many
> This is the greatest regret that my heart bears
> That the battle of Karbala is missed
> Now that I cannot sacrifice myself anymore
> Let me flow my tears in full vigour
>
> (*Śahide Kārbālā*, Saad Ali)[118]

In so doing, Saad Ali sought the blessings of Allah and provided another important template apparent in the narratives in Dobhāshī, where the shedding of tears in grief became an ethico-moral act constituting a form of Islamic *adab* for both the composer of the text and its audience. But these were Sunni reformist tears, validated as scripturally sanctioned action – *farz* – designed to attain Allah's blessings, which necessitated an immense identification of love with the Prophet's grandsons. Saad Ali wrote of how when Ibrahim the prophet was ready to sacrifice his son

Ismail, in a conversation with Allah, he declared his unparalleled love for Muhammad (yet to come as the Ultimate Prophet of Islam) and vouched for his love for Muhammad's progeny (*farzand*, Pr.) over his own sons.[119]

These Dobhāshī narratives have a narrative structure somewhat common to the whole repertoire. The narratives highlighted the deaths of iconic figures starting from Muhammad, then including Fatima as part of the *ahl al-bayt*, and the four Caliphs, and leading to the martyrdom of Hasan and Husayn. Each and every narrative sequence of death unleashed tremendous emotional energy where the audience was expected to identify with the feelings of pain and expressions of mourning. The moments of the deaths stand as the acute affective moments when the ties among the Early Caliphate and between the Early Caliphate and *ahl al-bayt* are strengthened. By reading how Muhammad's death was mourned by Fatima and the Early Caliphate, followed by the deaths of Fatima and the individual members of the Caliphate, the audience congealed into the community of the Prophet (see Section 2.2).

In Eshak Uddin's *Dāstān* too, *paẏār* was extended to express lament and proffer behavioural instructions, invalidating Muwayia's claims over the Caliphate by equating him with the false pirs (*jhutā pīr*) whose ritual practices were not sanctioned by the scriptures (*Dāstān*, 54). Eshak Uddin validated his own statements by saying "thus it has been said in the *hādich*." The narrator's voice grew more and more persuasive to intensify the affective engagement of the audience/readers, as he addressed them directly and categorised listening/reading as sacred acts:

> Bāki kāje phal nāhi karaha khatam
> Paṛhibe momin Āllā karibe raham
> Pāibe choẏāb tumi gam kara jadi
> Emāmer uchhilā dhara pābe gunanidhi
> Emām Hochener jebā jībanī paṛhibe
> Ār jei tār śoke āchhu ke muchibe
> Emāmer gamete haile perechān
> Ājim choẏāb debe pāk chobahān
>
> If you fail to accomplish other ethical duties
> O *momin*, you read my *dastan* as compensation
> You will get blessings if you feel pain for Imam
> You will get Imam the precious in your heart[120]
> Those who shed tears for Husayn's pain
> Will get *sawab* from Allah in the end
>
> (Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*)[121]

Thus, the narratorial voice assumed new self-importance, became increasingly self-conscious and instructive and began to overshadow the characters' voices, making their personal speeches increasingly less poignant. This was not so in the early modern Kārbālā narratives, where

the characters' voices mattered equally. But gradually, these individual voices of the characters started to become instructive as they expressed and explained pain during the times of deaths, structurally becoming extensions to the narrator's voice. For instance Eshak Uddin makes Ali cry in utter distress about how Muawiya had done all sorts of wrongs, as though to explain to the audience the outcome of wrongdoings in the Islamic sense:

Pāk mochalmān gane Khārijī bānāẏ
Muẏābiẏā darjāl kām hāẏ hāẏ hāẏ
Bahut kāndiẏā Ālī darbār mājhār
Don hāte pānā māṇge dargāhe Āllār
Hāẏ Āllā hedāẏet kato mābiẏāre
Khelāphati liẏā baẏāt kare maminere
Tāmām mamine Āllā rākha chālamate
Imām āmal ār mān o ejjate

Muawiya pushed the pious Muslims to the unlawful path
Allah, guide Muawiya to your righteous path
Ali cries and prays to Allah stretching out his hands to the sky
See how Muawiya is making Your servants his disciples
Allah save your servants and keep them safe
Listen momin, at any cost
You cannot forfeit your *iman*, honour should not be lost
(Eshak Uddin, Dāstān)[122]

Thus, the reformist authors of the Karbala narrative took upon themselves the onus of channelising reformist knowledge through the persuasive and instructive rendition of narratorial voice. Writing about the battle of Karbala was considered an ethico-moral action in itself to bring the audience to the collective listening of the episodes of the Karbala and turn it into a form of mourning.

1.4 Writing as sacred ritual: Turning pain from body to book

Eshak Uddin starts the second *bālām* (chapter) of his *Dāstān* with the formal *hamd* and *na'at* section, articulated in a traditional disembodied voice. The book, however, unlike any other in this repertoire, opens with a *monājāt* (prayer to Allah) and develops into a dialogue with Allah in an immediate and intimately perrsonal poetic voice, imbued with piety.

Elāhi ālāmin Āllā pāk paroẏār
Tumi to mābud āmi bāndā je tomār
Āmār upare tumi baṛhā daẏābān
Se daẏār sīmā diba nāhi mor jnān

Daẏā kari nānā mate pālan kariẏā
āpad bipade pher leha bācāiẏā
tomār jeman daẏā moder upare
merā sādhya nāhī tār had likhibāre
paydās kariẏā Āllā moder kāran
nānā chīj diẏā moder kāraha pālan
hāt pāo nāk mukh bakśile khodāẏ
chakshu neẏāmate bakśile āmāẏ
Jāhār kadam nāi khoṛhā sei jan
Dekhiẏā tāhār duksha kānde mor man
Chakshu neẏāmat dhan bakśile āmāre
Tāmām jāhān āmi dekhi man bhare
Śokar ālhāmdo lillā rabbel ālāmin
Aychā neẏāmat pāila Echhāk Uddin

Elahi 'āl-Amīn Allah, the purest the greatest one
Only Thou are to be worshipped, I am your servant
Your mercy is boundless, O Greatest One
How can I write about your compassion?
You are the creator, you are the Ultimate One
You have gifted us eyes, hands, legs and reason
We work with our hands with your mercy
We walk everywhere on our legs with your mercy
How can I talk about Thy mercy?
Only the cripple knows the value of these limbs
How can I tell about Thy mercy?
Only the blind knows the value of these eyes
I thank you al-Ḥamdu lillāhi Rabbil-'āl-Amīn
You shower your mercy on Eshak Uddin
(Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*)[123]

Eshak Uddin declares in his *monājāt* that he is writing to compensate for his inability to make the *hajj* pilgrimage. Writing about Karbala had by this time come to be identified as a means of redemption from "gonā" (sin, *gunah,* Pr.), and its reading/listening came to be identified with *farz* to prepare oneself for the Day of Judgement, as the authors repeatedly affirm a salvific turn in the staging of the narrative. Eshak Uddin, in this *monājāt,* praises Allah for every endowment bestowed upon the down-trodden, the crippled and the needy, and expresses his wish to remain faithful to Islam with Allah's blessings. He begs Allah to grant him the ability to see the sacred feet ("*mobārak caraṇ*") of Muhammad in his dreams, an affect that was deeply embedded in the Sufi rhetoric of the early modern period. This prayer itself also foregrounds the centrality of Muhammad (Prophet-centric piety) engendered by reformist Islam. The pangs of separation between the Rasul (Muhammad) and his devotee, another Sufi element, intensify the expression of piety, with the poet

expressively lamenting his inability to visit the *rowẓa* (mausoleum) of Muhammad in Medina due to his limited means. In the concluding lines of this verse, the experience of composing *Śahide Kārbālā* becomes equivalent to Eshak Uddin smearing the dust from Muhammad's *rowẓa* on his body in mystical ecstasy:

Tini āche Madināte āmi Bāngālāte
Jelā Raṇgpur bice thānā Jaldhākāte
Khālisā Khutāmārā grām janamer bhumi
Sekhāne garibī hāle rākha more tumi
Tākā nāhi kī upāẏe jāba Madināẏ
Raojāśaripher māti mākhi māthe gāẏ

Muhammad is in Medina, I am in Bengal, here
In Rangpur district, thana Jaldhaka, you keep me here
Khalisa Khutamara is my own village
I live in poverty all through my days
No money have I, how do I go to Medina then?
I smear the dust of *rowẓa sharif* on me in pain
(Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*)[124]

Such expressiveness in a poem otherwise placed within traditional sensibilities of the Dobhāshī paradigm, individuates the narrative. As already mentioned, the categorisation of the act of writing the Kārbālā narratives as a scriptural and sacred act endowed the manuscript/printed book with a ritual bearing. With the increasing individuation of the authors' voices and the expression of their specific circumstances, it also became customary for the authors to state that they had taken great care to finish writing during the Friday prayer – the *Juma,* that is, the sacred day for the weekly Muslim congregation at the mosque for sermons – a newly achieved reformist collective action. This became an integral generic element – naming the date and the exact time when they ended their *puthis* together with the statement "*ketāb haila tāmām*" (the book ends here) – for authors like Jonab Ali, Munshi Muhammad, Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab and Eshak Uddin.

Eshak Uddin ended his *puthi* by saying that "the *kalam* stopped inking on the day of *Juma* during the early morning prayer" (Figure 1.2). The reference to *kalam*, the reed pen, as a character in the Kārbālā *puthis* of Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab and Eshak Uddin, and the corollary set of verbs for writing ("*lekhā*") and reading ("*paṛhā*") as well as their duality, were posited in a new consciousness of print. The scribal system is thus recast within print culture, by denoting the *kalam* as a sacred medium, itself performing the role of the scribe. Jonab Ali and Muhammad Munshi always used the verbal "so I speak" ("*bali*") while framing their narratorial voice. They addressed their readers as an imagined and present audience and invoked their audience "to listen to" (*śuno bali jata dindār*)

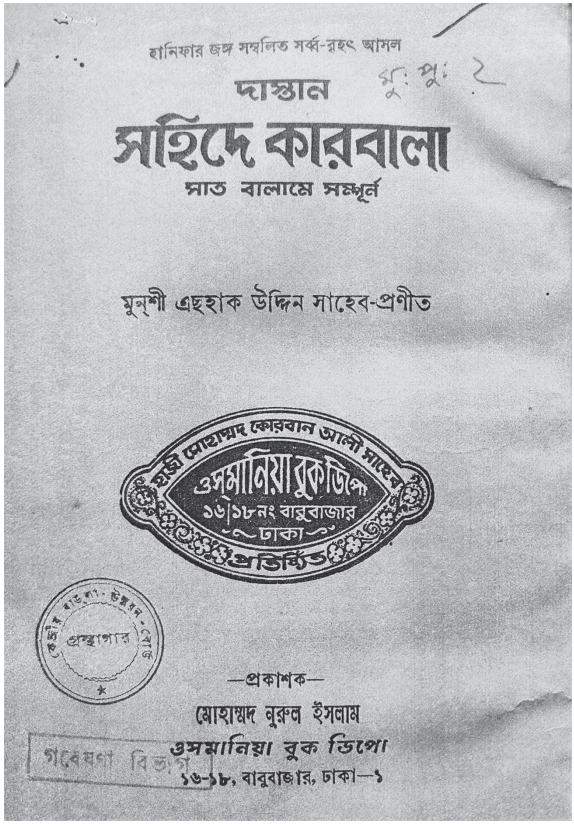


Figure 1.2 Cover page: *Dāstān Śahide Kārbālā* (1929) by Muhammad Eshak Uddin, Rare Books Section, Bangla Academy, Dhaka.

what the *ulama* "said" or things that "were told" in the *raẏāẏet*.[125] Again, Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab's *ketāb* (book) and Eshak Uddin's *Dāstān* (tale) introduce a modality of performance that veers between speaking and writing, listening and reading. In the duality of scribal sensibility and an engagement with the script-print culture, their *kalam* took over the act of "talking." The *kalam* is referred to by Muhammad Munshi as well, as an affective being in a Sufi-oriented worldview, at the very end of his *puthi*, when he describes the acts of writing by the *kalam* ("*kalamer ājiji*") as an exalted act of friendship (*'āziz*, Ar.). Here, the *kalam* performs an act of friendship by emulating the bond between Allah and Muhammad (Muhammad as the friend of Allah in the Sufi rhetoric).[126] For Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab and Eshak Uddin, the *kalam* becomes a character, and they create narrative sections separate from the narrative diegetic voice to let the *kalam* speak as one of the authors of knowledge (*kalamer ājijir baẏān*, or the testimonial to the *friendship* of the *kalam*). Here, the *kalam* speaks

on its own, as if independent of the author's consciousness and narratorial manipulations. Eshak Uddin says,

> Śuno ki bale kalam hāẏ
> Kalam kādiẏā kaẏ jābe Madināẏ
>
> Listen to what the kalam has to say
> The kalam cries and wants to go to Medina
> (Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*)[127]

Here, a new transterritorial identification is posited in a Sufi rhetoric about the pangs of separation from Muhammad and engulfs the audience/readers within a new affective transterritorial framework.

Scriptural Sufism had an integral position in Islamic reform. As a Sufi sheikh himself, Karāmat 'Alī made a link between *maẓhab* and the mystical ideas of *tasawwuf* integral to his idea of the right path of Islam.[128] This connection spread through the popular Dobhāshī prints written by his disciples. The Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives literarised this link through the *ṣaḥāba's* complete submission to Muhammad, articulated by their unrestrained tears over Muhammad's death to attain the status of ecstasy. When Ali writhed on the ground in pain after Muhammad departed for his heavenly abode, Eshak Uddin signified Ali's body as showing Sufi ecstasy, "*mārphate gaňje tanu gaṛāgaṛi jāẏ*" (Ali's body, the treasure of *ma'rifat*/mystical knowledge rolled on the ground). Muhammad Munshi, affirming his Sufi allegiances, continued to address his readers/audience as the lovers (*āshekān*) of Muhammad.[129] Muhammad was referred by all the Dobhāshī authors as the friend of Allah (*hābib*). Eshak Uddin emulated the Sufi theory of creation as he narrated how Allah created the whole universe out of his love for Muhammad. "*Hajarater pare Āllā āśek haiẏā/ tār nūre paẏdā kaila ei je duniẏā*." (Upon falling in love with Muhammad, Allah created the whole universe and this earth).[130]

While reformist Islam tried hard to eradicate Muharram as a ritual of frenzied physical performance of grief, these texts, partaking of and seeking to disseminate reformist sensibilities, utilise poetic strategies to their fullest to narrativise the grief performed by the characters. All the authors of Kārbālā narratives showed that at the time of mourning, the characters were scorched by the fire of a pain which cannot be extinguished, and that they wept an incessant flow of tears that cannot be controlled. The characters suffer seizures that make their bodies convulse in a manner that the authors compare those to the agony of freshly beheaded chickens which enables the audience/reader to merge in this affective realm (see Section 2.2 for the Sufi rendition of such pain). These psychological and physical states of the characters can be seen as the stock description in all the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* studied here.

The texts describe the sacred family and the companions (Caliphs) as weeping in grief, accompanied by the shrieks and shouts of their grieving

people, and of the plants and animals, which rip the sky apart. There are repeated instances of showing the people of Medina performing the same physical rituals of mourning (chest-beating, tearing of hair, etc.) in their grief for the sacred figures, described by the author as *mātam*, a ritual act of the Shīʿas already condemned as un-Islamic by reformist Islam. The descriptions of grief intensify in text after text – Ali's death makes the throne of Allah tremble, tears form rivers on the earth that shakes, Hasan and Husayn cry, beating their chests, and smear the soil from their father's grave on their faces – yet nobody seemed to have objected as long as these tears flowed not in ritual performances of grief during the commemoration of Muharram but as literary experiences of reading unconnected to Muharram. At the same time, the enactment of grief in Muharram was increasingly being identified as un-Islamic and belonging to the Shīʿas and was being vilified so as to make it a legitimate reason for Sunni Islamic reform.

In Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab's *Śahide Kārbālā*, Muhammad called his *ṣaḥāba* when he started praying for the redemption from his sins by reading *taobā āstāgāphār (astaǧfiru llāha*, literally "I ask forgiveness from Allah") on his deathbed. After giving his last "achiẏat" (*waṣiyat*, Ar., testament, will) to his *ṣaḥāba* on the moral ethical duties of Muslims at the time of his "*jānājā*" (death rite, *janazāh,* Ar., for the relevance of the death rite see Section 2.2.1), he suddenly underlined one *achiẏat* (ʿ*asiyat*, Ar,. instruction):

Pher ek achiẏat kari tomā sabe
Mātam chetam kari ijā nāhi dibe
Chāti pite kapaṛh pheṛhe kānde jei loke
E sakal kāme dukkha pouchibe morddāke
Ār je āchhāb merā hājer nā āche
Achiẏat pouchibe tāhāder kāchhe

Let me give you another instruction
Don't honour the tyranny of *mātam*
Those who beat their chest and tear their clothes
They hurt the deceased and commit sin
Those who are not present here today
Share this instruction of my *dīn*
(Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab, *Śahide Kārbālā*)[131]

The authors of the Kārbālā *puthis* remained extremely careful about mourning over the final death in the narrative, which they described as the ultimate event of martyrdom in the field of Karbala. Husayn, the martyr, finished his last duty by instructing the women of his family how to mourn in the sanctioned way by demarcating it from the acts of *gonā* (sin). In the last speeches that he made before he embarked on the last battle of his life, he allowed the flow of tears, declaring that screaming, tearing off one's hair, unveiling oneself, beating the chest and garments

were acts of sin, so as to secure the *ummah* of Muhammad through moral-ethical actions.

> Hargej tomrā sabe gamete āmār
> Nā khola cherer bāl kahi bār bār
> Chāti petā cul cheṛhā kāpaṛh o phāṛhā
> E kāmete jena sabe gonā āche baṛhā …
> Cellāiẏā nā kāndibe dele peye gam
> Ākhe āchu jharāibe nā kari mātam
>
> In the acute pain you feel when I am gone
> Do not let your hair loose, no one unveil, no one
> Beat chests and tear off garments
> These are acts of sin in the scriptural amendments
> Do not scream in grief even if it is unbearable
> Tame your body and only let your tears roll
> (Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab, *Śahide Kārbālā*)[132]

Thus, the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* became a site of contestation, a dynamic literary system that held the testimonials of Islamic reform and generic standardisation needed for the expansion of reformist sensibilities and popular piety. The demarcation of Shī'ī intercessory piety and the prohibition of physical enactments of grief as they were practised in the Shī'ī commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom were achieved through the employment of various strategic literary exercises in the Kārbālā *puthis* as a prerequisite to secure the Sunni reformist public sphere.

Conclusion

By mapping the growth of the Kārbālā narrative as a literary trope from the early modern to the print in Dobhāshī, this chapter highlights the thematic and generic shifts as the groundwork to discuss literary modernity, Islamic mobilisation and the polemic of the Bengali Muslim identity. The Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis*, which continued to be composed in the old metrical style, cannot be simply relegated to a subcultural domain of semi-literacy, owing to the copious scriptural references and inherent reformist ideas present in them.[133] The Dobhāshī repertoire exposes dynamic ambivalences between orality and print, scriptural stricture and affective piety. From this vantage point of inherent ambivalence, one might need to distance oneself from Roger Chartier's idea that "it is possible to establish exclusive relationship between specific cultural forms and particular social groups"[134] to chart out a literary community, orientated in terms of economic means and exposure to script and print. With their links to reformist popular piety, and generic innovations within, the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* prompt the researcher to notice acts of sharing, interchange, conflict, compromise and overlap between the grand and the

little, the elite and the subaltern, and the scriptural-discursive and the popular, in the same literary system.[135]

Battala, Dacca and Chittagong, the centres of Dobhāshī print culture in this framework, do not stand for any singular monolithic literary culture produced by *the people*. The popular as the repository of otherness, resistance and counter-hegemonic virtues seems inadequate here to explain the nuanced modes of appropriation of the elements of the scripture and a more popular form of articulation.[136] These Dobhāshī authors, who came from the reformist knowledge centres in the districts, were spreading reformist ideas by utilising print technology and the power of the Karbala narrative. While their volumes were printed in the urban centres and disseminated across Bengal, they did not become a part of the new literary circuits based in urban or rural areas where a new modern literature was emerging in standardised Bangla. In a period of asymmetrical growth of literacy across social tiers, the difference in the circulation of scriptural ideas and the use of standardised Bangla produced different models of authority and forms of their mediation.[137] The popularity of the Kārbālā volumes confirms the success of the literary forms of popular piety in Dobhāshī around which the masses were oriented, with respect to reformist sensibilities, as the *ummah*. Here, the physicality of Shī'a intercessory mourning was prohibited from transforming the sensory nature of devotion for Husayn into the contents of print. Muharram-centric devotion, in this process of textualisation, was shifted from body to book, from ritual to print creating new literary versions of the sensoriness of grieving for Husayn.

Notes

1 *Puthi* is the traditional term in Bangla for scribal manuscripts. Scribal manuscripts and cheap prints in Dobhāshī are not the same, even though they carry the same name.
2 The Press and Books Registration Act, 1867 was amended for the preservation of copies of books (and newspapers) printed in India, and for the registration of such books. There were year-wise modifications as well.
3 It was a Bangla translation of Taj al-Din Mufti al-Maliki's *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* (A Delight for the Hearts), a Persian translation of the *Hitopadeśa* from the mid-15th century.
4 Mazharul Islam, ed., *Heẏāt Māmud* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi Biswabidyalay, 1961).
5 Print culture in the 19th century enabled an entirely new network of circulation between the knowledge centres of north India and Bengal, where many non-urban centres, along with Calcutta and Dacca, created a vibrant culture of literary production and dissemination. With changes in the political scenario in the 19th and 20th centuries, the previous generations of scribes and literati lost their patrons and relevance and during the time of the colonial economy new actors in print emerged, facilitating new exchanges between urban and rural areas. This phenomenon signals at the emergence of newer texts with fresh thematic and generic thrusts, as a response to the reformist fervour.

6 Ali Ahmed, ed., *Imām Vijaẏa*: *Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān* (Dhaka: Kendriya Bangla Unnayan Board, 1982 [1969]).
7 Shahjahan Mian, ed., *Madhyajuger Kabi Hāmid Praṇīta Saṃgrām Husen* (Dhaka: Jyoti Prakashan, 2002).
8 Mazharul Islam, ed., *Kabi Heẏāt Māmud* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi Biswabidyalay, 1961).
9 Muhammad Abdul Jalil, *Śāh Garibullāh o Jaṇgnāmā* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1991).
10 Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011 [1994]), 27–8.
11 Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, 31.
12 In Bengal, Sufis belonging to the Suhrawardiyya and Chishtiyya *silsilāh*s were concentrated in the capital cities of Lakhnauti, Pandua and Gaur. The common understanding of the Sufi saints acting as mediators of divine authority shaped the position of the Sufis within the political scenario of Bengal, and successive dynasties continued to secure their political authority with the blessings of the Sufi saints. Eaton, ibid; Muhammad Enamul Haq, "Sufism in Bengal," *Muhammad Enāmul Haq Racanābalī*, vol 4, ed., Mansur Musa (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1991), 7–455. Patronage of the Sufi saints was quite common – the Ilyas Shahi rulers are known to have patronised Chishtiyya Sufis for a long time, their patronage ended as soon as the Sultan felt his authority rivalled by them. Ibid, 92–4.
13 Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh reconsidered the long-15th century as the time for the Indian Renaissance, "a time of radically greater connectedness, new local and urban political forms, and long-lasting experiments in language, literature and culture." See Sheikh and Orsini, eds., *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3. Sheikh and Orsini argue against the replicability of a singular model of the western Renaissance in the context of the historical development of colonial modernity, and instead urge the reader to reflect upon the internal complexities extant in the literary-cultural-linguistic fields of South Asia.
14 Paragal Khan was the army general and his son Chhuti Khan was the administrator of Ḥussain Shah posted in Chittagong.
15 Focusing upon how vernacularisation helped initiate an early modern era marked by its specific type of modernity, Sheldon Pollock discusses the emergence of various vernacular languages as the cosmopolitan vernacular within the Sanskrit cosmopolis in the second millennium South Asia. Taking into account the instances of Kannada, Telugu, Avadhi, Bihari, Bangla, Oriya, Marathi and Madhyadeshiya, Pollock historicises the processes of vernacularisation of South Asia in the early modern period. He talks about how vernacular literary cultures "were initiated by the conscious decisions of writers to reshape the boundaries of their cultural universe" replacing the older translocalism. See Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (February 1998): 6–37; "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 591–625; however, Middle Bangla poses an interesting case by forging transregional connections with other cosmopolitan vernaculars like Avadhi and Braj within the Sanskrit cosmopolis, and transterritorial connections with the Arabic-Persian literary networks, emerging therefore as a cosmopolitan vernacular.

16 The *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* by Krishnadāsa Kavirāja (b. 1496), the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* by Vrindāvana Dāsa (1507–1589) and the *Caitanya Mangala* by Lochana Dāsa (16th century) were very important for disseminating devotionalism around the figure of Chaitanya (1446–1534) in Bengal.
17 Ayesha Irani has resolved a long-drawn debate over the dating of Saghīr, whom literary historians like Muhammad Enamul Haq, Ahmed Sharif and Muhammad Shahidullah had placed as early as the 14th century. By analysing the linguistic components and language of his poetry, Irani confirmed that Sāgīr was a post-Chaitanya poet who was evidently influenced by the linguistic structure used in the Vaishnava *padābali*s of the last quarter of the 16th century. See Ayesha Irani, "Love's New Pavilion: Śāhā Muhammad Chagīr's Retelling of Yūsuf va Zulaykhā in Early Modern Bengal," in *The Reception of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's Works in the Islamicate World, ca. 9th/15th–14th/20th Century*, ed., Thibaut d'Hubert (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019), 699–703.
18 "Purāṇ Korān madhye dekhilu biśesh/ Ichuph Jalikhā bānī amṛta aśesh" (In the *purān* and the Koran/I have found the elixir of love between Yusuf and Jaleikha), in *Iusuh-Jolekhā*, ed., Muhammad Enamul Haq (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1984), 116.
19 Irani, "Love's New Pavilion," 2019.
20 Ayesha A. Irani engaged with this little-studied composition to interpret the processes of Islamic expansion on Bengal's eastern frontier in a milieu of religious competition. Irani, *The Muhammad Avatāra*: *Salvation History, Translation, and the Making of Bengali Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)
21 For a detailed discussion, see Thibaut d'Hubert, "Persian at the Court or in the Village? The Elusive Presence of Persian in Bengal," in *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca,* ed., Nile Green (California: University of California Press, 2019), 104–105.
22 Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory," *History of Religion* 30, no. 40 (2001): 283.
23 "Hāsān Hosen nām, tribhubane anupām, kothā gele pāi daraśan" (They are Hasan and Husayn, unparalleled in the three worlds, where shall I go to get a glimpse of their vision?), in *Imām Vijaẏa,* ed., Ali Ahmed (Dhaka: Kendriya Bangla Unnayan Board, 1984), 159.
24 "mukhacandra parakāś/adhar kamal hās/bhuru jug jini kāmdhanu," *Imām Vijaẏa*, 128.
25 "Kanak mṛnāl jini bāhu sulalita" and "adhar raṇgimā ati bimbaphal jini," Ibid, 116–117.
26 Ibid, 143.
27 Ibid, 144.
28 Thus, an intertextual field opened up between the local literary rhetoric and a religious-literary culture travelling in search of settlement.
29 Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence,": 261.
30 Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
31 Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence," 273.
32 For a discussion of dynamic equivalents see Anthony Howard Nichols, "Translating the Bible: A Critical Analysis of E.A. Nida's Theory of Dynamic

Equivalence and its Impact upon Recent Bible Translation," PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1996, accessed June 8, 2020, https://ethos.bl.uk?OrderDetails.do?unin=uk.bl.ethos.262848

33 Here the authors with Sufi orientations are considered elites due to their exposure to scriptural sources and links with Sanskrit aesthetics and the higher forms of literature of the times, like the Vaishava *padāvalī*. The courtly Persianate elite did not produce literature in Bangla in a significant way.

34 After the fall of the Hussain Shahi dynasty in 1538, Chittagong was ruled by the Arakanese Mrauk U dynasty till it was finally captured by the Mughals in 1666 during the reign of Humayun. *Nabīvaṃśa* (1615–1646), *Imām Vijaẏa* and *Maktul Hosen* were all composed against the backdrop of such political turmoil in Chittagong. Ālāol (1607–1673) was active in the Arakanese court around that time.

35 Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," 1998, 6–37.

36 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 153.

37 Sebastian Günther, "Maqatil Literature in Medieval Islam," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25, no. 3 (1994): 193–194.

38 Günther, "Maqatil Literature in Medieval Islam," 194.

39 Ibid, 208.

40 Mian, Shahjahan, ed., *Madhyajuger Kabi Hāmid Praṇīta Saṃgrām Husan* (Dhaka: Jyoti Prakashan, 2002), 76.

41 Mian, *Madhyajuger Kabi Hāmid Praṇīta Saṃgrām Husan*, 63.

42 Heyat Mamud, *Jaṇgnāmā*, ed. Mazharul Islam (Rajshahi: Rajshahi Biswabidyalaya, 1961).

43 There has been much discussion on the duality of fixity and unfixity, and accuracy and error of print in the context of print and performance in early modern Europe. See Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book 1480–1880: Print, Text and Performance in Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.

44 A. L. Becker, *Beyond Translation: Essays towards a Modern Philology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 394.

45 Becker, *Beyond Translation*, 286–287.

46 Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 147.

47 Ronit Ricci has discussed problems in using the word translation to designate textual renditions from one language to another while talking about the spread and sustenance of religious ideas far away from the place of its origin, across sharp cultural differences. Several cultures employ various ways of rewording or rewriting a text from one language to another which may comply with the normative ideas of translation or can completely defy them. Ricci, *Islam Translated*, 33–34. Here I have used translation along with rewriting by approximating meaning to mark intertextuality and search for equivalence.

48 Such a notion of unfixity of any prior text, and a related exploration of intertextuality, opens up the possibility of literary and pragmatic presuppositions upon any given theme or narrative situation. The intertextual presupposition relates the story, as Jonathan Culler puts it, to a series of other stories

and identifies it with the conventions of a genre, rather than any singular text (Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs,* 1981). Following such theoretical clues, the reading of any literary network does not entail a search for an evidential original text, but rather becomes an elaboration of an intertextual space within a broader literary repertoire. Ayesha Irani has done an intertextual reading of Saiẏad Sultān's *Nabīvaṃśa*. She has developed the idea of the literary network, including biographies of the Prophet in Arabic and Persian, as one that goes beyond a singular physical original text received by Saiẏad Sultān to compose his text. See Ayesha A. Irani, *The Muhammad Avatāra*, 2021.)

49 Kalpana Bhaumik, ed., *Kavīndra Mahābhārata* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1949), 488.

50 Ali Ahmed, ed., *Imām Vijaẏa: Kabi Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1984), 144.

51 Here, an elaborate study of the use of language by individual Karbala authors cannot be attempted. This requires a separate study which is long overdue. In an ongoing project on the manuscripts of Muhammad Khān (both in Bangla and Arabic scripts), I have attempted to address the issues of prior texts for the Karbala narratives of early modern Bengal.

52 Ali Ahmed, *Imām Vijaẏa*, 160.

53 Asim Roy has developed a sophisticated understanding of syncretism in premodern Bengal in *The Islamic Syncsretistic Tradition in Bengal*, 1983; see also Tony Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence," 261.

54 Ibid, 262.

55 Speech Acts qualify words as goal-directed actions defined in relation to the speaker's intentions and their effects on the listener(s). The term Speech Act was introduced by J. L. Austin (1962), and John Searle later proposed an analytical approach called the Speech Act Theory (1969). A Speech Act is premised upon the concept of language in action, and is considered as the basic unit of discourse. I have called the Karbala repertoire "speech-act texts" in order to demarcate certain linguistic rules or thematic conventions shared by the members of a language-literature community upon which the transfer of meaning of the significance of the battle of Karbala depended. For a detailed understanding of this conceptualisation, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); and John R. Searle, Ferenc Kiefer, Manfred Bierwisch, eds., *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatic* (Dordrecht: Holland, 1980).

56 J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975 [1962]); and Richard van Oort, "Performative-Constative Revisited: The Genetics of Austin's Theory of Speech Acts," *Anthropoetics* II, no. 2 (Fall 1996/ Winter 1997).

57 Considering the theoretical position that any literary utterance is performative following D. R. Nagaraj's discussion, one can still argue that the early modern *maqtal* texts were conceptually performative as speech-act texts even if they were not integral parts of Muharram as actual performances. D. R. Nagaraj discusses this duality for Kannada literature, "Critical Tensions in the History of Kannada Literary Culture," in *Literary Cultures in History:*

Reconstructions from South Asia, ed., Sheldon Pollock (California: University of California Press, 2006), 323–382.

58 John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 15.

59 Although bureaucrats, clerics, traders and soldiers migrated from different parts of Persianate Asia to Bengal as early as from the 13th century, it is difficult to trace the beginning of the commemoration of Muharram along their settlements, although many of them were of Shīʿa orientation. The battle of Karbala did not arrive in Bengal as an integral part of Shīʿa history; it was, rather, a matter of Sufi interpretation of Islamic piety. For a discussion of Iranian diaspora in Asia in general, see Luís Filipe F. O. R. Thomaz, "Iranian Diaspora in Maritime Asia: A Study of Sixteenth Century Portuguese Sources," *Studies in History* 31, no. 1 (2015): 51–84, accessed April 6, 2020, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0257643014558475

60 For a discussion of *jāri* performative repertoire, see Mary Frances Dunham, *Jarigan: Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1993); Epsita Halder, "Jarigaan," www.sahapedia.org/jarigaan.

61 From *Maktul Husen* to *Imām Vijaẏa*, also in *Saṃgrām Husen*, there is no reference of the performative aspects of the Muharram commemoration, no ritual connected to collective mourning is described. But Heẏat Mamud's *Jaṇgnāmā* has definite connection with the musical structure of *jāri* songs. There are thematic references in *Jaṇgnāmā* which actually reveal how men beat their chests and shed tears in a public performance. We may infer that the direction of change in the modalities of remembrance from narrative to ritual, and not from ritual to literary production.

62 "Jaṇgnāmā," in Islam, *Heẏāt Māmud*, 65.

63 Nabinchandra Sen, *Āmār Jīban* (Calcutta: Sanyal & Company, 1912).

64 Qazi Abdul Mannan, *The Emergence and Development of Dobhāshī Literature in Bengal upto 1855* (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1974 [1966]).

65 As the court poet of Nadia, Bhāratcandra Rāẏ Guṇākar was proficient in his knowledge of Persian and Sanskrit. His magnum opus, the *Annadāmaṇgal Kāvya,* which eulogised the goddess Annadā, is considered to be one of the most important literary contributions of the late medieval period, where he intentionally incorporated Persian words and idioms.

66 Qazi Abdul Mannan, *The Emergence and Development of Dobhāshī Literature in Bengal upto 1855* (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1974 [1966]), 49–71.

67 James Long, *Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works* (Calcutta: Sanders, Cones & Co., 1855).

68 Christopher Shackle, "Introduction: Urdu, Nation and Community," in *Nationalism in the Vernacular: Hindi, Urdu and the Literature of Indian Freedom,* ed., Shobna Nijhawan (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), 1–32.

69 Jaan Muhammad, *Hakikatecchālāt*, 5th ed. (Calcutta, 1868).

70 Ayesha Irani, "From Manuscript to Print," 360; d'Hubert, "Dobhāshī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *THREE*, eds., Kate Fleet. Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27851

71 James Fuller Blumhardt, *Catalogue of the Library of the India Office: Bengali, Oriya and Assamese Books*, Vol. II (London: Eyre and the Spottiswoode, 1905), 3.

72 Mannan, *The Emergence and Development of Dobhāshī Literature*.

73 James Long, *Returns Relating to Publications in the Bengali Language in 1857*, Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government, Vol. xxxii (Calcutta, 1859), xxx–xxxi.
74 James Long, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works: Containing a Classified List of Fourteen Hundred Bengali Books and Pamphlets* (Calcutta: James Long, 1855), 94.
75 Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, Vol. I (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934), 211f.
76 This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
77 will revisit this proposal made by Shahidullah to explore the nuanced question of the *jātiẏa* language literature of the Bengali Muslims in a later part of this book.
78 Muhammad Enamul Haq, *Muslim Bāṃglā Sāhitya* (Dacca: Pakistan Publications, 1957).
79 *Āhle Hādis*, Year I, Vol. 1 (October–November 1917 [Ashwin 1322 BS]): 15; and *Islām Darśan*, Year I, Vol. iv (April–May 1918 [Baishakh 1323 BS]): 190.
80 *Āhle Hādis*, Year 1, no. 1 (Ashwin 1322 BS [September–October 1905]).
81 For a detailed discussion of the print culture in Battala, see Tapti Roy, "Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature," in *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, ed., Partha Chatterjee (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 30–62; Sumanta Banerjee, "Bogey of the Bawdy: Changing Concept of 'Obscenity' in 19th Century Bengali Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly* 22, no. 29 (July 18, 1997): 1197–1206; Anindita Ghosh, "Revisiting the 'Bengal Renaissance': Literary Bengali and Low-Life Print in Colonial Calcutta," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 42 (October 19–25, 2002): 4329–4338; and Anindita Ghosh, "An Uncertain 'Coming of the Book': Early Print Cultures in Colonial India," *Book History* 6 (2003): 23–55; Goutam Bhadra, *Nyaṛhā Battalāẏ Jāẏ Kabār* (Kolkata: Chhatim Books, 2011).
82 Kathryn Hansen has worked on the orality-print interface in the north Indian popular musical drama form and in the narrative tradition. See Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992). Kumkum Sangari has argued that even if the form entered the domain of print, it moved "back and forth between oral narration, print and performance." See Sangari, "Multiple Temporalities, Unsettled Boundaries, Trickster Women: Reading a Nineteenth-century Qissa," in *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century,* eds., Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 215.
83 Stuart Blackburn discusses the trajectory of Tamil folklore from oral renditions to the print in the context of nationalism and critiques any binary between oral and print cultures, instead emphasising their coexistence in the early Tamil print culture. See Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Tamil Nationalism in Colonial South Asia* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2003).
84 Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Tamil Nationalism*, 2003, 1.
85 Islam, *Kabi Heyāt Māmud*, 13.
86 Ibid, 15.
87 Ibid, 27.
88 Jonab Ali, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* (Calcutta: Siddiqiya Library, 1882).

89 Muhammad Munshi, *Śhahid-i-Kārbālā* (Calcutta: Satyanarayan Press, 1900).
90 Saad Ali and Abdul Ohab, *Sacitra Gaňje Śahide Kārbālā* (Dacca: Solemani Sulabh Pustakalay, n. d.).
91 Muhammad Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān Śahide Kārbālā* (Dacca: Osmania Book Depot, 1934 [1929]).
92 Qazi Aminul Haq, *Ādi o Āsal Chahi Baṛa Jaṇge Kārbālā* 10th ed. (Dacca: Hamidiya Library, 1961 [1942]).
93 That their manuscripts were hand-copied by scribes is evident in the catalogues. See Ahmed Sharif's prolific catalogue of manuscripts *Puthi Pariciti* (Dacca: Dhaka Biswabidyalaya Bangla Bibhag, 1958).
94 Multiple editions of Jonab Ali's *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* were published from Siddiqiya Library, Upper Chitpur Road, Calcutta.
95 Mobarak Ali Khondakar of 29/12 Gopi Krishna Pal Lane published these editions from the Satyanarayan Press, Kolkata.
96 The edition of the Karbala text by Muhammad Munshi that I consulted contained no pagination.
97 Jonab Ali, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* (Calcutta: Siddiqiya Library, 1882), 63.
98 Saad Ali and Abdul Ohab, *Sacitra Gaňje Śahide Kārbālā*. (Dacca: Solemani Sulabh Pustakalay, no publication date), 365.
99 Ibid, 8, 11, 25 and so on.
100 *Haniphār Jaṇg* (The Battle of Hanifa), as a part of the Karbala *maqtal* and also as a separate narrative, became a part of the literary network in the early modern period. This charismatic figure emerges as an extension of heroic narratives and has a very important role to play in Shī'i piety, an emotion which generally remained invisible in the growth of the Islamic narrative in a predominantly Sunni Islamicate Bengal. Rather, the repertoire of popular religious texts attempted to imbibe the tenets of standardisation and sought to elevate themselves to more elite literary standards, as Robinson observes, in the process redefining both the elite and the popular.
101 Uddin, *Dāstān Śahide Kārbālā*, 345.
102 *Puthi Pariciti*, a catalogue of scribal manuscripts, collected by Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad and edited by Ahmed Sharif, 171.
103 "Jaṇgnāmā," *Sāhitya Parishat Patrikā*, Vol. 2 (1324 BS [1917]): 130–131.
104 That the original author of *Jaṇgnāmā* was Garibullāh and Yākub Ālī might have been the magnificent scribe is a theory elaborated by Sukumar Sen in *Bāṃlā Sāhityer Itihās*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Eastern Publishers, 1962), 524; Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṃlā Sāhityer Kathā,* Vol. 2 (Dacca: Maola Brothers, 1965), 299–300; Ahmed Sharif, *Bāṇgālī o Bāṃlā Sāhitya*, Vol. I (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1978), 125 and Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Mānas o Bāṃlā Sāhitya* (Calcutta: Muktadhara, 1971), 125.
105 Editions of the *Jaṇgnāmā* came out in 1878/1285 BS, 1880/1286 BS, and 1881/1287 BS from the Harihar Press, in 1876/1283 BS from Mortajabi Press, Calcutta, and from the Siddikiya Press in 1880/1286 BS and 1881/1287 BS. This confirms the unparalleled popularity of *Jaṇgnāmā puthis* based on the Karbala narrative.
106 The British Government enforced this law to regulate printing presses and newspapers through a system of registration and to preserve and catalogue copies of books and other matter printed in India.
107 Muhammad Munshi, *Śhahid-i-Kārbālā*, 10th ed. (Calcutta, 1912 [1900]).

108 Golam Saklayen, *Bāṃlāẏ Marsiẏā Sāhitya* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi Biswabidyalay, 1964), 236.
109 The author referred to the Second World War and the Famine of 1943 as a time when he could not continue writing, and resumed after the calamities were over.
110 One reformist *alim*, Jaan Muhammad, a disciple of Karāmat ʻAlī Jaunpurī, actually mentioned the culture of citation. "*Phekā hādich āche Korān taphchir*", that is *fiqh*, *hadis* and *tafsir*. Jaan Muhammad, *Hakikatecchālāt*, 2.
111 For a discussion of the Hereafter and the reformist reformulation of Sufism in Bengal, see my essay, "The Garden and the Fire: Hereafter in the Bengali Muslim Literary Imagination (late 19th–early 20th century)," forthcoming in a special issue of *International Journal of Islam in Asia*.
112 The prior text most commonly referred to in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā circuit is *Ānsār-e Shāhadatain* which was based on the testimonials of Khuzaima ibn Thabit Dhu'sh Shāhadatain al-Ansari, whose witness was considered by the Prophet to be as strong as that delivered by double witnesses – *Shāhadatain*. It can be assumed that a connection with a network of prior texts that responded to al-Tabari's historical accounts made such familiarity with Shāhdatein possible. The prolific historian of Islamic history al-Tabari referred to Khuzaima as one of his authentic sources when writing history. Al-Tabari was a descendant of Khuzaima, which made a genealogical claim possible. But without any other evidence, such statements must remain at the level of speculation.
113 Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*, 3.
114 There was a culture of reception of *dastan* since the 18th century. See Thibaut d'Hubert, "Literary History of Bengal: 8th – 19th century AD," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, online publication, February 2018, accessed June 19, 2021, http://asianhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-39?rskey=zOm0lk&result=1
115 Ali and Ohab, *Śahide Kārbālā*, 25.
116 I have discussed the debate on the supremacy of first four Caliphs and the *ahl al-bayt* in order to delineate an ideal prophetic legacy, in the following chapters.
117 Max Stille, "Shāh Muhammad Sāgīrer Iusuph-Jolekhā Kāvya: Paẏār Evam Tripadī Chander Adal Badal," *Bhābnagar* 2, no.2 (April 2015): 9–22.
118 Ali and Ohab, *Śahide Kārbālā*, 3.
119 Ibid, 5.
120 In original, "gunanidhi," *tatsama*.
121 Uddin, *Dāstān*, 1934 (1929), 349.
122 Ibid, 52.
123 Ibid, 1–2.
124 Ibid, 2.
125 This is not to claim that Jonab Ali and Muhammad Munshi did not realise that their *puthis* were being read as printed texts. What I want to foreground instead is that their oral-scribal rhetoric did not necessarily always register the new sensibilities of print culture.
126 In Sufism, the realisation of friendship with God is one of the basic paths of mystical realisation. Hasan al-Basri is the first Sufi philosopher to conceptualise proximity to God as friendship. Muhammad is celebrated as

Habibullah, or the ideal friend of Allah, in a Sufi oriented Prophet-centric piety. In the formative years of this narrative, the Sufi treatises *Kitab Sīrat al-Awliyā*' (The Life of the Friends of God) by Tirmidhi, one of the six eminent collectors of the sahih *hadis*, offered a very structured theorisation of friendship with God in the Islamic mystical tradition.

127 Ibid, 123.

128 Karāmat 'Alī Jaunpuri, *Murādul Muridin*, trans. Maolana A. B. M. Salahuddin Laskar (Dhaka: Fahimm Prakashani, 1978).

129 Uddin, *Dāstān*, 22.

130 Ibid, 25.

131 Ali and Ohab, *Śahide Kārbālā,* 11.

132 Ibid, 265.

133 We might follow here Roger Chartier's negation of traditional historiography, which tries to posit two cultures separated by a changeable but definable boundary. Disclaiming this ideal of pre-given cultural cleavages that may determine separate patterns of consumption, later historians of popular culture have offered a more layered reading of culture, consumption and appropriation. Chartier, *The Cultural Use of Print in Early Modern France,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

134 Chartier, *The Cultural Use of Print*, 3–4.

135 David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1996), 4.

136 For a discussion on ambivalence in the study of the popular, see Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England: 1550–1750* (London: Longman, 1998), 337–48; Tim Harris, "The Problem of 'Popular Political Culture' in Seventeenth Century London," *History of European Ideas* (1989): 43–58; and Roger Chartier, ed., *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Princeton Polity Press, 1989).

137 Members of the emergent intelligentsia like Mohammad Akram Khan and Abdul Rasul, who expressed their disagreement with the government proposal for the establishment of a separate University in East Bengal over more primary and secondary schools for the Bengali Muslims, can be remembered to understand the need for basic education for Bengali Muslims. The periodicals unanimously echoed this stance by saying that one higher educational institute would only bring gaps within the community. Rather, along with primary level education, a few Muslim colleges, hostels and other facilities for the Muslim students from the British government would be more productive. Discussed at length in Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims: A Study in Their Politicization, 1912–1929* (Calcutta & Delhi: K. P. Bagchi, 1991), 40–44. Such demands only expose the presence of multiple kinds of literacy-orality among the common Muslim masses.

2 Print and Husayn-Centric Piety

Prologue

Hāẏ hāẏ jami bice kī rog janmila
Khod bakhod tār cote kāpiẏā uṭhilo
Śanibār din chilo āchorer samaẏ
Maharam utsabe chila be-dīn sabāẏ

Alas what sickness pervades this age
The earth shook under our feet when
Last Saturday, as the Asr *namaz* was on,
People celebrated Muharram and lost their religion
(*Phesānāẏe Śore-Keẏāmat bā San 1304*
Sāler Bhūmikampa Nāmā,
Shah Abdul Oyahed Ebrahim)[1]

Antagonism towards the commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn was rampant and all-pervasive across reformist genres, as evident in the *adab* tracts and treatises since the 1860s. As an effect of Islamic reform, cheap tracts appeared and invaded the print market by declaring Islam as *hak* (*haqq,* truth) and the *kuphar* (*kufr,* un-Islamic) as *bātil* (false). Many authors had statements like "*Ichlām hak kuphar bātil*" printed at the top of the cover of their tracts. Abdul Oyahed of Bogra district of eastern Bengal, for example, had such a statement in his *Phesānāye* (*fasāna*, Ur., a tale on apocalypse, which was a chronicle about the earthquake of 1204). Statements like this were proclamations of their belonging to a new sober path of Islam. Here, *kuphar* did not necessarily refer to non-Islamic communities but to "un-Islamic" elements (*shirk* and *bid'at*) within Islam.

The scholars of new sober Islam proposed doctrinal reforms from within, prescribing strict measures for the expulsion of all un-Islamic elements (*urs*, *milad* and Muharram). The most influential of these scholars was Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (1703–1762).[2] His reformist thoughts were propagated and popularised in Bengal by his heirs and disciples, most effectively through the Patna School of Tariqah-i Muhammadiyya and the Taiyuni movements, and the Ahl-i Hadis,

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across social groups and regions. From elite scholars who translated the Qur'an in Sanskritised Bangla to someone like Oyahed Ebrahim, a peripheral madrasa teacher writing in Dobhāshī, the unease towards the commemoration of Muharram was equally intense. In his *Phesānāẏe*, for example, the readers were thoroughly warned by a terrifying description of how an earthquake was sent by Almighty Allah as punishment for the sin of observing Muharram. This tract sought to evoke two kinds of responses from the readers/audience, which were in fact the basic purpose of reformist writings – first, aversion towards the Shīʿī commemoration of Muharram; and second, fear of punishment by a wrathful Allah in a salvific turn if the right religious codes were not observed.

With the rise of reformist Islam in 19th-century Bengal, a plethora of cheap religious tracts in Dobhāshī like *Phesānāẏe* attempted to bring the fundamental tenets of Islam to the Bangla-speaking masses in order to create a sense of the *ummah*. The fundamental tenets of Islam like the notion of the Hereafter, well-defined prescriptions of *farz* and *adab* to make individual Muslims responsible for their actions on the Day of Judgment, and a stern and awe-inspiring Allah who would evaluate human action to assign heaven or hell were introduced to the Muslim masses. The authors of these tracts and also treatises, ranging from *namaz* manuals, ethico-moral codes of Islam to the injunctions of *fiqh* writing across multiples genres, established Prophet Muhammad as the saviour of the *ummah* on the Day of Judgement and framed his instructions and moral injunctions as the template for human action (as exemplified in the *hadis* repertoire). This chapter follows thematic exposition of the reformist tenets charted out by the *adab* tracts and treatises and literarised in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* so as to understand how Husayn became one of the most important figures after Muhammad in securing a Muhammad-centric piety. In this reformist framework, the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* were composed to uphold the central position of Muhammad by showing his last days, resolving the question of the Caliphate after his prophethood (*nabuyyat*), reaffirming the Early Caliphate as the most cohesive political-affective form of the Prophetic inheritance. At the same time, they celebrated the familial Muhammad by hailing his bonding with the other members of the *ahl al-bayt*, namely Fatima and Hasan-Husayn. These narratives framed Husayn's martyrdom as the ultimate crisis in the Early Caliphate but arranged the historical events in strategic ways to save the Islamic Caliphate from falling into disgrace after Muhammad's death. Civil unrest after Muhammad's death, the assassination of Usman, political conflict between Ali and Muawiya finally culminated in the battle of Karbala.

Simultaneously, the Dobhāshī Kārbālā authors demarcated the antagonistic positions of the Caliphate and the Shīʿa Imamate by separating the *ahl al-bayt* from any Shīʿī intercessory claim and appropriated it within Sunni reformist devotionalism, a reformist impulse carried forward by the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. I discuss in the forthcoming chapters, in a different context, how by experimenting with genre and standardised

Bangla, they attempted to historicise and rationalise reformist themes to frame a modern discourse on identity as a *jāti*. But before we can discuss those modernising efforts in thematic, generic and linguistic terms, a discussion of the Dobhāshī repertoire, which was mostly disavowed by the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, is necessary. Here, I emphasise that, together with British administrative initiatives like codification and anglicisation, Sunni reformist paradigms of identity formation "before and beyond the colonial mandate"[3] were equally impactful. For instance, a Muhammad-centric piety followed by a Husayn-centric piety fulfilled the basic theological and affective need to create a modern pro-Caliphate sentiment in Bengal in transterritorial and pan-Islamic terms, in turn, establishing a dominant Sunni reformist orientation in the Bengali Muslim public sphere.

2.1 New sober Islam and the new authors

Historians have discussed how the reformist *ulama* engaged in *bahas* with pre-reformist religious actors, whom they generally dismissed as *kāṭh mullahs*. The *ulama* ventured to establish the fundamental tenets of Islam against the more fluid and less-scripturally informed ideas of Islam of the *kāṭh mullahs*.[4] In their Dobhāshī tracts on *adab* too, the reformist *ulama* vehemently cancelled out the more popular and all-pervading effects of the *mullahs* and the *pirs*. Against the older forms of the *pir* cult, which were staunchly critiqued as *beshra* (that is, without *sharīati* sanction), the *ulama* now affirmed their training in the schools of *tasawwuf* and claimed their knowledge as *bashra* (with *sharīati* orientation), no matter how rudimentary the articulation of mysticism was in these Dobhāshī tracts.

One needs to remember here that a scriptural turn in religious ideas did not suddenly occur in Bengal with Islamic reform in early 19th century and not all the religious actors of the past were *kāṭh mullahs*. Rafiuddin Ahmed has already pointed out the continuity of genres that dealt with *farz* and *adab* from the pre-print era to the reformist period.[5] Authors of early modern manuscripts on *adab*, like Śekh Parāṇ (1550–1615), Śekh Muttālib (1595–1660), Ābdul Hākim (1600–1670) and Nasrullāh Khondakār (1700–1775), were the polyglot *ulama* who brought Islamic scriptural knowledge to Bengal through sophisticated generic formats based on Vaishnavite rhetoric and Sanskrit poetics.[6] But across Bengal, with the activities of the local religious authorities like the *pirs*, more popular and less scripturally oriented forms emerged in the grassroots and pervaded the religious imagination of the early modern era, remaining influential among the masses even when the reformist *ulama* started preaching in Bengal against such forms.[7]

For example, Munshi Mohammad Neyamat Ullah, a reformist *alim*, in his adab tract *Hujjutol Momenin* (The Proof of Islam for the Faithful,

1890), described how the *kāṭh mullahs* performed *milad*, beheaded hens on ritual occasions and extorted money from their followers.[8] In a strict, uncompromising tone, the text describes how the *pirs* and *fakirs* brought the masses under their sway with chants, amulets and magic potions. Other *adab* tracts, *Bedārol Gāphelin,* (Teaching of Attentiveness for the Unaware, 1879) by Munshi Samiruddin, and *Neẏāmate Dwaniẏā o Ākherāt,* (Blessings in this Life and Hereafter, 1903) by Munshi Muhammad Abdul Gani, condemned all the *bid'at* practices.[9] Abbach Ali Najir in his *Kalir Phakirer Khelā o Ālim Ganer Nachihat* (The Indulgence of the Deviant Fakir and Advice of the Religious Authorities, 1920) does not shy away from describing in minute detail the degenerate and elaborate use of music, consumption of intoxicants and illegitimate sexual unions rampant at the *ākhrā* (abode) of *fakirs*, with the intention of depicting the innate vulgarity of this "clever" and "shrewd" lot.[10] Samiruddin called grave-worshippers "devils" (*Śaitān*). Their tracts followed a typical thematic pattern. The narrator addressed the community as the servants of Allah (*Allār bāndā*), as believers (*momin*) or simply as Muslims; he forcefully demarcated the un-Islamic from Islamic beliefs and practices and threatened his audience/reader with the fires of hell if these new injunctions were not followed.[11]

The voices of the authors became agonisingly severe as they condemned the commemorative mourning and the processions bearing the *tājiyā* (*ta'ziyeh*, Ar., Pr.) on the day of Ashura. Samiruddin spends nearly 80 *paẏār* (rhymed couplets) lines criticising Muharram, calling the ritual false and its practitioners ignorant of Islam, and specifically of the *hadis*, *fiqh* and *tafsir*. Samiruddin went to the extent of calling them faithless (*beiman*) and servants of the Devil (*Śaitāner bāndā*), therefore unfit to belong to the Prophet's *ummah*.[12] Muhammad Oyahed Ebrahim too disparaged the practice, enquiring whether there was any such tradition of bearing the *tājiẏā* in Mecca-Medina, where Hasan-Husayn were born.[13]

Reformist *ulama* of Samiruddin's generation, as an antidote, projected their masters-teachers and themselves as the saviours of the masses from the ritual-driven and corrupt system of the *kāṭh mullahs* and the *pirs*. Abdul Aziz eulogised one of the disciples of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwī to describe how he eradicated *shirk* and *bid'at* as the harbinger of true Islam in Bengal (1876):

Dhol bājā mitāila Chaiẏad āsiẏā
Gaẏar Āllār najar ār pirer mānatā
Durgā Kāli Manasār dālā jatek debatā
Uṭhāiẏā dilā sab dargār manat
Kadam Rachul dargā jatek emat
Ār ār chil jata serek bedāt
Chaiẏad Āhmad jadi karila nipāt
Pir parasti churat kabar porast

> The Syed came and stopped the drummers
> He closed the door to the false gods, *pirs* were banned.
> He stopped the worship of goddesses Kali, Manasā and Durgā
> He barred people from coming to the *urs*, and demolished the dargah.
> Prayer was banned at the feet of the Prophet, as he was no God
> Every other *shirk bida't* Syed Ahmad forbade
> (Abdul Aziz, *Tārikā-i Mahāmmadiẏā*)[14]

After rejecting all forms of *bid'at*, these *adab* tracts introduced *namaz* as the most important ethico-moral code of action for a *mumin* and reminded their audience/readers of all the kinds of *farz* that they were expected to perform.[15] Through these tracts, a conception of the Hereafter – in effect, a scheme of punishment in hell for sins committed and reward of sensory indulgences in heaven for good deeds performed – began to take shape.[16] In this causal paradigm connecting one's actions in life to one's fate in the Hereafter, Muhammad's position as the saviour of the community was carefully underscored. Muhammad, in this reformist scheme of validation, did not stand as a solitary prophetic figure; rather, his affective entanglements with the members of the *ahl al-bayt*, and his position as the leader of the *ummah* with the first four Caliphs, were also placed at the heart of reformist piety. Riyazuddin Khan, in his *adab* tract *Chahī Hedāẏtul Ichlām* (True Guidance of Islam), after praising Allah in the *hamd*, went on to offer "[M]y salutation to my Prophet, my salutation to his grandsons and his Caliphate" in the *na'at*, and rather than simply mentioning the first four Caliphs as "*cāri iẏār*" (four friends) as they were called in the early modern period, he called them the *khalifas*. It was almost an imperative for the *ulama*, especially those like Riyazuddin and other disciples of Karāmat ʿAlī writing in Dobhāshī, to claim the four *ṣaḥāba*s as Caliphs and to posit them as ideal representatives of the ethico-moral codes of Islam. This was a continuation and dissemination of the pro-Caliphate Hanafi reformist sensibility of Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī himself.[17]

Gradually, the readership/audience fostered by a cheap print culture, which was organised through *anjuman*s (religious platforms), and public religious events like *wa'z* (preaching of sermons by individual *ulama*) and *bahas* (arguments between individuals), shaped Bengali Muslims into the *ummah* of the Prophet in a more structured fashion. Such sessions of *waʿẓ* and *bahas* were performed not only to demarcate the Islamic tenets from the un-Islamic practices (like Muharram), or rescind the effects of the traditional *mullahs*, or defend Islam from the open vilification of the Christian missionaries, but also for intra-Islamic debates among reformist groups, which were as fierce and caustic as possible. In fact, debates and disputes within reformist groups over the valid interpretations of Islam grew progressively more intense, resulting in rivalries within the Tariqah and the Faraizi, the Faraizi and the Taiyuni, the Ahl-i Hadis and the Hanafi, among others.[18]

2.1.1 Sunna *and* maẓhab*: Two elements of reformist sensibilities*

In particular, the trajectory of reformist Islam in the late-19th and early-20th centuries in Bengal was heavily impacted by debates over the validity of two paradigms of Sunni Islamic knowledge. One relied on interpretations predating the four *maẓhabs,* the other relied on *maẓhabi* interpretations; one was anchored in the principle of *ijtihād* (individual reasoning) and the other on *taqlid* (conformity to the teachings by the learned).[19] What emerged is, in the scheme of sobriety propounded by Walī Allāh, the majority of the *ulama* and the masses (*aam*) were prescribed *taqlid* as the means of acquiring Islamic knowledge, leaving the practice of *ijtihād* to a chosen few *ulama*, while the Hanafi school of law was posited as the most apposite *maẓhab*.[20]

Two major shifts were brought about in the prevalent reformist sensibilities in Bengal through Karāmat ʿAlī, namely adherence to *jihād* and *maẓhab* (jurist schools of Sunni Islam). Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī shifted from the staunch position of *jihād* held by the Tariqah, the Patna School and the Faraizis, and, by following the Sunni *maẓhab*, he drifted from Tariqite reformist groups to a preference of *taqlid* over *ijtihād*. The *ijtihādi* approach (based on the Qur'an and the *sunna*) of Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī, the founder of Tariqa, was elaborated in *Aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, a collection of his preachings.[21] This was further elaborated by Wilāyat ʿAlī, the leader of the next generation of the Patna School who relied upon *sunna* (*hadis*) as the final recourse in resolving any conflict between the Islamic law schools (*fiqh*).[22] Karāmat ʿAlī, in response to Wilāyat ʿAlī's treatise, put forward his disagreement, thus signalling a major rift within the Tariqah movement over the principle of the *maẓhabs*[23] and the fundamental sources of Islamic law (*fiqh*). Karāmat ʿAlī did not consider Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī's reliance on the Qur'an as something outside the four *maẓhab*s, which was what the disciples of Sayyid Ahmad Barēlwī's Patna School had argued.[24] Karāmat ʿAlī revised the complete reliance of the Patna School on the Qur'an without any later mediation of the fiqh, excluding the interpretations of the *maẓhab*s.[25] Debates over *maẓhab* and *taqlid* were fierce in Bengal, most famously chronicled in the writings of the followers of the Tariqah and the Ahl-i Hadis (who relied upon the Prophetic *sunna* rather than on *maẓhabi* and *taqlidi* interpretations), and the followers of Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpurī, who established the Hanafi *maẓhabi* ideas based on *taqlid*.[26]

Karāmat ʿAlī's influence over the Bengal masses increased, propelling a Hanafi orientation across regions. His disciple Jonab Ali, while referring to Ali's *taqlidi* position, was unambiguous in mentioning, "whenever possible, ask the *alim* to explain everything to you" ("*puche libe ālim lokete*"),[27] while concluding a section in *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*. All authors working in Dobhāshī repeatedly authenticated sections of their narrative through a *taqlidi* position, confirming that they were simply reiterating what was stated by the "*ulama* with clear vision" ("*mohākkek olmā*

lokete").[28] Eshak Uddin added a separate chapter to name the authors whose volumes he had followed.[29]

Intra-community conflict inflamed a flurry of derogatory terms like *benamāji, lā-majhābi*, *khāreji*, *nechāri* and *rāpheji*, meant for the opposing reformist groups (see Section 4.5). Several tracts were written by the *ulama* of respective rival reformist groups refuting the other,[30] and several other tracts chronicled the events of *bahas* too.[31] All these acrimonious debates may be discerned throughout the time period covered by this book.[32]

In this turn of events, the Shīʿas became the most vilified other-within, indiscriminately condemned and cornered by all these Sunni reformist groups in every kind of discourse attempted by the reformist *ulama*. All the derogatory terms noted above, meant for the other reformist groups, were directed indiscriminately at the Shīʿas. In fact, the word "Shīʿa" itself became a term of abuse to be hurled at other reformist groups. However, as has already been mentioned in this vigorous condemnation of the Shīʿas, Husayn had to first be rescued from his entanglement with Shīʿa intercessory piety and repositioned within reformist, Prophet-centric piety, of which he would become an integral and inalienable element.

2.1.2 From pir*-centric piety to Prophet-centric piety: Muhammad as the moral template*

In a Muhammad-centric piety, individual Muslims were made responsible for their actions, which gave Islam a this-worldly orientation.[33] In a new textual turn, Muhammad Eshak Uddin in the *hamd* section of the *Dāstān Śahide Kārbālā*, which is intended to sound like an intimate verbal exchange between Allah and himself, requested from Him the boons of an ability to keep *iman* and perform *farz*. By equating human will (to perform *farz*) with Allah's (that He would bestow ability to the faithful to perform *farz*), Eshak Uddin confirmed a crucial component of this-worldly Islam. There were perceptible changes in the articulations of *hamd* and *na'at* from the rhetorical articulation of early modern devotionalism, which shifted from being overtly puranic to strictly Qur'anic in the exposition of Allah's attributes and the qualities of Muhammad. In the excerpt below from Saad Ali's *hamd* in the *Śahīde Kārbālā,* Quranic inclinations are evident,

> Rahim Rahmān, Kādir Chobhān, jāt pāk parwār
> Āpnā kudrate, kul makhlukāte, paloke karen taiẏār
> Jwen enchān hur gelemān aphtāb māhtāb tārā
> Dariẏā pāhāṛ, jaṅgal ādi ār srijan karila sārā
> Ei duniẏaẏ, āpe daẏāmaẏ, enchān karila jāta
> Kariẏā meher, Ādam khāter, dila kata fajilata
> …

Diẏā nija nūr, karilā jahur, Mohāmmad Mostāpha Nabī
Ākherī Rachul, Khodār Makbul, kī likhiba tār khubi"

Compassionate and merciful, Supreme and exalted, He,
the purest ultimate one
With His own power, in no time, He created all
Human beings, celestial creatures, the sun and the moon
All the stars, all the rivers and mountains
In this world He created the human beings, so merciful He is
In His compassion He gave Adam many qualities
By imparting His own radiance, He made Muhammad
The Ultimate Prophet, very dear to Khoda, who defies description
(Saad Ali, *Śahīde Kārbālā*)[34]

The Almighty and Muhammad were now given a Qur'anic context, with the Arabic original retained untranslated in Dobhāshī – Rahman, Rahim, Qadir, Sobhan, Parwar (Pr.). The *ṣaḥāba* were called "*pāk*" (Pr., pure) and "*dindār*" (*Din*, Ar., *Dār*, Pr., one belonging to the religion Islam), which is an addition to *na'at*, and they were depicted as the bestowers of the ethico-moral teachings of Islam through their conduct and closeness to Muhammad. Hasan and Husayn were integral to these devotional articulations. Using an affective Sufi idiom of love, Saad Ali called Hasan and Husayn the flowers of heaven ("*beheśter phul*"). Eshak Uddin, in a devotional vein, narrated how the dark chambers were illuminated with the radiance of Husayn, who inherited nur-i Muhammad - the radiance that Allah bestowed upon Muhammad, His chosen one - from his grandfather ("*Āndhariẏā ghare jadi basiẏā thākita/churāter jyote ghar raośan haita*," *Dāstān*, 18). Eshak Uddin went on to tell his reader/audience that from the navel to the feet Husayn resembled Rasul ("*pāṅg haite nābhi tak āchila jeẏchāi/ Mohāmmad Rachuler śarīr eẏchāi*") and Hasan resembled Muhammad from his head to the chest.[35]

The intimate voice of the narrator, combined with the affective strength of the narrative, confirmed the ability of the audience to perform a set of *farz*, of which weeping for Husayn was the most important ethical act. With this ability, individual Muslims, both in the Dobhāshī *adab* tracts and also in the Kārbālā puthis, prayed for *śāphāt*, a specific role of Muhammad in serving his *ummah*. This specific role can be understood as the Qur'anic notion of Muhammad's intercession (*shafi, shafa'at*).[36] Muhammad was now established as the ultimate exemplar of intercession (*safa'at*) and penance for the masses, which helped settle eschatological questions for the Bangla-speaking *ummah*. Eshak Uddin's depiction of "Muhammad [as] the boatman for his sinful community"[37] was repeated in its essence many times in his *Dāstān*. This understanding of Muhammad as the sole saviour and guide of the *ummah* recurred in all the Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts. While Shī'ī intercession was vehemently cancelled as an Islamic form of devotion, the Dobhāshī Kārbālā

narratives upheld Muhammad's intercessory role in earning forgiveness for his *ummah* through his prayers and the sacrifice of his grandsons. Abdar Rahman, a Dobhāshī religious scholar, in his multi-edition *adab* tract, *Matlubal Momenīn Makchudal Moslemīn* (The Meaning of Being a Believer and a Muslim, 1872),[38] positioned Muhammad as the intercessor in eschatological matters and depicted him in prostration as he wept for his *ummah* out of sheer love, a motif that recurred in all the Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives. Here, in emulation of the rhetoric of new Islam, Muhammad was reaffirmed as a human being with his love for his grandsons, as someone who surrendered to Allah's will by sacrificing them, thus qualifying as the Ultimate Prophet. Muhammad's tears, after knowing of the inevitable *shahadat* of his grandsons, was a narrative device that provided ample scope for the reader/audience to identify with his pain and sacrifice, which then became the basis of the ethico-moral code connected to the events of Karbala.

In the slow and gradual processes of the formation of a community marked with Islamic devotionalism in early modern Bengal, there was no dearth of intermediary figures between the *tauhid* (Oneness) of Allah and a more polytheistically oriented local community.[39] Along with Muhammad, other figures with divine associations – Adam (in *Kāsāsul Āmbiẏā*), Moses (in *Musār Sawāl*), Jesus (in *Sultāner Jamjamā*) the *firishta* Jibreel (in *Rasul Vijaẏa*, *Nūr Nāmā*, *Mirāj Nāmā*, Kārbālā narratives) – occupied nodal positions as intermediaries in Islamic literature. But to bind the community as the *ummah*, the idea of Muhammad as the ideal man had to coalesce. This would embody the ideal form of mediation with the Divine in a new reformist sensibility. Ibn Arabī' (Arab Andalusian Muslim Sufi scholar and philosopher, 1165–1240) had designated Muhammad as "*al-insān al-kamīl*" (the Perfect Man or Complete Human). His mystical writings elaborate the idea of *wahdat al-wujud* (the Oneness of Being).[40] Walī Allāh, by appropriating ibn Arabī', expanded ibn Arabī"s ideas of complete surrender in Muhammad, who was seen as the fullest manifestation of the divine in human form, and the perfect representation of the fullest human potential.[41] With the expanding Urdu print network eastward to Bengal, such ideas, now included in the reformist tracts for the masses, percolated into the reformist literary culture in Bengal.

The Dobhāshī Kārbālā authors chose the act of presiding over the *namaz* as the resolution to the rival interpretations of the beginning of the Caliphate as part of the Sunni-Shīʿa conflict. As the Prophet, the leader of the *ummah*, Muhammad used to preside over *namaz*, or *imāmati*, as it was called in the Kārbālā texts. When ailing, Muhammad chose the first Caliph after his prophethood by selecting the next Imam of the *namaz*.

In Saad Ali Abdul Ohab's *Śahīde Kārbālā*, for example, when Muhammad sensed that his death was just one month away, he gathered his *ṣaḥāba* and the other members of the *ummah* around him to choose the

next person to preside over the *namaz* in his absence. Then he performed "*taubā āstāgaphār*" by reading Qur'anic verses to ask Allah's forgiveness and mercy on behalf of his *ummah*. Here, like his compatriots, Saad Ali took the opportunity to frame the "taubā āstāgaphār" as a *farz,* which would be treated as a mandatory prayer recited to obtain a form of atonement for individual Muslims before death. He accomplished this by choosing a strategic moment before Muhammad's death, when he had imparted his guidance to his *ṣaḥāba*.

Parete Hajarat Nabi karen nachihat
Śunaha Āchhābgaṇ merā nachihat
Pākoẏā parhejgāri khāoph Āllār
Ājāber dar dele rākhibe Khodār
Śupe dinu tomā sabe hujure Āllār
Bānāiẏā jāi je khaliphā āpnār
Lājem je haẏ ihā tomā sabākār
Julum nā kara keha opare kāhār
Nāhi kara takabbari jhagṛā phāchād
Āllār ālam jate nā haẏ barbād
Gonār kāmete khub parhej rāhibe
Ei nachihat merā eẏād rākhibe

Listen to my instructions, O my companions
Be abstinent and fearful of Allah
Always dread the publishment of Allah inside your grave
I make you Allah's own by offering you all to Him
I choose my own Caliph after me
My decision will be mandatory for you
You will never be unjust to one another
Don't engage in quarrels, conflict and rivalry
Don't destroy this universe created by Allah
Always abstain from doing evil and wrong
Do always remember the instructions (*sunna*) that I proclaim
(Saad Ali & Abdul Ohab, *Śahīde Kārbālā*)[42]

Thus, in Muhammad's last speech, as narrated by Saad Ali, Muhammad himself strove to end the possibility of dispute over the Caliphate that had haunted Islam throughout – antagonism between Abu Bakr and Ali as the contenders of Caliphate, the power struggle between Usman and Ali that led to the first *fitna* (civil war), and which culminated in the battle of Karbala. Saad Ali, like other Dobhāshī Kārbālā authors, unambiguously stated that Muhammad chose Abu Bakr as the first Caliph.[43] Functioning as a unit, the first four Caliphs, by virtue of being closest to Muhammad in his public life, stood for the strongest bond created to bear the charge of a Muhammad-centric piety. Thus, their combined position as the unmediated witness to Muhammad's speeches, actions and sanctions (the core

of *hadis*) made them the indispensable medium between Muhammad and the members of his *ummah*. The actions of the first four Caliphs, as evidence of their emulation of Muhammad's *sunna*, became the most viable template for instructing Muslims to correctly perform *farz*.

2.2 The Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt*: Two legacies of Muhammad and his intercession

In a Prophet-centric piety, the Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt* carry the strongest charge. In this devotional principle, Ali stood as the key figure for his position in the Caliphate and *ahl al-bayt* and at the same time as the core figure in the Shīʿī intercessory piety. To create a pro-Caliphate sentiment, Ali's antagonistic positions as the first Shīʿī Imam and a member of the *ahl al-bayt* had to be resolved by the Sunni reformers. They had to reaffirm Ali's standing as the fourth Caliph and at the same time reclaim the *ahl al-bayt*, erasing its connection with Shīʿī intercession. The Kārbālā narratives became an efficacious literary ecosystem to uphold the familial bonding of Muhammad by appropriating the pro-Alid devotionalism. The Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives represent a very poignant literary-ideational domain which attests to these contestations and appropriations, where Ali's figure is shared by the *ahl al-bayt* (as the son-in-law of Muhammad and as the father of Husayn) as well as the Early Caliphate (as the fourth Caliph).

The Umayyad (661–750) and the Abbasid (750–861, 936–1258) Caliphates were marked by the persecution of Shīʿī Imams and the suppression of their followers by the Sunni Caliphate. Though there were regular campaigns against the Shīʿī Imamate starting from the Umayyad period, Ali's position as the fourth Sunni Caliph was respected due to his close spiritual proximity with Muhammad, which had been widely written upon in various Sunni *hadis* traditions.[44] At the same time, the *ahl al-bayt,* with Ali as one of its members, emerged as a very important element of Sunni popular devotionalism in the Islamicate worlds of Central Asia.[45] Historically, by the end of the ninth century, except for the last Shīʿi Imam, Imam al-Mahdi (who is believed to have gone into the realm of the occult and is to return at the time of the apocalypse),[46] all the other Shīʿi Imams were either assassinated or poisoned during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. At that time, the pro-Alid and pro-Husayn sentiments grew among Shīʿi communities, which came to be marked with political persecution and suppression of the Shīʿas by the Sunni Caliphate.[47] One can delineate three dimensions of pro-Alid sentiment in Islam – the first is the Sufi configuration of Ali as the perfect mystical figure, the exclusive possessor of both faith (*iman*) and knowledge (*ilm*) after Muhammad.[48] Secondly, the Shīʿī Alid sentiments extol the holy lineage of the Imamate that descended from Fatima, Muhammad's daughter, and Ali, marking the centrality of Ali in Shīʿa discourses on *ahl al-bayt*.[49] Thirdly, in another version of the *ahl al-bayt* which the Sunnis

adhere to, Ali and his sons Hasan and Husayn are included along with Muhammad, his wives (including Aisha and Hafiza) and his daughters Zainab, Ruqayya, Kulsum and Fatima.[50] The idea of the *ahl al-bayt*, based on the pure figures of the *panjatan pāk* (the "sacred five" figures of Muhammad, Fatima, Ali, Hasan and Husayn), was strategically re-staged in Sunni reformist rhetoric with its inherent Sufi dimensions.

Alid narratives travelled widely and were formalised in the 16th century across Safavid Iran, taking shape within the cosmopolitan cultures of the period.[51] Wāʿiẓ Kāshifī (d. 1504), the Sufi preacher of Safavid Iran, brought the mystical dimensions of the *ahl al-bayt* to mainstream Islam when he declared that "[i]t is evident that love (*muhabbat*) towards the family of the Prophet is part of Islam" in his volume on chivalry titled *Futūwatnāma-i Sulṭānī*.[52] Kāshifī, patronised by the Sunni Timurid court, wrote about Alid chivalry and Alid martyrdom, in a manner that was not oriented to a strictly Shīʿī intercession. However, Kāshifī's tale *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'* continued to provide cues to authors writing on the battle of Karbala, irrespective of their Sunni-Shīʿa affiliations, in the early modern period across the Persianate world. It also became a repository for Shīʿī performative traditions during Muharram in Safavid Iran.

Both in the *Futūwwat* and the *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'*, Kāshifī began his narrative with the birth of the first prophet of the Abrahamic tradition and presented the line of prophets as exemplars of spiritual chivalry within an Islamic framework of mysticism. He brought together the Abrahamic paradigm of lineage (connecting Adam, Moses and Jesus to Muhammad) and the Persianate ethos of chivalry. At the same time, he emphasised the Syeds, that is, the bloodline of the Prophet that followed on from Fatima, as the bearers of a holy mysticism[53] (later textualised in the Dobhāshī narratives too). This was a time when the Shīʿas sought to distinguish the history of their Imamate from the Sunni Caliphate – reflected in every kind of popular literary exposition that was part of the commemorative ritual of Muharram. Acts of ritualistic mourning and readings were formalised, and the sacred sites of mourning (such as *āshurkhānā*, *imāmbāṛā*, *ḥoseyniye*) were consecrated based on the community's allegiance to the *ahl al-bayt* as the wronged holy family in a Shīʿī system rivalling the Caliphate.[54]

The repertoire of stories on Husayn's martyrdom spread across the Persianate world to reach Bengal in the 17th century. Rather than the legacy of Alid martyrdom infused with a Shīʿī fervour, an Abrahamic history of martyrdom became the thematic concern for the Karbala stories that resonated with Kashifi's narrative formulation. Muhammad Khān, the disciple of Saiẏad Sultān, followed the Abrahamic lineage that Sultān explicated in his *Nabīvaṃśa* and validated Muhammad's lineage (via Hasan and Husayn) as an extension of the line of Abrahamic prophets. Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān attributed the day of Ashura, the tenth day of the month of Muharram when Husayn was martyred, with a number of significant events (starting from the fall of Adam on the day of Ashura) in

the Abrahamic tradition relating to the prophets.[55] Thus, Bāhrām Khān took Ashura out of the exclusive Shīʿī sacred calendar but made it an integral part of the Abrahamic messianic calendar. On the day of Ashura, as Bāhrām Khān cites, Adam descended on earth, King Nāmrud (Nimrod) set prophet Abraham ablaze, the father-son prophet-duo Jakariya (Zechariah) and Iẏahiẏa (Yahya) of the Israelites were killed by the enemy of their religion, and prophet Suleiman lost his kingdom.[56] On the first 10 days of the month of Muharram, Bāhrām Khān instructed the Muslims to keep fast (*roẏā*), perform ritual ablutions, give ritual alms, weep over Husayn and do the *namaz*, thus making the commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom a part of a bigger ethico-moral system that was avowedly Sunni. Nowhere was the Sunni-Shīʿa dichotomy articulated in Bāhrām Khān's verses.

In early modern Kārbālā poetry, henceforth, validation of the Caliphate as the legitimate form of governance, which became mandatory in reformist Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives, was absent. It was not only absent thematically, even the term Caliphate (*khilāfat*) was non-existent. In the narration of episodes when Muhammad selected his first Caliph, Abu Bakr, poets ranging from Bāhrām Khān to Heẏāt Māmud translated the Caliphate as *rājya* (kingdom),[57] which as a concept neither invoked any association with the Caliphate nor any Sunni-Shīʿa rift.

The formalisation of the Shīʿī worldview in the early modern period in Central Asia and its percolation elsewhere invited counter-attacks from Sunni Islamic reformists propelling Islamic revival in the Indian subcontinent in the 18th century. One of the statements of Walī Allāh went thus:

> In this age, the heretic credulity of people has lent itself to the influence of the doctrines of the Shi'ah so much so that many people in this country entertain doubts regarding the validity of the installation of the Orthodox Caliphs. […] It established with certainty the conviction that the accession to the Caliphal office (*khilafah*) by these early elders of Islam was one of the cardinal principles of Religion. Without the strict adherence to this principle, no other principle of the *shari'ah* could be sustained on any firm ground.[58]

To counter-balance the claims of the Shīʿas, in Walī Allāh's legacy in Bengal, the reformist *ulama* had to reclaim the glory of Islam attained by Muhammad and carry forward in the purest form during the reign of the first four Caliphs. In the Dobhāshī texts, events after Muhammad unfolded in the narrative – with the quick succession of Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali as Caliphs, their glorious military exploits, and their individual deaths/assassinations in clannish rivalries – all culminating in the battle of Karbala.

Shah Abdur Rahim, a Sufi poet of late 19th-century Bengal, authenticated Ali's mystical position as part of the Sunni Caliphate and

denied all other forms of Alid-piety as un-Islamic in his 1891 Sufi treatise *Atharba Mohammadī Veda*[59]:

E cāri imām nije Alir chiphāt
Giẏāchen kata kare ke kare nihāt
Deoẏān Hāfej lekhe e bhābete śer
Nāhale Alir dost beśak kāpher

The first three Caliphs praised Ali
They always remembered his contributions
Thus said Sufi master Hafiz in his *Diwan*
Otherwise, Ali's followers are without religion
(Shah Abdur Rahim, *Atharba Mahammadī Veda*, 1891, no pagination)

Abdur Rahim claimed Shī'a Imamate from Ali to Imam al-Mahdi as a part of the Qadiriyya lineage to which he belonged, thus including Alid-piety in the mystical lineage. In the Dobhāshī repertoire, the overt Sufi orientation of the authors was reflected in the literarisation of the themes related to the Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt*. A bond of mystical love was established between Muhammad and his first four Caliphs, embodying a Prophet-centric piety. Karāmat 'Alī Jaunpurī, at the beginning of his Urdu *adab* tract *Murad ul-Muridin* (The Intention of the Disciple), stated that a true Muslim can only achieve the station of *iman* ("*mokāmmel imān*") by being madly in love with Muhammad, as the first four Caliphs were.[60]

The authors of the Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives invested a lot of energy to appropriate Ali's figure into the Caliphate and positioned the Early Caliphate as the ideal ethico-moral template by showing their affective ties with Muhammad. They did not, without exception, hesitate to show how devastated the first four Caliphs were when they came to know of the imminent death of Muhammad. The authors invested much effort to narrate how they were completely overcome with grief when Muhammad passed away. Muhammad Munshi in *Śahīd-i-Kārbālā* (1900) described the frenzied grief of the Caliphs in the following words:

Hajarat Ommar Sāhā Nabir eskete tāhā
Taloẏār khuliẏā je laila
Nabir okāt jei balibek jāre ei
Kātiẏā dāliba taloẏārete
Nāhi māna ei bāt śuẏe āche nekajāt
Kathā kahe Elāhīr sāte
Hajarat Uchmān thāẏ mukh banda haẏe jāẏ
Ceẏe rahe bobār ākār
Kāṭher murat pārā chale nāhi ek jārā
Ceẏe rahe dige sabākār

Hajarat Mortajā Āli sona tār kathā bali
Nabijir eskete jār jār
Ehātak kaila jāri sesab likhite nāri
Game tote koraś tenār
Jeẏchā bimārī loke uthite nā tākat thāke
Sei hāl haila Ālir
Chiddik Ākbar jini Nabir gamete tini
Bekārāre lāgila kāndite
Thāmite nā pāre to se gharer bhitare ese
Kāpaṛh tuliẏā ākherete
Kāndiẏā kāndiẏā kaẏ sona Nabi Mostāphāẏ
Jadi rāji thākiten more
Jān māl jata merā tomār nāmete sārā
Kariẏā je ditun korbāni"

Umar the second Caliph in utter grief
Took out his long sword
Whoever said Muhammad was dead
With his sword would be mowed
He did not listen Muhammad lay then
Talking only with the Almighty
Usman in distress sat motionless
His grief broke Allah's throne with its severity
And Mortaja Ali now hear about Ali
Who grieved intensely for the Prophet
He fell ill lost all his will
His love for Muhammad was so great
Siddique Abu Bakr could not stop his tears
Cried all night and day
To Muhammad he said if you had agreed
I would have given my life away
(Muhammad Munshi,
Śahīd-i-Kārbālā, no pagination)

This series of deaths connects all the protagonists through a chain of agony and tears, thus making the ritual of mourning over death into the basic act necessary for the cohesion of the *ummah*. In a section of his Sufi *adab* treatise *Murad ul-Muridin* titled "Bonding with the messenger of Allah," Karāmat ʻAlī emphasised that to become a *momin* (believer) one needs to emulate the external and internal forms of the prophetic order.[61] By external form, Karāmat ʻAlī meant obeying the *kitāb* (Qur'an) and adhering to *sunnat* (*hadis*) and one of the *maẓhab*s. He emphasised the need to observe the *mawlid* ritual to celebrate the Prophet's birthday. Karāmat ʻAlī stated that "if one of the four *maẓhab*s is not followed, no one can have a bond with the messenger of Allah."[62] Reading the Kārbālā narratives with the life events of Muhammad became equivalent

to performing the *mawlid* rituals in a reformist sensibility that validated both text and ritual.

The Kārbālā narratives served to formulate a new discourse on Muhammad's weeping as the complete surrender to the will of Allah. Muhammad's prostration and tears after knowing about the forthcoming deaths of his grandsons became a template for the readers (signifying the *ummah*) to emulate.[63] Both the first four Caliphs and the members of the *ahl al-bayt* continued with this ethical tradition of tears.

Eshak Uddin narrated the mourning of Fatima and Ali, and the other three companions of Muhammad, when Muhammad told them what Jibreel had revealed about the destinies of Hasan and Husayn,

Ei bāt bole Nabī din duniẏār khubi
Jār jār kānden bistar
Śuniẏā chāhābā sabe Kāndiẏā haẏrān tabe
Śoke sabe haila kātar
Śere Khodā ihā śuni kāchār khāiẏā tini
Paṛhlen jamin mājhār
Marār ākār haila dam jena nikalila
Tāhā dekhe jatek iẏār
…
Rachul Emāme liẏā Kānde jāre jār haiẏā
Ali tare kahite lāgila
Śuno bābā Hāẏdār sab tār kārbār
Tār khelā ke bujhibe bala
…
Āīr kāndane kāro sthir nahe man
Hāchān Hochen śoke kānde jane jan
Paśu pakkhi jib ādi kichui nā khāẏ
Āīr kāndane sabe kānde ubharāẏ
Akāśer tārā kānde pātāler nāg
Paśu pakkhi kānde ar baner je bāgh
Āphtāb māhtāb kānde āraśer tārā
Louha māhphuj kānde ār fereśtārā
Beheśt dojakh kānde sārābon tahurā
Lā-mākān singhāsone kānden tāhārā
…
Jakhan khabar Bibi betār śunila
Kāchār khāiẏa Bibi behuś haila
…
Kāndite kāndite Bibi borkā dāliẏā
Nabīr hujure cale deoẏānā haiyā
(Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*)[64]

An abridged translation of this passage reads: Muhammad revealed what he had to and broke down in inconsolable tears. The companions joined

him in crying. Ali, Sher-e Khoda, collapsed on the ground and lay there almost like dead. Seeing Ali's pain, everyone was shattered. Animals, birds and all other creatures joined in Ali's great sorrow. The stars in the sky, the serpent under the earth, animals, birds and the tiger, the Sun and the Moon – all cried their heart out. Even the formless throne of Allah trembled … When Fatima came to know of it, she fell on the ground, breathless. Then in an uncontrollable spasm of agony, she rushed to her father, putting a burqa over herself.

The ability to weep with one's tears streaming down one's face, the ecstasy invoked by this action, and the emotional and physical excess with which it was depicted – the choked voice and the convulsions of grief – took on a symbolism of pain which closely resembled Sufi ecstasy, which could only be felt by a Sufi heart purified with tears.[65]

Such connections are present not only at the level of poetic idiom and rhetoric, but also in a more stately formal manner in the narratives. Jonab Ali, for instance, started his second chapter (*dwitīya bālām*) with a reference to ʿAbdul Qādir Gīlānī, the founder of the Qadiriyya *silsilah*, and to Khwaja Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī, the founder of the Chishtiyya *silsilah*. Textual references such as these indicate the text's indebtedness to a Sufi lineage and thematise the bond of love with Muhammad by qualifying it with a Sufi affect.

All kinds of dissent and clannish political rivalries within the Caliphate were apparently resolved in the narrative through this chain of tears. But it was now necessary, as the Dobhāshī authors explicated, to nullify the crisis that had internally fractured the Caliphate through thematic reconsiderations. One such route was to confirm the Abrahamic lineage of Muhammad and posit his own Quraysh lineage. Eshak Uddin made equivalences between the previous Abrahamic prophets like Abraham, Moses, Jesus and the "Ultimate Prophet" Muhammad. The other route was to bring in the idea of the clannish rivalry of the past to justify antagonism between Ali and Muawiya. Eshak Uddin explains the antagonism between Ali and Muawiya as the outcome of the rivalry between their predecessors Banu Hashim and Banu Umayyad, the two brothers, to bring two bloodlines within the Quraysh clan. Thus, Yazid's (Muawiya's son in the Umayyad clan) coercion towards Hasan and Husayn (Ali's sons in the Banu Hashim clan) and the unjust killings of the battle of Karbala were interpreted as the recurrence of a pre-ordained clannish rivalry. There was hence an attempt to resolve the killing of the grandson of the Prophet by a Sunni Caliph, which is the moot paradox in the Caliphate, by interpreting the action as belonging to a pre-Islamic burden of warring bloodlines, and not a crisis within the Caliphate.

The crisis in the Caliphate emerged during the first *fitna*, which was the first civil war in the history of Islam. The roots of the first *fitna* can be traced back to the time when the third Caliph Usman was killed (in 656) by the rebels who took a dim view of his clannish parochialism. When Ali was elected as the fourth Caliph, his position was opposed by

Aisha, Muhammad's wife, who was joined by two other companions of Muhammad, Ṭalḥa ibn ʿUbayd and Zubayr. The two parties fought the *Jung-e Jamal* (Battle of the Camel, in 656) which is considered to be a divisive moment within Islam, with Ali and Aisha standing as opponents. Generally, it is held that Aisha and many others in the *ummah* were not satisfied with Ali for not being proactive in avenging Usman's death. Muhammad Munshi, to nullify any antagonism between Ali and Aisha in the *Jung-e Jamal*, showed that Ali took great care of Aisha during the battle, in which she was present on camelback to watch.[66]

The authors deployed various forms of poetic license to negotiate with the fissures in the Early Caliphate. Muhammad Munshi narrated that Ali was so enraged at the news of Usman's assassination in the hands of the enemy that he struck his own sons, Hasan and Husayn:

> Jālem śahid kaila Ochmān Sāhāẏ
> Mālmāttā Ochmāner loila kārhiẏā
> Tā bāde jālem sabe gela nikaliẏā
> Ei sor sār Ālī pāila śunite
> Douṛhāiẏā āse Ālī kāndite kāndite
> Hāchener gāle ek tāmecā mārila
> Ār Husener buke ghusha merechila
> Fajihat kare dohe chokkhe bahe pāni
> Tomā done karite bhejinu neghābāni
> Tomrā nā haile kena sāti Ochmāner
> Tomrā thākite māre Ochmān khāter
>
> The enemy killed Usman, made him a martyr
> They snatched away all of his belongings
> Hearing the commotion, Ali came running
> He shed profuse tears
> With his palm he struck Hasan's face
> And punched Husayn's chest
> Why didn't you two instead become martyrs with Usman
> Why else did I send you both with him
> (Muhammad Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā,* n.p.)

Here, Ali asked his sons how Usman could be killed in their presence. Muhammad Munshi, by thus laying out such thematic innovations and authenticating his narrative through citations of *Latāīf Ashrafī,*[67] attempted to empty the Caliphate of any internal contradictions. He cancelled out the antagonism between Usman and Ali, which is traditionally considered to be the cause of the first *fitna* that led to the *Jung-e Siffin* (the Battle of Siffin, in 657) between Ali and Muawiya, the first attempt by a Umayyad ruler (Muawiya) to overthrow the Early Caliphate. The same sequence was narrated by Abdul Ohab in *Śahīde Kārbālā*.[68]

Walī Allāh separated these first four Caliphs as *khalifah khassah* (the distinguished Caliphs) from the later Caliphs (Umayyad and Abbasid) by categorising the latter as the *khalifah ām* (the commoner Caliphs). Walī Allāh was of the opinion that the first four Caliphs, by attaining political and spiritual heights through their singularly excellent virtues and their high moral and ethical-spiritual conduct, became the ideal Islamic authorities after Muhammad.[69] The legacy of Walī Allāh established the relevance of the Early Caliphate across the reformist groups, and especially among the Tariqah and Taiyuni preachers across Bengal.

2.2.1 Namaz *and the* ahl al-bayt*: Muhammad's twin treasures*

> "I have left with you two things which, if you follow them, you will never go astray: the Qur'an and the *sunnah*."
>
> Malik ibn Anas (d. 795) reporting one of Muhammad's last sermons and the *sunna* of His Prophet
>
> (*Muwatta*: 2, 899)[70]

In all the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* consulted here, this particular *hadis* of Muhammad often recurred: "*ummater janya Muhammad je dui cīj rekhe gechen tār baẏān*" (A discourse on two things that Muhammad left for his *ummah*). But there was a curious modification. The *sunna* that was bequeathed by Mohammad in one of his *hadis* utterances (cited above) was replaced in the Kārbālā *puthis* with the *ahl al-bayt*. The two things in this title "A discourse (*baẏān*) on the two things that the Prophet left for his *ummah*" were *namaz* and the *ahl al-bayt*. This title pointed out the importance of the *namaz* and the significance of the *ahl al-bayt* in reformist piety. But whether Muhammad had spoken of the *ahl al-bayt* or the *sunna* as his legacy in his last sermon remained a contentious element in the Sunni-Shīʿa rivalry. The *sunna* was claimed by the Sunnis as the legacy of Muhammad, while the Shīʿas proclaimed that it was the *ahl al-bayt*. Traditionally, Muhammad's *sunna* and *ahl al-bayt* stood in antagonism. In reformist writings in Dobhāshī, however, the Prophetic utterance was recontextualised to remove this antagonism. The Kārbālā narratives included the *ahl al-bayt* in the devotional context of the *sunna*.

In this sober path of devotionalism, the *namaz*, performed by Muhammad and his *ṣaḥāba* in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis*, was affirmed as an ethico-moral code. This reformist moment also became an occasion to resolve the contentious question of the Caliphate. The narratives on the Karbala began with a detailed chronicling of the last days of Muhammad's life, an episode which served to bear testimony to his act of nomination of the first Caliph. This process entailed the formal handover of the authority to preside over the *namaz* gatherings (*imāmati*) from Muhammad to his successors:

Abu Bakkarer tare dākiẏā Rachul
Sirinī jabāne kohe Khodār makbul
Āj āpe masjide kara imāmati
Jwarer kārane mor thik nāi mati
…
Bubakkar Chiddīkike kariẏā emām
Nāmāj paṛilā Nabī ālāẏhecchālām

Beckoning Abu Bakr near him
Muhammad spoke taking the name of Allah, Rahim
Preside over today's prayer O Abu Bakr
I am not feeling well with burning fever
…
By choosing Abu Bakr as the presiding Imam
Muhammad prayed the *namaz*, *ʿalayhi as-salām*
(Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*, 26–27)

The *namaz* gatherings then appeared as evidence of this transfer and Muhammad's own declaration legitimised the individual chosen from his four *ṣaḥāba*. This choice, which triggered enormous debate and dispute in the history of Islam, was narrativised in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* to strategically portray a special bond among the Early Caliphs in order to pre-empt any rival claims that historically followed between the Sunnis and the Shīʿas.[71] Eshak Uddin narrated how, after entrusting Abu Bakr with the *namaz*, Muhammad, wracked with fever, leaned on Ali to arrive at the mosque for the prayer. In this way, the author nullified the oldest and strongest form of dissent over the Prophetic inheritance. Muhammad Munshi wrote of this episode in more detail. Munshi narrated an episode where an ailing Mahammad was sitting with his wives, Abu Bakr's daughter Aisha and Umar's daughter Hafiza. He narrated how Aisha demurred when Muhammad offered the *imāmati* to Abu Bakr by saying that her father would not be able to withstand the pain of Muhammad's absence during the *namaz* and would be too choked up to discharge his duties. This again established Abu Bakr's complete submission to Muhammad. In the same breath, Muhammad rejected Hafiza's proposal of her father Umar as the presiding Imam after Muhammad passed away.

Śune Nabī kahilen Belāler tare
Ābu Bakyare kaha giẏā emāmatī kare
Śuniyā Āẏeshā Bibi kahen Hajarate
Phormālen mor bāpe nāmāj paṛhāte
Bahuti naram del bāper āmār
Jakhan mimbār khāli dekhibe tomār
Ei game nāmāj nā paṛhāte pāribe
Āpnāre nā dekhiẏā ghābrāiẏā jābe

…
Ummarer beti jini Hāphejā nām jār
Chilen āhliẏā tini Nabī mostāphār
Hāphejā āroj kore kahe Mostāphāẏ
Hukum hoile merā bāp je paṛhāẏ
E bāt śuniẏā Nabī goswā haiẏā bale
Śuno jata Bibi gan kahi je sakale
Emāmatī karibāre Chiddik thākite
Kehu nā pāribe ār śono sakalete"

Then Muhammad instructed Belal
Go and ask Abu Bakr to preside over the *namaz*
Learning of this, Aisha was anxious
You have asked my father to lead the *namaz*
You know how devoted my father is to you
He will weep in pain if on the pedestal he does not find you
Umar's daughter Hafiza requested Muhammad
My father can lead the *namaz* if you want
Muhammad was furious hearing this
Listen to me, listen carefully, O ladies
Who can be the leader of the *namaz* after me
No one else but Abu Bakr, only Abu Bakr can be
(Muhammad Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, n.p.)

The Caliphate, which was otherwise rife with instances of clannish bloodshed, was thus redeemed through the erasure of greed for power among the first four Caliphs with Aisha's intervention. This episode ends with a narration of Muhammad praying inside the mosque for the last time, with Abu Bakr presiding over the *namaz* while the other three *ṣaḥāba* and all the members of the *ummah* followed him as the anointed one: "*Hujrā haite Nabī pardā uṭhāila/ Chiddikīre emāmatī karite dekhila/ Jatek Ānchār r Āchhāb bekār/ pichete maktādi haẏe bandhiẏā kātār*" (Muhammad lifted the curtain of his chamber/He could see Abu Bakr presiding over the *namaz*/all the Ansars and *ṣaḥāba* stood in queue/as Abu Bakr led the prayer).[72] Muhammad Munshi did not refer to the individual presence of Ali in this episode to legitimise the delegation. Instead, Ali rushed to Muhammad's deathbed with Fatima after dreaming about Muhammad's miraculous disappearance. Jonab Ali's Muhammad called for Ali immediately after delegating to Abu Bakr the duties of the Imamate and made a clear announcement that Ali would perform the death rites of Muhammad for the *ahl al-bayt*.[73] Here, the spatial separation between the public and the private domains for Abu Bakr and Ali secured the Caliphate in the hands of the former and the intimate familial space with the latter. Muhammad addressed Ali with much affection, calling him "*bābājān*" or beloved son-in-law.

Before the translation of the Qur'an into standardised Bangla, *namaz* manuals were introduced in Dobhāshī to enlighten the masses about the protocols of prayer.[74] These *namaz* manuals, like *Mephtāhul Jānnāt bā Beheśter Kunjī*, a translation of Karāmat 'Alī Jaunpurī's *Miftāh al-Jannat*, presented *namaz* as *sunna*. By depicting the selection of the first Caliph as the first Imam, the Dobhāshī Kārbālā repertoire reformulated the validity of *namaz* in the reformist context and made Muhammad's choice rational and identifiable for the reader/audience. In Eshak Uddin's *Dāstān,* the depiction of Muhammad's tears while reading the Qur'an at the time of *namaz* was not only a sign of his spiritual fervour but also reflected his anxiety about the fate of his *ummah* in the Hereafter. Here, Muhammad's ethical conduct was presented as the ideal template for moral action within Islam. At the same time, his anxiety over what would befall his *ummah* in the Hereafter on the Day of Judgement – punishment in hell for their sin (*gonā*) or eternal bliss in paradise for performing ethical (*nek*) action – was also repeatedly emphasised. Muhammad Munshi narrated in his *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* how Muhammad prayed to Allah to forgive the sins of his *ummah* by praying the *namaz* in the proper way.

A Muhammad-centric piety, and the formulation of an ideal template for ethico-moral codes centring on *namaz*, was extended to include the Early Caliphate. The first four Caliphs were also always shown to be particular about the *namaz*. Muhammad Munshi, in his *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, described Ali in the act of prodding someone called Abdur Rahman with his foot because Rahman had been lying idly with his sword under his arm inside the mosque instead of joining the others during *namaz*.

Jāhārā śuiẏā chila masjider pare
Nāmāj paṛhite Sāhā oṭhāẏ sabāre
Abdur Rahman pāpī makyār kariẏā
Śuẏe chila bagalete taloẏār rākhiẏā
Pāẏer ṭhokkar mere Abdur Rahmāne
Nāmājer okta jāẏ śuẏe kī kārane
Elāhīr hukum gāphel ācho kāhe
Okta mata paṛhile chaẏāb pābe tāhe

Those who lay idle inside the mosque
Ali invited them all for the prayer
Abdur Rahman, the sinner, was lying in a corner
Resting his sword under his arm
Ali in scorn prodded him with his foot
'Why are you lying here at the time of prayer
How dare you not obey Allah's order?
If you follow the times of prayer, you will get His blessings
(Muhammad Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā,* n.p.)

Abdur Rahman did not take this lesson in the right spirit. Following this exchange, during the *namaz*, Ali was stabbed from behind with the sword and killed by the same Abdur Rahman, who wanted to avenge his humiliation. Muhammad Munshi did not stop at holding Abdur Rahman individually responsible for Ali's assassination; instead, with a stroke of narrative innovation, he took the account out of its immediate temporality to hint that Ali's murder was caused by an older clannish rivalry between the Banu Hashim and the Banu Umayyad clans, since he remarked that Abdur Rahman belonged to the latter, which was also that of Usman. At the same time, the poet Muhammad Munshi managed to use the episode of Ali's assassination as an occasion to confirm *namaz* as *farz*. It must be mentioned here that these Kārbālā authors continued to tell their reader/audience that Yazid was not regular at *namaz*. Eshak Uddin described the *be-din* ways of Yazid,

> Aar ki baliba kathā Ejid nādān
> karen sarābkhuri khān gānja bhāng
> kakhan nāmāj paṛhe kakhan nā paṛhe
> jenākāri tāmāsāte hāmesā je phire
>
> What more can I say, Yazid, the imbecile,
> Enjoys alcohol, marijunana and opium, everything vile
> No one knows when he prays and when he skips the prayer
> He womanises and indulges in lewd laughter
> (Eshak Uddin, *Dāstān*, 135)

The Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts, with the series of deaths of Muhammad, the *ṣaḥāba* and Fatima and ending with Hasan and Husayn as their inevitable subject matter, contained elaborate details about the rituals surrounding death and plenty of references to the Hereafter. Each death, except for that of Husayn because of its exceptional context and consequences, was followed by elaborate descriptions of the obligatory steps in the burial ritual (*jānājā/janāzah,* Ar.) – starting from bathing the dead to covering the body in the grave with soil.[75] The *janāzah* rituals in the narrative brought the *ummah* together in mourning and at the same time created a degree of identification for the reader/audience with the burial ritual built into the narrative, since, through this device, they were instructed by the narrator to utter the Qur'anic verse Ṣalāt al-Janāzah: *innā li-llāhi wa-'innā 'ilayhi rāji'ūn.*

While all the Kārbālā narratives were invested in describing the burial ritual step by step, Muhammad Munshi went a step forward in making his narrative sequences resemble an instruction manual on the *janāzah*. Munshi described Muhammad's burial as follows:

> Bibī Āyeśār ghare dam chutechila
> Seikhāne tāk bandi kabbar haila

Muhāmmad Mostāphār tare kabbare rākhiẏā
Kācā it bechaiẏā dilen gāthiẏā
Māti diẏā śāhī postā bāndhiẏā kabbare
Uchā kare ādhā hāt Tāhār upare
Cherāne Belal dila pāni je dhāliẏā
Kabbar taiẏār kare sakale miliẏā

As Muhammad left this world from Aisha's house
In that house his grave was prepared
To place Muhammad's body inside the earth
Unfired bricks were arranged one by one
A layering of soil was placed on them
It was made one foot higher than the level of the ground
Water was sprinkled on the soil
Hand in hand, they made the grave
(Muhammad Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā,* n.p.)

Further on, Muhammad Munshi meticulously described how Fatima performed her own ablutions and clothed herself before her death. The author detailed the steps thus:

Gochal karite pāni lila māngāiẏā
Gochal kariẏā Bibī pāk chāph hailā
Pākijā lebāch Bibī pindhiẏā laila
Pākijā bichoẏānā bechāiẏā bhālo mate
Śuilā Joharā Bibī dān karotete
Chīnā pare hāt rekhe mukh kebālā rekhe
Āpnā badan sab chāddarete rekhe
Suilā Fātemā Bibī Elāhīr chāhā

Fatima performed her ritual ablutions
She wrapped herself in the purified clothes
She made her bed and purified it
She then lit the camphor that Muhammad brought from Heaven
She closed her door and lay on the bed
She placed her hands on her chest
All of her body she covered except her face
(Muhammad Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā,* n.p.)

The steps described here by Munshi were equivalent to those prescribed in the Dobhāshī manuals on death rites, as part of the *adab* repertoire. On occasions of *janāzah,* the poets mentioned the places of burial too. These were also strategically formulated, sometimes using poetic license, to reconcile the antagonism between the Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt*. Jonab Ali in his *Śahid-i-Kārbālā* showed how Abu Bakr had expressed his wish to be buried beside Muhammad's grave at the burial ground of *jannat*

al-baqi (exclusively meant for the *ahl al-bayt*) in order to remain close to the Prophet even after death.[76] Thus, Abu Bakr himself diminished the gap in the Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt*, prevalent in the Shīʿī devotional principle.[77]

2.3 Fatima, the mother of the martyrs: The template of *Sabr*

The Kārbālā narratives had to simultaneously resolve the opposition between Aisha (Muhammad's wife) and Fatima (Muhammad's daughter) as the two female holy figures of the Sunnis and the Shīʿas, respectively to claim Aisha and include Fatima in Sunni reformist lanscape. They were shifted from their antagonistic positions prevalent in the pivotal Sunni-Shīʿa debates. Muhammad Munshi showed that Muhammad chose to spend his last days in Aisha's house, allowing her the hallowed position of caregiver to the Prophet, and died with his head on Aisha's lap.[78] Fatima, Muhammad's daughter, was chosen to enact her grief at her father's death in the Kārbālā narratives, which did not include Aisha's mourning. Fatima's intense grief and uncontrollable tears when she heard of her sons' premature and violent deaths took up the central position in the narratives. Fatima's conduct was offered as a template of moral action.

The interconnectedness of gender, politics and piety in early Islam was iconised in the figures of Aisha and Fatima that took a more structured form beginning from the 10th century. For her special position in the Sunni *ahl al-bayt* as Muhammad's favourite wife, Aisha's *hadis* was logically chosen as a very important source in the Sunni scriptural tradition.[79] As the daughter of Muhammad, the Shīʿī veneration of Fatima's figure stood as a challenge to Aisha's position in Muhammad's life. As the mother of Hasan and Husayn, she inaugurated a bilateral lineage in Islam. Aisha's role in the *Jung-e Jamal* against Ali instigated a degree of aversion towards her among the Shīʿas.[80] In contrast, they celebrated the naturally sanctioned Muhammad-Fatima blood tie and positioned it as the most sacred one, over Muhammad's conjugal relationship.

In the political histories of Islam, Aisha stood as a transgressive woman for participating in the matters of the Caliphate in the first *fitna*. Sunni Islam, to sculpt the ideal ethical codes for Muslim women, needed other female characters integral to Muhammad's life. His mother Amina and first wife Khadija, along with his daughter Fatima, provided the ideals of Islamic womanhood which could not be fully served by Aisha.[81] Amina and Khadija appeared as protagonists in *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* and the *sīrah* of Muhammad, while Aisha and Fatima became integral to the narratives on the Karbala.[82] These narratives emphasised the domestic capacity of Aisha, and Muhammad's trust in her as a caregiver. But as a childless widow, she remained outside the ambit of the crisis over Prophetic legacy.

Fatima emerged as one of the central forces of Shīʿī intercessory piety as the tragic mother figure during the 10th century, which is called the Shīʿī century for the climactic consolidation of Shīʿī theology and the

political power of the Shīʿī dynasties, namely the Fatimid (909–1171) and the Buyid (934–1062). The proto-Shīʿa orientation had a rather patrilineal form, with ascendant Shīʿa heroes like Muhammad ibn al-Hanifiya (d. 700) and his son Abu Hashim (d. 776). In the *hadis* traditions, both Sunni and Shīʿa, Fatima started to emerge as the Islamic version of Mary – a figure of chastity, purity and extreme moral superiority.[83] Since she was Muhammad's daughter, the *hadis* traditions started endowing her with the Prophet's characteristics, and thus Fatima entered the Sufi rhetoric glowing with the radiance (*nūr*) of her father. Saiẏad Murtazā, a Sufi poet of 17th-century Bengal with a Vaishnava orientation called Fatima "the mother of the entire world" (*jagat jananī*). This was not an exception, as within a Sufi-informed devotional landscape, Fatima was venerated as the superior Mother in the verses at the beginning of any poetic-religious expression.

In a *hadis* in *Sahih Bukhari*, compiled in the 9th century, Aisha says "I have not seen anyone who more resembled the Prophet (pbuh) in words or speech or manner of sitting than Fatima. He is used to kissing her when she comes and so does she."[84] The complementarity between Aisha and Fatima entered Sunni reformist Islam, cancelling out any Shīʿī claim over Fatima. In the Dobhāshī Kārbālā repertoire, the authors established the public-private division in Muhammad's life through these two iconic female figures. Aisha's narrative dealt with Muhammad as the Prophet of the *ummah,* whereas Fatima's narrative exuded the affective intimacy of Muhammad's familial persona as a loving father and a grandfather. In the patrilineal Kārbālā narratives of early modern Bengal, Fatima appeared in the sequence where Jibreel revealed the fates of her sons and reappeared after Husayn's death on the battlefield of Karbala. Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts represented the bilateral paradigm of descent that Fatima stood for by bringing together Alid-piety and a devotionalism centred on Fatima. The narratives began with the patrilineal lineage of the Abrahamic prophets and the Arab clans, giving way to Fatima's superior position in carrying the legacy of her father to her sons. Hasan and Husayn were referred to as both *Sayedzada* (sons of Sayeda Fatima) and *Alizada* (the sons of Ali) in the Kārbālā narratives. In this bilateral descent, the matrilineal connection with Fatima remained stronger, overpowering the other because of Fatima's sacred position as the daughter of the Prophet.

Eshak Uddin and Saad Ali-Abdul Ohab, like many early modern poets, added to the Karbala events with an episode where Husayn's half-brother Abu Hanifa appears to avenge the massacre of Karbala and protect Zayn al-Abidin, Husayn's only surviving son in Karbala and the next Shīʿa Imam. Abu Hanifa, named after his mother Bibi Hanufa, and not his father Ali (similar to the term *Sayedzada* for Husayn), fighting against the enemy (Yazid) of his step-brothers, could be interpreted as another example of bilateral descent. But there is an ambivalence in his case, as the name of the mother – Bibi Hanufa – was subsumed into the name of the father when Hanifa came to join his father's progeny.

Hanifa's actions brought the narrative back to its patrilineage. The *adab* repertoire, together with the *namaz* manuals and *tafsirs*, positioned Fatima as the ideal recipient of *hadis*. These treatises exalted Fatima for having directly received instructions from Muhammad and celebrated her as the ideal example of sober womanhood in matters like marriage, motherhood and death.[85] After Fatima's death, as Eshak Uddin narrated in an episode, all the prophets descended to the earth to guide her to heaven, proving her spiritual superiority. Fatima, the lady of perfect modesty (*hayā'*), by appearing in the narratives with prior knowledge of her sons' preordained deaths, became both the ideal mourner and an embodiment of *sabr*. She is also known never to have smiled again in her life after her father's death, signifying an inalienable connection between father and daughter. By placing Fatima on the list of the five iconic mourners in Islam – Adam, Yaqub, Yusuf, Fatima and Zayn al-Abidin – Eshak Uddin places her within the lineage of grieving, alongside three prophets of Islam.[86] In these verses by Eshak Uddin, Adam was shown to be shedding tears of repentance after tasting the apple, Yaqub mourning over the death of his beloved son Yusuf, Yusuf crying when he was imprisoned, Fatima weeping at the death of her father Muhammad, and finally Zayn al-Abidin crying at the death of his father Husayn. Eshak Uddin's depiction of Zayn al-Abidin grieving over his father Husayn's martyrdom also converged the Sunni Abrahamic prophetic line and the Imamate tradition.[87]

In the reformist Sunni imagination in Bengal, Fatima began to be venerated as the perfect woman to whom the Prophet had guaranteed paradise. Fatima, exalted as *khātun-i-jannat* (the leading woman in paradise), emerged with the same intercessory power as her father, emanating *nur-i Muhammad* (radiance that Allah had given exclusively to Muhammad) herself. Eshak Uddin praised Fatima as "the leader of the community in paradise/ we will clutch her robes and enter the gates of paradise."[88]

Fatima was domesticated in Bengal already in early modern devotional system, catalysing various genres and giving rise to a vocabulary of devotionalism which was entangled with the rhetoric of *maṇgal kāvyas* and the *bhakti* traditions. When Fatima reappeared in the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis* as the Supreme Mother and the beloved daughter of Muhammad, she emblematised the *fakiri* (poverty, exalted as a mystical virtue) of her father. She resembled any rural mother of Bengal, who washed her son's dirty hair with clay. An overwhelming form of fatherly care and compassion also exudes from Muhammad as he plaits with his own sacred ("*mobārak*") hands Fatima's hair dishevelled from her frenzied crying after she comes to know of her sons' predestined deaths. Eshak Uddin wrote thus: "*Fatemār kāndane kānde Allahr Rachul/ mobārak haste bāndhe Fatemar cul*" (Muhammad, the messenger of

Allah, cries with Fatima's grief/He ties Fatima's dishevelled hair with his blessed fingers).[89]

But Muhammad's paternal care served another purpose too. Muhammad, by tying up Fatima's dishevelled hair, also guided her to the proper ways of mourning. The copious shedding of tears was permissible, but not the loosening of one's hair in the intense physical frenzy of grief, which was so specific to the Muharram commemoration. This is where the notion of *sabr* came in, as a restrained form of mourning, annulling other forms that found expression in physical excess. And thus Fatima, in effect, was instructed repeatedly to follow *sabr* by Muhammad so that she might ensure her place in paradise.

This theme was brought back in the episode following the military exploits of Hanifa, when Eshak Uddin described the Last Day of Judgement, with Muhammad as the intercessory figure on the Day of Resurrection. Muhammad, having been assured that Hasan and Husayn had earned their rightful places in paradise, expressed his anxiety about Fatima, the mourning mother. Eshak Uddin portrayed the Prophet praying to Allah that He may give Fatima *sabr* after the death of her sons, so that she did not allow herself the frenzied grief of the *jāri,* that is, she did not mourn as the Shīʿas did.[90]

Since the beginning of the print of *sharīʿati* texts like the *adab* treatises and *namaz* manuals in Dobhāshī, the male masculine ethical codes were supplemented by a list of *farz* to be performed by Muslim women. In these texts, men are warned that any possible deviation from these *farz*, which were new implementations of reformist Islam, women were not to get their right place in the Hereafter and that will cause the downfall of their husbands and guardians to suffer punishment in hell. The translation of the *tafsir* and the *hadis* repertoire in Bangla brought these themes like mandatory veil, customs related to feminine body cycles, reproductive actions, conjugal responsibilities as the ideal wife, motherhood and everyday virtues of Muslim women to the standardised literary domain, which was supplemented by the addition of new treatises on these themes. The Dobhāshī Kārbālā narratives did not leave out the ideals of Muslim womanhood to reorient the private gendered space of Islam along reformist lines. In the speeches of Muhammad to Fatima, and those of Husayn to the women of his family, the ethics of *hayā'* was reaffirmed by regulating their patterns of mourning which was directly addressed to Muharram *matam*. The translation of *Bahishti Zewar* (The Heavenly Treasure, 1905) in Bangla as *Beheshti Jebar*, a comprehensive educational curriculum for women aligned along reformist Islamic ideals, by Ashraf Ali Thanawi, belonging to the Deobandi School of Islamic reform,[91] energised new forms of instruction for women in the private domain and later in the schools and *madrasas* intended for the Muslim girls in Bengal.[92]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how the ideological significance of the battle of Karbala was reframed in the Dobhāshī repertoire since the last decades of the 19th century to create a pro-Caliphate sentiment as the binding factor for the Bengali-speaking *ummah*. To create a pro-Caliphate principle, the authors shaped and consolidated the collective memory around the Karbala battle by reproducing the pain of the deaths of Muhammad, his daughter, his four companions and his grandsons, and made their implied audience witness and share such pain. When these themes were literarised, they became the history and the identity of the community. How the authors negotiated with the crisis in the Early Caliphate, mostly manifested in the first *fitna* and resulting in the battle of Karbala, has already been discussed. To nullify the internal fissures and fractures within the *ummah* after Muhammad during the Early Caliphate, themes were rearranged to coalesce its readers/audience around a collective memory of the traumatic event in Karbala. To impart effectively to the readers/audience the "truth" of the scriptures, the authors created poetic allure and offered narratives equivalent to the scriptures.

After recounting these efforts by the authors of the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis*, the following chapters will trace how a Husayn-centric piety and a pro-Caliphate sentiment were carried forward to consolidate a sense of the modern Bengali *ummah*.

I will end this chapter by going back to the question of ambivalence that I employed in the first chapter to review the idea of historicity and modernity in the Kārbālā *puthis*. The Dobhāshī authors of the Kārbālā narratives marked the date of the commencement of their writings and concluded the text mentioning the time and date, always choosing the auspicious day of *Juma,* and one of the five stipulated times of the *namaz*. Eshak Uddin mentioned, "*tera śata coutriś sāl daśai Chaitrate/ kalya je Eid er din Ramjān bādete/ Roj haila Śukrabār jāna he momin/ ketāb karinu śuru Eshak Uddin*" (The year is 1340 and the date tenth of Chaitra/today is the day of Eid after Ramzan/It is a Friday, listen to me O momin/I start writing, me, Eshak Uddin).[93] Muhammad Munshi ended his *puthi* with: "*tera śo sāt sāle, Jummār phajar kāle tārikh dekhiẏā bandha haila/ tiriś Sābān chānda kalam haila bandha/ ommed nā dekhite āchila*" (The year is 1308, it is the morning of Friday/I stop my pen on this day/it is the 30th of the month of Saban/The pen has stopped/there is nothing more to say).[94] These instances inscribed the act of writing within a sacred calendar, which added a sense of historical temporality to their narratives. Within the text, no important event in the Prophet's life escaped historical time, either Gregorian or that of the Hijri Islamic calendar. Such an attempt at historicisation was constantly validated by references to the *hadis*, *tafsir* and *tarikh* texts, creating an ambivalence with the overlap between calendar and scriptural times. The authors of

religious modernity articulated in *jātīẏa sāhitya* attempted to separate them from such overlaps. The following chapters will show, however, that the rationale of Islamic discourses and historicisation of the events from Muhammad's time to the battle of Karbala actually carried the ambivalence of the rational-historical and the extraordinary-mythological which formed the core values of the religious and literary modernity of *jātīya sāhitya*. If the Sufi orientation of the *maẓhabi* position is the ideational thematic for the majority of the Dobhāshī Kārbālā texts that were discussed in this chapter, how was this literarised in *jātīya sāhitya* written in standardised Bangla? I will discuss in the remaining chapters the significance of such Sufi orientations and adherence to the *maẓhab* in generic, linguistic and thematic terms and explore how such orientations impacted the formation of social institutions and the wider multilingual literary networks of Bengali Muslims.

Notes

1 Shah Abdul Oyahed Ebrahim, *Phesānāẏe Śore-Keẏāmat* (Bogra: Choudhury Press, 1897), 1.
2 See Pirbhai, *Reconsidering Islam* in a South Asian Context (Leiden & Boston: E. J. Brill, 2009); Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Vaseleios Syros, "An Early Modern South Asian Thinker on the Rise and Decline of Empires: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi, the Mughals, and the Byzantines," *Journal of World History* 23, no. 4 (December 2012): 793–840.
3 Pirbhai, *Reconsidering Islam*, 14.
4 For a detailed study, see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871–1905: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981); Gautam Bhadra, *Imān o Niśān*: *Uniś Śatake Bāṃlār Krishak Caitanyer Ek Adhyāẏ* (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 1994).
5 Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslim*, 1981.
6 Ahmed Sharif, *Madhyajuger Sāhitye Samāj o Sanskṛitir Rūp* (Dhaka: Samay, 2004).
7 Gautam Bhadra, *Imān o Niśān*: *Uniś Śatake Bāṃlār Krishak Caitanyer Ek Adhyāẏ* (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 1994).
8 Neyamat Ullah, *Hujjutol Momenin* (Karatiya: Mahmudiya Jantra, 1890).
9 Samiruddin, *Bedārol Gaphelin*, 4th ed. (Calcutta: Published by Tajaddin Mahammad, 1879); and Munshi Muhammad Abdul Gani, *Neyāmate Dwaniyā o Ākherāt*, 2nd ed. (Dacca: Hoseniya Press, 1903).
10 Abbachh Ali Nazir, *Kalir Phakirer Khelā o Ālim Ganer Nachhihat* (Dacca: Islamiya Press, 1920).
11 As Abdul Aziz in *Tarikā-i Mahāmmadiẏā* (page 18) and Munshi Samiruddin in *Bedārol Gāphelin* (page 2) elaborated.
12 Samiruddin, *Bedārol Gāphelin*, 67–9.
13 Muhammad Oyahed Ebrahim, *Phesānāẏe Śore*-Keẏāmat, 5.
14 Aziz, *Tārikā-i Mahāmmadiẏā*, 16–17 (publication details not available).
15 It is important to note that the female audience was never invoked in the Dobhāshī repertoire. The onus of fulfilling the ethico-moral duties of women

was placed on the shoulders of men, who would in turn act as women's moral authorities, and as their interlocutors with divine authority.

16 In the early modern period, Muhammad's journey through hell and heaven was described in the *miraj* tales (stories on Revelation). In religious tracts like the *Durre Majlis* by Ābdul Hākim (1600–1690), there were mentions of *akherat* (the Day of Judgement) and detailed narration of the experience of the *momin* in hell and heaven who was prescribed the *farz*, *acār* (customs) and *adab* and offered an understanding of *sharī'a*, *halal* and *haram*, *bedayat* (*bid'at*) and some Qur'anic conceptions of Islamic ethico-moral codes. What was different in these reformist tracts was the complete absence of Vaishnavite lexicon and the rhetoric in which Hākim couched his scriptural expositions. The coexistence of Islamic religious terms, Sanskrit poetics and purānic idioms, which was the signature of the 17th-century Bengali authors of Islam, had disappeared altogether in the 19th century. Religious tracts followed the poetics of Dobhāshī, which dissociated itself from Sanskritic parameters and its equivalents in the purānic registers. This difference was not only generic. As has already been mentioned, the ideas of the Hereafter were integrally connected to the larger framework of Islamic reformist movements.

17 Jonab Ali and Jaan Muhammad were Karāmat 'Alī Jaunpurī's disciples, who published numerous religious tracts to spread Hanafi reformist values of their master.

18 For a discussion on the *bahas*, see Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, 1981. See also Mou Banerjee, "The Tale of the Tailor: Munshi Mohammad Meherullah and Muslim–Christian Apologetics in Bengal, 1885–1907," *South Asian Studies* 33, no. 2: 122–136, accessed June 8, 2018, doi: 10.1080/02666030.2017.1354483; A. R. Kapoor, "Reforming the 'Muslims': Piety, State and Islamic Reform Movement in Bengal," *Society and Culture in South Asia* 3, no. 2 (2017): 157–174; and Sufia M. Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 60–65.

19 Walī Allāh unified ibn Arabi's (1165–1240) doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (oneness of being) and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī's (1564–1624) *Waḥdat ash-Shuhūd* (oneness of vision). Walī Allāh favoured the intellectual contributions of the *Khulafā' Rāshidūn* in the domains of the Qur'an, *hadis*, *fiqh*, the Arabic language and spiritual guidance, and he did not encourage reliance on the interpretations of later authors of *maẓhabi fiqh*. Rather, Walī Allāh advocated complete reliance on the six *sahih hadis* – *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan al-Nasa`i*, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* and *Sunan ibn Majah* – the authors of which were usually called the *Tābi'ū al-Tābi'īn* (third generation of Muslims) because they had mediated access to the *Khulafā' Rāshidūn* via the *tābi'ūn* (second generation of Muslims). Walī Allāh considered the later Sunni law schools (*maẓhab*) inadequate guides to religious truth, and he argued for *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) over *taqlid* (imitation of the interpretation of the *ulama*) of any one jurist's school. But Walī Allāh also adjudicated an elitist safeguard by differentiating between the *khas* (the elites) and the *ām* (common masses) regarding their capacities to follow *ijtihād* and *taqlid*, as he held that common folk (including even educated Muslims, who might nonetheless be intellectually inept), if given the choice of *ijtihād*, would fall into error. He resolved the debate over pre-*maẓhab* and post-*maẓhab* Islamic doctrines by saying that the responsibility of *ijtihād* could be entrusted to the

eligible, leaving the vast common population to follow the Hanafi school of law. For more exposition on this subject, see F. A. Qadri, "Indian Response to the Pantheistic Doctrine of Ibn al-'Arabi," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 65 (2004): 335–344; and, Muhammad U. Faruque, "Sufism contra Shariah? Shāh Walī Allāh's Metaphysics of Waḥdat al-Wujūd," *Brill Journal of Sufi Studies* 5, no.1 (2016): 27–57.

20 Barbara Dally Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband (1860–1900)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

21 *Aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm* was later compiled by his disciple Ismail (1779–1831), the grandson of Walī Allāh.

22 Harlan O. Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-Century India: The Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008), 48–49.

23 Hanafi, Malaiki, Shafi'i amd Hanbali, these four Sunni *maẓhab*s (schools of fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence) were initiated by the four scholars, namely Abū Ḥanīfa (699–767), Malik ibn Anas (711–795), Muhammad al-Shafi'i (767–820) and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855).

24 Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival*, 52–56.

25 Bashir Ahmad Khan, "From 'Wahabi' to 'Ahl-i-Hadith': A Historical Analysis," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 61, Part One (2000–2001): 747–760.

26 Karāmat ʿAlī, the most influential *alim* to preach reformist Hanafi ideas across the regions of Bengal and Assam and orient a vast population of vernacular-speaking Muslim masses, wrote about 46 tracts and treatises on theological discourse, explanations of the Qur'an and on the proper methods of prayer and ablution, *juma* and *Eid namaz*, and also explained *tasawwuf*, all of which were critically based on prior texts in Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

27 Jonab Ali, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, 35.

28 Ibid., 73.

29 Uddin, *Dāstān* 3.

30 Jaan Muhammad wrote *Hakikatecchālāt* (Calcutta, Qaderiya Press, 1868) and Muhammad Abdul Gani wrote *Neẏāmate Dwaniyā O Ākherāt* (Dacca: Muhammad Bakshi, 1903) against the Tariqaites.

31 Muhammad Kobad Ali, *Nabābpure Hānāphi Mohāmmadi Ganer Bāhāch* (Dacca: Islamiya Press, 1923), a report on the *bahas* between Ahl-i Hadis and the Hanafis etc.

32 The book against the Mohammadis by Munshi Naimuddin, *Ādellāẏe Hānāphiẏa phi Radde Majhābiẏā* (Karatiya: Mir Atahar Ali, 1894) against the Hanafis, by Babur Ali, *Ekhrājol-Mobtādein phi Radde Pherkāton-Nājin* (Baruipur, 1925); and on Hanafi and Ahl-i Hadis *bahas* by Ruhul Amin, *Sāẏkātol Mochlemin* (Calcutta,1922).

33 See Francis Robinson, "Other-Worldly and This-Worldly Islam and the Islamic Revival," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Third Series) 14, no. 1 (Apr 2004): 47–58.

34 Ali and Ohab, *Śahīde Kārbālā*, 1–2.

35 Uddin, *Dāstān*, 18.

36 For a discussion of Muhammad's intercession, see SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2020); and Paul L. Heck, "An Early Response to Wahhabism from Morocco: The Politics of Intercession," *Studia Islamica* 107 (2012): 235–254, accessed November 13, 2021, www.jstor.org/stable/43577526

37 Uddin, *Dāstān*, 13.
38 Abdur Rahman, *Matlubal Momenīn Makchudal Moslemīn* (Basirhat, 1894), 7.
39 Richard Eaton, *Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 269.
40 Valerie J. Hoffman, "Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of a Sufi Practice," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (Aug 1999): 351–69; and Masataka Takeshita, "The Theory of the Perfect Man in Ibn Arabi's Fusu al-Hikam," *Studia Culturae Islamica* 32, no. iii (1987): 87–102, accessed June 30, 2020, www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/orient1960/19/0/19_0_87/_pdf
41 That Muhammad was human, even fallible, was an idea forwarded by Abdul Wahhab (1703–92), the foremost religious scholar and Sunni theologician of 18th-century Central Asia. He was the founder of the most important reformist movement of the period, named Salafism, which is more popularly known as Wahhabism. Abdul Wahhab's life narrative of Muhammad showed that, apart from the events of the Revelation, Muhammad was a human being whose emotions were intrinsically relatable and whose actions could be imitated by ordinary human beings. See Martin Thomas Riexinger, "Rendering Muḥammad Human Again: The Prophetology of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792)," *Numen* 6, no. 1 (2013): 103–118.
42 Here is an example how the Dobhāshī poets used Arabic-Persian loanwords – *nachhihat/nasihat,* Ar. (instruction), *parhejgar/parhaīz gar,* Ar. (abstinate), *khauf,* Ar. (fearful of Allah), *dar,* Pr. (dread) *ajāb/aẕāb,* Ar. (punishment inside the grave), *lājem/lāzim,* Ar. (mandatory), *barbād,* Ar. (waste), *gonā/gunāh,* Pr. (sin), *Ālam,* Ar. (the universe), *sunnah* (Instructions of Muhammad).
43 In the Shīʿa *hadis*, a sermon delivered by Muhammad near a pool (*ghadīr*) in the valley of Khumm has been exalted, in opposition to the Sunni version of Muhammad's choice of his Caliphate. In this sermon, Muhammad made a declaration in favour of Ali.
44 Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Nebil Husayn, "The Rehabilitation of ʿAlī in Sunnī Ḥadīth and Historiography," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29, no. 4 (2017): 565–583.
45 Alessandro Monsutti, Silvia Naef, Farian Sabahi, eds., *The Other Shi'ites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).
46 Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam (a Historical Background)* (California: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).
47 Robert Brenton Betts, *The Sunni-Shi'a Divide: Islam's Internal Divisions and Their Global Consequences* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2013): 150; and Sayyid Husayn Muhammad Ja'fari, *The Origins and Early Development of Shīʿa Islam* (Qum: Ansariya Publications, 2014).
48 Matti Moosa, *Extreme Shīītes: The Ghulat Sect* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 64–65.
49 Cited in Claude Addas, "The Muhammadian House: Ibn Arabi'c concept of *ahl al-bayt*," *The Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 50 (2011), accessed May 17, 2020, https://ibnarabisociety.org/prophet-muhammad-family-claude-addas/

50 In certain Sunni *hadis* traditions, the descendants of Muhammad's paternal uncles Abu Talib and al-'Abbas are included too.
51 Since the 13th century, the Persianate Sufi traditions had developed a more formal discourse of pro-Alid mysticism in Safavid Iran (1501–1736). In Safavid Iran, the idea of a fraternal bond spread across territories, where the cosmopolitan rhetoric of chivalry (*futuwat*), mystical knowledge (*tasawwuf*) and mystical love (*muhabbat*) congealed to constitute and convey pro-Alid piety. See Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), 165; Derryl N. Maclean and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed, eds., *Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); and Colin Paul Mitchell, "To Preserve and Protect: Husayn Va'iz-i Kashifi and Perso-Islamic Chancellery Culture," *Iranian Studies* "Husayn Vaʿiz-i Kashifi" (Special issue) 36, no. 4 (2003): 485–507, accessed May 15, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/i401572
52 Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 165. For the South Asian context, see David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); and Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*: *Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
53 Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 161–190.
54 Together with this mystical dimension of Kashifi's work, there was another parallel reception of his writings on Alid martyrdom, marking a split within the Persianate worlds that eventually led to a shift from Alid mystical-chivalrous piety to the emergence of a separate Shīʿa Imami theocracy. Ibid., 218–236; for more on the development of such emotions and practices, Ibid.
55 Bāhrām Khan went on to chronicle other significant events that also transpired on the same day (albeit in different years) in the lives of other prophets like Namrud, Yahya-Zacaria and Soleiman. Ali Ahmed, eds., *Imām Vijaẏa: Kabi Doulat Ujir Bāhrām Khān* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1984), 47.
56 Khān, *Imām Vijaẏa*, 81.
57 Ibid., 65; Mazharul Islam, ed., *Kabi Heyāt Māmud* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi Biswabidyalay, 1961), 132.
58 Quoted in Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Socio-political Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2009), 123–124.
59 Shah Abdul Rahim, *Atharba Mohammadī Veda* (Calcutta; Milan Press, 1891 [1298 BS]) (no pagination).
60 Karāmat ʿAlī Jaunpuri, *Murādul Muridin*, trans. A. B. M. Salahuddin Laskar (Dhaka: Fahimm Prakashani, 1978 [1874]), 7.
61 Jaunpurī, *Murādul Muridin*, 43.
62 Ibid., 49.
63 Mohammad Mahmoud al-Domi, "The Cry in The Holy Quran and the Effect on the Human Behavior," *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 20 (2015), accessed May 20, 2020, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1079060.pdf
64 Uddin, *Dāstān*, 22–23.
65 Tears became integral to devotionalism connected with the reading of the Qur'an, and towards the prophets upon whom Allah had bestowed His favour:

> Those were they unto whom Allâh bestowed His Grace from among the Prophets, of the offspring of Adam, and of those whom We carried (in the ship) with Nûh (Noah), and of the offspring of Ibrâhim (Abraham) and Israel and from among those whom We guided and chose. When the Verses of the Most Beneficent (Allâh) were recited unto them, they fell down prostrating and weeping.

Surah Maryam, 58; *The Noble Quran in the English Language: A Summarized Version of At-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir with comments from Sahih al-Bukhari*, eds., Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina: King Fahd Complex, 2011), 425.

66 Muhammad Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā,* 1912 [1900], n.p.

67 A collection of the speeches of Sayyid Jahangir Simnani, the Sufi master of the Chishtiyya and Qadiriyya orders in the 14th century.

68 Ali and Ohab, *Śahīde Kārbālā,* 102.

69 Muhammad Ikram Chaghatai, *Shah Walī Allāh (1703–1762): His Political and Religious Thought* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2005), 252–257; and al-Ghazali, *Socio-political Thought of Walī Allāh*, 92.

70 Vincent J. Cornell, *Voices of Islam: Voices of Tradition*, Vol. 1 (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 127.

71 For a detailed discussion of this period, see Muhammad Ali, *The Early Caliphate* (Lahore & USA: Ahmadiya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, 2015); and Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession of Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

72 Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, n.p.

73 Ali, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, 56.

74 Karāmat 'Alī Jaunpurī, *Mephtāhul Jānnāt bā Beheśter Kunjī* (translation of Jaunpurī's Miftāh al-Jannat).

75 Jonab Ali, by attempting several genres, from *namaz* manuals like the *Nāmāj Māhātya* (The Superior Value of Prayer), *adab* tracts like *Jiẏārate Kabar* (Veneration of the Grave) or *Phajilate Darud* (The Excellence of Invocation to Complement the Prophet), and historical narratives like *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, *Jaṇge Khaẏbar* (on the battle between Muslims and Jews at Khaybar) and the *Jehāde Islāmiẏā* (battles during the reign of the second Caliph Umar), perfectly exemplified authors making creative inter-generic connections between reformist articulations.

76 Ali, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā*, 68.

77 For a discussion of Abu Bakr's position in the early Sunni biographies and historiographical traditions, see John Renard, "Abu Bakr in Tradition and Early Historiography," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Tradition*, ed., John Renard (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2009), 15–29.

78 In the earliest biographical dictionary, *Kitāb aṭ-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* by Ibn Sa'd (784–845), Aisha stood out for her role within the Prophetic household and her servitude towards her husband in matters like ablutions, and her constant presence on his deathbed was emphasised.

79 Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana and Meena Sharify-Funk, "Muslim Women Peacemakers as Agents of Change," in *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam,* ed., Qamar ul-Huda (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010), 187, 179–198; Aisha Gessinger, " 'A'isha bint

Abu Bakr and her Contributions to the Formation of the Islamic Tradition," *Religion Compass* 5, no.1 (2011): 37–49, accessed May 26, 2020, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2010.00260.x

80 "Fitnah," *Britannica.com*, accessed May 26, 2020, www.britannica.com/topic/fitnah#ref176002

81 Denise A. Spellberg, "The Politics of Praise: Depictions of Khadija, Fatima and Aisha in Ninth Century Muslim Sources," *Literature East and West* 26 (1990): 130–148. There were attempts to write modern biographies of these pious women in standardised Bangla in the early-20th century in order to provide the women of the community with a template for the ethical principles of Islam that they were expected to follow.

82 The importance of Aisha and Fatima lies in the fact that they were both born Muslim, unlike Muhammad's mother and first wife, and their opposition as contemporaries informed debates over gender roles, sexual mores, politics and theology in early Islam, and would later go on to shape sectarian strife and contesting models of devotionalism in Islam.

83 Mary F. Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women: Mary and Fatima in Medieval Christianity and Shi'ite Islam* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

84 Al-Adab Al-Mufrad: 947. Accessed May 26, 2021. The Story of Fatima Az Zahra (R.A.) (southmetroic.org).

85 *Mephtāhul Jānnāt bā Beheśter Kunjī, hakikacchālāt, Bedāral Gāphelīn – adab* treatises and *namaz* manuals already mentioned in this chapter. There was a great amount of literature that offered structured ethico-moral roles for Muslim women as integral to Islamic reforms and as a prerogative to male moral action.

86 Uddin, *Dāstān*, 503.

87 Ibid., 504–505.

88 Ibid., 32.

89 Ibid., 24.

90 Ibid., 526.

91 As a Sunni revivalist reformist movement in India, the Deobandi school of thought adhered to Sunni Hanafi *maẓhab*. It was initiated by formed in the late-19th century around the Darul Uloom Madrassa in Deoband, India. The founder reformers were Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi. The Deobandi movement championed the teachings of Islamic theology and fiqh with a deliberation to spread Islamic scriptural education in colonial India. Its political wing, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, founded in 1919, contributed to the anti-Partition politics in India.

92 In this book, the issues of women's reform and new education and the original perspectives of women which flourished in Bengal have not been discussed. For such discussions, see, Sonia Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939* (Verlag: Brill, 1996); and Mahua Sarkar, *Visible Histories, Disappearing Women: Producing Muslim Womanhood in Late Colonial Bengal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For a detailed study on the education of *sharif* women in the reformed Urdu-speaking public sphere with the intention of orientating the *zanana* (the private space inhabited by women), which spread since the late-19th century through the initiatives of reformist educators, see Barbara Dally Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana*

Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar (California: University of California Press, 1992); and Faisal Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform in Muslim India, 1857–1900," *South Asia* XIV, no. 1 (1991): 141–153.

93 Uddin, *Dāstān*, 385.

94 Munshi, *Śahid-i-Kārbālā,* n.p.

3 The Rhetoric of Loss and Recovery
The Moment of Muslim *jātīyatā*

Jātīẏa gourab, jātīẏa unnati ebaṃ jātīẏa jīban gaṭhan karibār ekti pradhān upādān ekatā. Kintu uhā samājer sange driṛharūpe saṃlipta; ataẏeb, samāj tyag karile jātīẏa unnatir āśā sudūr parāhata.

The most crucial element for the construction of *jātīẏa* pride, *jātīẏa* progress and *jātīẏa* life is unity. But that is strongly and integrally connected to *samāj*; hence, if we let go of *samāj*, *jātīẏa* progress is impossible to attain.

(Maulavi Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra* (The Portrait of Islam and Muslim Society), 1907)[1]

Prologue

The idea of a collective Bengali Muslim community as the *ummah* (*ommat* in Dobhāshī) changed perceptibly in the 1880s as a new generation of reformist *ulama* and literati across the districts started responding to the reformist ethos to crystallise as a *jāti*. They began identifying with Sanskritised Bangla as their preferred public language, claiming Bangla as their mother tongue and articulating Islamic tenets and themes in modern genres. These authors deliberately moved away from the Dobhāshī repertoire to offer Islamic themes in modern genres, including history, biography, modern prose and poetry. In doing so, they largely appropriated the literary styles and thematic arrangements available in the modern Bangla literary discourses of the time, authored mainly by the Hindu and Brahmo literati. They adopted terms like *jātī*, *jātīẏa* and *samāj* from these Hindu and Brahmo repertoires to define the collective identity and attributes of Bengali Muslims and created *jātīẏa sāhitya* as a modern literary discursive domain to articulate these attributes. The epigraph from Maulavi Sheikh Abdul Jabbar's (1881–1918) book on Islamic history and ideals mentioned above testifies to such sensibilities. Sheikh Abdul Jabbar of Mymensingh district was among a group of polyglot Muslim litterateurs who simultaneously took part in government education and the traditional *madrasa* and adopted Sanskritised Bangla for

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their medium of writing since the 1880s.[2] In the writings of the authors of his generation, there is an evident sense of loss of past Islamic glories, which they strove to regain by devising *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, therefore, became a domain of literary-linguistic innovation to articulate this sense of loss and to find ways for possible restoration.

The ideas related to the loss and the recovery of past glories in response to colonial domination available in the modern Bangla literary repertoire were the creations of Hindu nationalists who had entrenched it firmly within a staunch anti-Muslim rhetoric. To reclaim their belongingness in Bengal as Bengalis and to establish Islam as a rational knowledge system, the *ulama* and Muslim literati had to adopt the genres and poetics of standardised Bangla that had evolved in the Bengali Hindu and Brahmo public spheres. At the same time, in order to efficiently articulate Muslim *jātīẏa* attributes, essentially different from Hindu territorial nationalism, it was imperative for them to negate the basic themes of the Bangla literature written by, or belonging to, the Hindu literati. The Muslim experience of loss and the possible formats for recovery, even when following the affective rhetoric of Hindu nationalist literature, were paradigmatically different. It was one of transterritorial Muslim civilisational loss, across time and space, which prevailed in the formulation of loss and recovery in the Muslim *jātīẏa* discourses. It was unlike the Hindu experience articulated as the conquest of *Aryavarta* by the Muslim rulers which led to a 'civilisational wound' and then a singular event of colonial territorial domination as the Hindu nationalists had perceived.

Not only did Bengali Muslims have to work within the boundaries of the Hindu nationalist rhetoric while formulating their temporally and spatially different collective consciousness, they also had to reinstitute the past glories of Islam in response to the proselytising propaganda of Christian missionaries against Islam and its Prophet. Muslim authors constantly countered the discourses of the Christian missionaries and those of the Hindu nationalists through works composed in multiple literary genres – ranging from the translation of the Qur'an to the history of early Islam. *Jātīẏa sāhitya* was a creative literary means of reaffirming the superior virtues of Islam and of restating the glory that it had achieved in Muhammad's lifetime and during the Early Caliphate.

The Bengali Muslims claimed Bengaliness to counter their othering in Hindu nationalist discourses and reaffirmed Bangla as their mother tongue while choosing Sanskritised Bangla as their "public language."[3] It was a deliberate decision to assert their Bengaliness against the use of Urdu in the exclusionary literary and ideational domain inhabited by elite Muslims across Bengal. Socio-literary organisations for the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Bengal like the Mohammedan Literary Society (1863, founder Nawab Abdul Latif) and the Calcutta National Muhammadan Association (1878, founder Syed Ameer Ali) had already been founded earlier by Urdu elites and had energised a vast Urdu-speaking social network (see Section 3.1.2). So far excluded from the

Urdu public sphere, the Bengali Muslims began to organise themselves since the 1880s by publishing periodicals and forming *anjuman*s (socio-religious organisations). In the periodicals, a newly built connection with the Urdu modern literary sphere may be discerned as a new linguistic-cultural phenomenon, different from the reception of Urdu scriptural material in the Dobhāshī repertoire.

In this chapter, I trace how the *ulama* and the Muslim literati in Bengal came together and forged allegiances to form various modern collectives by establishing *anjuman*s, publishing journals and periodicals, and building new connection with the Urdu modern literary sphere. A new connection with pan-Islamism as a modern, transterritorial understanding and a regional awakening of Bengaliness were the most important themes during the inauguration of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. This chapter marks how the Bengali Muslim literary experiences entered the new domain of Arabic-Persian multilinguality via the expanding literary network of Urdu, and how *jātīẏa sāhitya* began with acts of translation and transcreation in a multilingual environment. In more structured print endeavours connected to these new public institutions and platforms, the modes of contact with the Urdu scriptural material changed, as it were, in the Dobhashi repertoire. Multiple kinds of reception and rejection of varied sources in Arabic, Persian and Urdu may be discerned in the literary endeavours of the Muslim literati who simultaneously adopted various themes and genres from standardised Bangla literature. Syed Ameer Ali's elite endeavours towards forming social organisations and forging a modern discourse of Islam influenced a section of Bengali Muslims, who were simultaneously compelled to create a space separate from the exclusionary and dominant discourse of the Urdu-speaking Muslim elite like Ameer Ali. The Urdu-speaking elite, while placing their demands before the British for the economic and educational empowerment of Muslims, did not include the Bengali Muslims on their agenda, considering them racially inferior.[4] In this chapter I also address the debates on Bangla and Urdu as the language of the Muslims in Bengal, as Bengali Muslims attempted to use Sanskritised Bangla as the medium of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, while claiming Arabic as their *jātīẏa* language. This chapter dwells on how the tripartite axes of Bengali Muslim identity – pan-Islamic, pan-Indian and regional – made it difficult to imagine a monolingual and territorially sustained national or regional identity for the Bengali Muslim community. It also lays the groundwork for a study of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, which in turn will carry forward the discussion on modern literary activities by Bengali Muslims. The next two chapters – on history and biography (Chapter 4), and literary genres (Chapter 5), respectively – offer a detailed discussion of the Karbala trope across genres.

The battle of Karbala was narrativised in *jātīẏa sāhitya* as a means of resolving the crisis in the Caliphate, similar to the Dobhāshī tradition, so as to fulfil the requirements of Islamic reform. However, this resolution to restore the glory of Islam, as ideated in *jātīẏa sāhitya*, was connected

to contemporary politics, transnationally, through identification as the *ummah*. Here, Husayn's virtues of *sabr* and *shahādat* as the replica of Muhammad's ideals continued to form important tropes exemplifying the glorious ideals of Islam. Where Hindu nationalism was based on the indomitable martial glory of the Aryan race, encompassing the Sikhs, the Marathas and Rajputs, as well as Pratapaditya of Bengal,[5] in Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, the quietude of Husayn's martyrdom was celebrated along with the martial glory of Muhammad and the Early Caliphate through historical, biographical and literary expressions.

To give one example, Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, in his *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra* (1907), expressed in long lyrical stanzas an acute lament over the loss of Islamic glory, both epistemological and cultural, in the modern times of western imperialism, and suggested the path for Bengali Muslims to recover the era when Muslims had created "the most superior civilisation in the world."[6] The text echoes the lament over the loss and optimism for the recovery of Islamic pride which had emerged as a stock metaphor in the domain of the Muslim *jātīẏa* literary sphere. The loss of Islamic glory that Jabbar articulated was, in transterritorial terms, across regions, and along multiple timelines, and thus different from the Hindu template which was based on the defeat of the Aryans at the hands of the Muslims. Terms like *jāti*, *jātīẏa unnati* (progress/upliftment), *jātīẏa sāhitya* (literature) and *samāj* (community) were borrowed freely from the Hindu nationalist rhetoric to create a vocabulary of identity formation for Bengali Muslims.[7] The promise of recovery of glories lost was expressed through Jabbar's repeated use of words like *ābār* or *punaḥ* (once more, yet again), which carried the same assurance as the prefix "re-" in renaissance, and which had already been creatively inaugurated in the Hindu nationalist vocabulary.[8] In a lyrical section titled "*Se din phiriẏā punaḥ āsibe ki ār?*" (Will those days be back again?) in *Islām Citra*, Abdul Jabbar employs an affective tone predominant in such discourses:

> Se din phiriẏā punaḥ āsibe ki ār?
> Jedin Islām chila bareṇya sabār,
> Se din phiriẏā ki go āsibe ki ār?
> Laksha laksha bīr daksha Islām rakshaṇe,
> Āropita harshe sthir bhīm raṇāṇgane
> Bāṛi ghar chāṛi kata śata jan ār
> Dur deśe giẏe dharmma karita pracār
> Se din phiriẏā punaḥ āsibe ki ār?
> …
> Je din Moslem chila saber pradhān
> Se din Moslem grihe chila dhan-mān;
> Islām-mahimā gīt ha'ta anibār
> Se din phiriẏā punaḥ āsibe ki ār?

Will those days be back again?
When Islam was hailed by all the races
Will those days ever be back again?
When millions of heroes marched along
To show the indomitable spirit of Islam
Heeding to the call of Islam, preachers left their homes
They spread the teaching of Islam, country after country,
as they roamed
Will those days be back again?
When Islam was supreme among all civilisations
When Muslims had wealth and honour
Odes to Islam were always chanted
Will those days be back again?
(Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra*)[9]

Islām Citra has both lyrical exposition and prose sections. Where the affective lament of the poetic persona stopped, the more critical discursive voice of the prose narrator began (an example of which has already been quoted in the beginning of this chapter). This second voice employed equally the strength of affect and lyricism in order to evoke in its readers the surge of *jātīyata*.

Finally, the mass appeal of the Khilafat Movement (1919–1924) and the impact of constitutional reform in the 1920s have been identified by historians as significant factors for Muslim communal identity to congeal, which was now "defined through political categories along religious lines."[10] Scholars have attempted to read this crystallisation of community consciousness through various interpretive lenses. To a growing scholarship since the 1980s, the construction of the Bengali Muslim identity was facilitated through the lens of class (the peasantry). Marxist historians like Narahari Kaviraj interpreted the Faraizi movement and the reformist upsurge led by Mir Nisar Ali in terms of a class struggle where Muslim peasants rose against the Hindu and Muslim landlords.[11] There have been scholarly critiques against positioning of peasant consciousness in the monolithic ideas of class that include in reality multiple social groups and linguistic orientations, and the role of the *ulama*.[12] But these historians did not acknowledge peasants' improvement in Islamic soteriological terms. In the study of the political fields, the monolithic idea of territorial nationalism has been critiqued by some scholars who have highlighted the participation of the Bengali Muslim political actors in regional and national politics to bring forth an idea of composite and federal nationalism more applicable to the Indian context.[13] But because of their disciplinary orientation, these studies do not take account of the exploratory domain of the Bengali Muslim public sphere by focusing on literature, poetic-aesthetic choices, and the issues of linguistic affiliations. The linguistic-discursive activities and religious orientations of political actors like Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan and Maniruzzaman

Islamabadi, and their connections to print culture that mobilised the reading public along *jatīya* sensibilities, remain unexplored in these studies of political formations.[14] Historians have attempted to address this lacuna by reading Bengali Muslim literary cultures as integrally connected with regional identity, political orientation, Islam and literary modernity. But the impact of Islamic reform on Muslim literature has not received proper attention in these studies.[15] This chapter inaugurates a discussion of the long-term engagements of the Bengali Muslims with the issues of language and literature to define the attributes of a "public" that they termed *jātīya*. This chapter begins a discussion of the many discursive and poetic ways of defining *jātīya* ethos that the Bengali Muslims envisaged, by founding public institutions and literary and through religious mobilisation.

3.1 The beginning of *jātīẏatā*: Bengaliness and Muslimness

> In Calcutta the Hindus are called Bengalees by every Mohamedan who has never travelled beyond the Marhata Ditch, as if such Mohamedans, by the fact of their professing the faith of the Great Arabian Prophet, have a right to be non-Bengalees.
>
> (Maulavi Yaqinuddin Ahmed, *The Moslem Chronicle*, 1896)[16]

This idea of the Muslims of Bengal being of foreign origin came from the elite Urdu-speaking Muslim quarters of Bengal.[17] From the statement quoted above, it can be deduced that immigration theory as the basis of elite origin of the Muslims in Bengal was contagious enough to even influence the local-born Muslims which the author Yaqinuddin Ahmed humours. Khondkar Fuzli Rubbee claimed that, "[t]he ancestors of the present Musalmans of this country were certainly those Musalmans who came here from foreign parts during the rule of the former sovereigns."[18] This racialisation of identity along communal lines echoed in East Pakistan as Abul Hayat narrated how he was informed in a predominantly Muslim village in Faridpur: "Sir, only Muslims live in this village. There are no Bengalis here."[19] Such assertions of the community's aspiration can be related to the desire for ashrafisation[20] that had taken root in the late-19th century, in the constant structuring of Islamic beliefs and everyday customs, with the advent of Islamic reform.[21] At the same time, such a self-definition was forged in response to the idea of the Muslims as foreigners propounded by Hindu cultural nationalists. By positing the Muslims as the racial other, the Hindu literati marked Bengaliness as essentially Hindu.[22] Saratchandra Chattopadhyay (1876–1938), one of the most important Bengali authors, opened his much-read novel *Srīkānta* (1917) with this telling sentence: "There was a football match between the Bengalis and the Muslims."[23] The making of the ideational and aesthetic dimensions of Bengali modernity, and a Bengali public sphere, was predicated upon the structural erasure of the Bengali identity of the Bangla-speaking Muslims.

Mir Mosharraf Hossain (1847–1912) of Kushtia district, one of the iconic figures of Muslim literary modernity, observed in his autobiography *Āmār Jībanī* (1908–10) that the rural *mullah*s "hated the study of Bangla [language],"[24] while historian Rafiuddin Ahmed notes the preference of the rural Muslims for the Islamic languages – Arabic, Persian and Urdu – over Bangla.[25] But apathy towards Bangla that Hossain observed around him as an author and Rafiuddin Ahmed analysed as a historian can be translated as the reformist *ulama*'s scepticism towards Sanskritised Bangla. Here the *ulama* that both Hossain and Ahmed referred to belonged to the older generation who preferred overt Arabicisation and considered any adherence to *tatsama* Bangla as blatant Sanskritisation of Muslimness. Their literary choice was Dobhāshī, different from the linguistic culture to which Hossain himself belonged. *Jātīẏa sāhitya* was set up in opposition to the elite Urdu-speaking social groups which claimed Urdu as the public language of the Bengali Muslims and also a group of *ulama* who demanded an overt Arabicisation of the format and script when adopting Bangla as the medium of communication. But the connections of Bengali Muslims with Urdu did not follow any singular path to define the multilingual aspects of their identity (see Sections 3.3 and 5.1.2), which makes the processes of defining Bengaliness for the Muslims in Bengal such a challenging journey.

The loss of the moral and political glory of Islamic civilisation as a transterritorial experience, and the degradation of Bengali Muslims was interpreted by the *ulama* and the literati as a specific regional phenomenon. They observed and keenly felt the absence of social empowerment among the Bengali Muslims in comparison to the Hindus of Bengal and of the Muslims in other countries. They ideated *jātīẏa sāhitya* with the aim of disseminating "the events of glory of their ancestors and devotional narratives and the sacred ethical codes of the sacred religion Islam."[26] To boost the confidence of the Bengali Muslims, the authors declared that the very first generation of Muslims, including the *ṣaḥāba*, were the ancestors (*pūrbapurush*) of Bangla-speaking Muslims.[27] The degraded condition of the Bengali Muslims was repeatedly described as the outcome of their ignorant slumber (*ajñānatār nidrā*),[28] the indulgent darkness of illusion (*bhrāntir mohāndhakār*)[29] and their love for lazing on the bed (*ālasya śayyā*).[30] They were exhorted to come out to the courtyard of *jātīẏa sāhitya* in order to recover their lost glory as Muslims.

Wajed Ali, in his presidential lecture at the 5th conference of the Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti (BMSS) in 1925, marked the reasons behind such degeneration in very specific regional terms.

> The Bengali Muslims' contempt for their mother tongue (*mātribhāshā*) Bangla has made their condition so miserable! They live with self-loathing (*ātma-ghriṇā*) and self-dismissal (*ātma-tācchilya*) by internalising of the negative and vilified portrayal of the Muslim characters in the Hindu writings.[31]

He was succinct in prescribing *jātīẏa sāhitya* as the remedy (*pratikār*) for this ailment (*byādhi*). And the stentorian tone was evident in Wajed Ali's voice as he said, "[t]he Muslims, to save themselves from this utter distress, ought to cultivate Bangla language with extreme seriousness, across age and class and plunge into the nurturing (*carcā*) of *jātīẏa sāhitya*."[32]

The efforts to create a literary public through the cultivation of *jātīẏa sāhitya* were strategic and creative, as was the adoption of Sanskritised Bangla. Muhammad Babur Ali, the editor of the *Ahle Hādis*, the periodical run by the Ahl-i Hadis reformist group, invoked all Bengali Muslims to emulate the ideals of great men by basically referring to the members of the Early Caliphate who chose to serve Islam and the *qawm* (community) as the ultimate goal of their lives.[33] In perfect standardised Bangla, Babur Ali put forward three Arabic words signifying religion, community and service – *din*, *kaom* (*qawm*) and *khedmat*. But, *din* and *qawm*, despite being two very essential Islamic terms, were not generally used in the writings of the new age *ulama* and literati, including that of Babur Ali himself. These authors preferred rather to use *tatsama* Bangla word *dharma* for *din*. In the same sentence, Babur Ali used *dharmabīr* – the warriors of religion – to designate the first four Caliphs. In the search for equivalents, Bengali Muslims employed *jātīẏa* as the universal attribute of the Islamic transterritorial *ummah* and designated *samāj* (society) its regional collective – the Bengali Muslim community. The Bengali Muslims, instead of adopting terms like *millat* (transterritorial community of Muhammad), *qawm* (territorially marked Islamic community) and *watan* (homeland) from the Urdu public articulations in north India, used the term *jātīẏa* from Hindu nationalist discourses as their key qualifier to articulate issues in Bengal related to Islamic essence (*jātīẏa bhāb*), ideal (*jātīẏa ādarśa*), literary modernity (*jātīẏa sāhitya*) and upliftment of Muslims (*jātīẏa unnati*). In this process, *jātīẏa* became a stretchable term, interchangeably used for both transterritorial and regional belongingnesses. The litterateur Mirza Mohammad Yusufzai (Rajshahi, 19th century), in *Soubhagya Sparśamaṇi* (1895–1903), a collaborative translation of al-Ghazzali's (1058–1111) *Kimiya-i Sa'adat* (The Alchemy of Happiness) mentioned that the dissemination of Islamic religious ideas (*dharmatattva*) was necessary for the *jātīẏa unnati* of Muslim brothers and sisters (*swa-jātīẏa*) of the land of Bengal (*swa-deśīẏa*).[34]

Such ideations began in the 1880s through a layered and multidiscursive response to various ideological narratives that projected Islam in a negative light. By then, there was a constant threat from the Christian missionaries, who preached in the public spaces across Bengal and published tracts to prove that Islam was a deviant religion. Defamations of Islam by the Christian missionaries prompted outrage among the Bengali Muslims, who then formulated an energetic counter-narrative based on the glory of Islam. They also had to counter derogatory representations of Muslims in the modern Bangla literary sphere, deeply entrenched in

Hindu nationalist sensibilities which hegemonically influenced the entire Hindu public sphere. At the same time, they derived generic expressions and linguistic templates from the *jātīẏa sāhitya* of the Hindus. All these strands took place in the context of the adoption of the pan-Islamic ideas of Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī, which oriented the Bengali Muslims towards a modern understanding of transterritorial belongingness as regional Muslims. Simultaneously, Ameer Ali's writings offered the Bengali Muslims an idea about the historicisation of the Islamic past and the discursive formulation of the life of Muhammad.

3.1.1 The jātīẏa *between Syed Ameer Ali and Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī*

Two icons who remained influential in the formulation of *jātīẏa sāhitya* in transterritorial and multilingual terms were Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī (1839–1897) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928). It was the visit to Calcutta by al-Afghānī, the most prolific pan-Islamist, en route to Constantinople in 1871 that roused the Bengali Muslims to a modern transterritorial emotion. The *ulama* and literati were exposed to al-Afghānī's speeches as they were translated from Persian to Urdu. A group of *ulama* and literati, from different districts, came together to translate al-Afghānī's biography to Bangla. Reyazuddin Ahmed Mashadi, author and publisher (Mymensingh district, 1859–1919), Maulavi Meyarazuddin Ahmed, teacher of Arabic and Persian at Doveton College and Saint Xavier's College, author and editor Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmed (Barisal district, 1862–1933), poet Mozammel Haq (Nadia district, 1860–1933) and author and editor Sheikh Abdur Rahim (Basirhat district, 1859–1931) collaborated to compile the Urdu translation (1884) of al-Afghānī's 1881 Persian work *Haqiqat-i Madhhāb-i Nechariyya Bayān-i Hāl-i Nechariyyan* (The Truth about the Nechari Sect and an Explanation of the Necharis). The collaborators published the Bangla translation as *Eslam Tattva bā Mosalmān Dharmer Sārsangraha* in 1888. The translators stated in the Preface that the book may be read as one of the early manifestos of *jātīẏa sāhitya*: "*Bāṇgadeśe Eslāmdharmer śocaniẏa abasthā dekhiẏā tatsaṇgśodhan janya āmrā Eslāmtattva likhite prabritta haiẏāchi…āmāder nabya śikshita bhratribrinder nikat binīta prārthanā ei je tāhārā jena pabitra Eslām dharmer mūl tattva biśeshrūpe abagata haiẏā sva sva kartabya anudhāban karen.*"[35] (We joined hands to write *Eslāmtattva*, feeling great despair over the degraded status of Islam in Bengal. It is our humble proposal to our newly-educated youth that they should know the basic tenets of Islam and understand their responsibilities towards society.) The next volume was published in 1889, the same year this collective started a new periodical, *Sudhākar*, as a *jātīẏa* endeavour to spread the *jātīẏa* sensibilities of Islam among the reading public across Bengal.

In the realm of the *jātīẏa* literary public, there was no unilinear way to interpret religious concepts as internal debates among various

reformist groups grew over the proper rational approach to Islam. The *jātīya* endeavours, based on the pan-Islamic sensibilities of al-Afghani, first congealed around *Sudhākar*. The *Sudhākar* associates adopted al-Afghani's critique of the rationalist position of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh movement.[36] They were not ready to accept and employ Syed Ameer Ali's westernised ideas either and worked out their own ways to rationalise Islamic tenets and to formulate *jātīya sāhitya* accordingly. Ameer Ali's writings became a gateway for the Bengali Muslims to connect to the modern rendition of Islamic history and the life of Muhammad. Ameer Ali's texts, *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (1873), *The Spirit of Islam* (1891) and *A Short History of the Saracens* (1899)[37] based on references ranging from the Qur'an, *hadis*, *fiqh*, *ta'rīkh* (Islamic historical genres), *ṣirāh* (life accounts of Muhammad), the writings of the British Orientalist historians and colonial administrators and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, became an archive for the Bengali Muslims first explored by the members of *Sudhākar*. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Ameer Ali were both westernised in their thought. But their interpretations of the Caliphate and their placement of the *ummah* in relation to territorial nationalism were markedly different from each other. In comparison to the Early Caliphate, the Umayyad hereditary monarchy was considered by Sir Syed Ahmed to be a lesser Caliphate. His conception of the contemporary Caliphate as a lesser political system supported his assessment of the British Empire as a better political and rational system than the Turkish Caliphate of his time.

Ameer Ali, on the other hand, despite being a Shī'a, argued for the superiority of the Sunni Caliphate, a transterritorial Islamic system, against the British imperial power. In his book *A Short History of the Saracens*, he developed an evolutionary history of governance during the Umayyad and the Abbasid periods.[38] Ameer Ali designated the governance of the Early Caliphate as a "republic" and differentiated it as superior to the hereditary governance that started from the Umayyad period.[39] In *A Short History of the Saracens*, all the episodes are arranged in real time and geographical space accompanied by 14 photographic images and 4 maps endowing the past with historicity for the readers. Ameer Ali described the killing of Husayn and his companions in a section titled "the massacre of Kerbela"[40] and designated it as the watershed moment between the republic (Early Caliphate) and the period of hereditary governance (Umayyad Caliphate).

The most curious thing about the ideation of Muslim *jātīya sāhitya* is its reception of information on Islamic history from multiple sources, which were often contradictory or even antagonistic to each other. The varied reading list that the authors of *jātīya sāhitya* utilised included Afghānī's discourses with anti-imperialist religious traditionalism, pan-Islamism with the centrality of the Caliphate in Turkey and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's staunch westernism and his adherence to territorial nationalism that favoured British rule. Though the authors of *jātīya sāhitya* did not

follow Ameer Ali's westernism, their admiration and gratitude towards his discursive efforts was conspicuous in the periodicals. In the periodical *Āhmadī* (1886), published in Tangail district, poet Abdul Hamid Yusufzai commented in an article titled "Musalmāndiger hiter nimitta Honorable Āmīr Ālīr abadān" (The Contributions of the Hon'ble Ameer Ali towards the Uplift of Muslims): "The unparalleled and flaming *jātīya* spirit that Ali had articulated in *Life of Mohammed* and *The Spirit of Islam* is something that no one will be able to do again even after a hundred years."[41] In two of his essays, "A Cry from the Indian Musalman" (1882) and "Indian Retrospections and Comments" (1905) Syed Ameer Ali analysed the marginalised position of the Muslims vis-à-vis the Hindus in educational and economic institutions.[42] Ameer Ali's proclamation, "The Islam of Mohammed, with its stern discipline and its severe morality, has proved itself as the only practical religion for low natures to save them from drifting into lawless materialism,"[43] became a core realisation of the Bengali Muslims to articulate the need for a *jātīya sāhitya*.

Connections with Ameer Ali's oeuvre may be tangibly marked in Reyazuddin Ahmed's translation of Ameer Ali's *A Short History of Saracens* into Sanskritised Bangla as *Ārab Jātir Itihās* (volume one in 1910, volume two in 1912). Before Reyazuddin translated Ameer Ali, Ameer Ali's works started to be read and referred to in the Bengali literary circuit. Sheikh Abdur Rahim's biography of the Prophet, titled *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban O Dharmanīti* (1887), was a response to Ameer Ali's *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* at the time of pan-Islamic awakening, before al-Afghānī's ideas came into circulation through translation into Bangla. Even though they did not apply Ameer Ali's form of modernity, the *Sudhākar* associates formulated modern terminologies in Bangla defining the Islamic state, governance and the *ummah* based on Ameer Ali's English equivalents. They chose Ameer Ali's "nation" and translated it as *jātī* rather than overtly falling back on the various equivalents that were emerging in the north Indian Urdu public sphere. They chose a modern *prajātantra* from Sanskritised Bangla to translate the "republic" that Ameer Ali used to signify the Early Caliphate.[44]

Besides Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's biography of Muhammad in Arabic titled *Al-Khuṭbat al-Ahmadiyya fi'l Arab wa'i Ṣīrāt al-Muhammadiyya* (A Series of Essays on the Life of Prophet Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Therein, 1969), and Ameer Ali's *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (1873), Sheikh Abdur Rahim referred to various Arabic and Persian source texts, which he mentioned to have consulted with Maulavi Meyarazuddin Ahmed as his interlocutor. Many of Abdur Rahim's Arabic-Persian references had already been cited by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Ameer Ali, such as to Ibn-Hisham (d. 833), *Madārij un-Nabuyyat* (The Status of Prophethood) and *Jazb-ul-Quloob* (The Mystical Absorption of the Heart) by Sheikh 'Abd al-Haq al-Dihlawī (1551–1642) among others.

Though Ameer Ali's literary oeuvre remained a nodal discursive point of reference in *jātīẏa sāhitya*, in his agendas to empower Muslims of Bengal with equal educational and economic opportunities for the Muslims of Bengal on a par with the Hindus, Bangla-speaking Muslims in general were never included.[45] Nawab Abdul Latif recommended a large number of separate primary schools for Bangla-speaking Muslims of the lower economic groups with a Islamicised Bangla as the medium of instruction.[46] Ameer Ali was also against any pedagogical system inclusive of class and linguistic affiliations which would have Urdu-speaking and Bangla-speaking Muslims together.[47] When the Central National Muhammadan Association (CNMA), one of the most prolific socio-reformist platforms of the Urdu-speaking elite in Bengal, founded by Ameer Ali in 1878, started to spread its several branches in various districts of Bengal, it facilitated the expansion of an Urdu-speaking public network. The proliferating branches of the CNMA across the districts, and their functioning to uphold the causes of the elite and educated Urdu-speaking Muslims, mobilised Bengali Muslims to establish *anjuman*s across several districts of Bengal. These *anjuman*s became the most important platforms to spread the values of Islam and helped to work towards the economic empowerment of the Bangla-speaking masses. The founders and members of these *anjumans* also started journals and periodicals, contributing to the modern print network across Bengal for the spread of Islamic sensibilities in modern literary forms in standardised Bangla.

3.1.2 **Anjumans***, periodicals and the new print network: Affiliation, alliance and antagonism*

> Periodicals are the life-force for *jātīẏa* progress. We are the Muslims of Bengal. This is why we need a periodical in Bangla... By publishing the periodical, the lost glory, confidence and prowess of the Muslims and their power of intellect and knowledge can be showcased in their full vigour. ... We will place our demands and grievances to the British government through this periodical for resolution...
>
> ("Editorial," *Sudhākar* (Kartik 1296 BS [Sept-Oct, 1889]): iii)

What the editors of *Sudhākar* articulated in the first issue of the periodical can be considered to be a shared concern of the Bengali Muslims since the 1880s. The first *alim* to translate the entire Qur'an into Bangla, Munshi Naimuddin (1832-1907) of Tangail district, was the first among the proselytising *ulama* to start a periodical, *Ākhbāre Eslāmiẏā* (1884). It published articles on the Qur'an, *hadis*, the life stories of Muhammad and the Early Caliphs, with a special focus on articles countering the attacks on Islam by the Christian missionaries. The iconic reformist preacher and author of many reformist treatises, Munshi Meherullah (1861–1907) of the Jessore district, founded an *anjuman* called the Islam Dharmottejika

Sabha (1889). Naimuddin started an *anjuman* – Anjumane Mainul Eslam (1891) – to facilitate a more structured form of preaching against the Christian missionaries. Belonging to the Hanafi reformist orientation, Naimuddin devoted his energies to engage in debate with the *lamaẓhabi* Ahl-i Hadis group. The translation of the Qur'an and *hadis* by Naimuddin, and religious tracts by both Naimuddin and Meherullah, can be considered to be parts of *jātīẏa sāhitya* though these two formidable preachers did not identify their discourses as such. But it was *Sudhākar* which brought the proselytising *ulama* and the literati together to inaugurate *jātīẏa sāhitya* as a literary venture intended to spread Islamic ideals and affirmed the need for inculcating a Sanskritised Bangla to induce *jātīẏa cetanā* (consciousness) among the new Muslim readership. *Sudhākar* was not connected to any specific *anjuman*. But since Naimuddin and Meherullah were associated with *Sudhākar* as regular contributors and were the reformist allies of Hanafi orientation, the proselytisation activities of these two *ulama* were enthusiastically supported by the *Sudhākar* group through the collection of donations and through the reportage of their *bahas* events in glorious language across several editions. The *anjuman*s, in their agenda, declared support for *wa'z* sessions by individual preachers, supported periodicals in publishing explanations of the Qur'an, translated versions of seminal religious texts in Arabic and Persian into Bangla and encouraged and patronised individual authors to produce new literary material with Islamic values to create *jātīẏa aikyabodh* (unity).[48] The *Āhle Hādis* and *Islām Darśan* both advocated for the writing and publication of books that conveyed a *jātīẏa* essence (*jātīẏabhāber pustak*) and a reformed curriculum for the *madrasas,* where the *jātīẏa* essence of Islam would be taught in the medium of standardised Bangla.[49]

The *anjuman*-periodical network branched out across districts. CNMA's outreach into rural Bengal (in at least 20 districts) since 1884 created a new example of the institutionalisation of social reform as a modern collective process across Bengal.[50] *Anjuman*s started emerging in several districts – Jessore, Tangail, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Noakhali, Chittagong, Medinipur, Jalpaiguri, Comilla and many more with their shared agenda of spreading the ideas of reformed Islam through individual preaching and standardised print to promote *jātīẏa* consciousness.[51] Such endeavours attest to a strong regional attribution to the formation of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* beyond Calcutta and Dacca, that was mobilised by the mediators across the districts, further provincialising the idea of a print-based modernity.[52]

The participation of the members of the periodicals in the functioning of the various *anjumans* as hosts and invitees, as archived in the reports of the meetings and conferences published in the periodicals, confirms an emerging *anjuman*-periodical link since the 1880s. Conferences at Meherullah's Eslam Dharmottejika Sabha were regularly attended by the associates of *Sudhākar*, many of whom were also associated with

other *anjuman*s and were contributors to other periodicals.[53] What came up from such lateral participations was an overarching Hanafi orientation that reflected in the thematic modifications in *jātīẏa sāhitya* that the authors involved were formulating. In this hegemonic functioning of Hanafi reformist ideals of the late-19th century, among the prominent periodicals only *Āhmadī* articulated the reformist views of Tariqah.[54] *Mohāmmadī* (1903), one of the major periodicals of the 20th century edited by Mohammad Akram Khan, was another literary platform with Tariqah orientation. It attempted to spread reformist ideas among its readers by publishing discourses on the Qur'an and *hadis* and engaged with critical debates on Islamic instructions, such as whether music is legitimate in Islam, and literary criticism supporting arguments with *maẓhabi* interpretations. But Akram Khan practised his own critical (*ijtihādi*) reformist stand as a Tariqaite to create critical discourses outside any public institutional space of any Tariqah *anjuman*. *Mohāmmadī* was not the mouthpiece of any *anjuman* or reformist platform as *Āhle Hādis* was for the Ahl-i Hadis group. The All India Ahl-i Hadis opened its regional branch, known as the Anjamane Ahle Hadis Bangala, in Calcutta, from where their reformist mouthpiece periodical *Āhle Hādis* was published (1917). But Akram Khan's functioning outside of the institutional space of Ahl-i Hadis made him a target of criticism by the *ulama* of Ahl-i Hadis, with whom Akram Khan shared a common reformist (Tariqah) pre-*maẓhabi* orientation.[55] An aggressive debate broke out between Akram Khan and the Hanafi institutions, which can be discerned on the pages of *Mohāmmadī* and the Hanafi-oriented periodicals – most importantly, *Islām Darśan* (1920) and *Hānāphi* (1926).

Islām Darśan, edited by Mohammad Abdul Hakim and Nur Ahmad, and *Hānāphi*, edited by Ruhul Amin, iconic Hanafi proselytiser and author of various religious tracts, used to be active under the auspices of Anjuman-e Wa'ezin e Bangala, an *anjuman* facilitated by the Hanafi Sufi sheikh and reformist preacher Pir Abu Bakr Siddique (1865–1943) of Furfura Sharif. Of these, Abu Bakr became the most prominent figure, with a prolific hold over the various *anjuman*s, periodicals and individual publications to become a unanimous spiritual authority in the Hanafi reformist sphere. Many periodicals like *Moslem Hitaishī*, *Islām Darśan*, *Śariẏat*, *Śariẏat-e-Islām* and *Hidāẏat*, all functioning under a Hanafi reformist agenda, followed the doctrinal path of Abu Bakr, which they declared on the title page. *Islām Darśan* used to mention that the periodical was published with the spiritual guidance of Abu Bakr as the mouthpiece of Anjuman-e Wa'ezin e Bangala ("*Janāb Māolānā Śāh Sufi Mohammad Abu-Bakar Sāheber prishṭhaposhakatāẏ paricālita, Ānjamane Wāijin Bāṇgālār mukhapatra*").[56] *Islām Darśan* never failed to declare itself as a *jātīẏa māsik patra* (*jātīẏa* monthly periodical) on the cover as well.

A wide range of social affiliations discernible among the disciples of Abu Bakr proved the presence of religious actors and the intelligentsia from many strata of society. This goes beyond the assumption that only

those from the educated middle class could be authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, something that this book also endorses. Further, a study of Abu Bakr's spiritual position and the social relevance of the institutions that he founded or led (*dargah* at Furfura, *anjumans* and periodicals) and the literary expressions that his disciples produced can take us beyond the Marxist analysis of peasant consciousness through a reading of the improvement manuals started to be published since the 1920s.[57] Revisionist historians like P. K. Datta break the binary between the Hindu/landlord and the Muslim/peasant by acknowledging "horizontal comradeship" between the Muslim and Namasudra agrarian communities in terms of class.[58] But the functioning of the multiple vertically arranged Muslim groups with their multiple overlapping aspirations reflected in the print culture of the time remained outside of their purview.[59] The landed property belonging to Abu Bakr, if interpreted as a feudal possession of power over his peasant followers, as Datta observed, entirely obliterates the sacred status of Abu Bakr's hold over land, which supported institutions like the *masjid*, the *dargah* and the *madrasa* at the holy site of Furfura.[60] Secondly, by considering the *anjuman*s to have been patronised and supported only by the local feudal landholders,[61] this analytical framework makes invisible a whole spectrum of vertical and horizontal "classes," with their overlapping socio-economic and literary interests and aspirations associated with the *anjumans*. The print network that Abu Bakr patronised exemplifies multiple literary themes – instructional manuals for the masses, discursive writings, high and popular literary compositions with varied economic, educational and social bearings of the authors, exposing the presence of a variety of actors (the "middling sort") that cannot be interpreted with the stable attributes of "class."[62]

Not only did Ruhul Amin, a learned *alim* who, through his *wa'z* events and publications, spread the Hanafi reformist ideology of Abu Bakr, there was among Abu Bakr's disciples Muhammad Shahidullah, prominent educator and linguist with a DPhil degree from Sorbonne University, Paris, who had been selected as one of the Pir's *khalifas*. Among the others, Abdul Bari Kabiratna wrote a long lyrical narrative, *Kārbālā Kābya* (1913) and *Phurphurār Ichāle Chaoẏāb* (1923) on the annual *urs* that Abu Bakr had reformulated to introduce as the central ritual at Furfura. That this same Abdul Bari had been appointed as the second *pundit* at Harinarayanpur Middle English School proved his acumen in Sanskrit language-literature. His prose writings explained his versatility in Sanskritised Bangla, so evident in his prose writings.[63] Another disciple, Qazi Aminul Haq, wrote *Śahide Kārbālā* in Dobhāshī. With the help of his disciples placed in different districts and *khalifa*s active in the numerous branches of the Anjuman-e Wa'ezin e Bangala, and through a host of periodicals which had his spiritual patronage like *Islām Darśan* and *Hānāphi*, Abu Bakr succeeded in consolidating his influence across more than 52 districts in Bengal and Assam, and firmly established the dominance of a Hanafi worldview over Bengali Muslims.

Jamat-e-ulama-e-Bangala, established in 1936, was the last organisation founded by Abu Bakr. In the 1937 provincial elections of Bengal, Abu Bakr and other leaders of Jamat-e-ulama-e-Bangala campaigned for Muslim League candidates in opposition to the political alliance between Jami'at-e-ulama-e-Hind and the Indian National Congress. Abu Bakr issued several *fatwa*s in favour of Muslim League candidates and denounced the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British led by the Congress.[64] All these hint at a newly drawn line of communal separation in the Hanafi *jātīẏa* public sphere.

The intra-Islamic debates of the late-19th century were structured more along the interlinked activities of the *anjuman*-periodicals, which reaffirmed *jātīẏa sāhitya* as the carrier of reformist ideals. The rival groups were in consensus about declaring that periodicals publishing literature without reformist values cannot be the ideal examples of *jātīẏa patrikā*.[65] The definition of *jātīẏa* thus expanded as rival reformist groups and started cancelling each other by invalidating each other's discursive and literary expressions as lacking *jātīẏa* sensibilities for not having the same religious alignment. *Islām Darśan* said that *Āhle Hādis*, for "remaining confined to their parochial and narrow ideas about Islam, cannot be accepted as the *jātīẏa* mouthpiece of Islam."[66] *Āhle Hādis*, by designating itself a periodical of religion (*dharma*), community (*samāj*) and literature (*sāhitya*), declared in unambiguous terms that it was imperative for periodicals to show *jātīẏa* ideals to the neighbours (the Hindus) and to the world.[67] In their constant attack of the Hanafi institutions like the *anjuman*s and periodicals and their figures of authority, especially Abu Bakr and Ruhul Amin, they attempted to cancel the Hanafi *maẓhabi* reformist ideas as the *jātīẏa* ideal (*ādarśa*) of Islam.[68] Very interestingly, these periodicals across the conflicting reformist groups deliberately and unanimously employed Sanskritised Bangla, with the unambiguous purpose of creating a high and standardised discourse which would convey the ideals of Islam.

Why were associates of *Sudhākar*, who themselves wrote in Sanskritised Bangla, so staunchly against Mir Mosharraf Hossain's rendition of *Bishād Sindhu*, the first prose narrative in standardised Bangla? This reveals the nuances and multiple debates related to *jātīẏa sāhitya*. The collective opposition of Hossain's thematic choices and linguistic concerns from the Muslim reformist literary sphere places the poetics of *jātīẏa sāhitya* in the larger scheme of Islamic reform and its different orientations (see Section 5.2.2 for a more detailed discussion). *Sudhākar* associates and Hossain converged in their defensive attempts to rearticulate Islamic history and themes in literature for a wider readership, including that of the Hindus. But the *Sudhākar* associates did not like Hossain's uncritical emulation of the template of writing history that most specifically took shape in the historical novels of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94), the doyen of Hindu cultural nationalism in Bengal. At the same time, Hossain's association with the journal *Āhmadī*, which had a Tariqah orientation, and

his publications supporting a ban on cow slaughter adopted by *Āhmadī*, made him a target of attack in the Hanafi-oriented literary circuit.[69]

Along with the *anjuman*-periodical network, other social organisations started coming up during this period, categorising themselves as literary organisations even without being led by the *anjumans*. First the Bangiya Sahitya Bishayak Musalman Samiti (1899) and then a more structured and active Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti (1911–42) attempted to restore the honour of Islam by formulating a modern literature called *jātīẏa sāhitya* in standardised Bangla. In addition, it is important to notice the organisational efforts of Mohammad Akram Khan (1868–1969) and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875–1950), both polyglots and scripturally trained *ulama*, who sought to construct religious discourses for the Bengali Muslims. Akram Khan founded the Anjuman-i-Ulama-i-Bangala (1913) with Islamabadi[70] as a social organisation based on reformist Islamic values, and not as a missionary faction within Islam like the Hanafi and Ahl-i Hadis groups. Rather, the Anjuman-i ulama-i Bangala, along with Islam Mission, another reformist organisation, attempted to bring together the *ulama* of Bengal under a common umbrella, transcending the divide between the Hanafis and Mohammadis.[71] This was different from the efforts of *Sudhākar*, which only supported Hanafi missionary activities in rural Bengal. Although the Anjuman-i ulama-i Bangala and Islam Mission followed the same parameters as the Hanafi missionary *anjumans* to secure *jātīẏa unnati* (improvement) for the Bengali Muslims, Akram Khan differed from their reformist interpretation agenda. Akram Khan attempted a complete discursive rational overhauling of the idea of Islam as the basis of social reform, which was not fully co-terminus with social reform as part of active Hanafi proselytisation.[72] Islamabadi emphasised in his article "Baṇgīẏa Musalmānganer Jātīẏa Mahāsamiti" (The Jātīẏa Greater Organisation of the Bengali Muslims) upon the need for an inclusive platform like Anjuman-i ulama-i Bangala beyond the intra-Islamic competitions which defined what Islamabadi and Akram Khan conceived as the Muslim *jātīẏa* ethos:

> Now we do not have any *jātīẏa* school-college, or trade, or organisations for social reform, or any *jātīẏa* newspaper or periodical, powerful author or poet, neither do we have the power of money or hold over the political institutes…. Let's have this *mahāsamiti* to spread education, business partnership, and eradicate social evils to *re*-gain the lost glory of the Muslims.[73] (Emphasis mine)

However, it was almost impossible for them to secure such an inclusive idea of a Bengali Muslim public sphere so entrenched in intra-Islamic rivalry. In the context of the Khilafat Movement, both Islamabadi and Akram Khan placed equal emphasis on the transnational identity of the Bengali Muslims as belonging to the Islamic *Khilafat*, and their national identity as Indian Muslims. In his article titled "Asahajogītā-o-Āmāder

Kartabya" (Non-cooperation and Our Responsibility), Islamabadi declared that the protection of the *Khilafat* in Turkey and the attainment of self-rule for India were the twin goals of the Khilafat Movement. In their search for a *swadeśī* and *jātīẏa* public sphere, they conceived of autonomous *jātīẏa* institutions – university, court and industry – under the auspices of the Anjuman-i-ulama-i-Bangala and the Islam Mission, rejecting colonial institutions.[74] The Arbi Biswabidyalay (Arabic University) was conceptualised by Akram Khan, together with associates like Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, with the purpose of imparting the Bengali Muslim youth with knowledge of scriptural Islam alongside western disciplines of knowledge.[75] They based their pedagogical formulations on the ideological template of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, established in 1875, by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, to introduce English education and the western sciences but wanted a regionally specific variant of educational institute for the Bengali Muslim youth with standardised Bangla as the medium of teaching.[76]

What is important to discuss here, irrespective of all ideological differences within the fractured idea of a *jātīẏa* Bengali Muslim public, was the common aim to validate Islam and make it a singularly cohesive system. In the formulation of a *jātīẏa sāhitya*, the entire reformist public sphere – reformist groups with different scriptural positions (like Hanafi and Ahl-i Hadis), individual *ulama* and the authors of literature, literary organisations like the BMSS and staunchly religious periodicals like *Islām Pracārak* (Sunni Hanafi, *maẓhabi* and *taqlidī*) and *Āhle Hādis* (pre-*maẓhabi* and *ijtihādi*) – tried to negate the interpretation and portrayal of Islam and its Prophet by Christian missionaries and Orientalist historians.

3.2 Talking back to the Evangelists and Orientalists: Jesus versus Muhammad

> The sword of Mahomet and the Coran are the most fatal enemies of civilization, liberty and truth which the world has yet known in the nineteenth century.
>
> (William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, 1858)[77]

> Now, our arch enemy is the Christian missionaries.
>
> (*Islām Pracārak* (Bhadra 1298 BS [September-October 1891]))

Against the aggressive military and missionary image of Islam and negative character traits of Muhammad imagined by the Christian missionaries and the British Orientalist historians like William Muir, *jātīẏa sāhitya* placed Islam as a superior religion, and Muhammad as the embodiment of higher spiritual and rational virtues. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan penned his biography of Muhammad, *Al-Khuṭbat al-Aḥmadiyya fi'i Arab wa'i Ṣīrat al-Muhammadiyya* (1869–70), as a refutation of William Muir's *The Life of Mahomet* (1858). It was first referred to

by Syed Ameer Ali,[78] then by the *Sudhākar* authors and finally by Mohammad Akram Khan. Muir's position was repeatedly engaged with and countered.

Muir belonged to a long tradition of Christian idealogues who developed antagonism towards Islam developed since the Crusades, where Muhammad was depicted as equivalent to Anti-Christ, a false Prophet, a political tyrant, immoral and a sensualist and, in the same vein, Islam was branded in derogatory terms as "Mohammedanism," or heresy.[79] As the Orientalist texts on Islam started being circulated widely and Christian evangelists intensified their mission for conversion across colonial India, Muslim reformers responded with counterarguments against such vilification public speeches and printed tracts. Countering this narrative assumed urgency in Bengal too, which took root as an integral element in *jātīya sāhitya*.

Evangelisation was an essential part of the missionary activities of the Serampore Mission (1800–45), which was also involved the translation of the gospels into Bangla and their spread via print and preaching excursions to the rural localities.[80] Idolatry and the ritual practices of the Hindus and customs of the Bengali Muslims were harshly attacked in the missionary preaching sessions and publications. George Mundy, a member of the London Missionary Society, articulated thus in his *Christianity and Hindooism Contrasted* (1827):

> If we contemplate the nature of the religion of Muhammad and compare it with that which is revealed in the scriptures of the New Testament, we shall observe a striking difference between the immoral tendency of the former, and the exalted purity of the latter.[81]

In 1833, the Bishop of Calcutta justified evangelisation by saying, "All India now seems to be waiting for the doctrine of salvation. Hindooism and Mahomedanism are crumbling under their own weight…to erect the modest Christian edifice on the ruins of deserted mosque and pagoda – that is the office of England."[82]

A rhetoric to demean Muhammad and the religion that he preached was gradually structured in the wider missionary preaching and writing of the prominent missionaries of Serampore like Joshua Marshman, William Carey and William Ward in the 18th century.[83] Statements like "[T]he addition of traditions to the Koran, all of which are extremely childish and grossly absurd, has made Mohammedanism a complete system of superstition which sinks its votaries into a moral state, as wretched and hopeless as the others" were rampant.[84] *The Asiatic Observer*, published as a joint venture of the missionaries of the London Missionary Society and the Baptist Missionary Society in Bengal, similarly echoed the Orientalist rhetoric in an article "On Mahometanism" in 1823, by stating that the Prophet's life was "licentious and his principles impure and that his votaries are fierce, intolerant and intractable."[85]

Syed Ahmad Khan was the first among the reformist intelligentsia to defend Islam from all such attacks in *Al-tābi'īn -al-Kalam fi Tafsir-al-Taurāt-wa'i 'Injīl ala Mullat-al-Islam* (The Clear Exposition of the Words in the Explanation of the *Torah* and the *Injil* according to the Muslim Community, 1862). His volume was repeatedly cited as essential reading material by the reformist *ulama* in Bengal.[86] Although the Dobhāshī authors defended Islam against the Jews and the Christians in the Karbala narratives, and in many tracts the *wa'z* events of the reformist masters were referred to, contemporary clashes between the Christian and the Muslim proselytisers during the 1860s and 1870s were absent from their discourse. It was the relentless preaching (*bahas* and *wa'z*) against the Christian missionaries of the new age *ulama*, pioneered by Munshi Meherullah (1861–1907) of Jessore district and his disciple Munshi Jamiruddin (1870–1930) of Kushtia district that entered the Muslim literary sphere in standardised Bangla in the 1880s. Since then, Muslim reformist missionary activities became part of the functions of the *anjuman*s, published in the periodicals and referred to in literature. In many periodicals (like *Sudhākar*, *Islām Pracārak*, *Hānāphi*, *Islām Darśan* and *Āhle Hādis* etc.) and reports of the *anjumans*, regular updates on the appointment of preachers for the districts and reports of their *bahas* with the opponent reformist preachers and subsequent victories (many times tweaked and exaggerated) were published.

In this landscape, Munshi Meherullah and Munshi Naimuddin stand out in the intersection between reformist social organisations and modern print and publishing endeavours. They exemplify a new culture of alliance between the *ulama* and the literati in the context of Islamic reformist proselytisation and *jātīya sāhitya*. Generally, their preaching was patronised by the periodicals and *anjumans* they were associated with. It was through his legendary oratory, as chronicled in his biographies, that Meherullah refuted the Christian missionaries and defended Islam in his *wa'z* sessions. He penned an array of tracts both in Dobhāshī and standardised Bangla, such as the *Khrishtīya Dharmer Asāratā* (Worthlessness of Christianity; 1886),[87] the *Radde Khrishtīyān o Dalilol Echlām* (The Refutation of Christianity and Evidence for Islam; 1895) and so on, to spread his ideas.[88] A gloating tone was not hidden in the description of Meherullah's biographer: "The evangelists against whom no one dared to raise his voice, now a young man named Meherullah countered them with his flawless arguments and thus formed the core elements in Islamic *jātīyatā*."[89] In his *Meherul Islām o Islām Rabi* (The Obligations of Islam and the Sun of Islam; 1897) in Dobhāshī *paẏār*, Meherullah laid out the behavioural codes of Islam and posited Muhammad as having stronger prophetic qualities than Jesus addressing a wider spectrum of readers. He categorically justified his choice of Dobhāshī in a footnote on the first page of the book: "So that the common Muslims, not versed in standardised Bangla, should not fall into the trap of ignorance, I have

used their language and diction."[90] To posit the monotheistic values of Islam, Meherullah did not leave the popular Hindu pantheon unattacked. Among other deities, Krishna's sensuous and erotic figure was critiqued by Meherullah vigorously in his cheaply printed tract *Hindu-Dharma Rahasya o Debalilā* (The mystery called Hindu-religion and the indulgent ploys of Hindu deities, 1898) where he mercilessly critiqued the Hindu pantheon as immoral and sexually deviant.[91]

Abul Mansur repeated Meherullah's title *Hindu-Dharma Rahasya o Debalilā* for his two-volume book (1907), where he quoted from the works of the stalwarts of Hindu literature of the late-19th century to refute them one by one. He included the poetic works of Ishwar Chandra Gupta (1812–1859) and showed how Gupta in his poetry used extremely derogatory terms like "nyāṛā" for the Muslims and compared them to bearded goats, ridiculed the *luṇgis* around their waists, and declared that like a herd of rams, they had no purpose in life.[92] Mansur then went on to quote sections from historical novels like *Krishňakānter Will*, *Rājsingha* and *Mrinalinī* by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay; *Pratāpāditya Upanyās* by Damodar Mukhopadhyay; a translation of Captain Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* by Babu Yajnesvar Mukhopadhyay; and various social novels by eminent Hindu litterateurs published in the late-19th century to show how both popular and highbrow Bangla literature was germinating and propagating an acute antipathy and loathing for Muslims. According to these Hindu authors, Mansur said, Muslims were loathsome and less than human (*narādham*), no better than apes (*bānar haite uttam nay*).[93]

That Meherullah's critique of the sensuality of the Hindu gods did not go unnoticed in the Hindu literary sphere can be confirmed in Meherullah's response in the introduction to the sixth edition of his book. He wrote back to his critics by saying,

> Authors from the most elite to the lowest sections of the Hindus have for the last one hundred years continued to vilify the pure religion of Islam in such lurid hues and obscene adjectives, that it appeared endless. Motivated by injustice and enmity, they, without reason, have continued to take immense pleasure and have gloated with joy by calling the Muslims without-religion, violent, sinners, sinful, sinister, aggressive, villainous, demons, monkeys, bearded, monsters, unreasonable, ignorant and ingrate.[94]

But in general, in the realm of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, direct confrontation with the Hindu mainstream was not the central endeavour. Rather, the authors decided to inculcate capacity (*saksham*) in preparing a literature to show their Hindu neighbours the superior values of Islam: "Let us cultivate the capacity to display the superior virtues of Islam to our neighbours" ("*Āmrā jena āmāder pratibeśīdigake Islāmer samunnata ādarśa guli dekhāite saksham hai*").[95]

Simultaneously, Meherullah supported the publication of Munshi Jamiruddin's autobiography.[96] Jamiruddin had converted at an early age to Christianity but came back into the fold of Islam after being convinced by Meherullah's fiery speeches countering Christianity. He became the most prolific of Meherullah's disciples and associates in proselytisation. His exposure to and participation in Christian missionary work and his exchanges with Brahmo organisations made him an ideal disciple of Meherullah in the latter's fight against Christian missionaries. Jamiruddin wrote more than a hundred reformist texts published both as autonomous tracts and as entries in periodicals.[97] His interactions with Pir Abu Bakr Siddique of Furfura Sharif cultivated in him a more structured defence of Islam against Christianity, and he brought out *Radde Khrishtīẏān*, a series consisting of a series of cheaply printed tracts of apologetics refuting Christianity, following Abu Bakr's instructions. He stands thus as a connecting link between Meherullah and Pir Abu Bakr, two major Hanafi preachers, ensuring the spread of ideas through cheap print.[98] The translators of the Qur'an in their annotations, and the biographers of Muhammad, often directly addressed the Christian missionaries using their narratorial voice, in the same manner as Meherullah and Jamiruddin had done in their reformist tracts.

Munshi Jamiruddin, similar to *Sudhākar* editor Sheikh Abdur Rahim, attested to an expansion of a multilingual horizon, as they both cited Ameer Ali's biography of Muhammad *The Spirit of Islam* on their reading list. Ameer Ali remarked upon the "fundamental defect in Christianity" and declared the superiority of Muhammad by saying that "[t]he work of Jesus was left unfinished. It was reserved for another Prophet to systematise the laws of morality."[99] Reyazuddin Ahmed reflected that "Ameer Ali showed us how Islam can be defended against the vilification of the Christian missionaries."[100] Ameer Ali undoubtedly inspired the Bengali literati to form a counter-discourse in their attempts in various modern genres. *Mihir o Sudhākar*, another periodical edited by Sheikh Abdur Rahim, published a literary review of Rahim's *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmanīti*, which drew references from Ameer Ali's biography of Muhammad. The review praised the volume wholeheartedly for achieving control (*nirakaraṇ*) over the unnecessary vilification (*ajathā doshārop*) of Islam by the Christian missionaries. The reviewer noted in the same article that, much like the Christian missionaries, the Hindus should also know about the superior grace of Islam.[101]

Since Meherullah and Naimuddin were associated with *Sudhākar*, Jamiruddin maintained a close association with *Eslām Pracārak* besides his work with *Sudhākar*, and was a regular contributor to periodicals such as *Mihir o Sudhākar*, *Nabanūr*, and *Islām Darśan,* all of which had a Hanafi orientation. Sheikh Abdur Rahim actively participated in the functioning of Anjamane Wa'ijine Bangala (as the first secretary of this *anjuman* of Abu Bakr) and the BMSS too. Connections, such as those between the preachers and the periodicals, the publicists and the

pamphleteers, the authors of biography and history and the translators of the Qur'an and the *hadis*, the poets and the writers of obligatory principles, were the institutional links mobilised by the individuals and the collective that consolidated the Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa* sphere. These connections linked the new Muslim reading public across Bengal with transnational events concerning Islam, like the Caliphate in Turkey, the construction of the Hejaz Railways (1900–08) and the crisis of the Caliphate during the Khilafat Movement. At the same time, they attempted to awaken in the Bengali Muslims the need to voice their educational and economic demands as regional Muslims like their Urdu-speaking coreligionists in Bengal had already done.[102]

The Bengali Muslims had to affirm the validity of their identity against the linguistically racially exclusionary principles of the Urdu intelligentsia. The separatist endeavours of the Urdu-speaking elite were primarily posited along linguistic lines, which prompted the Bengali Muslims to affirm their ethno-linguistic identity specifically through their mother tongue Bangla. It may be noticed that the connections with Urdu changed in the period spanning the later decades of the 19th and the 20th centuries. In the late-19th century, the Muslim public sphere created a distance from the linguistic hegemony of the "Urduwalas" in Bengal by affirming their Bengali identity and configuring Sanskritised Bangla as their public language. But it can be discerned that later the Urdu-versus-Bangla debate in defining the public language of the Bengali Muslims took a new turn. Urdu began to be proposed as an auxiliary language for the Bengali Muslims in the early-20th century, adding another layer to their multilingual experience (see Section 5.1.2). In this chapter, I have attempted to map the first realisation of a Bengaliness that emerged at a difference with Urdu.

3.3 The Bangla–Urdu divide: Bengali Muslims between region and nation

> For the middle and the upper classes of Mahomedans, the Urdoo should be recognised as the vernacular. … The middle and upper classes of Mahomedans are descended from the original conquerers of Bengal, or the pious, the learned, and the brave men who were attracted from Arabia, Persia and Central Asia to the service of the Mahomedan rulers of Bengal.
>
> (Nawab Abdul Latif, in his comments to The Indian Education Commission of 1882–83 (The Hunter Commission))[103]

In Ameer Ali's view, the social and economic empowerment of common Muslims, whom W. W. Hunter (1840–1900), a Scottish historian, statistician and member of the Indian civil service, had described as not so "wise," was possible through western education and government jobs. Ameer Ali described the hegemonic nature of the government sector from

where the Muslims were "crowded off" by the majority of Hindus.[104] Ameer Ali's scheme of economic and moral reform was integrally connected to the idea of a universal community (*ummah*) aligned along the transterritorial notion of a central Caliphate, and specifically subjects of the British Empire (*qawm*). But like his predecessor Nawab Abdul Latif, Ameer Ali did not include the Bangla-speaking Muslims in his scheme of opportunity and empowerment.

For Ameer Ali, the Indian Muslims were "a homogeneous people," "having a common language [Urdu] and religion."[105] To demand the "serious consideration of the administrators of Indian policy" for the collective entity of Indian Muslims, Syed Ameer Ali proposed that Islamic reform was necessary to bring disparate groups into the fold of true Islam as an *ummah*, with Urdu as the national language. For him, Urdu was the "ordinary vehicle of intercommunication between diverse races which were brought together by the Muslim conquest" in India.[106] He proposed Urdu as the medium of communication in Bengal as well, where, according to him, the influence of Urdu diminished as one travelled from upper Bengal to its lower extremes, till it lost all its vitality in the deltaic districts, where the Muslims spoke in "a patois of Bengali dialect."[107] His derogatory tone was targeted at Dobhāshī and a colloquial form of Bangla interspersed with Arabic and Persian lexicons.

The first two organisations to demand government jobs and entry into trade were the Mohammedan Literary Society (MLS) of Nawab Abdul Latif (1863), and the Central National Muhammadan Association (CNMA) of Ameer Ali (1877). Both Abdul Latif and Ameer Ali stressed on the importance of spreading education through reformist madrasas with Urdu as the medium of instruction and proposed Urdu as the public language for the Bengali Muslims.[108] These two organisations, the MLS and the CNMA, aimed at the inclusion of only the *sharif* classes and affirmed Urdu along with English and occasional Persian as their medium of communication.[109] Ameer Ali conceived the CNMA as a national organisation, and as its branches spread all across Bengal (and elsewhere in India), attempted to create through it an Urdu-speaking milieu, which would manifest a supra-national Muslim public sphere. Bangla was rejected, as it was supposed that its acceptance as the language of instruction would "diminish the *national* attributes of the Muslims by half and destroy the prowess of the Muslims as a *race*" (emphasis mine).[110]

This stance of demeaning the Bengali Muslims and their mother tongue did not go without critique. In *Mihir o Sudhākar*, the editor Sheikh Abdur Rahim pointedly observed that Urdu-speaking leaders would never accept the demands of the Bengali Muslims.[111] The choice of Sanskritised Bangla as the viable language to articulate and cultivate the *jātīya* sensibilities was thus also intended to countermand the hegemony of Urdu.[112] Their rationale of the inclusion of Arabic and Persian-Urdu in Sanskritised Bangla was both strategic and aesthetic, meant to create a new model of Islamic attributes articulated in mother tongue Bangla.

The new formulation regarding the introduction of Urdu for Bangla-speaking Muslims was functionally different from the hegemonic propagation of Urdu introduced by the MLS and the CNMA and continued by the Urdu-speaking elite in Bengal in the 1920s. The circumstances and the significance of this new interpretation added to Urdu in a multilingual domain in a new political context need a deeper understanding. To claim their *ashraf* (elite) position in Muslim society, many landed Muslims attempted to affirm Urdu as the language of the Muslims in Bengal. The use of Urdu, again placed in terms of racial difference, enraged the Bengali Muslims to the extent that they often responded with indignation. Citing a letter to the editor of periodical *Mussalman* from one Muzhar-i-Tawheed who wrote on the spread of Urdu as the public language for the Muslims in Bengal, Abul Hayat succinctly said that "in spite of his incurable dislike of the Bengali language, Muzhar-i-Tawheed and his family spoke Bengali at home."[113] For the inherent dominance of Urdu over the Bangla-speaking Muslims, the deliberation for ashrafisation by adopting Urdu was thoroughly critiqued by the latter. They noticed that these Urduwalas with very little proficiency in Urdu preferred it over Bangla which they were actually proficient in to gain racial-linguistic superiority artificially.[114] Muhammad Wajid Ali noticed how the Bengali maulavis repeated a word in faltering Urdu if they uttered anything mistakenly in Bangla.[115]

As the demand for a separate electorate for the Muslims was granted by the Morley-Minto Reforms in 1909, a sense of national, pan-Indian political solidarity among the Bengali Muslims was kindled. The annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1911 rekindled the need in the Bengali Muslim communities to align themselves politically with their north Indian counterparts. While the pan-Islamic fervour grew in Bengal, so did the urge of the Bengali Muslims to situate themselves within the dominant Urdu-speaking pan-Indian political and regional social reformist and cultural contexts. While refuting Urdu as the mother tongue or public language for the Bengali Muslims, this urge, in a curious way, brought them closer to Urdu. Adopting Urdu as the public language for Indian Muslims became the pre-condition to coalesce as a community seeking representation in the demography of Indian national politics. The case for Urdu was articulated by political figures like Fazlul Huq (1873–1962) of Buckergunge district, the leader of the Krishak Praja Party, who served as the first Prime Minister of Bengal in British India, and later after 1947 as the home minister of Pakistan. Huq strongly recommended the study of Urdu for the Bengali Muslim students of Dacca University.[116]

Huq's proposal in favour of Urdu was different from that of the Urdu-speaking "self-appointed elites," whom *Mihir o Sudhākar* unambiguously called unfit to be representatives of the Bengali Muslims.[117] Huq's preference for Urdu for instruction at Dacca University was motivated by the belief that it would create a regional intelligentsia, whose access to national-level institutions and political agency would be facilitated by the language. Although some historians read this framework proposed by

Huq as proof of an inviolable Bangla-Urdu divide,[118] Huq's preference, I argue, only re-emphasised the multilingual propensities and affiliations of the Bengali Muslims, where Urdu had its specific functionality for the Bangla-speaking Muslims of Bengal in a national political network. Huq's proposal for Urdu was also a direct response to the marginal position that the Bengali Muslims were allotted in the All India Muslim League and All India Muslim Conference.[119] He proposed literacy in Urdu and its cultivation with every necessary action taken for the development of the mother tongue ("*mātribhāshā Bāṇglā*").[120] It is quite clear that, according to Huq, cultivation of Urdu was needed to make Bengali Muslims more capable of taking part in national and supra-regional political discourses. Here, according to Huq's conception, Urdu did not become the sole sanctioned language for the Bengali Muslims, as ideated by Urdu-speaking members of the intelligentsia like Sir Abdur Rahim (1867–1952). Rahim, an educator, politician and authority in Islamic jurisprudence, who, moreover served many courts as a judge, proposed Urdu as the medium of instruction in Calcutta University in 1926. His proposal was oriented towards the minority Urdu-speaking Muslims of Bengal.[121] Huq, in contrast, proposed that Urdu and Bangla be designated as the languages of the public and private domains of the Bengali Muslims which had started to function nationally. What Huq was opposed to was the complete adherence to Sanskritised Bangla as he did not deem it adequate for the Bengali Muslims in the supra-national political and intellectual context.

By the 1920s, many Muslim literati were advocating for the use of Urdu for the Bengali Muslims. But this should not be read as an orthodox choice for Muslims, contrapuntal to the more liberal choice of Sanskritised Bangla. It was rather a response to the urgent need to connect the Bengali Muslims with the supra-national public sphere. Many of them stressed Urdu's relevance as the national lingua franca for Muslims and argued that a regional Muslim community needed to build a national-territorial consciousness rather than parochially respond to Urdu as the elitist imposition of the Urdu-speaking intelligentsia. Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmed, the editor of *Islām Pracārak*, argued that the Bengali Muslims' monolingual adherence to Bangla was responsible for narrow regionalism, timidity, docility and the lack of *jātīẏa* pride. He proclaimed Urdu as the ideal carrier of a sense of *jātīẏatā*, which could connect the Bengali Muslims with the Muslims of the other provinces.[122] Mohammad Akram Khan, the editor of *Mohāmmadī*, by highlighting the supra-regional capacity of Urdu across the Indian sub-continent stated that "Urdu is neither our mother tongue, nor our *jātīẏa* language. But to maintain and preserve *jātīẏatā* for Indian Muslims, we need Urdu."[123] Both Reyazuddin Ahmed[124] and Akram Khan[125] considered Bangla as the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims and dedicated their lives to cultivating and strengthening Bangla as a discursive language to articulate *jātīẏa bhāb* for the Bengali Muslims. Akram Khan claimed Arabic as the *jātīẏa* language of the Muslims and

Bangla as the mother tongue, while vehemently urging the *ulama* to serve their mother tongue Bangla in turn to serve Islam (*sebā*).[126] This league of authors was quite clear about the tripartite nature of the Bengali Muslim identity, split along pan-Islamic, pan-Indian and regional axes and never reduced such multiplicities to a unilinear, monolingual regional identity. This multilinguality, Muhammad Shahidullah (1885–1969) argued, was an attribute of any Muslim, commenting upon the difficulty encountered by Muslim boys, who were required to accomplish fluency in several languages. He said,

> A Muslim boy has to learn five languages. Arabic as the language of his religion ("*dharmabhāshā*"), Persian as the language of literature ("*sāhitya bhāshā*"), Urdu as the connecting lingua franca in India ("*bhāratīẏa āntarjanīn bhāshā*"), and English as the language of the ruler ("*rāj bhāshā*") and Bangla as his mother tongue ("*mātribhāshā*").[127]

Going back to Fazlul Huq, he was not an educator, and unlike Muhammad Shahidullah, Akram Khan and Islamabadi, his proposal of Urdu as the public language of the Bengali Muslims was based on his reading of the functions of Bangla as limited to region, not useful in national politics. His views were not connected to the efficacy of Bangla as a literary language. However, the fact that Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid dedicated his prose narrative *Karbala* to Fazlul Huq by addressing him as *Śer-e-Bāṃla* (The Tiger of Bengal, as Huq was fondly addressed since his Krishak Praja Party days) indicates that Huq's insistence on Urdu's functional importance nationally did not contradict the choice of Sanskritised Bangla by the *ulama* and literati.[128]

At the same time, a whole array of polemical essays concerning the acceptability of Bangla as the carrier of the *jātīẏa bhāb* of the Bengali Muslims, an issue first formally raised by the *Sudhākar* associates, began to appear in the late 1910s. Essays like "Bengali Language and Muslim Literature" by S. Wajed Ali,[129] and "Bengali Language and Muslims" by Saiyad Emdad Ali raised an outcry over the reluctance and ignorance among the Bengali Muslims in engaging in literary activities in Bangla.[130] But as we talk about the position of Bangla within the multilinguality of Arabic, Persian and Urdu, it is imperative to look at the inherent multilinguality of Sanskritised Bangla as proposed by these *ulama* and literati. The authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* felt that the uncritical adaptation of Sanskritic Bangla would invariably result in acculturation of Muslimness. As a remedy, Reyazuddin Ahmed proposed that if "words are culled from Arabic, Persian and Urdu to articulate *jātīẏa bhāb* (essence), *jātīẏa tej* (prowess), *jātīẏa dharmaparāẏaṇatā* (religiosity) in Bangla, only then will our mother tongue Bangla produce the desired *jātīẏa* effect."[131] His proposal for strategic multilingualism was echoed by the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. The proposal of having a different orientation of Bangla

language endowed with Muslim *jātīẏatā* was heard elsewhere too, as this became the overarching idea to propose the same linguistic identity-in-difference for the Bengali Muslims. Syed Emdad Ali was succinct in marking the possibilities of acculturation in the Bengali Muslim society with the hegemonic influence of Bangla literature saturated with Hindu-*bhāb* (mode) and Hindu-*ādarśa* (ideal). At the same time, the adaptation of the Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords was varied, creating different layers of multilinguality in the Bengali Muslims literature depending on the individual literary styles and poetic status of the individual authors.

Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad (1871–1953) of Chittagong district, littérateur, historian of Bangla literature and collector and interpreter of old Bangla manuscripts, in his lecture "Bāṇgālī Musalmāner Mātribhāshā" (Mother Tongue of the Bengali Muslims) delivered in 1913 at the annual conference of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat in Calcutta, declared his community's mother tongue as the *jātīẏa* language.[132] He did not want to demarcate the private and public domains through the use of languages as Fazlul Huq did. Abdul Karim also felt that no community could flourish without "extracting the sap" (*rasākarshaṇ*) of higher ideals from literature written in the *jātīẏa* language, here, Bangla. Abdul Karim started by demarcating the transterritorial Muslim community (*jāti*), from a regional Bengali Muslim community (*samāj*) and in a radical twist ended the argument by categorising Arabic and Persian, like Latin and Sanskrit, as the classical languages of Islam (*dharmabhāshā*) and claimed that Bangla, the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims, as their *jātīẏa* language. Contrary to the general idea of Arabic as the *jātīẏa* language of the Bengali Muslims, Karim created a unique argument that having a *jātīẏa* language different from one's mother tongue had its pitfalls. According to him, in such a case, *jātīẏa* language and mother tongue would both become crippled (*paṇgu*) and vigourless (*śaktihīnā*).[133]

Referring to the archive of manuscripts that Karim himself had collected from the remotest parts of rural Bengal throughout his life, he demonstrated the presence of the rich and illustrious traditions of Bangla *kāvya* created by the Muslim authors in the early modern period. By citing over 80 authors thus far unknown in mainstream Bangla literary historiography, he discussed the trajectory of reception of the Arabic and Persian sources in Bangla. But in his ideation, he did not include a discussion of the varied presence of Arabic and Persian loanwords in Bangla during the early modern period.[134] Moreover, Karim's ideas about the awakening of the Muslim masses to the glories of their forefathers, who had translated the Islamic scriptures into Bangla, drew upon a model of Bangla translations of the Sanskrit scriptures and were premised upon the total translatability of Perso-Arabic original sources.[135] He argued that there was a common form of Bangla shared by different communities, thereby attesting to the idea of communal harmony in medieval Bengal. In Karim's conceptualisation of complete translatability from Arabic and Persian into Bangla, the relevance of multiple interlocutory

languages (like Avadhi) in bringing Islamic (Sufi) themes into Bengal remained unexplored. There was no dearth of traditional *ulama* with knowledge in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, but their lack of exposure to Bangla made them unfit for the modern Muslim public sphere in Bengal, Karim reflected.[136] He inspired the *ulama* and literati to emulate the caring servitude (*sajatna sebā*) of the medieval Muslim poets to expand and strengthen Bangla *sāhitya* and to enhance the *jātīẏatā* of the Bengali Muslims. According to Karim, expansive and undivided (*bipul akhanda*) Hindu-Muslim communal harmony could only be achieved by sharing one singular language.[137] He dismissed the chances of Arabic, Persian and Urdu becoming the *jātīẏa* language of the Bengali Muslims, instead confirming Bangla as the "*jātīẏa bhāshā*" in his overtly regional interpretation of the Bengali Muslim identity.[138] Karim, while talking about why "*Islāmī bhāb*" and "*Islāmī ādarśa*" were essential for the creation of "*Islāmī sāhitya*,"[139] did not elaborate upon the multilingual status of the Bengali Muslims. Karim was instead more involved with the question of the poetic capacity of Muslim authors of the scribal *puthis* who were yet to be a part of the dominant discourses in Bangla literature.[140]

Simultaneously, when the BMSS attempted to bring Arabic and Persian loanwords signifying Islamic concepts to prepare Bangla to carry Islamic themes, it was severely critiqued by the Hindu intelligentsia and was accused of injecting separatism into the Bangla literary sphere. This was the general outlook of the Hindu nationalist public sphere. Ramesh Chandra Bandyopadhyay, a regular contributor to Bangla periodicals, was unambiguously critical of the attempts made by *maqtab*s and *madrasa*s to include a liberal amount of Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords in standardised Bangla. He interpreted this as corollaries to other attempts towards political-communal separatism articulated in the demand for separate electorates and reservation for educated Muslims in social institutions.[141] Bandyopadhyay criticised primers written by a traditionalist reformer Maulavi Muhammad Mobarak Ali and linguist-polymath Muhammad Shahidullah. Both Mobarak Ali and Shahidullah were arguing for a possible complementarity between Arabic-Persian-Urdu and Sanskritised Bangla, thus highlighting the multilingual potential of Bangla for the Bengali Muslims to articulate their religious and cultural expressions.

But such multilinguality was only a contamination of Bangla to a Hindu purist like Bandyopadhyay. He did not hesitate to taunt Shahidullah, the holder of a DPhil degree, as a "*daktar-pandit*." Bandyopadhyay was uncompromising in emphasising that Shahidullah, in spite of being a representative of the decent and educated Bengali Muslims, chose to replicate the hodgepodge (*khichuri*) Bangla that the maulavis had put together out of their hatred towards the Hindus and a vulgarised (*kutsit*) Bangla tainted by words imported from Arabic and Persian.[142] In this context, it is worth noticing how a litterateur like Abdul Karim actually proposed the idea of an undivided Bengali heritage without highlighting its essentially

Muslim experiences which were only a matter of historical record for him. His formulation as such was an antidote to allegations of communal separatism made against the Muslims literati, who spoke the language of cultural and religious difference. Despite their inclusion of authors like Romesh Chander Dutt, Nabinchandra Sen and Rabindranath Tagore in their publications, the BMSS was labelled separatist by the BSP and its associates because of its search for an autonomous (*swatantra*) literary culture of the Bengali Muslims. Here, it is important to note why the BMSS felt the need for a separate literary enterprise. The sense of betrayal felt at the Hindu nationalist overtures at Bangiya Sahitya Parishat was not hidden in Akram Khan's presidential lecture at the third literary conference of the BMSP in 1927 held in Calcutta. Akram Khan said:

> One unpleasant truth is that the Muslim authors always feel that they have lost their identity when they participate in any event of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat. In the inauguration ceremony, introductory remarks, keynote speeches, presidential addresses, or any other lectures and essays, the Hinduness and polytheistic sensibilities are so acute and ubiquitous that a Muslim cannot be a part of that unless he erases his Muslimness entirely.[143]

In this deliberation of having a separate literary sphere, there were Muslim authors who actually worked towards earning accolades by adopting the poetic ideals prevalent in the Hindu-dominated Bangla literature of their times without any attempt at self-assertion as Muslim. Indeed, in the Hindu Bengali public sphere, Muslim authors were praised only when their Muslimness was thematically absent in literature. Even if a Muslim theme was literarised, it was accepted only when the Muslim authors employed pure Sanskritised Bangla, erasing the Arabic and Persian lexicons associated with the theme, with total translatability of Islamic ideas and Muslim cultural-religious experiences. Muslim themes were accepted only when Muslim authors were successful in turning them into purely literary themes by disconnecting them from their Islamic moorings.

A literary review of Mirza Yusuf's book *Dugdha Sarobar* (The Lake of Milk, 1891), published in *Nur-al-Iman*, expressed disappointment while quoting some Hindu periodicals ("*Hindu khabar kāgaj oẏālā*") without naming them, which had denigrated the use of Arabic and Persian words in Yusuf's Sanskritised Bangla. According to the critic, Arabic and Persian loanwords Islamised Yusuf's *tatasama* Bangla and disqualified it for the Hindu readers: "The milk boiled in a Muslim kitchen is untouchable for the Hindus, that's why we could not savour this milk."[144]

Muhammad Shahidullah, also a founder-member of the BMSS, represents a very important strand connecting the transterritorial and regional parameters of the Bengali Muslim identity, placing it in between Arabic as its *juban-i qawmi* (language of religious community) and

Bangla as its mother tongue. As a linguist, he worked relentlessly on the ethnographic mapping of dialects (*bulijarip*) reflected in the volumes of the dictionary *Bānglādeśer Āncalik Bhāshār Abhidhān* (three volumes; 1965 and 1968) that he prepared. He unambiguously described Islam as a multilingual experience.[145] Bengal's unique multilinguality between Arabic and Bangla, which was not adequately addressed by Abdul Karim Sahitya-Bisharad, was explained by Shahidullah in his presidential lecture in 1914 at the BMSS titled "Āmāder Bhāshā Samasyā" (The Problem with Our Language). There he proposed that Bangla should be the primary medium of instruction in both government schools and *madrasas,* that Bangla should be taught compulsorily, and that Arabic, English, Persian and Urdu should be optional languages.[146] Some literary scholars accused Shahidullah of not exploring the Bengali Muslims' connections with Arabic sources in his linguistic study of Bangla within a multilingual framework.[147] For Shahidullah, the adaptation of Islamic themes from Persian sources in Bangla literature was a model for *jātīya sāhitya*. He defended the inclusion of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu loanwords into Bangla against an opposition that only interpreted such multilinguality as the "Islamisation" of Bangla – pointing out that Persian had nonetheless retained its generic expressions, literary styles and forms while becoming a language of Islam. Shahidullah posited the resilience of Persian literature as the model for a multilingual Bangla. Shahidullah highly commended the scholars of north India for their creation of an impeccable ("*sarbāṇgasundar*") corpus of Islamic scriptural and literary discourses in Urdu and suggested that the Bengali Muslims follow suit.[148] Shahidullah, in his 1928 presidential lecture at the BMSS titled "Sāhityer Rūp" (Forms of Literature), counterargued that if the religiosity of the Hindus, with all its aesthetic charge, could remain at the core of modern literature authored by the Hindus, the same could be true for Muslims as well.[149]

In this multilingual framework, the issues of the translatability of Islamic essential ideas into Sanskritised Bangla were a contested site. It was a shift from the early modern use of Sanskritic aesthetics and dynamic equivalents from the grand tradition of Bangla to express Islamic ideals (as discussed in Section 1.1.1) to the retention of cultural otherness in untranslatable Arabic-Persian words. The translation of the Qur'an can be seen in this context as the most challenging linguistic exercise, where an attempt was made to establish the Divine Word in Arabic as untranslatable in Sanskritised Bangla. For the translators of the Qur'an and authors working with modern discursive and literary genres, the Brahmo linguistic repertoire became influential. The Brahmo literati prepared a Sanskritised Bangla conceptually distinct from the Sanskritised polytheistic Bangla of the Hindus to articulate the monotheistic ideals of Brahmoism (see Section 4.2 for a detailed discussion). The Muslim authors stopped using *Īśwar* for its polytheistic connotation. But *Parameśwar* (The Ultimate One) and *Jagadīśwar* (the Supreme Owner of the Universe) used by the

Brahmo literati to signify the monotheistic divine appealed to the Muslim literati. The aesthetic template of the Brahmo literati mostly standardised by Bhai Girishchandra Sen in his translation of the Qur'an (1881–1885), *hadis* (1892–1908) and biographies was emulated by the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, even though there was no conscious reference to Sen's repertoire in their list of citations. Not only were words like *upāsanā* ("*ibadat*"), *maṇgalmaẏ* ("*Rahman*"), *pabitra* ("*nek*"), *mahārājādhirāj* ("*maliki yawmi'd-din*") used as equivalents to their Arabic "original" (given in parentheses here), adopted from Brahmo usage, but the aesthetics of Sen's discursive and affective language also seeped into *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Along with the emulation of aesthetic-poetic ideals of the Hindu literary genres (history, historical novel, heroic poetry etc.), such reliance on the Brahmo template clearly demonstrates the Bengali Muslims' move towards literary modernity by adopting all available modern literary devices.

Participation in such literary endeavours was not exclusive to any specific singular group. Sufi poet Maulavi Sayid Hafizullah chose *Dikshā* in parenthesis after the Arabic title of his Sufi treatise *Tāoẏājjāẏe Āhsāniẏā* (1925)[150] where he included Sufi lyrical couplets strikingly resembling the emotive devotional rhetoric of the monotheistic Brahmosangeet repertoire. In this couplet, translated as "Nobody remembers you here, everybody only drinks poison" (*tomār kathā hethā keha to bale nā, śudhu pān kare halāhal*), Hafizullah expanded the generic capacities of *hamd* as he explained the meaning of *Bismillah*. Such lyrical expressions affirmed the creative liberty enjoyed by the poets to transform Islamic themes into modern poetic utterances. At the same time, by using the Arabic font for Bismillah in this play of poetic emotion, the immutability and untranslatability of Arabic stayed intact.[151] The simultaneity of poetic freedom and scriptural truth that created a haunting and productive ambivalence was integral to the formulation of *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

The Bengali Muslims' exposure to scriptural discourses in Arabic and Persian started to be mediated by Urdu, energising the field of multilingual experience through multiple forms of exchange with the Urdu literary repertoire.[152] These connections with Urdu now were different from the age of the first wave of reform. With the preachers from north India roaming through the remotest districts of Bengal, Urdu came to be familiar as a new language of communication. Together with Karāmat ʻAlī Jaunpurī, Urdu source texts came within the horizon of reading of the older generation of reformist *ulama* in Bengal. Karāmat ʻAlī himself wrote majorly in Urdu. The Urdu *tafsir* of the Qur'an by one of Wali Allah's sons, Shāh Rafi ad-Din Dihlawī, and the Urdu translation of the Arabic-Persian scriptural sources connected the reformist *ulama* in Bengal to a vast array of scriptural discourses via Urdu. At the same time, the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* had added to their reading lists the writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in Urdu. They had also begun to be exposed to Urdu journalistic writing in periodicals published in north India. In *Sudhākar*, Meyarazuddin Ahmed published the translations of articles selected from the Urdu periodicals. During the Khilafat Movement, this connection

with Urdu took a political turn, with the speeches of Muslim politicians like Maulana Shaukat Ali (1873–1938) and Maulana Muhammad Ali (1878–1931) being translated from the districts as the regional Khilafat Committees spread across Bengal.[153] But translations of the poetic works of Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914), and then Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), so entrenched in the rhetoric of loss and recovery,[154] cannot be traced back prior to the 1940s.

Thus, the Bengali Muslims' ideation of *jātīẏa sāhitya* emerged since the 1880s as a realisation of the loss of Islamic glory and the proposal to regain it was connected to Urdu nationalism only in the broader context of Islam in India. The Bengali Muslims were not as quickly influenced by the sense of loss that their north Indian Urdu-speaking counterparts immediately felt with a replacement of the Islamic power (Mughal) with the colonial (Christian). For the Bengali Muslims, the sense of loss and the desire to recover the glory was invoked by Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī. The fall of Granada, one of the major citadels of Islamic power till Christian invasion in Iberian Peninsula in late-15th century, invoked a great trauma of loss in the pan-Islamic *ummah* in Hali's poem "Musaddas-e Madd-o Jazr-e Islām" (Musaddas on the ebb and flow of Islam, 1879). Hali's poem exposed the Bengali Muslims to another temporal-spatial realm of the Islamic civilisation, reflected in the references to Granada in various writings. As a response to Hali's poem, Sheikh Abdur Rahim wrote a long romantic narrative *Alhambra* (1891), which was on the splendours of Islamic architecture in Granada. A photographic image of the court of lions of the Alhambra was first printed in his *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti* (1887). But since Abdur Rahim's narrative was an adaptation of Washington Irving's *Tales of Alhamra*, and since one of his sources for *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti*, Ameer Ali's *The Spirit of Islam* had already had the same photographic image, it is very hard to mark the direct influence of Hali's poetry till the poet began to be translated in Bangla in the 1940s. It is in the 1940s that both Hali and Muhammad Iqbal appeared as part of *jātīẏa sāhitya* in translation. Iqbal was already a familiar name, as he had created a stir in the 1930s by proposing a separate nation in his presidential lecture at the Allahabad Conference of the All India Muslim League. Pamphlets containing Iqbal's poem were circulated in the districts of Bengal by the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. But the corpus of poetry of Hali and Iqbal became part of a large-scale translation project in which many among the literati took up the initiative to work with them. Muhammad Shahidullah published his translations of Iqbal's *Shikwa* and *Jabab-e-Shikwa* (1942), and wrote a biography of Iqbal known as *Ikbāl Jībanī* (1945), indicating a new connection with the Urdu modern literary domain and with Urdu nationalism.[155] Golam Mostafa, one of the major poets who translated the Qur'an in rhyme and wrote a biography of the Muhammad called *Biswa Nabī* (1956), a long lyrical narrative, translated Hali's *Musaddas* (1941)[156] and *Qalam-i-Iqbal* (1957).[157] But it is curious to notice that in the making of the domain of a *jātīẏa sāhitya* that explored the theme of

Karbala so widely, not a single translation of the works of two major Urdu poets to have extensively celebrated the theme of Karbala – Mir Babar Ali Anees (1803–1874) and Mirza Dabir (1803–1875) – can be found. Perhaps the integral connection between their renditions of the battle of Karbala, mainly in the form of *marsiya* that were recited as parts of the Muharram rituals in Lucknow, made them ineligible for a Sunni-led *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

The poetic inspiration and aspiration to relive the impact of Karbala and to posit the values of Islam were integrally connected to attributes of literary modernity emerging in the Bengali Hindu literary domain. The Bengali Muslims had to negotiate numerous regional issues to reclaim the Karbala as a literary and reformist theme.

3.4 Literariness of *jātīẏa sāhitya*

> We have come out in the sacred light in the service of our mother tongue. Muslims have been maligned and only the cultivation of literature can uplift the *jātīẏa* life from the passivity and depression that has befallen them. Only *jātīẏa sāhitya* can infuse vigour in *jātīẏa* life.
>
> "Sucanā" (Preface), *Nabanūr* (Asharh 1310 BS [June-July 1903])

What was summed up in this editorial written in Sanskritised Bangla by Saiyad Emdad Ali (1876–1956), the editor of *Nabanūr* (1903–06), was a sentiment that unanimously pervaded the Bengali Muslim public sphere, that is, the ardent need for *sāhitya-carcā* (the cultivation of literature) by the Bengali Muslims. Some periodicals-journals like *Saogāt*, *Nabanūr*, *Bulbul* and *Śikha* proclaimed their literary activities as purely literary rather than anchoring them in reformist endeavours. But the need for literature was vociferously claimed by the reformist authors. In the realm of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, the issues of language, ethics of translation, choice of theme and generic innovations – all the questions pertaining to the literary field – were keenly debated upon. The reformist *ulama* and literati engaged with these questions to articulate the *jātīẏa bhāb* (essence) of the Bengali Muslims as a community, in order to attain *jātīẏa unnati* (progress and empowerment).

Scholarly works on the Bengali Muslim identity formation which explore literature written by Muslim authors tend to maintain a distinction between the literary and the non-literary. But in these efforts, they refer to the inclusion of only the activities of literary associations like the BMSS and Muslim Sahitya Samaj (1926–38)[158] and literary journals like *Saogāt* (1918), *Moslem Bhārat* (1920–21) and *Bulbul* (1930–?).[159] These journals attempted to create a poetic-aesthetic framework by taking elements from both Muslim and Hindu experiences, while also turning religious references into cultural metaphors.[160] However, *Sudhākar*, *Mihir o Sudhākar* and the more focused reformist periodicals like *Islām Pracārak*.

Islām Darśan, *Hānāphi* and *Āhle Hādis* also provided an aesthetic-poetic model without encouraging an autonomy of literature without reformist values. Here, *Mohāmmadī* deserves special attention for ushering in reformist sensibilities via literary activities outside the institutional domain of the *anjumans*, markedly found in the literary activities of the *Islām Pracārak*, *Islām Darśan*, *Hānāphi* and also *Āhle Hādis*. It is nevertheless intriguing to notice that periodicals claiming the purely literary status of *sāhitya* defined their dealings of Islamic themes in completely aesthetic ways without connecting them with proselytisation in a bid to create communal unity between the Hindus and Muslims. They upheld the idea of a shared literary field based, even by adopting Hindu literary models. Hindu authors contributed to these journals too. The aim of these literary journals and periodicals can be unambiguously interpreted in the voice of the editor of *Kohinūr*:

> *Jātīẏa samāj*, for its moral growth, relies upon *jātīẏa sāhitya*. *Jātīẏa* values grow exponentially with the growth in *jātīẏa sāhitya* […] it is to our delight that the Muslim brethren have now realised that if *jātīẏa sāhitya* cannot be developed, there cannot be any *jātīẏa* progress.[161]

The debate between the reformist and the literary continued, not always in the name of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, but within the *jātīẏa* sensibilities that tried to strike a balance between the validity of a literature with Islamic values (reformist *jātīẏa sāhitya*) and one rooted in free rational thinking, beyond the confinement of the scriptural anchoring as was proposed by the members of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS).

When Muzaffar Ahmad (1889–1973), one of the founders of the Communist Party of India (1925), joined the BMSS briefly (1919–1920), a new critical ideological turn was introduced to the existing literary debates at the BMSS. As a corrective to both Hindu nationalism and the Muslim *jātīẏatā*, Ahmad presented the claims of the "working class" as a democratic position beyond the Hindu-Muslim divide.[162] The poet and prolific song writer Nazrul Islam (1899–1976) of Burdwan district epitomised the attempts to free Islamic elements from their scriptural moorings and discover them through sensual Persianate energy, and clustered them together with Hindu puranic and devotional metaphors.[163] By offering new metaphors and styles with the juxtaposition of the Qur'anic and the puranic references, he decontextualised them into pure aesthetic idioms. But it may be noticed from the absence in the critical studies on Nazrul Islam in the literary history of Bengal that while Nazrul's lyrics for *Shyamasangeet* (devotional songs for the goddess Kali) were highly esteemed in the Hindu literary circles, his playful poetic multilinguality of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, *tatsama* and indigenous Bangla lexicon received neither aesthetic acclaim nor any significant critical recognition from the Hindu literati. Although Nazrul received occasional praise in his lifetime

from contemporary literary stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, he remained largely an outsider in modern Bangla literature. Nazrul's poetic renditions of Islamic themes in poems like "Śātil Ārab" (Sat-il Arab), "Korbānī," "Moharram" and "Phateẏa Doẏāz Daham" (*Fateha-i-Yajdaham*), all published in *Moslem Bhārat*, might have been read by the Hindu readership of that periodical. But from the absence of literary reviews on these poems by the Hindu readers, it can be opined that Nazrul's "Islamic" poems did not leave an impression on Hindu readership in general. Rather, the silence of the Hindu readers on those poems seems deliberate, largely nullifying Nazrul's Islamic connections and turning his literary endeavours autonomously poetic, and even syncretic.

At a time when Muslims were scorned for retaining lexical expressions like *monajat* in Arabic in the primers taught at *maqtab*s, *Moslem Bhārat* made its linguistic-poetic choices more inclusive as a remedy to such antagonism. They turned the traditional *hamd* into a modern poetic rendition about the creation of the world by the Almighty and gave it a Sanskritised title, *maṇgalācaraṇ* (traditionally the invocation of a god or goddess in the beginning of a medieval poem composed by a Hindu author). Monotheistic Islamic devotion, here, was rendered as modern poetic articulations that resonated with the devotional songs of Rabindranath Tagore and Atulprasad Sen (1871–1934), whose repertoires reflected Brahmo monotheistic sensibilities.

Shahidullah, in order to define the thematic difference between Hindu and Muslim literatures, mentioned the blissful ignorance of the Hindus on Muslim scripture, history and culture. A tone of frustration could not be hidden in the reaction towards such ignorance by many of the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, like Shahidullah. He proposed Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* as a bridge between the Hindu and Muslim communities as the Bengalis. For this, he advocated a peaceful coexistence of two literary compartments, with difference in their themes, aesthetics and religious experiences, but with constant exchanges. Shahidullah unambiguously advocated a composite Bangla (*miśra*) over a hegemonic monolingual and mono-literary singularity of Bangla language-literature as practised by the Hindus (see Section 5.1.2). The Hindu Bengali intelligentsia, needless to say, chose to overlook the inherent hegemony in their conception of the literary history of Bangla.

Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, a major contributor to *Sudhākar* and *Mihir o Sudhākar*, with whom this chapter started,[164] emphasised the need for *jātīẏa* heritage and *bhāb* (essence) for the Bengali Muslims. He quite emotionally declared Munshi Naimuddin and Mir Mosharraf Hossain as the two sole rising stars in the sky of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Such a declaration has a unique position within the Hanafi reformist circle as Jabbar did not follow the qualifiers of *jātīẏa sāhitya* that the *Sudhākar*-associates had ideated, and neither was he bothered, as they were, about the *Āhamadi* connection of Mosharraf Hossain. Jabbar placed as equivalents the pure literary rendition of the history of Karbala by Mosharraf Hossain and

Naimuddin's staunch Hanafi reformist literary attempts in translating the Qur'an and *hadis*, editing the Muslim almanac and writing other scriptural texts. Jabbar's position can be read as a singular attempt to reconcile the opposition between the aesthetic-literary and the religious-scriptural dimensions prevalent in contemporary debates on literature in *jātīẏa sāhitya*. By juxtaposing these two authors, he helped his readers take into account Islamic values through narrative rendition of the Karbala, while at the same time proposing literariness in reformist scriptural endeavours. Statements such as Jabbar's also help bring about multiple critical positions in the domain of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* which can inspire a reframing of the understanding of the literary history of the late-19th and the early-20th centuries. Attempts within literary history have so far focused mostly on how poetic sensibilities (only with reference to Nazrul) were constantly throttled by religious orthodoxy. Jabbar's hailing of Mosharraf Hossain might well be an individual acceptance of the purely literary in *jātīẏa sāhitya*, but it opens up the scope for a broader discussion on the engagement with Mosharraf Hossain's *Bishād Sindhu* by the reformist authors (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3). The discussion of the reception and rejection of literary themes and generic styles attempted to fix the issues of language, theme and generic ideals to delineate the contours of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, indicating a complex relationship between the poetic-literary and the reformist-discursive.

Conclusion

This chapter marks the emergence and growth of a new age *ulama* and literati, who with their exposure to scriptural knowledge and standardised Bangla literary culture woke up to the idea of modern transterritorial Islamic identity. In this, the shift towards pan-Islamic connections and regional belongingness as Bengalis were almost simultaneous realisations for Bengali Muslims. For them, the imagination of an originary land in Arabia and a motherland in Bengal was inevitable as a new definition of collective belonging. This chapter shows how such a duality in orientation was articulated by the Muslim literati by declaring Arabic as the *jātīẏa* language and owning Bangla as the mother tongue. It notes that adopting Sanskritised Bangla to launch *jātīẏa sahiya* based on the *jātīẏa bhāb* (essence) of the Bengali Muslims was imperative but not unilinear in terms of the limits and possibilities of the translatability of Islamic concepts to Bangla in a multilingual framework. I have charted out here three trajectories of the polemical beginnings of *jātīẏa sāhitya* – the direct relation of *jātīẏa sāhitya* to the spread of the institutional networks of *anjuman*s and periodicals, responses to the discursive polemic of Orientalism and Christian evangelism and the debate over the viability of language and literary themes. Exclusion from the elite Urdu-speaking agenda of Muslim uplift prompted the Bengali Muslims to formulate their own institutional domain, facilitated by the periodical-*anjuman* network that eventually connected the Muslims in organised efforts of proselytisation and print.

What started as the counterargument of the reformist *ulama* in open sessions took up a standardised literary expression in *jātīẏa sāhitya* that continuously talked back at Orientalist historians and Christian missionaries. What is most important to notice in the exchanges foregrounded in this chapter, however, is a constant ambivalence of rejection and reception present in the engagement of the *ulama* and the literati with the dominant discourses. In the construction of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, Syed Ameer Ali remains a constant inspiration, even though as an Urdu-speaking elite, Ali did not include the Bengali Muslims in his agenda of economic and educational rights of Muslims. Again, Ali's western affiliation was not what most authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* were comfortable with. Their deliberate choice of Urdu as an intermediary language to access Arabic-Persian works and modern thought brought Urdu out of the clutches of the Urdu-speaking elite who had actively practised racial difference with Bangla-speaking Muslims in linguistic terms. At the same time, the emulation of generic templates from standardised Bangla literature was not an easy task due to the inherent charge of anti-Muslim sentiments in the Hindu Bengali interpretation of the history of India. The authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* had to follow the precarious path of writing in the same genres that Hindu nationalist authors had excelled in, turning them into mediums to articulate Islamic essences. In the next chapter, I will discuss the writing of history and biography, as exemplars of modern genres in the Bengali Muslim literary sphere, attempted by the literati with the aim of validating the superior ideals of Islam in a historical timeline and positioning Muhammad as the ideal embodiment of Islamic virtues. The authors invoked the Islamic past, the time of the Muhammad's *nabuyyat* (prophethood) and the Caliphate of his *ṣaḥāba* as the most superior time in Islamic history. They attempted to resolve the crisis in the Caliphate exemplified in the battle of Karbala by constantly reformulating the thematic issues in the Karbala. The Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt* again became the most important components narrativised in a different context of literary modernity with Husayn, the martyr, carrying forward the legacy of Muhammad in this new generic formulation of *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

Notes

1 Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra*, 2nd ed. (Mymensingh: The Portrait of Islam and Muslim Society, 1913 [1907]), 24.

2 For a detailed discussion of the education policy and colonial endeavours, see Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Calcutta: Ratna Prakashan, 1974); Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1867–1906: Quest for Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981); Waqil Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake Bāṇgālī Musalmāner Cintā o Cetanār Dhārā* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2013 [1983]); Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims: A Study in Their Politicization (1912–1929)* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1991); and Dhurjati Prasad De, *Bengal Muslims in Search of Social Identity 1905-47* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1998).

3 For a detailed discussion of public language, see, Francesca Orsini, "What Did They Mean by 'Public'? Language, Literature and the Politics of Nationalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 7 (February 13–19, 1999): 409–16.
4 To know more on this, see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*; Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims*; and Dhurjati Prasad De, *Bengal Muslims*.
5 More on the writing of nationalist history, see Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi: Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past," in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, eds., Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), 27–87.
6 Jabbar, *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra*, 35.
7 For a detailed discussion see Chapter 4 of this book.
8 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986); Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, *'Punar' Bishaye Punarbibecanā: Hindutver Sāltāmāmi* (Kolkata: Ababhas, 2004 [1999]); and Bandopadhyay, "Producing and Re-Producing the New Women: A Note on the Prefix 'Re'," *Social Scientist* 22, no. 1/2 (January–February 1994): 19–39.
9 Jabbar, *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra*, 2.
10 Zaheer Abbas, *Construction of Bengali Muslim Identity in Colonial Bengal, c. 1870–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), https://doi.org/10.17615/dhh1-ez62
11 Narahari Kaviraj, *The Wahhabi and Faraizi Rebels of Bengal* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1982).
12 Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).
13 Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).
14 In very important scholarly entries, even while discussing Muslim instructional manuals, there is no scope to foreground their linguistic or literary nuances. For example in Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia*, 1992; P. K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Sumit Sarkar, "Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants, 1909–10," in *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism and History*, ed., Sumit Sarkar (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 96–112.
15 Reformist deliberations in the literary field are left unattended, although extensive studies on the contribution of the Muslim authors in the Bangla literary field have already been attempted. Bose, *Recasting the Region*.
16 *The Moslem Chronicle*, April 11, 1896, 164. Cited in Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslims*, 1981, 112.
17 Richard Eaton contextualises the census reports and their counterarguments while discussing the theories of mass conversion into Islam in vast regions of Bengal. There he mentions the elite Urdu-speaking *ashraf*s of Bengal coming up with reports and books. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204–1760* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 119–24.
18 Khondkar Fazli Rubbee, *The Origin of the Musalmans in Bengal*, 2nd ed. (Dacca: Society for Pakistan Studies, 1970 [1895]), 40–41.
19 Abul Hayat, *Mussalmans of Bengal* (Calcutta: Sri Zahed Ali, 1966), 97.

20 Analogous to Sanskritisation or Aryanisation, ashrafisation (or Syedisation) denotes the tendency of the lower socio-economic groups of Muslims adopting the customs and practices of elite Muslims for upward mobility. This is a unique feature in South Asia that affirms the caste-like formations in the social stratification of the Muslims.

21 It may be noticed that within the existing caste and other social hierarchies and land relations, the conceptual equality of Islam was transformed into a vertical system of social hierarchies in South Asia. The disadvantaged groups attempted to mobilise themselves by aligning them more with the discursive tradition of Islam to go up in the social ladder which the historians have termed "ashrafisation." See, A. R. Momin, "The Indo-Islamic Tradition," *Sociological Bulletin* 26, no. 2 (September 1977): 242–258; Rowena Robinson, "Indian Muslims: The Varied Dimensions of Marginality," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 10 (2007): 839–843; S. K. Rai, "Social Histories of Exclusion and Moments of Resistance: The Case of Muslim Julaha Weavers in Colonial United Provinces," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 55, no. 4 (2018): 549–574, accessed February 15, 2019, doi: 10.1177/0019464618796896.

22 For a discussion of Hindu cultural hegemony see, Sudipta Kaviraj, *Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001); and Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

23 *Śrīkānta* was published in four parts between 1917 and 1933. Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, *Śarat Racanābalī*, Vol I (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2007), 15.

24 Mir Mosharraf Hossain, *Āmār Jībanī* first published in 1908, Calcutta. Reprinted in *Mir Moshārraph Hossain Racanābalī* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985).

25 Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslim*, 30–5.

26 "Editorial," *Hāfez* 2, no. 8 (Magh 1904 BS [January-February 1897]): 31.

27 Jabbar, *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra*, 41.

28 Ibid, 32.

29 "Editorial," *Kohinūr* (Asharh 1305 BS [May-June 1898]): 12.

30 Ibid, 14.

31 S. Wajed Ali, *Sabhāpatir Abhibhāshaṇ*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti, 1925), 4.

32 Wajed Ali, *Sabhāpatir Abhibhāshaṇ*, 5.

33 *Āhle Hādis*, Year 2, no. I (Ashwin 1323 BS [October-November 1916]): 3.

34 Yusufzai, "Bhūmikā," in *Soubhāgya Sparśamaṇi*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Books and Books, 1963[1903]).

35 Muhammad Mansur Uddin, *Ādhunik Bāṃla Sāhitye Muslim-Sādhanā* (Dhaka: Hasi Prakashanalay, 1964), 235–6.

36 During al-Afghānī's in India between 1879 and 1883, he issued *fatwas* against Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and constantly refuted Khan in frequent public addresses. See Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 1968), 54–55; Omid

Wali, "Sayed Jamaluddin Afghan as a Social Reformer in Islamic World," accessed March 30, 2021, www.researchgate.net/publication/338543249

37 Ameer Ali, *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1873); *The Spirit of Islam or the Life and Teachings of Muhammad* (London: W. H. Allen, 1891); and *A Short History of the Saracens* (London, Bombay and Calcutta: Macmillan and Co., 1916 [1899]).

38 Ali, *A Short History of the Saracens*, 20–55.

39 Ibid. The word "republic" first appeared on the contents page, and then was referred to repeatedly.

40 This is how Ameer Ali titled the episode that he wrote on the battle of Karbala. Ibid, 85.

41 *Āhamadī* (Poush, 1297 BS [October-November 1890]): 45.

42 *Nabanūr* (Agrahayan, 1312 BS [September–October 1907]): 62.

43 Syed Ameer Ali, "Preface," in *The Spirit of Islam* (Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri & Co., 1902), xiii.

44 Ameer Ali in his *Spirit of Islam* used "republic" for the Greco-Roman political confederacy and continued to use the term to designate the statehood that Muhammad had ideated and materialised, which was then carried forward by the Early Caliphate.

45 For a detailed discussion of the linguistic separatist policy of the Urdu-speaking elite of Bengal, see De, *Roots of Separatism*; Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*; Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims*.

46 *Education Commission Report: Bengal Volume* (Calcutta: Supt. of Govt.., 1884), 213–7.

47 Ibid, 220.

48 In the first list of agendas, the Bangiya Pradeshik Musalman Siksha Samiti (Bengal Provincial Educational Organisation) referred to *jātīya aikyabodh*. Reported in *Islām Pracārak* (Poush 1894 BS [October-November 1903]): 57.

49 *Islām-Darśan*, Year I, no. (Magh, 1312 BS [January–February 1905]):14.

50 Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 140–9.

51 Ibid, 115–206.

52 Bose, *Recasting the Region*, 2014.

53 Sheikh Jamiruddin, *Meher Carit* (Calcutta: Reyazul Islam Press, 1907), 9.

54 Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 380.

55 Akram Khan severed his connections with *Āhle Hādis* for ideological difference and started *Mohāmmadī*, earning reprimands from *Āhle Hādis*.

56 *Islām Darśan*, Year 1, no 1 (Baishakh, 1327 BS [March-April 1920]).

57 Revisionist Marxist analysis like that of P. K. Datta brings together religiosity and class consciousness as complementary analytical categories to explain the religious mobilisation of the "peasants" (*krishak*) absent in the work of Rafiuddin Ahmed. He critiques the formulation of class offered by Chatterjee (*Bengal: 1920–1947*, 1984) and Bose (*Agrarian Bengal*, 1987), who look at the Muslim peasants as a single community and a homogeneous economic unit. But Datta's reading of the improvement tracts only focuses on the monetary aspirations of the peasants, newly charged by the increased production of lucrative crops like jute, by describing the *wa'z* as simply sessions on the theme of "worldly affairs" where the monetary activities of Muslims are concerned, without looking at their eschatological meanings in

the framework of *farz* and *adab*. See P. K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

58 Datta, *Carving Blocs*, 64–108.

59 Ibid, 79.

60 Ibid, 88–93.

61 Ibid, 74.

62 Historians have used this category, that of a "middle sort of people," to signify people in transition from the peasantry to the industrialist class. A "middle sort of people," rather than standing for a cohesive group, implies many affiliations in early modern English society, which was neither pre-industrial nor industrial, neither feudal nor industrialist-capitalist. The multiplicity of categorisations of this group, with multiple affiliations within, has influenced me to take it up as a productive category to understand the multiple social locations of the actors in the Bengali Muslim public sphere, and to expand the definition of the public sphere. See Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); H. R. French, "The Search for the 'Middle Sort of People' in England, 1600–1800," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. i (March 2000): 277–93; and Joan Kent, *The Rural 'Middling Sort' in Early Modern England, circa 1640–1740: Some Economic, Political and Socio-Cultural Characteristics* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008).

63 Ali Ahmad, *Bāṃlā Muslim Granthapaṇjī* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985), 128.

64 Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India, 1937–47* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 63.

65 Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, 3.

66 Ibid, 4.

67 *Āhle Hādis*, Year 1, no. I (Ashwin 1322 BS [September–October 1915]): 18.

68 *Āhle Hādis*, Year 2, no. XI (Shraban 1324 BS [June-July 1917]): 375.

69 *Bishād Sindhu* remained a provocative literary piece, which unleashed debates on language and genre for *jātiya sāhitya* and provided literary templates to the succeeding generations of authors, who strategically adopted or rejected them (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3).

70 Abul Kalam Muhammad Abdullah, *Bāṇgālī Muslim Dharmīẏa o Sānskritik Jībane Māolānā Ākram Khāner Abadān* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2009), 156–157.

71 Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 2013, 303–304.

72 Ibid, 159–160.

73 *Mihir o Sudhākar* (Shraban 1324 BS [June-July 1917]), quoted in Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 304.

74 Abul Kalam Muhammad Abdullah, *Bāṇgālī Muslim Dharmīẏa o Sānskritik Jībane Māolānā Ākram Khāner Abadān* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2009), 159.

75 Ibid, 160.

76 Ibid, 160.

77 William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and History of Islam*, Vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1858). 111.

78 Ali, *Life and Teachings of Mohammed*.

79 Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "The Rhetoric of Antichrist in Western Lives of Muhammad," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (1997): 297–307, accessed May 24, 2021, doi: 10.1080/09596419708721128; Charles Tieszen, *The Christian Encounter with Muhammad: How Theologians have Interpreted the Prophet* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); and Deva Alvina Sebayang, "Incomprehensive Understanding about Mohammed: A Critic over Orientalist," *DINIKA Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016), accessed May 24, 2021, doi: 10.22515/dinika.v1i1.3.

80 Kanti Prasanna Sengupta, *The Christian Missionaries in Bengal: 1793–1833* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1971); Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, "Serampore Missionaries and Christian Muslim Interaction in Bengal (1793–1834)," *The Bulletin of Christian Institutes of Islamic Studies* 3 (1980): 115–132; Brian K. Pennington, "Reverend William Ward and His Legacy for Christian (Mis) perception of Hinduism," *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* 13 (2000): 5–11; and Galen K. Johnson, "William Carey's Muslim Encounters in India," *Baptist History and Heritage* 39, no. 2 (2004): 101.

81 J. Mundy, *Christianity and Hindooism Contrasted: Or, a Comparative View of the Evidence by which the Respective Claims to Divine Authority of the Bible and Hindoo Shasters are Supported* (Serampore: Baptist Mission Press, 1827), 12.

82 Letter written by Bishop Wilson, June 21, 1833, in *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Reports* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1833), 152.

83 John Fenwick, "Biographical Sketches of Joshua Marshman, D.D. of Serampore," in *Newcastle Chronicle* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Emerson Charnley, 1838); and William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindoos: Including a Minute Description of their Manners and Customs, and Translations from their Principal Works*, 5th ed. (Madras: J. Higginbotham, 1863).

84 *The Missionary Sketches* I, no. I (London: London Missionary Society, 1818).

85 *The Asiatic Observer* (October 1824): 405.

86 Many authors mentioned that they had consulted various writings of Sir Syed Ahmad. But his rationalistic projects were severly critiqued by the authors of *jātiya sāhitya*, up until Maulana Akram Khan incorporated them in his translation of the Qur'an and biography of Muhammad, *Mostāphā Carit*. Akram Khan's utilisation of Syed Ahmad Khan's rational framework to interpret Islam demands a lengthier critical discussion.

87 Meherullah, *Khrishtīya Dharmer Asāratā* (Jessore: Nepal Chandra Das, 1886).

88 Meherullah, *Radde Khrishtīyān o Dalilol Echlām* (Jessore: Mansur Ahmed, 1887).

89 Sheikh Habibur Rahman Sahityaratna, *Karmmabīr Munśī Meherullā* (Calcutta: Mohammadi Press, 1934), 15.

90 Meherullah, *Meherul Islām o Islām Rabi* (Calcutta: Shahen Shah & Co, 1897), iv.

91 Meherullah, *Hindu Dharma Rahasya o Debalīlā* (Calcutta: Reyazuddin Ahmed, 1898), 15–6.

92 Abul Mansur, *Hindu Dharma Rahasya o Debalīlā* (Jessore: Mansur Ahmed, 1907), 57.

93 Ibid, 23.

94 Meherullah, *Hindu Dharmer Rahasya o Debalīlā*, 2nd ed. (Jessore, 1898).

95 "Ābāhan," (editorial) *Ahle Hadis*, Year 1, no. 5 (Ashwin 1322 BS [September-October 1915]): 18.
96 Jamiruddin, *Āmār Jībanī o Islām Grahan Brittānta* (Jessore: Annapurna Press, 1897).
97 Rahman, *Munśī Meherullā*, 32.
98 This series included original articles in English (*Glory of Islam*, Vol. 8), translations from English (*Christianity and Islam*, Vol 1) and Urdu (*Uluhat-e Masiha*) tracts, Jamiruddin's own original English essays ("From Christianity to Islam") and counterarguments to Christian evangelical discourses like *Radde Satya-dharma nirūpan o Hedāẏtul Khrīshtān* (1926) and *Pādrī Mānror Dhokā Bhaṇjan* (Breaking the Illusions of Padri Monroe, 1927).
99 Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, 27.
100 *Islām Pracārak* (Agrahayan 1310 BS [November-December 1903]).
101 *Mihir o Sudhākar* (Poush 1307 BS [October-November 1900]).
102 To learn more about the Urdu public sphere in Bengal, see Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, and De, *Roots of Separatism*.
103 Quoted in Enamul Hoque, *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif: His Writings and Related Documents* (Dhaka: Samudra Prakashani, 1968), 225.
104 Shan Muhammad, ed., *The Right Hon'ble Syed Ameer Ali: Political Writings* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1989), 44.
105 Ameer Ali, "A Cry from the Indian Muslims," in Ibid, 25.
106 Ibid, 32.
107 Ibid, 33.
108 Hoque, *Nawab Bahadur Abdul Latif,* 152.
109 Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 129.
110 As declared by Dr. Edward Denison Ross, the Principal of the Calcutta Madrasa, in a meeting reported in *Mihir o Sudhākar* (Ashārh 1309 BS [June-July 1902]), quoted in Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 178.
111 Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 178.
112 Chandiprasad Sarkar also discusses the call for a Bengali autonomy against Urdu hegemony. See Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims*, 64–70.
113 Abul Hayat, *Mussalmans of Bengal* (Calcutta: Robi Art Press, 1966), 95.
114 "Nur-al-Imāner Āpil", *Nur-al-Iman* (Asharh 1307 BS [June-July 1900]), 218. Cited in Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengali Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengali Press, 1901-1930* (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1973), 222–223.
115 *Bengal Education Proceedings*, 1872, 78. Cited in Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims,* 123–124.
116 This issue will be discussed in the context of the "Bangla versus Urdu debate" in Chapter 5.
117 *Mihir o Sudhākar* (13 Asharh 1309 BS [28 June 1902]).
118 Bose, *Recasting Region*, 111.
119 Amalendu De has discussed this marginality of the Bengali Muslims in national politics. See Amalendu De, *Pakistān Prastāb o Fazlul Huq* (Calcutta: West Bengal State Book Board, 1989), 12–13.
120 Point number 9 in "Objects and Programme of the Nikhil Bangla Krishak Praja Samity," Calcutta, September, 1936, vide *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 September, 1936, quoted in Amalendu De, *Pakistān Prastāb o Fazlul Huq* (Kolkata: Ratna Prakashan, 1972), 14.
121 *Report on the Administration of Bengal*, 1925–26 (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1927), xxiii.

122 Reyazuddin Ahmed, "Introduction," in *Hajarat Mohammad Mostāphā* (a.s.) *Jībancarit* (Calcutta: Maniruddin Ahmed & Sons, 1927).

123 "Presidential Lecture," *Baṇgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* (Magh 1325 BS [January-February 1918]). Cited in Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 510.

124 Reyazuddin Ahmed wrote several books and made several translations in Sanskritised Bangla. He wrote *Tuhphātul Muslemin* (The Gift of the Muslims, 1886), translated Afghani's biography and teaching as *Islāmtattva* (1888–1889) in collaboration, wrote two volumes of *Jaṇge Rūm o Iẏunān* (1905, 1908) on the Greco-Turkish war, a biography of Muhammad titled *Hajarat Mohāmmad Mostāphār Jībancarit* (1927) and published several Islamic almanacs in Bangla.

125 Akram Khan contributed to several journals and periodicals, translated the complete *Qur'an Sharif* along with the *tafsir* and *hadis,* and wrote Hazrat Muhammad's biography *Mostāphā Carit* (1925), *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās* (Social History of Muslim Bengal, 1965).

126 Akram Khan, "Ālem Samāj o Mātribhāshā," *BMSP*, Year 1, no. iv (Shraban 1325 BS [July-August 1918]): 306.

127 Shahidullah, Presidential lecture at the second conference of the Bengali Muslim Sahitya Sammelan, *BMSP*, Year 1, no. I (Baishakh 1325 BS [April–May 1918]): 4.

128 This dedication by Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid of Mymensingh, a sub-inspector of schools, affirms his support for the Krishak Praja Party, a political platform that supported and secured the cause of Muslim tenant farmers. In the same year (1936), Huq left the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti and founded the Krishak Praja Party (KPP). Huq, as KPP's elected leader, drafted his election manifesto around the rights of tenant farmers during the year, as preparation for taking part in Bengal's state assembly election of 1937.

129 S. Wajed Ali, "Bāṇglābhāshā o Musalmān Sāhitya," *BMSP*, Year 1, no. iv (Magh 1325 BS [January–February 1918]): 360–368.

130 Saiyad Emdad Ali, "Bāṇgabhāshā o Musalmān," *BMSP*, Year 1, no. iv (Magh 1325 BS [January–February 1918]): 317–325.

131 *Islam-Pracārak* (Poush 1310 BS [December-January 1903]): 21.

132 The speech is included in Gautam Bhadra, *Nyāṛā Battalāẏ Jāẏ Kabār?* (Kolkata: Talpata, 2014): 263–270.

133 Bhadra, *Nyāṛā Battalāẏ*, 264.

134 Diachronic changes in the presence of Arabic-Persian loanwords have been discussed in Section 1.1. Scholars have worked extensively on the position of Bangla in multilingual literary networks in the early modern period. See Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory," in *History of Religions* 40 (2001), 261–88; Thibaut d'Hubert, focusing on the literary repertoire of Alaol, analyses the poetics of Middle Bangla literary traditions in the multilingual context of South and Southeast Asia and historicises Indo-Persian literature in Bengal and the surrounding regions in his work *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Ayesha Irani argues that Saiẏad Sultān, in *Nabīvaṃśa*, employed the strategies of translation that were pursued by Persian translators of the Arabic Tales of the Prophets. See Irani, *The Muhammad Avatāra: Salvation History, Translation, and the Making of Bengali Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

135 Bhadra, *Nyāṛā Battalāẏ*, 269.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid, 270.
138 Ibid, 268–269.
139 Presidential lecture at the third conference of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Sammelan, 1939, reprinted in *Jege Uthilām*, eds., Amzad Hosen et al (Kolkata: Biswakosh Parishad, 2019), 46–47.
140 Bhadra, *Nyāṛā Battalāẏ*, 269–270.
141 Rameshchandra Bandyopadhyay, "Maktab-Mādrāsār Bāṇgālābhāshā," *Māsik Basumatī* 1, no. 5 (Bhadra 1341 BS [August-September 1934]): 826–829.
142 Bandyopadhyay, "Maktab-Mādrāsār Bāṇgālābhāshā," 829.
143 *BMSP*, Year I, no. iv (Chaitra 1311 BS [March-April 1918]): 303.
144 *Nūr al-Imān* (Shraban 1307 BS [June-July 1901]), quoted in Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 253.
145 See "Prasaṇgakathā o Bhūmikā" (Introductory Note), *Pūrba Pākistanī Āncalik Bhāshār Abhidhān* (Bangla Academy: Dacca, 1965), iii. A team at the Bangla Academy in Dacca compiled the volume *Pūrba Pākistanī Āncalik Bhāshār Abhidhān* (Regional Dialect Dictionary of East Pakistan, also translated as Lexicon of East Pakistan Dialects) with Muhammad Shahidullah as its editor-in-chief. The dictionary contains 166,245 words from colloquial speech and regional dialects (including some from English), collected by 453 field workers in three years' from 17 districts. It was published serially in three volumes between 1965 and 1968.
146 Muhammad Shahidullah, "Āmāder Bhāshā Samasyā," Presidential lecture at the second conference of the BMSS, *BMSP*, Year 1, no. 1 (Baishakh 1325 BS [March-April 1918]), 6.
147 Hayat Mamud discusses this critique of Shahidullah by the scholars in "Śahīdullāh: Tār Jīban, Sukritī o Samaẏ," in *Dr. Muhammad Śahīdullāh Smārak Grantha*, eds., Shamsuzzaman Khan et al (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985), 33–52.
148 Ibid.
149 Compiled in Shahidullah, *Bhāshā o Sāhitya* (Language and Literature) (Dacca: The Dacca Library, 1931), 25–32.
150 Maulavi Saiyad Hafizullah, *Tāoẏājjāẏe Āhsāniẏā* (Dacca: 1925).
151 Brahmosangeet is a repertoire of devotional songs of the Brahmo Samaj exemplifying monotheistic sensibilities. This repertoire gradually became a very important part of Bengali cultural modernity.
152 The Urdu-Bangla debate will be further elaborated in Sections 5.1 and 5.1.2.
153 *Khelāphat Sambandhe Duiti Kathā: Maolānā Śaokat Ālī o Maolānā Muhammad Ālīr Bakritā* (Mymensigh: Khilafat Committee, 1919). No publication details available.
154 There are the voluminous *Musaddas-e madd-o jazr-e Islām* (1878–79) and the *Shikwah-e Hind* (1888).
155 Both books were published by the Provincial Library, Dacca in 1945.
156 Golam Mostafa, *Musaddas* (Hooghly: Hooghly Collegiate School, 1941).
157 Golam Mostafa, *Kālām-i-Ikbāl* (Dacca: Muslim Bengal Library, Dacca, 1957).
158 See Section 5.1 for more details.

159 These journals are discussed by the scholars at length to trace their individual contributions towards the political and poetic awakening of the reading public in the first decades of the 20th century. Bose, *Recasting the Region*, 57–74, 129–48; Samarpita Mitra, *Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture: Bengal at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (The Netherlands: Brill, 2020).

160 See Bose, *Recasting the Region; Samarpita Mitra, Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture*, for a discussion of these periodicals.

161 "Editorial," *Kohinūr* (Asharh 1305 [June-July 1898]), cited in Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake*, 392.

162 See Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, 1913-1929* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2021).

163 Nazrul himself edited the weekly *Dhūmketu* (Comet; 1922) and the weekly *Lāṇgal* (The Plough; 1925–26) which had a strong anti-imperialist tenor. He also held an important position at the journal *Samyabādī* (Socialist; 1922–25) alongside Muzaffar Ahmad and Abdul Halim. Another journal, *Nabajug*, was revived under his editorship in 1940.

164 *Makkā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1906), *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1907) and *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra* (1907) etc., which will be discussed in Section 4.1.2.

4 The Recovery of the Past
History and Biography

Prologue

In the devotional poem "Pāpīr Param Bandhu" (The Ultimate Saviour-Friend of the Sinner), poet Mohammad Daad Ali (1852–1936) of Kushtia district narrated in standardised Bangla how Ali, the father of Hasan and Husayn, expressed his pain to Prophet Muhammad after Husayn died in the battle of Karbala:

Hāsāne bisher dwārā
Karibek nidhan
Jal binā Kaśemer
Juddhe hatyā sādhan

Laksha laksha jodri mili
Saṃhāribe Hosene
Tāder se loha-rekhā
Rabe cira e mane

Śunechi tomār kāche
Bhishan atyācāre
Taba śishya baṃśadhar
Amār baṃśadhare

Karibe nihata hāẏ
Kaite hridi bidare
Ei sab pratiśodh
Laitām hāśare

Kariba tāder kshamā
Pratiśodh laba nā
Se punya ommate deba
Karanāko bhābanā

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With poison
Hasan was killed,
The enemy felled Kashem thirsty
In the battlefield.

Millions of soldiers
Slayed a solitary Husayn,
We will remember
The enduring bloodstain.

I heard, as you foretold,
How the son of your disciple
Would torture my progeny
And kill them in battle.

Remembering Karbala
My heart shatters in pain,
I could have taken vengeance,
On doomsday.

But I shall forgive them,
Revenge will not be sought.
I will, rather, sacrifice my progeny,
And offer my people the blessings I receive.
(Daad Ali, *Āśeke Rasul*)[1]

This excerpt from Daad Ali's *Āśeke Rasul* (The Lover of the Prophet, 1908),[2] a two-volume anthology with multiple editions, celebrates love for Muhammad in short lyrical poems. Shifting completely from the rhyme scheme of *paẏār*, Daad Ali emulated the style of poetry written in modern meters, such as those as prevailing at that time in the Hindu literary sphere. In this poem, Daad Ali affirms that Ali is willing to sacrifice his sons and therefore refrains from vengeance, extending the legacy of sacrifice from Muhammad to Husayn via Ali. In *jātīẏa sāhitya*, as already mentioned, the ethics of *shahādat* (sacrifice) reaffirm Muhammad's abilities beyond familial emotions, thus qualifying him as the Ultimate Prophet. *Jātīẏa sāhitya* offered Muhammad as the ideal template for ethical behaviour, and the early Islamic political state as the supreme example of polity and civilisation. *Jātīẏa sāhitya* explored various generic forms like history and biography to show how the virtue of sacrifice was carried forward by Husayn, and eventually attempted to resolve the crisis in the Caliphate. Daad Ali's renditions of the Karbala in poems like "Ommater prati Daẏā" (Mercy for the *Ummah*), "Nabi Ommater Gourab" (Muhammad, the Pride of the *Ummah*) or "Dhairjye Saphalatā" (Success in Patience) mixed the generic and thematic traits of history, biography and poetry. This generic multivalence, where history

was written as poetry, and poetry claimed as history, was in keeping with the ideational attributes of Muslim *jātīẏa* literature, where literature meant to carry historical truth and the ethico-moral values of Islam.

Daad Ali wrote *Āśeke Rasul* to compensate for his failure to go to *hajj:* "The pangs of separation from Medina have taken the shape of poetry," he wrote in the Preface. Within this larger spatial identification, it was not only Daad Ali who felt a new emotional pull to Medina and expressed it in poetic language, such emotion towards the land of Muhammad was the ethos of the time, defining the Bengali Muslims' newer transterritorial belonging as part of Muhammad's *ummah*. Such connections were realised and articulated by adopting two genres from a modern Bangla literature already dominated by Hindu authors, and thereby entering into a complex engagement of acceptance-rejection of the thematic formulations and aesthetic-poetic devices employed by Hindu authors. As the core of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, the history of early Islam had to be reclaimed and the script of the lives of venerated characters, from Muhammad to the members of the Early Caliphate and the *ahl al-bayt*, had to be penned.

This chapter traces a number of attributes of *jātīẏa sāhitya* by focusing on *itihās* (history) and *jībanī* (biography). It reads the ideological implications and relevance of the two genres – history and biography – as explored by the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* in order to reclaim the glory of Islam. The scope of history and biography offered to facilitate the transterritorial expansion of the Bengali Muslim spatial belonging between Medina and Bengal has been introduced in the previous chapter (Section 3.3). Continuing the discussion of *jātīẏa sāhitya* developing as a counter-narrative to Orientalist discourses and Christian evangelist preachings against Islam (Section 3.2), this chapter expands the argument here to show how the aesthetic-poetic values of *jātīẏa sāhitya* were formed through a highly complex creative adaptation of Brahmo (see Section 4.2) and Hindu literary devices, and through a rejection of polytheistic sensibilities and Hindu nationalist thematic arrangements. These two genres, this chapter shows, testify to the growth of discursive and narrative prose of and around the Bengali Muslim literary modernity.

Muslim *jātīẏa* literary endeavours were always caught in a defensive bind as they had to rescue Muslims from "wrong (*mithyā*), unjust (*anyaẏ*) and vilified (*śatrusulabh*) representation of Muslim culture and characters in the Hindu historical imaginations"[3] and restore respect and honour to the Bengali Muslims. History and biography were two ideal genres for reclaiming the superior values of Islam, inculcating a sense of glory among the Bengali Muslims, and helping them regain confidence. To understand how Muslim authors put forth claims about the historical authenticity of Islam and delineated the ethico-moral values for a modern readership – both Hindu and Muslim – I will discuss a number of works on the history of Islam and biographies of Islamic sacred characters. These historical texts include *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmaīiti* (1887) and *Islām*

Itibritta (1910) by Sheikh Abdur Rahim;[4] *Moslem Pratibhā* by Abdul Oyahed (1909);[5] *Makkā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1906, Figure 4.1), *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra* (1907) and *Madinā- Śarīpher Itihās* (1907) by Sheikh Abdul Jabbar;[6] *Moslem Patākā* (1924) by Saiyad Abul Hosen[7]; *Islāmer Itihās* (1924) by Qazi Akram Husain[8] and *Ichlāmer Itibritta* (1934) by Ahsan Ullah.[9] The biographies include *Mahāmmader Jīban Carit* (1886), *Hāsān Hosaỳaner Jībanī* (1901), *Cārijan Dharmmanetā* (1906) by Girishchandra Sen; *Hajarater Jībanī* (1913) by Sheikh Abdul Jabbar;[10] *Mahābīr Hajarat Ālīr Jībanī* (1926); *Chāri Āshāber Jībanī* (1929)[11], *Hajarat Emām Hāsān Hosener Jībanī* (1932) by Azhar Ali.[12]

By exploring these genres, their authors separated their narratives from what they believed were mythological and quasi-historical depictions of



Figure 4.1 Cover page: *Makkā-Śarīpher Itihās* by Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, 1909, 2nd edition, India Office Library Collection, The British Library, London.

Islamic themes in Dobhāshī. Hence they rejected the Dobhāshī repertoire for its lack of historicity and thematic standardisation and branded Dobhāshī incapable of expressing modern sensibilities. Mohammad Uddin Ahmed mentioned in the preface to his *Moharram Kānda* (1912),

> Till date inauthentic accounts of Islam have been circulated in the popular Battala market. The impact of those prints in Dobhāshī is all-pervasive. That there is not a single historical account of the battle of Karbala is a matter of disgrace for the Bengali Muslims.[13]

Such statements became a common refrain prefacing historical accounts of Islam and volumes on the lives of Islamic characters. By shunning Dobhāshī, the authors of history and biography moved on to newer devices, such as standardised generic attributes and stock themes, and authenticated their discourses with citations from an array of Islamic writings. All these shifts took shape against the backdrop of Brahmo discourses of monotheism and the Hindu nationalist polytheistic moorings based on the otherisation of the Muslims in the Bengali public sphere.

4.1 A Hindu nationalist script and the Muslim *jātīẏa*

With the development of Indological history as a discipline in Bangla, largely focused on revivalism and characterised by triumphalist Hindu religious-cultural tropes in the mid-19th century,[14] a new historical imagination, spread across various narrative-poetic modes, orientated Hindus towards their essential difference from Muslims. Bengali Hindu authors of Indologist history dwelt on themes of lament over the defeat of the people of *Bhāratvarsha* as a singular *jāti* (Hindu) at the hands of invading outsiders (Muslims), while at the same time establishing a Hindu past of masculine prowess that could be reclaimed in the present.[15] By the mid-19th century, the generic and aesthetic templates of Bangla historical literature had been formulated. Poets like Rangalal Bandyopadhyay (1827–1877), Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay (1838–1903) and Nabinchandra Sen (1847–1909), prose authors like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848–1909), and historians equally versatile in the domain of literature like Rajendralal Mitra (1822–1891), Haraprasad Sastri (1853–1931) and Rakhal Das Bandyopadhyay (1885–1930) called the medieval period of India a time of "Arab despots and blood-thirsty Muslim tyrants,"[16] imitating the Orientalists. What Rangalal Bandyopadhyay inaugurated in his depiction of the battle to protect Hindu Chittor in Rajputana against the advancing Islamic empire in Delhi in his long heroic poetry *Padmini Upākhyān* (1859) was popularised to uphold Hindu nationalist masculine virtues and vilify Muslims as the enemy of Hindu civilisation. Authors imagined the Rajputs and the Marathas as Hindu martial races who attempted to

win freedom from the Islamic empire to put an end to the 'dark' Muslim age. Indologist history, or the national history of the Hindus, essentially became the imagination of a collective glorious past, with the Muslims as the foreign race threatening its sovereignty. In his historical novels, Romesh Chunder Dutt glorified the martial attempts of the Rajputs and Marathas to "win freedom" from the Islamic empire as attempts to end the darkness of the Muslim reign.[17] Indologist history writing attempted to restore the dignity of the Hindus as the defeated race and as a nation, now territorially identified as *Bhāratvarsha*, and visualised as a mother.[18] The idea of a deified motherland, emblematically expressed in Bankimchandra's "*Bande Mātaram*" (Hail Mother[land], *Ānandamaṭh*, 1882), and the fetishisation of the Mother Goddess eventually deepened Hindu-Muslim communal differences in the nationalist public sphere.[19] Rajendralal Mitra wrote *Śibajī Carit* (The Life of Sivaji, 1860), and *Meoẏār Rājetibritta* (The Lineage of the Kings of Mewar, 1861), and published articles such as "Śikh Itihās," "Rājput Itihās," "Pānipather Yuddha" and "Jaẏpur Rājyer Itihās," which instilled a popular nationalist historical consciousness among the general Hindu reading public against the Muslims.[20]

In turn, Bengali Muslims conceptualised *jātīẏa sāhitya* to counter this overarching imagination of a masculine heroic Hindu race and civilisation which propped up Muslims as the ultimate other. They placed their counter-claims in *jātīẏa sāhitya* by citing from authentic Islamic discourses, which, in turn, standardised the generic attributes of history and biography. As Sheikh Abdur Rahim mentioned in *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmaīiti*, "showcasing the Islamic superior ideals ("*samunnata adarśa*") to one's neighbours"[21] was a pedagogical tool for the new Muslim readership which had, without knowing the greatness of Islam, opted to read the literature of the Hindus and internalised the vilified version of Islam and its civilisation. Authors like Sheikh Abdur Jabbar lamented at how a vast Muslim readership had grown without confidence in its religion and past; who had to be weaned away from the hegemony of Hindu nationalist literature through Muslim *itihās* and *jībanī*.

This realisation prompted a creative and productive domain of self-definition that connected *jātīẏa sāhitya* with world literature through the Bengali Muslims' exposure to multiple literary genres in various languages spread across regions. From Urdu translation of *hadis-tafsīr* and *ta'rīkh*, *ṣirāt* to Sufi treatises in Arabic, Persian and modern Urdu prose – essentially articles published in Urdu periodicals[22] – all these arrived on the reading lists of the literati. Exposure to the discourses of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb of Arabia and Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī of Afghanistan led to the production of a vast array of reformist literature in north India and Bengal through a complex network of reception of their writings and speeches. Reformist groups, from the Tariqah to the Hanafis, facilitated the spread of reformist ideas and pan-Islamism with

tremendous energy.[23] Scholars of Urdu periodicals have observed how the title of the Arab periodical *Al-Hilal*, edited by Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914), reappeared as the title of a periodical edited by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958). Azad, political activist and theologian, became the first education minister of independent India. Jurji Zaydan, author, journalist and pioneer of Arabic literary nationalism, was a staunch anti-imperialist. His "unacknowledged" influence can be marked in Azad's articulation of anti-British pro-Caliphate sentiment. But such reception remained in the individual level and did not become the general ethos in Bengal.[24] Though Zaydan's historical novels in Urdu translation became quite popular among the reading public in north India,[25] they did not enjoy the same currency in the Bengali Muslim literary sphere, however. From the absence of Zaydan's volumes in citations, either in Arabic or Urdu translations or adaptation of his work in Bengal, it may be concluded that historical writings in Bengal were not very receptive to the churnings in modern Urdu literature (original or translations) till the 1940s. Modern Urdu literature by Hali and Iqbal started to be translated into Bangla from the 1940s (Section 3.3, f.n. 158). Writings of other authors like Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926) on historical themes were not cited by the authors of *jātīya sāhitya* either in general. While they relied upon the translation and transcreation of reformist Islamic texts in Urdu, their connection to modern literary trends was achieved through the Brahmo and Hindu literati in Bengal and not via modern Urdu literature.

Dr Saiyad Abul Hosen (1862–?) of Hooghly district did mention one historical narrative of Sharar[26] in his list of references in *Moslem Patākā*. But he did not follow Sharar's narrative styles. For him, Sharar stood as the provider of historical data equivalent to the *ta'rīkh* volumes, while the poetics of narration or telling were derived from the more dramatic narratives of the Hindu authors. Abul Hosen devised the *Hoseini chanda* (Husayni meter) emulating the blank verse patterns of Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873), poet and dramatist, who had employed this meter for the first time in Bangla in *Meghnādbadh Kābya* (1861, The Slaying of Meghnad).

Though the allure of storytelling in Bangla literary genres was very hard to escape, as is evident in the writings of the Muslim authors, they did not consider the historical novel to be a very effective genre for conveying their *jātīya* ideologies in the Bangla literary field. Their apathy towards *Bishād Sindhu* by Mosharraf Hossain as a literary expression was also because of the "fictionalisation" of historical themes (*kalpita*) in a prose narrative, as Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid. B.T., a sub-inspector of schools, unambiguously declared in the Preface of his *Kārbālā* (1936) (for a detailed discussion, see Section 5.2).[27] In the circle of *jātīya sāhitya*, there was staunch criticism of historical genres by Hindu authors as they invariably vilified Muslims. One finds such criticisms in a cluster of novels by Saiyad Abul Hosen, the author of *Moslem Patākā* (The Flag of Islam). He wrote parodies of seven of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's

historical novels to expose ("*unmukta kore dite*") Chattopadhyay's bias against Muslims ("*Musalmān bidweś*").[28] He made grotesque parodies of the narratives, sometimes even crossing the boundaries of middle-class decency, mimicking Chattopadhyay's typical lexicon, sentence structure and narrative styles. A complete disavowal of Hindu themes and outcries against the odious portrayals of Muslims in literature penned by Hindus can be found in the writings of the Muslim authors like Meherullah, Abul Mansur (discussed in Section 3.2) and Saiyad Abul Hosen. However, their adherence to Sanskritised Bangla makes it quite clear that they were distinguishing between language as a medium and polytheistic sensibilities embedded in Hindu culture nationalism. Moreover, not only did such parodies invalidate the thematic concerns premised upon the bias against Muslims articulated by Chattopadhyay, they also rendered historical novels ineligible as a genre to uphold history writing.

In the broader literary sphere in Bengal, iconic religious figures – such as Krishna, Buddha and Chaitanya – were offered as modern and historical and positioned as ideal leaders of the community. *Jībanī*, *carit* and *jīban-carit* – these generic names categorised the literarised lives of such figures. The lives of Krishna, Buddha and Chaitanya – three icons perched on differing notches of divinity and historicity – were narrativised with the purpose of deriving historical truth from their lives. In the *jībanī* genre, these icons were generally connected to ideas of religious reform and the standardisation of literary ideals, as one might observe in *Śākyamuni o Nirbbāntattva* (1882) by Sadhu Aghornath Gupta (1841–1881),[29] *Krishňa Caritra* (The Life of Krishna, 1886–1892) by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the modern biography of Chaitanya, *Śrī Amiẏa Nimāi Carit* (1885–1914), written by Sisir Kumar Ghosh (1840–1911).[30] In a comparative framework, Ghosh placed Chaitanya as equivalent to Jesus Christ and Muhammad as a reformer and attempted to establish Chaitanya's superiority over them in a language redolent with the rhetoric of Hindu cultural nationalism. He declared that for Bengalis and Indians ("*Bāṇgālī kī bhāratbarshiẏa*"), Chaitanya should be the ideal reformist icon.[31] Chattopadhyay in *Krishna Caritra* redeemed Krishna, the "savage self of the Hindu Orient,"[32] of "mundane eroticism" and rescued his epic figure from the maze of the *purānas*, positing the Kurukshetra war in *Mahābhārata* as a historical event. Here, Chattopadhyay placed Krishna alongside Jesus and Buddha to claim him as superior to the other two. Chattopadhyay did not refer to Muhammad. All four, Krishna the *avatāra* deity, Buddha as deity/*mahāpurusha* (the supreme being), Chaitanya the *avatāra* (or incarnation of Vishnu) and Muhammad the Prophet were reclaimed in the late 19th-century Bengali public sphere under the same logic of historicity and collective identification.[33]

In this context, writing about early Islam and Islamic biographies was a significant literary attempt to historicise Muhammad along with his companions and grandsons as real figures, creates a sense of history, and provides an ethico-moral template for human action in terms

of reformist Islam. And just as Chattopadhyay rescued his divine hero Krishna from the fluidity of the *purāna*s, the Bengali Muslim *ulama* and literati authenticated Muhammad by historicising his life, both in biography and history, by citing an array of texts drawn from multiple genres, languages and temporalities.

4.1.1 The search for jātīẏa*: Territorial expansion and authentication*

> Ei samasta mādrāsār chātragaṇ ki jāne Islāmer itihās ki? Rasule Khodār aitihāsik jībanī ki jinish? Tāhārā ki Musalmān dharmmabidi-i samyak parijñāta? Tafsīr ebaṃ hādisei ki tāhāder sampurṇa dakshatā āche?
>
> Do these madrasa students know what the history of Islam is? Are they aware of the historical biography of the Prophet? Are they well acquainted with the proper scriptural codes of Islam? Have they cultivated knowledge in *hadis* or *tafsīr*?
>
> (Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra*)[34]

The emergence of *jātīẏa* sensibilities – or awakening (*jāgaraṇ*) – was often expressed through the use of history and biography as genres to depict the historicity of early Islam. Systems of authentication brought fixity into literary discourses, and the statement by Abdul Jabbar quoted above – pointing towards the literary discourses (history and biography) that needed to be cultivated together with knowledge of *hadis* and *tafsīr* – sanctioned equal status to the scriptures included in *jātīẏa sāhitya*. For such a claim, systematic citation and explanations were important for works created in these two genres, which in turn resulted in a layered narrative structure with long introductions, footnotes and annotations.

Nationalist historical discourses generally followed a teleology, progressing from a historicised origin to finally arrive at a territorially marked identity and belonging. But the dynamic connection between transterritoriality and identity in the emergence of historical consciousness in the Bengali Muslim public sphere was not necessarily equivalent to the template of territorial nationalism already laid down by its Hindu counterpart. The unique exercise of writing an episodic history from the time of Muhammad's *nabuyyat* to the battle of Karbala, via the Early Caliphate was formulated through the strict references of "authentic" sources. Narrative formulations were often taken from historical novels, against which *jātīẏa sāhitya* had launched an ideological battle. When the authors expanded the scope of the narrative by going beyond history and biography to write creative prose and poetry, at times referring to them as *kāhinī* (*Kārbālā Kāhinī*, prose) and *kābya* (*Kārbālā Kābya*, a poetic narrative), they continued to validate them with citations of the scriptures. As the literary renditions were authenticated by citations from Islamic discourses, the authors simultaneously enjoyed poetic freedom. But as the status of literary genres was confirmed in *jātīẏa sāhitya* as

historical truth and not truth-based literature, poetic freedom did not hurt *jātīya* literary ideals. Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid gives a list of 10 books starting his prose narrative *Kārbālā* (1936), which included the Urdu translations of five Arabic *ta'rīkh* volumes (*Ta'rīkh-e ibne Khaldun*, *Ta'rīkh-e ibne Asir*, *Ta'rīkh-e at-Tabari*, *Ta'rīkh-e Khamiz* and *Ta'rīkh ul-Islam*), a few narratives on the Karbala in Urdu (*Ṣirāt-e Husayn*, *Nural ayn fi Shahādat-e Husayn*, *'Urs-e Karbalā'*) and Girishchandra Sen's *Emām Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī* in Bangla. He categorically renounced Mir Mosharraf Hossain's *Bishād Sindhu* and the Dobhāshī *puthis* on the Karbala in a single stroke for their "historical inauthenticity." Such invalidation of the earlier sources on the battle of Karbala, which were multiple in number ("*Maharam sambandhe anek bai-i āche*"[35]), owing to their status of being not history but fabricated tales masquerading as history, became the generic articulation of any text on the Karbala – be it historical or biographical, prose or poetic narrative to offer historical authenticity by the author in his narrative. Even when no list of references is provided, such as in Abdul Bari Kabiratna's *Kārbālā Kābya* (1912),[36] as the authenticator of the text, the author makes it very clear that *Kārbālā Kābya* is based on historical facts ("*aitihāsik satyer opar saṃsthāpita*").[37] Bari explains in his introduction how he considers the classical days of Arabia, the basic tenets of Islam and the superiority of Islamic civilisation in an egalitarian, unbiased and precise form.

The ideal form of governance under the Early Caliphate as the legitimate legacy of Muhammad was celebrated by all the authors, major and minor, across the districts of Bengal, with unparalleled gusto. The episodes of history in these narratives generally had two thematic lines, one starting with the pre-Islamic clannish time and the other beginning with the time of Muhammad, that is, the period covering the spread of Islam. The history of pre-Islamic Arabia was also explored to secure a clannish genealogy of Muhammad's people, like Abul Ali Hafizal Hasan did in his *Ārab Itibritta* (1913) and Sheikh Reyazuddin Ahmed succeeded in showing in *Ārab Jātir Itihās* (second edition, 1915). Books starting with the time of Muhammad marked the inheritance of his legacy via the Early Caliphate and ended with the battle of Karbala. Examples of these include *Moslem Patākā* (1908) by Dr Saiyad Abul Hosen, *Moslem Jātir Itihās* (1927) by Golam Muhammad Khondakar and *Ichlāmer Itibritta* (1934) by Khan Bahadur Ahsan Ullah. *Islām Itibritta* by Sheikh Abdur Rahim and the second volume of *Moslem Patākā* drew the genealogy of the Caliphate directly from the governance of the first four rightly guided Caliphs, all the way to Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918), the Sultan of Turkey, who was the Sunni Caliph of Islam at the time.[38]

As discussed previously, the sense of location and belonging spread both temporally and spatially beyond Bengal with the advent of Islamic reform, and this had already been articulated in the Dobhāshī repertoire. But there was a marked shift from the exuberance of devotion expressed in the rhetoric of Sufi pangs of separation between Medina and the villages

of Bengal in Dobhāshī. But now, in both historical narratives and poetic renditions, geographical and cultural alignments with Mecca and Medina were sought out. Dobhāshī affect was now transformed into historical consciousness, an agenda "to inflame affinities with Islam and devotion for the homeland" (*jāhāte pāthakdiger dharmmānurāg o swadeśbhakti prabalrūpe uddīpta haite pāre*) as Abul Hosen explained in the introduction to *Moslem Patākā*.[39] Abul Hosen described the writing of the history of Mecca and Medina as that of real places at real times, impelled by the need to retrieve the intelligence (*buddhi*), glory (*gourab*) and pride (*darpa*) of the Muslims, which Muslim readers seemed to be forgetting by reading the worthless imaginations (*asār kalpī*) of Hindus about Muslims, all-pervasive in their books and periodicals. Abul Hosen turned *jātīya sāhitya* into an arena of ideological struggle to be played out by writing history, reminding Muslims of how they, "the clan of lions, were wilfully jumping into the well of disgrace getting tricked by the mythologies of the jackals,"[40] or metaphorically the version of history offered by the Hindu nationalists. Writing the early history of Islam was a project intended to retrieve the achievement of the ancestors of the Muslims in matters of wisdom, knowledge, art, technology and military prowess.

Together with history and biography as the two modern genres, the translation of the Qur'an and the *hadis* repertoire into Bangla brought Muhammad's speeches and actions close to the reading public.[41] Muhammad's presence in the *tafsīr* and *hadis* as the supreme protagonist narrating the revelation of Allah made the Prophet's life and experiences part of the Qur'anic experience. Mecca and Medina, where the Qur'an was revealed step by step to Muhammad, the Chosen One, were also real tangible spaces where Muhammad and his associates had lived. Mecca and Medina, as sacred sites, created emotive mediations and kindled in the Bengali Muslims a desire to embark upon *hajj*. Contemporary periodicals chronicled how more and more people from the Bengal countryside were setting out for *hajj*. Narratives on Mecca and Medina not only created historical consciousness among the Bengali Muslims, the experience of reading *itihās* and *jībanī* also energised the visual imagination of these places as a form of compensation for not physically undertaking the *hajj*. A reviewer of the *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1907) for the periodical *Moslem Suhrid* wrote:

> We were not born with the privilege to go to Mecca and Medina to see the sacred sites with our own eyes. Owing to the greatness of the author of *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās*, we got the privilege to see Mecca-Medina with our inner eyes.[42]

The poet Kaykobad too said that going for *hajj* to Mecca was economically impossible for him. But while writing about Mecca in his *Maharam Śarīph* (1933), he actually visualised the sacred land of Medina in his imagination thus: "*pāpī āmi – tāpī āmi, jīban bhariẏā/ je Makkā dekhite*

sādh chila ei mane;/ arthābhābe pāre nāi purite se āśā … kalpanā lo, dhanya tore, tui punyamaẏī, tori anugrahe āji dhanya hanu āmi/ dekhāli se Makkā mor antar-naẏane" (A sinner I am – deviant too/ All my life I desired to see Mecca with my own eyes/ But never was there any money to travel to the far-off sacred land/ O Poetic Imagination, my goddess, I hail thee/ you showed me Mecca in my inner vision).[43] The literati started to travel to Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Hejaz and wrote accounts of their travels, marking a new mobilisation through the oceanic routes across the Arabian Sea.[44] It can be observed that Shibli Nomani's travels to Syria, Egypt and Turkey in 1892, published in Urdu as *Safarnama e Rum-o-Misr-o-Sham*, inspired the literary imaginations of the aspirant traveller-writers in Bengal who set out for West Asia.[45]

Even though *hajj* narratives and descriptions of *bhramaṇ* (travel) differed from each other in terms of their intentions and narrative devices, the rhetoric of piety used in them often overlapped, making *hajj* and *bhramaṇ* interchangeable as devotional experiences. Travelogues, for instance, *Turaska Bhramaṇ* (Travel to Turkey, 1913) by Ismail Hosen Siraji, *Kanstāntinopal* (Constantinople, 1906) by Maniruzzaman Islamabadi,[46] *Moslem Kīrti o Islām Jagater Sacitra Bhramaṇ Brittānta* (The Great Deeds of the Muslims and a Pictorial depiction of Travel across the Muslim World, 1935) by Gazi Chaudhury Khan Bahadur Ajhajj[47] testify to such overlaps. International political events like the First Balkan War (1887), Turkey's position in the First World War (1914), the Khilafat Movement (1919–24) and the Greco-Turkish War (1921–22) placed Turkey at the centre of contemporary Islam in the collective regional Muslim consciousness, reflected in all these travel narratives.

In this project of retrieval, spatial imaginations of Mecca, and even more so Medina, forged symbolic transterritorial connections with the superior polity and knowledge of Muslims. Medina became the centre of Muslim devotional cartography, pulling all affective utterances across genres in a centripetal move towards where Muhammad lived, and where his mausoleum now stood. Abdul Bari, in *Kārbālā Kābya* (1912), overcome with emotion, wrote affective stanzas calling Medina the motherland (*mātribhūmi*). The description of Medina was full of blazing pride, "*jagate atul tumi*" (you are the most supreme one). The poet spoke of how devotion and joy rippled through the heart when one remembered Medina – "*ānanda khele prāṇe*."[48] It is curious to notice how the Bengali Muslims employed various affective-spatial terms to designate transterritorial and regional belongings, occasionally using the same word for both, resulting in an ambivalence in nomenclature and concept. Abul Hosen in *Moslem Patākā* (1924) designated adherence to a pan-Islamic connection, with devotional emotion for Arabia as "*swadeś bhakti*," and in the same breath designated the Bengali Muslims as the people of *swadeś*.[49] Abdul Bari Kabiratna, in his *Kārbālā Kābya* inserted a lyrical section titled "Ātma-nibedaner gān: Janma-bhūmir bandanā gīt" (A song of self-offering: An anthem for the motherland).[50] In that poem,

he connected Bengal with Medina by imagining dual motherlands. He claimed Banga (Bengal) as the "*janmabhūmi*" (motherland), and Medina as the "*priẏabhūmi*" (beloved land) equivalent to the motherland of the Bengali Muslims.

To come back to the question of authentication, this new spatial expansion and historicisation necessitated a thorough system of textual citation to claim the historical veracity of the literary discourses. Books like *Islāmer Itibritta* (1910) by Sheikh Abdur Rahim or *Islāmer Itihās* (1927) by Akram Husain and *Ichlāmer Itibritta* (1934) by Ahsan Ullah were structured in the form of research observations drawing upon a plethora of sources in the footnotes. Both Abdur Rahim and Akram Husain cited various texts written by the Orientalists and colonial historians and then critically refuted sections where those historians vilified Islam. For example, Ahsan Ullah took up one of the major contentious issues concerning Muhammad's multiple marriages which these British historians saw as Muhammad's unsatiable lust ("*kāmāturatā*").[51] Ahsan Ullah marked those marriages as Muhammad's acts of benevolent shelter ("*aśraẏ deoẏar uddeśye*"), providing the respectable umbrella of marriage to Hafsa bint Umar and Zaynab bint Khuzayma who were war widows.[52]

In the second edition of *Moslem Patākā*, after long introductions to both the editions, Syed Abul Hosen cited an array of reference material. They are: *Ta'rīkh al-Islam* by Sheikh Muhammad Mian (originally in Arabic, Urdu translation by Abul Fazl Abbasi), *Ṣirāt al-Farooq* by Ali Muhammad as-Salabi (Life of Umar, originally in Arabic, Urdu translation by Sirajuddin Ahammad), *Fateh Andalus* of Abdul Halim Sharar (The Victory of Andalus, Urdu) and seven books in English belonging to the genre of history including *The History of the Saracens* by Simon Ockley (1708, 1718), *Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada* by Washington Irving (1829), *History of the Saracen Empire* by Edward Gibbon (1870) and *Short History of the Saracens* by Syed Ameer Ali (1899). Such an eclectic choice of historical sources, not always coterminous or harmonious in their interpretations of Islam as a religion and civilisation, made the processes of authentication both rich in nuance and internally fissured.

The editor of *Sudhākar*, Sheikh Abdur Rahim, consulted various sources including *ṣirāt* and *maghāzī* texts relating to the Prophet's life, such as *Kitab at-Ta'rīkh wa al-Maghāzī ar-Rasul* by al-Waqidi (747–823), *As-Ṣirāt an-Nabawiyyah* by Ibn Hisham (d. 833) and *Madarij an-Nabuyyat* and *Jazbul Qulub* (A History of Medina), both by Sheikh Abdul Haq Dehlavi (1551–1642), a major revivalist theologian and *hadis* scholar of Delhi. At the same time, Abdur Rahim had translated various sections from the books of British historians like Gibbon and Muir and countered their analysis of Muhammad. Though the positions of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Ameer Ali did not entirely coincide, they provided valid rationalist historical frames of analysis which were emulated by Bangla-speaking litterateurs like Abdur Rahim. One may observe here a

re-evaluation of the traditional Islamic genre of history and life stories, *ta'rīkh* and *ṣirāt*, respectively, taken up by the authors of history, biography and prose narratives. Sheikh Abdul Jabbar relied upon *Jazb al-Qulub* by Sheikh 'Abd al-Haqq al-Dihlawī and *Ṣirāt al-Muhammadiyya* by Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan to write his *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās*. In the advertorial of his book, Abdul Jabbar did not neglect to mention that *Jazb al-Qulub* was the Persian adaptation of a *khabar* volume titled *Wafa al-wafa bi Akhbar Dar al-Mustafa* in Arabic by 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allāh Samhuddi (1440–1505) of Medina, in order to secure authenticity in linguistic (Arabic-Persian) and spatial terms (Medina). Simultaneously, his use of the Urdu version *Jazb al-Qulub* marked multilingual dimensions of authentication and generic fixity.

The gradual expansion of the Urdu literary network with the rising status of Urdu as the intermediary language for the Bengali Muslims brought more Arabic and Persian texts into the fold of reading experience through Urdu translations. But how the modern Arabic national literary expressions, so important at that time, were received by the Bengali Muslim literati has not yet been studied. Mohammad Akram Khan's mention of Jurji Zaydan as one of his resources in *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās* (1956) is significant here.[53] Zaydan, publicly active in the first half of the 20th century as an editor, journalist and pioneer of Arabic literary nationalism, attests to the connection of the Bengali Muslims with the contemporary Arabic literary network.

One might delineate another style of authentication employed by Akram Khan in his *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās*, a discourse in prose charting out the historical expansion of Islam that ended with the spread of Islam in India and Bengal. He consulted and referred to a wide range of materials and genres, including the Qur'an, *hadis*, *ṣirāt*, *maghāzī*, *ta'rīkh*, *adab* literature, as well as the writings of eminent historians of his times, Arabic poetry by various poets and the folk songs of Bengal. He cited a set of source materials, many of which were not referred to in the Bengali Muslim literary circuit, like the *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān* (Ar., Book of the Conquest of the Lands, the origin of the Islamic state) by al-Balādhurī (820–892), *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy* (Ar., The History of The World Conqueror, 13th century) by Atâ-Malik Juvayni (1226–1283) and *Ain-i-Akbari* (Pr., late-16th century) by Abu'l Fazl and *Ta'rīkh-e-Khan Jahani* (Pr., 1613) by Khwaja Ni'mat Allah al-Harawi. Apart from the *Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī* (Ar., 1901–1906) by Jurji Zaydan, *History of Bengal* (1943) by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the *Bisvakosh* (Encyclopaedia of the World, 1886–1911) by Nagendranath Basu[54] and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he also included medieval manuscripts by the *ulama* and the Sufis in both Arabic-Persian and Bangla like *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Akram Khan constantly emphasised the need to read and authenticate any theological interpretations with reference to the Qur'an and authentic *hadis* texts, affirming his reliance of individual reasoning (*ijtihād*).

In his endeavour to historicise the dynamic spread of Islam from its originary land Arabia, Akram Khan attempts to posit the centrality of

the Arab people and domination of the Arabic discourses over the idea of the Persianate Islamicate cultures. He goes to the extent of refuting the idea of the presence of Persia ("*Pārasya deś baliẏā duniẏāẏ kona deś chila nā*") with the aid of the inscriptions of Darius and old maps because of its adherence to conservative polytheism ("*rakshanśīl pouttalikatā*"). Akram Khan suggests that it came to become a region with the advent of Islam. Furthermore, his understanding of the Muslim people was strictly based on their racial identification as the Arabs ("*Ārab jāti*") that expanded Islam territorially ("*abhiyān*," "*bijaẏ*") and converted the local people ("*sthāniẏa adhibāsider Islām dharma grahaṇ*"). Akram Khan's formulation of the Arab *jāti* was based on strict racial-linguistic autonomy. The other authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* discussed here meanwhile placed the Arab *jāti* and its religious and cultural superiority in a multilingual and multilocal framework. A strong logic of Arabicisation was utilised to explain the processes of Islamisation and formulate the Islamicate world in Akram Khan's discourses. In this logic, he placed Muslim identity in the diglossia of Arabic and Sanskritised Bangla. His *ijtihādi* position was reaffirmed by his direct access to the Arabic texts, belonging both to the scriptural and the *ta'rīkh* genres, without any mediation of Persian, though his reading list had a plethora of Persian discourses on history. While claiming to propose Arabicisation as the central axis of Islamisation, Akram Khan differentiates himself from the invocation of any universal idea of Arabic nationalism emerging in Syria and Lebanon from the beginning of the 20th century. His rejected Jurji Zaydan's statement on the absence of sea voyage among the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era, terming it derogatory for the Arab race whose navigational skills, in Akram Khan's understanding, were excellent. Akram Khan refuted Zaydan's analytical framework as he discerned in it a deliberate ploy to defame the Arabs in the Hijaz region, being himself a Christian.[55] But such different models of appropriation and rejection of the available discourses actually prove the Bengali Muslims' multi-temporal and multi-spatial connections with Islam, endowing the region with a complex transterritorial self-fashioning as a regional community.

4.1.2 Writing the history of the sacred: Between Medina and Mymensingh

Pūrṇa nahe man jār itihās jñāne
Jīban tikta hate mishta nāhi jāne
Atīt kāhinī mālā gāthe je jatane
Naba naba janma sei labhe e jībane

Ei jātīẏa abhyūdaẏer dine Islāmer itihās pratyek nara-nārīr abaśya pāṭhya. Je sādhanāẏ birāt Moslem sabhyatā o sāmrājya sādhita haiẏāche, Islāmer itihāse tāhār suspashta nirdeś rahiẏāche.

> His mind is not full to the brim
> who does not have the knowledge of history
> He who threads a garland with tales from history
> Is born anew in one single life.
>
> On this day of our *jātīẏa* awakening, every Muslim man and woman should read the history of Islam. The efforts that were taken to achieve such a glorious Muslim civilisation and the Islamic Empire have been illustrated in Islamic history.
>
> (Qazi Akram Husain, *Islāmer Itihās*)[56]

This short poem and the following prose section which appeared on the title page of Qazi Akram Husain's (1896–1963) *Islāmer Itihās* indicate the general sensibilities around writing the history of Islam as one of the major *jātīẏa* endeavours. In the first volume, the author maps the growth of Islam, encompassing a time frame ranging from the pre-Islamic clannish era to the Ottoman Caliphate via all the major episodes – the time of Muhammad and the development of the Caliphate episodically, ending with the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. In the second volume, he illustrates the spread of Islam through vast spatial expansions, including different countries in West Asia, Middle and East Africa and Southeast Asia via land and sea routes. Akram Husain, coming from a family of the qazis in Khulna district, with an M.A. degree in English Literature from Calcutta's Presidency College, published other books on history like *Islāmer Kahinī* (The Tale of Islam, 1931) and *Islāmer Itikathā* (The Story of Islam, 1932) for both students as well as general readers. On the title page of *Islāmer Itihās*, as for all his books, the term "*punaruththān*" (resurrection) is printed as a recurrent leitmotif, to inspire his readers to rise from, in his view, the morass into which the Bengali Muslims had fallen. The authors of the history of Islam echoed Ahsan Ullah, another author of the history of Islam in his *Ichlāmer Itibritta* (1934), who said that without a connection to *jātīẏa* history, the Bengali Muslims remained inferior and backward compared to the other communities ("*jātīẏa itihās alocanār abhābe baṇgīẏa Mochalmān anyānya jāti apekshā anunnata o hīṇabal*").[57] Akram Husain lamented, "A race without a history is of no consequence whatsoever. And one that has a history but chooses not to know it, is truly an ill-fated race. The Bengali Muslims belong to this latter category" (*je jātir itihās nāi, se jāti naganya, ār je jātir itihās āche, athaca tāhār sandhān rākhe nā, bastabik-i se jāti bhāgyahīṇ. Bāṃlādeśer Musalmān ei śeshokta śrenīr antargata*).[58] The superiority of the Muslims as a people was reaffirmed, interestingly, not only through the discovery of a glorious political past, but also by recognising them as the people who gave birth to the discipline of history. Ahsan Ullah wrote in the Preface to his *Ichlāmer Itibritta* (1934):

> *E kathā cira satya je, Mochalmān rāi jagate itihās-śāstrer janmadātā o mantraguru. Ati prācīnkāl haitei tāhāder jerūp puṅkhanāpuṅkha o*

> *dhārābāhik itihās āche, jagater ār kono jātir serūp itihās āche kinā sandeha. Kintu duksher bishaẏ, e kathā anekei anabagata.*
>
> It is but an eternal truth that the Muslims are the progenitors and mentors of history. I doubt that any other race in the world has the kind of meticulous and episodic history that the Muslims have owned since the most ancient times. But, lamentably, very few are aware of this fact.
>
> (Ahsan Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta*)[59]

Citing references of the first *fitna*, the battle of Karbala and of political decline during the Crusades, Akram Husain asked his readers to draw inspiration from the ability of Islamic civilisation to be *reborn* from destruction at several conjunctions in history. For Akram Husain, the battle of Karbala "intensified the moral crisis that emerged with the assassinations of Umar and Ali," (*sarbbopari Kārbālār kalaṅka-kahinī sei bishādke aro ghanībhūta kariẏā tuliẏāchila*) when the community had to prove its ability to carry on after the Prophet.[60]

By the 1930s, the overall disregard of Muslim transterritorial belonging by Hindu political actors in the Khilafat Movement generated a strong sense of mistrust in the Muslim community to rule out any possible political coalition with the Hindus. At the same time, the spread of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League intensified the possibility of a political turn to a communal identity. At that time, a rhetoric of coexistence prevailed in *jātīẏa sāhitya* which can be observed in this statement of Akram Husain in *Islāmer Itihās*:

> *Musalmāner itihās abagata haoẏā āmrā je kebal Musalmāner janyai prayojan mane kari tāhā nahe, Hindur paksheo abaśya kartabya baliẏā bibecanā kari. Niẏatir cakre āmrā duiti jāti pāśāpāśi āsiyā dārhāiẏāchi. Hindu-Musalmāne sadbhāb nā haile Bhārate śāntir āśā sudūr-parāhata. Sadbhāber pūrbe paricaẏ praẏojan. Sei janya Hinduke Musalmāner ebaṃ Musalmānke Hindur itihās anusandhān karite haibe.*
>
> We believe that it is not only the Muslims who should be aware of their own history, but it is also essential for the Hindus. By a twist of fate these two races have come to stand side by side. Without amity between the Hindus and the Muslims, our country will neither flourish, nor will there be peace. But before we can achieve harmony, making mutual acquaintance is the first step. This is why the Hindus and Muslims must explore the history of each other.
>
> (Akram Husain, *Islāmer Itihās*)[61]

Even the religious periodicals like *Āhle Hādis* and *Islām Darśan* expressed a similar stand in unambiguous terms.

That the Hindus should know the glorious history of Islam and its higher ideals and thereafter rewrite their Hindu nationalist narratives was an opinion shared by many Muslim authors of the time. Ahsan Ullah, in his *Islāmer Itihās*, almost exactly echoed Akram Husain:

> Bhārate Hindu o Mochalamāner ekatā laiẏā caturdike ektā rol uṭhiẏāche. Je parjanta Hindu o Mochalmān parasparer itihās o pūrba gourab anabagata thākibe, se parjanta Hindu-Mochalmāner madhye samprīti sambhabpar haibe baliyā mane haẏ nā.
>
> There has lately been much hue and cry about unity between Hindus and Muslims. But as long as the Hindus and Muslims remain unaware and ignorant of each other's histories, there cannot be any accord between the two.
>
> (Ahsan Ullah, *Islāmer Itihās*)[62]

The overarching sense of separation that weighed upon the Hindu and Muslim communities during the proposed Partition of Bengal (1905–11) was temporarily resolved at the time of the Khilafat Movement and the Muslim alliance with the Indian National Congress (INC). The Khilafat Movement for a brief span in the early 1920s bridged Muslim pan-Islamic identity with its territorial national belonging by facilitating an anti-British political sentiment.[63] Participation in anti-British national politics had so far remained a matter of individual choice of the Muslims, and not a collective motivation as observed in the participation of Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Mohammad Akram Khan in the INC.

To come back to the question of authentication, the choice of source texts and the methodology of citation can mark different reformist stances within *jātīẏa sāhitya*. While Akram Khan himself was not entirely against reading descriptive genres like *ṣirāt* and *maghāzī* as authentic sources of history, he criticised the *muhaddidh* (authorities of the true *hadis*), who neither scrutinised nor prevented the wide proliferation of descriptive genres that were so prone to perpetuating inauthentic information.[64] He advocated instead a path of independent reasoning to rationally evaluate the facts offered by these texts. His rationale was derived largely from Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's rationalism and it displeased many contemporary Hanafi *ulama* and literati. The latter group did not separate what Khan called the real or empirical ("*bāstab*") from the extraordinary experiences of the Prophet. The modernising turn in reformist Islam had evidently given rise to multiple definitions of what was rational in Muhammad's life, both as a sacred life and also as a historically situated one. Thus, the historical narratives were often endowed with emotions associated with piety not on a par with modern rationalism. *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1907) by Sheikh Abdul Jabbar elaborated upon the redemptive capacities of Medina, as a site of pilgrimage, across three pages. The author validated his claims citing references from *hadis* (Muhammad's life) and

biographical sketches of one reformist *alim*. Here, three temporalities come together as the narrative experience to validate the redemptive value of Medina. In *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās* the timelessness of the prophetic experience was inseparable from Muhammad's life in historical time, which was equally entwined with the contemporary time of Islamic reform. Jabbar, for example, describes the healing powers bestowed on the dust of Medina city by the touch of Muhammad's feet as he walked on its streets. Jabbar placed his newfound Muslim readership within a transterritorial pull of devotional identification by deifying Medina. Jabbar goes on to cite *Bukhari Sharif* to describe Medina's strong redemptive power: "Medina is a sacred place. As fire cleanses gold of impurities, so does living in Medina. It purifies the hearts of the sinful." He then quoted Firuzabadi, a reformist scholar, who vouched for this sacredness of the soil of Medina as he "applied that dust, mixed with water, to cure some unknown fever." Firuzabadi prescribed this solution for any kind of ailment.[65]

Mohammad Akram Khan attempted to expel the roots of such enchantments from his notion of historicity, and made a strict distinction between religious rationalism and popular piety as the primary condition for the religious modernity that he advocated. But that only invited trenchant criticism from the Hanafi *ulama*, with Ruhul Amin leading powerful antagonistic voices from within the Bengali Muslim reformist sphere.

Literary modernity in history and biography thus required different orders of rationalism, exploration and emulation of the stylistic devices prevalent in the modern Bangla literary sphere. Biographical writings, generally named *jībanī* or *carit*, adopted forms of narration and poetics of language from contemporary biographical genres authored by the Hindus and Brahmos. The most prolific repertoire of the *jībanī* of Islamic sacred figures was created by Bhai Girishchandra Sen (1835-1910), a polyglot Brahmo scholar, who had a significant influence on Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

4.2 *Jībanī/Carit* as a modern genre: The contribution of Girishchandra Sen

> Ei mahāpurusher jīban brittānta jatai alocita haibe, pāper prabhāb tatai kamiẏā āsibe, ebaṃ bhramāndha mānush punyer dike tatai agrasar haite thākibe.
>
> The more you recount the life stories of this great *man*, the more your sins shall wash away, and the deviant men will move towards virtue. [emphasis mine]
>
> ("Introduction," Kaykobad to *Hajarater Jībanī* of Sheikh Abdul Jabbar)[66]

The authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* felt that the accounts of Muhammad's life had to be rescued from earlier devotional articulations by differentiating between what Sheikh Abdul Jabbar marked as the "invented" (*kalpita*)

and the "imagined elements" (*kālpanik tathya*).[67] Generic reformulations were needed to bring out Muhammad's life from the recitation and singing of *maulud sharif* to structure it in the form of *jībanī*. The intention was to convey the religious tenets of a "this-worldly Islam," undergirded by Mohammad's mortality and humanity. At the same time, through *jībanī* as a modern genre, the derogatory Orientalist interpretations of Muhammad's life were refuted and a rational-historical version of his life was put forth.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan systematically countered William Muir's *Life of Mohamet* (1861) in his *Al-Khutbat al-Ahmadiya fi'l Arab wa'i Ṣirāt al-Muhammadiya* (A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad from the Original Sources; 1869–70)[68] which made a deep impact on the ongoing attempt of the Bengali Muslims to write Muhammad's *jībanī*.[69] Syed Ameer Ali, following Syed Ahmad Khan, defended Muhammad's exalted status as a religious reformer and an authority on military knowledge and statecraft.

The authors of Muhammad's *jībanī* utilised the writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Syed Ameer Ali and Muir, otherwise on two opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. Sheikh Abdur Rahim consulted all of them to write his *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmanīti*, intended to lend historicity to Islam and its Prophet. But Bengali Muslim authors in general, such as Jabbar, neither followed Syed Ahmad's rationalism nor Ameer Ami's westernisation. When Mohammad Akram Khan took to the logic of rationalism drawing from the framework of Syed Ahmad Khan (although without advocating total westernisation of pedagogy and knowledge like Syed Ahmad), to present scientific explanations of the events in Muhammad's life in his *Mostāphā Carit* (1925), he came under attack from the displeased Hanafi *ulama*.[70] It is quite probable that such sharp critique from the *ulama* had its roots in the intra-Islamic conflict between the Tariqahite Akram Khan and his Hanafi co-religionists, which was reflected in the disagreements chronicled in contemporary journals on various other theological matters as well.[71] Syed Ahmad Khan was greatly annoyed by the fact that English-educated young men from the community, ignorant of religious knowledge due to their inability to understand Persian or Arabic, would succumb to Muir's "misrepresentation of plain and simple facts."[72] The Bengali literati suffered from the same anxiety that the newly educated youth might internalise the negative portrayals of Islam and its Prophet written by the Orientalist missionaries and the Hindu literati.[73] However, in their case, the Hindu authors rather than the English ones caused more concern, as the general Muslim reading public was not generally used to reading in English. It was fairly common for litterateurs to express anxiety about the portrayal of Muslims in the writings of Hindu authors. One author, Nurunnecha Khatun, said in the introduction to her book, *Moslem Bikram o Bāṇgālay Moslem Rājatwa* (The Prowess of the Muslims and their Reign in Bengal), how the Muslims were portrayed as "lecherous, instinctive, greedy and lazy" (*kāmuk, durbal bā kāpurush*)

in the literature and textbooks penned by Hindus. She affirmed that these "completely untrue" versions were motivated by a "habitual sense of jealousy and falsification" (*svabhābsulabh īrshā o mithyā pralāp*) of the Hindus.[74] The Bengali Muslim literati's explorations within the genres of biography and history were thus also quests for an answer to the question that Syed Ahmad had put forward in the face of the Orientalist-evangelist depictions of Islam and its history – "what are those facts in reality?"[75]

In this context, the narratives on the lives of the Early Caliphate became an important entry to the ideal polity and superior Islamic ethics attested to in the biographies. Azhar Ali stated emphatically in the introduction to his *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī* (1929) that

> [a]ll the ideals that are embedded in the sacred lives of these personalities are difficult to cull from elsewhere. Compared to their sacred lives and actions, we do not qualify as Muslims […]. If Muslims of today had one *anna* of their sacred attributes, the Muslim community would not have fallen into such disgrace.[76]

In Bangla, biographies of Usman are scarce,[77] but Abu Bakr, Umar and Ali were portrayed as exemplary figures representing the remarkable territorial expansion of Islam which made it a world religion. Ali was also a central figure in Sufi-influenced literature, confirming the presence of Alid-piety in Bengal, where Ali, as well as the members of the *panjatan pak*, were venerated alongside Hasan and Husayn.

As an important member of the league of Brahmo scholars, Girishchandra Sen holds a significant position here, singlehandedly formulating a template of linguistic and generic modernity in Sanskritised Bangla for the Islamic corpus. He was not only the first non-Muslim Bengali to translate the entire Qur'an and *hadis* into Bangla, he also wrote the *jībanī* of the major Abrahamic prophets, ending with Muhammad (*Mahāpurush Carit*, four volumes; 1883–1886). *Mahāmmader Jīban Carit* (1886) follows Muhammad's life from his *hijrat* from Mecca to Medina, up to his demise, and also records the early history of Islam from Muhammad's time to the battle of Karbala, stopping before the Umayyad period. Sen did not include the later histories, as he opined that the ideal time for knowledge formation in Islam was before the battle of Karbala. Sen translated the Persian compilation of the biographies of Sufi saints (*Tazkirat al-Awliyā*,' by Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭar, 12th century) as Bangla *Tāpasmālā* (1881, 1882)[78] even before Naimuddin started translating the Qur'an (1891) or Sheikh Abdur Rahim wrote *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti* (1889). Then came Sen's biographies of Hasan and Husayn (*Emām Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī*, 1901), the *ṣaḥābas* (*Cārijan Dharmmanetā*, 1906)[79] and the major female figures of Islamic history. Sen was very particular about citing his sources and referred to Husain Kashifi's *Jawaher at-Tafsīr*, *Akhlāq e-Muḥsinī* and *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'*.

In fact, *Rawẓat ash-Shuhadā'* was consulted by many later authors, some via Sen. Though Sen authenticated his biography of Hasan and Husayn through Kashifi's *Rawẓat* and *Ansar ash-Shahādatain*, he did admit to taking some poetic liberties by "not translating all of Kashifi's poems and taking the core ideas embedded in them" to keep the book to a manageable length.[80] So the opening of a gateway to Arabic-Persian texts for the Bengali Muslims by Sen resulted in their exposure to several such texts being indirect translations/transcreations mediated by Sen. In order to translate Islamic scriptures, the Qur'an and *hadis*, Sen adopted lexical equivalents within monotheistic Christianity in Sanskritised Bangla from translations of the gospels published by proselytising missionaries, with Sanskrit pundits as interlocutors. Sen's use of modern literary devices to depict biographical sketches of the sacred lives of Islam brought in a marked shift in the way these lives were narrated in the Dobhāshī repertoire. He put together an enormous body of work on Islam which was devoid of any of the essentialisations that the Orientalists, Christian missionaries and Hindu nationalist authors had made to disparage Islam, its Prophet and its people. Sen's corpus was thus a unique contribution to the study of Islam, which kindled creative energy in the Bengali Muslim public sphere towards modernising genre and language. In the plethora of texts on the lives of the sacred figures that followed, produced by Bengali Muslim authors to shape the core and contours of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, there was the unacknowledged influence of Sen, discernible in the choice of equivalents, syntactic structure and narrative flow. For example, Sen attempted in the introduction of his first volume of the Qur'an to explain the absence of Islamic knowledge in public domain by claiming that "the Qur'an is confined in the invincible fort of Arabic language" (*Ārabya bhāshārup durbhedya durge ābaddha*)[81] an idea that recurred in the discourses of the Bengali Muslims. Sheikh Abdur Rahim used it verbatim in his *Islām Itibritta* to explain the lack of spiritual morality and absence of empowerment and growth as a community, since "the history of Islam is confined in the invincible fort of Arabic language."[82]

The ambiguity left behind by the Prophet, who had not officially declared the name of the first Caliph to succeed him as his spiritual and political heir, had to be addressed both in the historical and biographical writings. Volumes like *Cārijan Dharmanetā* (1906) by Girishchandra Sen and *Cāri Ashāber Jībanī* (1929) by Azhar Ali depicted an exemplary time of unity for the *ummah* while each one of the Sunni Caliphate took great care to resolve the crisis within (see Section 4.5). Abdur Rahim's *Islām Itibritta* starts with the death of Muhammad, continues to narrate in consecutive volumes the accounts of the lives of the first four Caliphs, equating *itihās* with *jībanī* and vice versa. Abdur Rahim succinctly commented that as the Caliphate was never a hereditary system and was distinct from the *nabuyyat*, the legacy of prophethood could not continue in any form. This is why, after Muhammad, Ali could not become the first Caliph.[83]

Why did Sen choose to write about the deaths of Hasan and Husayn, which had fuelled such an irreparable sectarian rift within Islam? As a non-Muslim and a member of the Brahmo Samaj, he was not personally invested in the Sunni-Shī'a antagonism integral to the history of Karbala, nor was he judgemental towards the Shī'ī commemorative ritual of Muharram, as is evident in the way he describes the ritual at the beginning of his *Emām Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī*. He recounted the different performative aspects of the Muharram ritual in which, he added, Sunnis also participated:

> Sei emāmer prati ekānta bhaktibaśata: Śīẏā sampradāybhukta Mosalmāngan dalabaddha haiẏā prati batsar ukta dibase tāhār uddeśye tājiẏā (śok prakāś) kariẏā thāken. Sunnī sampradāẏ bhukta anek Mosalmān o tāhāte jogdān karen. … Bahu Mosalmān āpan āpan bakshaḥsthale āghāt kariẏā "Hosayen Hosayen" śabda uccasware uccāran pūrbbak dalabaddha bhābe pathe pathe śok prakāś kariẏā berhān. … Śīẏā sampradāybhukta bhadramahilāgan o antaḥpure ei prakār śok prakaś karen.
>
> With their utmost devotion, the Shī'as congregate on the day of Ashura to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn by carrying the *ta'ziyeh*. Many Muslims belonging to the Sunni community also participate. … Muslims in various groups walk the streets beating their chests and chanting "Husayn Husayn" to mourn Husayn's martyrdom. Women of the Shī'a community engage in ritual mourning in the privacy of their homes.
>
> (Girishchandra Sen, *Emām Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī*)[84]

Sen placed the significance of Husayn's martyrdom within the ambit of Shī'a sensibility, but generalised it within the larger framework of Islam, where Sunni-Shī'a rivalry did not become his concern. In fact, Sen did not narrate the battle of Karbala as an internal sectarian struggle. Rather, for him it was the royal Umayyad dynasty of Damesque, which as the rival force to the spiritual authority of the Early Caliphate in Medina, caused the battle of Karbala. Sen's demarcation between the Early Caliphate and the Umayyad Caliphate resounded in the writings of the later Muslim authors of history and biography. Hasan and Husayn clearly stood for the Islamic virtues of unparalleled patience ("*asāmānya dhairyya*"), steadfastness ("*sahishňutā*"), total subjugation to Divine will ("*Iśwarer prati ekānta nirbhar*") and unshakable faith amidst unbearable pain and extreme adversities ("*durbishaha kleś*"). Sen wrote: "Such enthusiastic and selfless sacrifice ("*akātare o utsāha sahakāre prāṇdan*") in the battle of Karbala out of deep devotion ("*pragāḍha bhakti*") for their leader-teacher ("*netā o āchāryya*") cannot be found anywhere else."[85]

Sen himself, in fact, much before the reformist Hanafi *ulama* had attempted to resolve these sectarian issues, had positioned Hasan and

Husayn as the catalysts of unification between the Sunnis and the Shī'as, and introduced a rhetoric that placed the brothers at the centre of a Prophet-centric piety. He wrote with emotion how Muhammad had bequeathed his virtues to the duo: "Hasan will get my attributes ("*prakriti*") and honour ("*gourab-aṃśa*"), and for Husayn I keep my prowess ("*bīryya*") and generosity ("*badānyatā*")," [86] and described how Husayn had exclaimed before the battle of Karbala that truce and amity ("*sandhi o sadbhāb sthāpan*"), not war, was his foremost concern.[87] Sen even mentioned that Kashifi, the Sunni theologian, had written about the Karbala martyrdom,[88] thus preparing the ground in his biography for understanding Husayn-centric piety as universal Islamic devotion, and not just Shī'ī intercession. The reformist *ulama* and literati also placed Husayn's attributes to become a martyr within the universal Islamic value system, but unlike Sen, their idea of Islam was parochially ideated within the Sunni domain that they had hegemonically created across genres in order to erase Shī'a identification with Husayn.

On many occasions, Sen oscillates between third-person and the first-person expository narratorial voices, often saturated with the power of affect. Sen followed a storyline where Hasan's wife Asma (Zayda in most of the other renditions) was tempted by Yazid with the offer of becoming the queen of Damesque, his kingdom, if she poisoned her husband Hasan. But Yazid punished this husband-killer at the end of the battle of Karbala. Sen could not restrain his emotions: "See, now that husband-killer Asma has become the queen of Damesque. See how she was punished in an open public square! See how the grave crime was retributed with a grave punishment" (*gurutara pāper keman gurutara pariṇām o gurutara daṇda haila*).[89] As a Brahmo litterateur, he felt compelled to sanitise certain Islamic customs which, according to him, were not "morally acceptable and excruciatingly painful" (*niratiśaẏ kashta*) especially as they were practised by such a "race with superior values" (*ucca bhāber jāti*).[90] When Hasan sends a proposal of marriage to Zaynab, Sen abruptly shifts to a first-person voice disapproving polygamy. Sen held Hasan's polygamy to be the cause behind the heart-wrenching deaths that followed. This sternly judgmental voice returns in the episode when Husayn's daughter Sakina is wedded to Hasan's son Qasim right before he joins the battle.[91] While Sen expresses his grief at the untimely loss of a young life in lyrically poignant language, he adds a footnote injecting some ambiguity over the identity of Sakina as Husayn's biological daughter by saying that the relationship "could not be clearly understood" (*thik bujhā jāiteche nā*) because he personally felt that marriages between cousins were "utterly vulgar and unnatural" (*kutsit o aswābhābik*).[92] Sakina was finally identified by Sen as some virgin foster daughter of Husayn and not his biological offspring so that he could sanitise the story for his Brahmo and Hindu readership. Sen always utilised his narratorial authority to explain various Islamic religious or theological intricacies, such as describing how a crisis was

resolved by consulting a *phāl* (*al-f'aal*, Ar., form of reasoning in the Qur'an), or how the death rites were performed by reading the *Istirja darud* "innā lillāhi wa 'innā 'ilayhi rāji 'un" (verily we belong to God and verily to him do we return) etc.[93] He provided explanations for every historical, cultural and geographical specificity that he thought could be unfamiliar to his readers and often engaged in affect-laden commentaries endowing his biographies with the elements of storytelling. At the same time, he qualified his narrative with an ornate prose that minimised the gap between history and narrative, a trait evident in modern genres based on history, such as the historical novel. Although Sen began his narrative by presenting an inclusive picture of Muharram, in his principal narrative, Husayn was depicted as asking his wife Sahrbanu neither to uncover her head during mourning, nor let loose her hair nor strike her forehead and chest if she saw him fall from horseback and bleed out to death:

> Preẏasī, jadi e sthāne erūp dekha je āmi turaṇga prisṭha haite patita haiẏāchi, āmār mastak kshata bikshata ebaṃ aṇga pratyaṇga sakal śastrāghāte chinna bhinna, sābdhān! Takhan swīẏa mastak o keś puňjake ābaran mukta ebaṃ lalāt deśe o bakshasthale karāghāt kario nā.[94]

His young daughter Sakina, while devastated with grief over her martyred husband Qasim, similarly instructed her female relatives not to slap their cheeks or let their hair loose as expressions of grief, saying that such acts were performed by the ignorant, devoid of religion.[95] Sen, writing from outside the Muslim community, possibly remained faithful to Kashifi's source text, where such physical display of Muharram grief was prohibited, indicating the growing intolerance of the Sunnis towards the Shī'as in Kashifi's time.[96] Sen restaged this in his biography as a thematic repetition and not as his own authorial intervention.

But when the modern literary genres designated as *jātīẏa sāhitya* by the Bengali Muslim literati articulated such prohibitions across genres, they were not merely emulating their source texts. They were, rather, utilising all the narrative strategies and occasions available to invalidate the intercessory piety of the Shī'as, and their frenzied form of lament. At the same time, like the authors of the Dobhāshī repertoire, they had to validate the flow of tears and the heartfelt lament as expressions of grief at the loss of the Prophet's grandson. And it is by virtue of this inherent tragic-dramatic charge of the battle of Karbala that the life of Husayn spilled over from the domain of biography to become one of the most celebrated literary themes across genres in *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

It was Sen who first expressed the need to include Islamic themes in standardised modern genres articulated in Sanskritised Bangla. Following Sen, who opened up generic possibilities to rationalise and historicise the

sacred Islamic figures in standardised Bangla, the Bengali Muslim literati placed their venerated figures within the rational context of Islam. But for them, the purpose of linguistic and generic reform held another value, which was of no concern to Sen. The *ulama* and the literati explored and celebrated the rational-historical life of Muhammad and his *ṣaḥābas* and members of the *ahl al-bayt* to counter the Orientalist-evangelist interpretations of Islam. While doing so, instead a singular path, a polemic on the processes of modernisation and historicisation emerged through the efforts of several different Muslim reformers and the literati.

4.3 Writing *jātīẏa itihās and jībanī* as modern literature: Between the rational and the miraculous

Biographers of Muhammad's life (like Sheikh Abdur Rahim, Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, Mohammad Akram Khan) and authors of history (like Saiyad Abul Hosen, Qazi Akram Husain and Khan Bahadur Ahsan Ullah) directly countered the Orientalist-evangelist narratives that had vehemently negated the Qur'an as revealed knowledge and Muhammad's position as the last prophet in the Abrahamic tradition by declaring Muhammad's experience of revelation inauthentic. But the validation of Islam in the biographies as counter-narratives did not follow any singular pattern of argument, and formulated different methods of rationality to interpret Muhammad's experiences, especially those related to the revelation of the Qur'an, as historical.

To rationalise these discourses on sacred lives, structural renovations in generic-linguistic terms were necessary. Along with the debate over poetic license in aesthetic-poetic terms, the authors pondered over whether Muhammad's name should be mentioned with or without the Arabic *ṣalawāt* (phrase of salutation: *Allahumma ṣalli 'ala Muḥammadin wa-ali Muḥammad* [O Allah (do) bless Muhammad and the household of Muhammad], usually abbreviated as "a.s."), which should be read every time Muhammad's name is uttered in any prayer. Authors like Sheikh Abdur Rahim retained the *salawāt* as a part of the text and thus added prayer to the domain of modern prose. Those who decided to omit the *salawāt* offered yet another ethics of reading to accommodate the sacredness of Muhammad. Abdul Oyahed, for example, did not repeat the *salawāt* in his historical account *Moslem Pratibhā* (1909). He instead requested his Muslim readers in an annecdotal note to utter the *salawāt darud* each time Muhammad's name appeared in the text, even if the *salawāt* was not printed alongside the Prophet's name:

> Here is the earnest request to the reader that they read the *darud* as they utter the name of Hazrat Muhammad. They are requested to do the same for the *ṣaḥābas*. Considering the printing of *darud* as many times the sacred names appear rather laborious, such portions are

omitted from the printed book. The readers may forgive the author for this decision.[97]

He also instructed his readers to use "Hajarat" before the names of the first four Caliphs and utter the proper salutations after their names. Other authors who chose to keep the salutation, like Sheikh Abdur Rahim, did not write the full form and rather worked out an easy and printable abbreviated version for the *salawat* utterances meant for Muhammad and his companions. Azhar Ali in his *Cāri Ashāber Jībanī*, *Mahābīr Hajarat Alīr Jībanī* and *Hajarat Emam Hasan Hosener Jībanī* (Figure 4.2) put abbreviations for the *darud* each time the companions and Fatima, Hasan and Husayn were mentioned.[98] Such an ambivalence in reading about the sacred lives in the desacralised literary language of a modern genre and

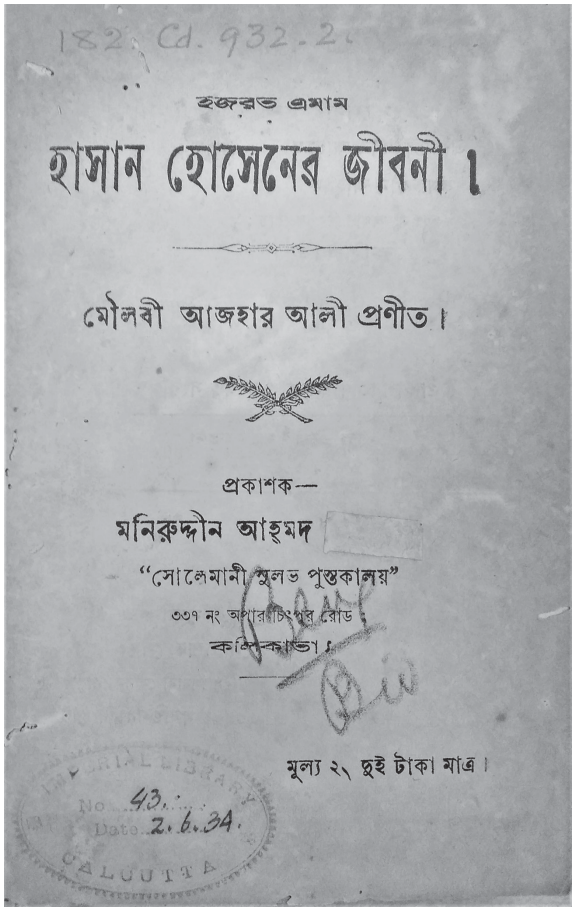


Figure 4.2 Title page: *Hajarat Emām Hasan Hosener Jībanī* by Maulavi Azhar Ali, 1932, Rare Books Section, National Library, Kolkata.

reciting the *salawat* to make reading equivalent to prayer is an attribute unique to the Bengali Muslims' literary modernity.

In the 1913 edition of *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti* (Figure 4.3), Sheikh Abdur Rahim instructed in the introduction, "I will expect that any Muslim, man and woman alike, out of their devotion, should keep this supreme jewel in the house, and to attain religious ethical learning and blessings from Allah, read this book"[99]. This confirms that the modern biography narrating sacred lives also often had the dual function and identity of a prayer book. Reading these biographies was constantly prescribed not only for learning the ethico-moral codes of Islam as exemplified by these sacred figures from Muhammad to his grandsons, but also as an act of prayer to earn Allah's blessings through the pious deed (*punya*) of reading.

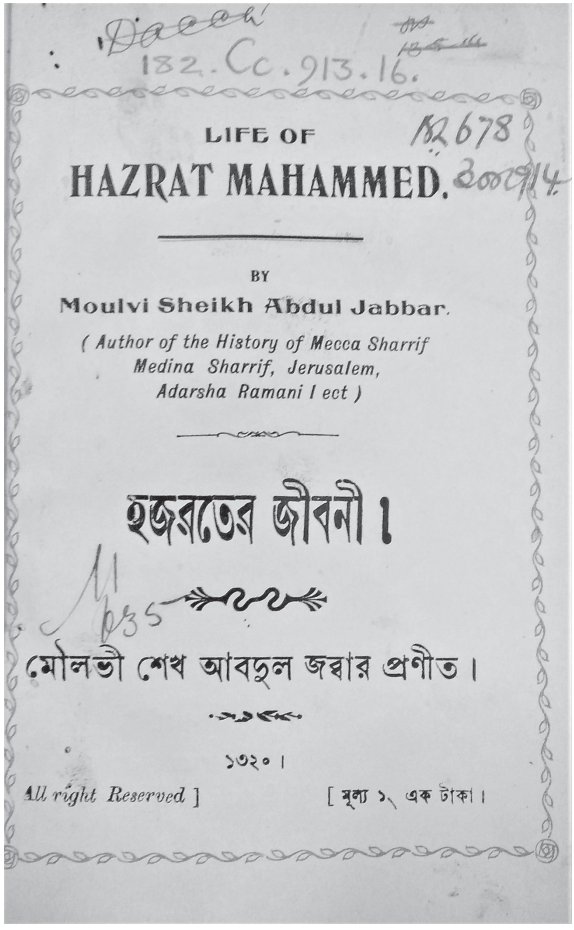


Figure 4.3 Cover page: *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmanīti* by Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, 1913, Rare Books Section, National Library, Kolkata.

The volumes on history and biography, and on the narratives on the Karbala, generally began with paratextual interventions – preface, introduction, inclusion of the literary review, footnotes[100] – or else were internally interspersed through various strategic interpolations with the narrative voice. The narration frequently goes beyond the description of the events and reflects critically on them. Azhar Ali, for instance, engaged readers in a critical reading when he commented that "[t]he readers should themselves consider how heartless and cruel were those Muslims who, in spite of being Muslims, did not shed a single drop after killing Hazrat Husayn (R.A)" (*kintu jāhārā Musalmān haiẏā Hajarat Hosen (R.A) ke hatyā kariẏā ektuo caksher pāni phele nāi, tāhārā ki rūp kaṭhor prān nirddaẏ Musalmān, tāhā priẏa pāthak pāthikār bibecanār upare nirbhar rahila*).[101] The act of conscious reading, induced through such an interlocution of the narrator, then became a modern literary function that separated the experience of *jātīẏa sāhitya* from total identification with the narrator's description in the Dobhāshī repertoire. Then the narrator in Azhar Ali's text continued to describe how Fatima was devastated when she came to know that her beloved son Husayn would be killed in an unjust manner and not have his grandfather or parents to mourn over his brutal death. A celestial voice was then heard addressing her thus: "Fatima, in your absence, all the living creatures of the world would mourn the martyrdom of Husayn till apocalypse, in utter pain."[102] Here the narrator, by invoking the readers' critical reflection and affective engagement through changing narratorial positions, steers them towards the rehabilitative sanctuary of mourning for Husayn's martyrdom.

The voice of the narrator, thus, with its ownership over textual interpretation in leading the readers towards the valid path of Islam cancelled opposing interpretations. The narrator in Azhar Ali's text described how, after Husayn's death, the tender hearts of Husayn's kin turned into stone with pain as they cried for him. He added in a critical tone that,

> The exclamation of 'Hay Husayn,' 'Hay Husayn' in high pitched voices of the Shī'as may not be the only way to show reverence for Husayn. Shedding tears in patient silence for Husayn will qualify us to be dear to Khoda. We can do that. We definitely can.[103]

But this narrative quality, evolved by adopting the artifices common to the modern genres of Bangla literature, was not aimed at producing an individual narrator outside the context of religious modernity. Rather, structurally, the persuasive narrative voice took up the role of the *wa'z* preacher to align the readers as a singular affective community – the Bengali *ummah*.

A close reading reveals that the persuasive affective intensity of the narrative voice palpable throughout the narratives reached its highest arc in two situations: the death of Muhammad and the Battle of Karbala. To build the intensity of affect, the authors employed a heavily Sanskritised

Bangla with its grandiose words and a syntactical structure, culled from their experience of reading high/elite literary expressions of the Hindu authors and emulating its rhetoric and poetics. In *Moslem Pratibhā*, for example, Abdul Oyahed, intending to describe the mysterious, ineffable capacity of the Divine (*srishtikartā*) to create the universe, used loaded puranic expressions like *līlā* (divine playfulness of the Hindu gods, used most often for Krishna's ludic-erotic action, which were also adopted by Brahmo authors to define the mysterious power of the monotheistic Divine). He also used terms popular in Hindu and Brahmo literary circles like *punyātmā* (literally holy soul, used to refer to sacred personalities) and *sādhuśreshṭha* (greatest of the sages) as adjectives for Muhammad and compared his birth to the vibrant full moon rising on the horizon using terms resonating with the rhetoric of bhakti devotionalism.[104]

The Muslim authors of Islamic history and biography not only showed this affinity in the choice of lexicon, but also in the use of standard generic elements and poetic artefacts of the modern prose created by Hindu authors, frequently succumbing to the charm of storytelling. Qazi Akram Husain, in *Islāmer Itihās* (1924), abandoned his objective voice of factual narration as soon as he arrived at the episode of the battle of Karbala, which he described as the "most sacrilegious episode in Muslim history that increased the pain caused by the first *fitna*."[105] Then suddenly again, after a few pages of informative description, his narratorial voice assumed the affective language common in historical novels, creating a spectacular grandeur to invoke the intended dramatic emotions. At this point, his narration changed from the past tense to the present continuous and present perfect participle, so as to let the battle unfold in front of the reader's eyes.

> Karbala! Matrikroṛe śiśu jāhār nām śunile kāpiẏa oṭhe, sei Kārbālā—Prāntar dhū dhū kariteche; marubhūmir taptaśwās niẏata tāhār buker opar diẏā bahiẏā jāiteche. Kono trikāl drashtā mahāpurush jena Kārbālār bhabishyat jānite pāriẏā uhār opar abhisampāt barshaṇ kariẏachen. Sei anale se anarabata jwaliteche.
>
> Karbala! Upon hearing the name, an infant would faint on its mother's lap. The barren horizon. The hot fiery winds of the desert constantly blowing over its undulating breasts. As though some omniscient cosmic persona, coming to know of the fate that it would bear, has cursed it to burn forever. With that fire, Karbala burns forever.
>
> (Qazi Akram Husain, *Islāmer Itihās*)[106]

Azhar Ali, in the introduction to his *Hajarat Emām Hāsān Hosener Jībanī* (1932), listed the remarkable attributes of the Imam brothers – supernatural power (*karamat*, Ar.), sage-like honesty (*sādhutā*), innocence (*saralatā*), endurance (*sahishňutā*), patience (*dhairjyagun*) and *razamandi* (silent acceptance of Divine Will, Ur.)[107] – that he had gleaned from

several renowned volumes of *hadis* and *ta'rīkh*. He explained here that Imam Husayn was no less a warrior, but while in the throes of destroying the enemy, he suddenly remembered the sacrificial death destined for him by Allah, and realised that He would be pleased by his sacrifice. Husayn then restrained himself from a war that he was winning and surrendered to Allah's will. Elaborating upon the Islamic models of *sabr* in Husayn and in his surviving son Zayn al-Abidin, the author requested "every educated Muslim man and woman" to read this volume as a religious grounding.[108]

The authors used various modern artefacts which laid claim to historicity. Sheikh Abdur Rahim and Sheikh Abdur Jabbar, in their historical accounts of Mecca and Medina and in their biographies of Muhammad, added maps and photographs of different scared sites in Mecca and Medina including the *rowza* (mausoleum) of Muhammad and the Ka'aba. Sheikh Abdur Rahim included a photograph of the Hira Cave before proceeding to address Edward Gibbon's refutation of the revelation of the Qur'an.[109] Rahim compared the extraordinary experience of the revelation of Allah's message to Mohammad to the scientific discovery of wave transfers in inventions such as the telegraph, the telephone and the gramophone, and even likened the revelation to the solar system in being subject to an abstract law beyond human comprehension or control.[110] In the reformist interpretations, rationalism, in general, was deeply imbued with the ethereal nature of Muhammad's prophetic experience, which was one of the core elements of Muhammad's historicity. However, not all authors were as keen as Sheikh Abdur Rahim to deploy geographical maps, photographs and scientific discoveries in order to imbue devotion for Muhammad with rational explanations. Abdul Oyahed in *Moslem Pratibhā* (1909), intending to counter the negative portrayal of Islam and its Prophet in Orientalist and missionary writings, described how the decaying Abrahamic religion was protected by Muhammad through a series of events which were "unthinkable" (*acintanīya*) and "unattainable" (*asādhya*) in their magnitude.[111]

Such elements beyond human cognition were also referred to by other authors, like Khan Bahadur Ahsan Ullah, who similarly declared in *Ichlāmer Itibritta* (1934) that "the domain of the spiritual cannot be mapped by the laws of the material world"[112] to validate the extraordinary nature of Muhammad's experiences. Ahsan Ullah asked, in his strongly Sanskritised Bangla, and in a register somewhat different from Abdur Rahim's rational scientific analogies, that "if electricity can accomplish completely uncharted wonders, why can't spirituality function in stranger ways?"[113]

Thus, various orders of formalisation of popular piety in high literature are discernible in these texts marking interpretations of the rational status of Islam. Several literary communities were gradually accommodated as these authors began to incorporate different forms of devotionalism into

jātīẏa sāhitya, envisage different generic ploys and use themes and linguistic elements to cater to different layers of readership.

Simultaneously, attempts to write the history of Islam neither limited itself to the time of Muhammad and the Early Caliphate, nor did biography remain enclosed within the moral-ethical actions of the sacred prophetic figures. The authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* went beyond these ambits and explored various historical periods and characters to formulate the definition of a people called the Muslim *jāti* which had moorings in conceptions ranging from the pan-Islamic to the national-regional.

4.4 Other histories and other biographies: Between the pan-Islamic and the province

In this expansion of the biographical genre, Sufi figures were included owing to the contribution of reformist Islam in the formation of an Alid-piety expanding to a Husayn-centric piety. Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya and Chishtiyya. These three schools of Sufism, in various degrees, were studied by reformist scholars and reformist Sufi authorities according to the theological need of their respective reformist inclinations (Taiyuni, Hanafi or Mohammadi) in Bengal. With the translation of Farīd ad-Dīn ʻAṭṭar's 12th-century Persian treatise *Tazkirat al-Awliyā*' (hagiographic accounts of eminent Sufi preachers) undertaken by Girishchandra Sen as *Tāpasmālā* (1894), the lives of individual Sufi masters entered the domain of *jībanī*. When Muslim authors started writing on the lives of the Sufi saints, ʻAbdul Qādir Gīlānī (1078–1166), the founder of the Qadiriyya *silsilah* (school of thought), emerged as the most celebrated Sufi saint within the Muslim literary field of *jībanī*. Biographers of Gīlānī never failed to mention the Sheikh's direct lineage from Husayn as proof of his spiritual supremacy. Azhar Ali, who was strongly inclined towards an Alid-piety discernible in his *Mahābīr Hajarat Alīr Jībanī* (The Biography of Hazrat Ali, the Mighty, 1914)), in his *Baṛa Pīr Sāheber Jībanī o Āścarya Kerāmat* (The Biography of the Great Pir and His Many Miracles, 1918), clearly delineated the historical legacy from Ali to Husayn without once referring to the Caliphate, and then went on to create a lineage of the Shīʻī Imamate from Husayn to directly arrive at Gīlānī.[114] Dewan Shah Abdar Rashid of the Chishtiyya school started his volume of *marfati* (mystical) poetry titled *Jñān-Sindhu Bā Gaňje Touhid* (The Ocean of knowledge or the Treasure of the Oneness of Allah; 1919) with salutations to the *panjatan pak* and the *ahl al-bayt* and unambiguously stated that Muhammad had handed over the Caliphate to Ali without ever referring to the Sunni Caliphs.[115] Shah Abdul Jalil Shikdar, trained in the Qadiriyya, Naqshbandiyya and Chishtiyya orders, at the end of his poetically rendered mystical theological treatise *Prabhu Paricaẏ* (Knowledge of the Supreme Master; 1923) listed the days of *urs* (veneration on the death anniversary of a sacred figure) for all the iconic Sufi figures starting with the Prophet. Arranged along the yearly calendar starting with the

death of Muhammad (12 Rabi'al-Awwal), he tabulated the death anniversaries of 'Abdul Qādir Gīlānī, Niẓām ad-Dīn Awliyā', Imam Ali and many other Sufi masters from Iran like Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (804–874) and local Sufi teachers, alongside Hasan and Husayn.[116] These authors, by adhering to the *panjatan pak* and the *ahl al-bayt*, and by revering Hasan and Husayn, did not align themselves with Shī'ī intercessory piety, which had the same core elements. Even when authors with a Sufi inclination came close to discussing the Shī'ī Imamate in their writings such as Azhar Ali mentioning the lineage of the Shī'ī Imams from either Hasan or Husayn, and Abdul Jalil Shikdar writing 58 affective lines of poetry praising the 12 Shī'ī Imams – they did not claim any Shī'ī affiliation. Similarly, although Sheikh Abdul Jabbar provided in his *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās* a family tree descending from Fatima till the last Shī'ī Imam Mehdi, together with the dates of their deaths, he did not align himself to Shī'ī piety.[117] Saiyad Abul Hosen wrote extensively in his *Moslem Patākā* on the origin of the Syeds descending from Fatima while expressing pride at his own Syed descent. But after mentioning Hasan and Husayn as the first two Syeds, he did not explore the Shī'ī lineage of the Imams and stepped away from the Imamate.[118]

Mohammad Akram Khan offered a different line of thought to reconcile the idea of a unified Islam. In his book *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās* (1956), after a discussion on the first *fitna* between Umar and Ali, Akram Khan wrote about the Battle of Karbala as the most tragic and violent episode in the history of Islam and as an event that had the most devastating effect on the community in sectarian terms.[119] Akram Khan was a proponent of the idea of a unified Islam and praised the Iraqi historian Ibn al-Jawzī (1116–1201), an influential Islamic scholar who maintained such unity in Islam beyond the Sunni-Shī'a divide. Akram Khan referred to one of al-Jawzī 's *wa'z* sessions, in which al-Jawzi discussed the supremacy of Abu Bakr and Ali for the Sunnis and the Shī'as respectively as two complementary theological standpoints of Islam rather than cancelling one for the other.[120]

In the project to reclaim Muslim identity, both national and regional, the authors had to redraft the Hindu imagined history of the "ferocious" Turks plundering and vandalising the land, the subsequent political unrest in early modern Bengal and the view that Muslims were an inferior (*hīṇ*) and non-Aryan (*anāryyasambhūta*) race that had settled in Bengal.[121] In all these new histories, the urge of the Bengali Muslims to reclaim Bengal as their homeland, as well as their position in the history of Bengal, were repeatedly articulated. *Islām Pracārak* commented in 1900:

> We understand Bengal well and are satisfied to declare ourselves Bengalis. We can never think that the country, where we have lived for thousands of years, and endured and enjoyed its winters and summers, its prosperity and adversity, its happiness and distress,

and its joys and sorrows in equal measure, is not our homeland (*swadeś*).[122]

Akram Khan not only historically situated Islam in Bengal through scholarly endeavours, but also took great pains in his edited periodical *Māsik Mohammadī* to enlighten his readers by publishing various articles on Muslim Bengal. Articles like "Baṇge Islām Prasār" (The Spread of Islam in Bengal, 1937) by Enamul Haq, M.A.B.T., attempted to formulate a non-Orientalist interpretation of the processes of Islamisation in Bengal.

From the second decade of the 20th century, authors also started including chapters on the larger (north) Indian ("*Bhāratiẏa*") situation. Maniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875–1950) of Chittagong, a close associate of Akram Khan in his political and social reformist endeavours, offered in his *Bhārate Islām Pracār* (Islamic Proselytisation in India, 1915) a very structured and well-defined counter-narrative to the Orientalist depiction of the spread of Islam by the sword in the Indian subcontinent. In *Bhārate Islām Pracār*, which followed his *Bhārate Musalmān Sabhyatā* (Muslim Civilisation in India, 1914), he outlined the trajectories of the cultural and theological achievements of Muslim rulers from the Sultanate to the Mughal dynasty.[123] *Bhāratbarshe Musalmān Rājatwer Itibritta* (The Historical Account of the Islamic Rule in India) by Abdul Karim, B.A., was published as early as 1898,[124] but a general sensibility pertaining to a Muslim India was finally added to the Bengali Muslim's pan-Islamic and regional historical consciousness particularly after the foundation of the All India Muslim League (1906), which rose dramatically during the Khilafat Movement (1919–24). As an integral part of this history, the study of the Mughal period, and of Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurangzeb (1618-1707) in particular, became instrumental in presenting multiple interpretations of the Muslim rule in India, which had a major contribution in the self-identification of Indian Muslims.[125]

When the "marriage of convenience"[126] between the Indian National Congress and the Khilafat Movement collapsed by the end of the Khilafat Movement, it left Indian Muslims completely disillusioned. Among other journals, *Islām Darśan* and *Hānāphi* bear evidence of this sense of great disillusionment in the Bengali Muslim public sphere. The end of the Khilafat Movement changed the dynamics of the Hindu-Muslim relationship, with a growing mistrust apparent among the Muslim leaders toward the Hindu leaders of the Indian National Congress. The communal divide gradually solidified. No less than 90 Hindu-Muslim riots took place between 1923 and 1927, which marked an eruption of mistrust and reduced the possibility of any future political alliance between the two communities.[127] After the phase of temporary cooperation during the Khilafat Movement, the gap between the Muslim community and the INC, as also the Hindu community in general, was doubly affirmed in the Suddhi Movement launched in Punjab,[128] and then in other parts of

the country by the Arya Samaj (founded in 1875 by Dayanand Saraswati, 1884–1923). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was born in 1925 in Nagpur. In the 1920s and 1930s, as the ideologies of the more orthodox Hindu and Muslim publics clashed with each other, socio-religious institutions like *tablīgh* and *tanzīm* emerged to spread ideas of a cohesive Muslim community and facilitate staunchly pro-Caliphate and linear transterritorial sentiments.[129]

After the domination of the Urdu-speaking elite of Bengal in the late-19th century, the Muslim literati, now faced with the hegemony of the north Indian Urdu-speaking elite Muslims in the Muslim League, began to think about political agency in regional terms. The Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML, 1912–47) mobilised regional consciousness under the rubric of the national political body of the Muslim League. But how far this branch could act as an autonomous provincial chapter to address region-specific issues began to be debated. In 1929, a faction of the BPML, with Akram Khan in the lead, broke away to establish the Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti (NBPS), which advocated the interests of tenant farmers in Bengal's landed gentry estates. A. K. Fazlul Huq was elected as its party leader in 1935.[130] Since 1936, the NBPS began to identify itself as the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and contested the 1937 Bengal election.[131] Although the KPP did not have a communal point of view in addressing the interests of peasants, it certainly managed to attract the majority of Muslim votes in Bengal. When the Congress did not agree to form a coalition government with the Fazlul Huq-led KPP, Huq accepted the Muslim League's offer of a premiership and formed a Bengal cabinet in coalition with the League, thus diminishing the possibility of any future collaboration with the Congress.[132]

The Bengal Tenant Act (1928) proposed by Huq and his pro-peasant visions went against the views of the north Indian leaders of the Muslim League who supported the elite landlords over the peasants. Huq started attending, as a coalition leader, the sessions of the Muslim League and became the President of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, while also remaining the President of the KPP. Huq's subsequent coalitions with the Hindu Mahasabha, the Forward Bloc and the Independent Scheduled Caste Party led to the creation of the Progressive Coalition Party. This resulted in the resignation of all the Muslim League members from his cabinet, forcing him in turn to resign from his ministry.[133] Subsequently, Huq put together his ministry with those representatives of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Forward Bloc who already belonged to his Progressive Coalition Party. This earned him a great deal of displeasure from the Muslims in general. The Muslim students' associations shifted their support from Huq to the Muslim League.[134] This phase saw a dramatic migration of support from the KPP to the Muslim League and Huq was eventually expelled from the League in 1941.

This volatile phase, however, can be summed up by a momentous statement made by Abdur Rashid when in 1936, he called Fazlul Huq

"the undisputed leader of the people of the land" (*swajātīẏa*), and "the uncrowned Emperor of Bengal," (*Bāngālār mukut-hīṇ rājā*) and dedicated his prose narrative *Kārbālā* to Huq (also discussed in relation to Urdu as the chosen language for the Bengali Muslims in the political sphere Section 3.3).[135]

The experience of the Bengali Muslims in spatial terms truly spread from "the Balkans to Bengal" and was inaugurated in *jātīẏa sāhitya*. The victory of the Ottoman military power after the 30-day war against Greece in 1877 was hailed in *jātiẏa sāhitya* as one of the most praiseworthy moments for the Caliphate. Historical accounts of the war, like *Jaṇge Rūm Iẏunān arthāt Turkī o Grīker loṛai* (Rum and Yunan in the Battlefield or the Greco-Turkish War; 1905) by Garib Shayer urf Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmed[136] were added to the series of historical accounts about Turkey. Moreover, certain regions in Bengal became very important sites for the reclamation of a Muslim past. Regions with a strong Islamic political or cultural past, such as Gaur (Malda), Chittagong, and Rangpur, began to emerge as subjects in social history writing. Along with the biography of the Sultan of Turkey, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi wrote the biography of Syed Ahmad Khan, confirming his own preference for a rational and modernising strand of Indian Islam ("Bhārate Islām") in the *jātīẏa* sphere. At the same time, to reclaim their Bengali identity, the ideas of Muslim heroism ("*bikram*") and sacrilege ("*kalaṇka*") were both addressed by the Bengali Muslim authors. The aesthetic-poetic formulae provided by Bengali Hindu playwrights like Girishchandra Ghosh (1844–1912), Dwijendralal Ray (1863–1913) and Akshay Kumar Maitra (1861–1930) in historical plays, and poets like Nabinchandra Sen (1847–1909, for a discussion on the influence of Sen, see Section 5.2.2), were adapted by Muslim litterateurs to produce tragic heroic figures from history. Siraj ud-Daulah (1733–1757), the last independent nawab of Bengal, who was defeated by the military troops of the East India Company in the Battle of Plassey (1757), became one of the most celebrated themes.[137] S. M. Ahmed, in his play *Palāśīr Yuddha*, sought to restore Siraj ud-Daulah's glory, lost not only at the Battle of Plassey but also in the writings of Hindu authors.

The character of Siraj in Ahmed's play repeatedly declared Bengal as Siraj's "motherland" and countrymen as his innocent Bengali brethren. At the moment of his death on the battlefield a thunderbolt struck and split the sky unable to bear such injustice. Siraj's sister Goolneyar wept and called Siraj "the god of the Bengalis, the father of the Bengalis" (*Bāṇgālīr bhagabān, Bāṇgālīr bāp*)[138] while cursing Mir Zafar, the alleged saboteur working for the East India Company, who had caused Siraj's unfair defeat. These narratives coming out of the 1940s emotively constituted the dyad of Bengaliness and Muslimness at a time when the Two-Nation Theory had already taken root.

Such multi-spatial and multitemporal forms of *jātīẏa* belonging were not supposed to follow a singular logic of identification. The rise of Turkey

as a secular national power by causing the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, resulting in the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 remained the most contentious issue in Muslim trans-national identity. Nazrul Islam penned his much-celebrated poem "Kāmāl Pāśā" (1921) to hail the Turkish field marshal and revolutionary statesman Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), the founding father of the Republic of Turkey. A celebration of Ataturk, or Kemal Pasha, as he was called, who was instrumental in abolishing the Caliphate by defeating the Ottoman Empire, can be considered the radical poet's articulation of his new liberal political ideals beyond the traditional sense of the Islamic collective, in a new poetic language. But how the authors attempted to place the abolisher of the Sunni Caliphate in the domain of *jātīya itihās* remains curious. There were already a number of biographies of Kemal Pasha that had come out since the beginning of the Greco-Turkish War (1919–22), where Pasha took a major position as a lieutenant. Turkey featured in the volumes of history as the natural inheritor of the Sunni Caliphate, not as the Republic of Turkey that Pasha established upon the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate.[139]

The biographies of Kemal Pasha were all written before the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1924 – *Kemāl Pāśā* (1908), *Grīs-Turaska Yuddha* (war between Greece and Turkey; 1900 and 1908, vols. I and II). Without any political angle to address the fall of the Caliphate, the authors symbolised Pasha as an Islamic martial icon of contemporary times. Volumes of history written after 1924, however, strategically bypassed the episode of the fall of the Caliphate. Ahsan Ullah's *Ichlāmer Itibritta*, with its accounts of the Prophet, the Early Caliphate and the Battle of Karbala, began with a map of Arabia and ended with a map of Turkey, thus connecting the originary land of Islam with modern Turkey as the contemporary citadel of the Caliphate with the aid of visual realism. Turkey here stands for an Islamic force that had defeated the enemy in the Tripoli and Balkan Wars under the leadership of Anwar Pasha (Ottoman General and a leading member of the Ottoman government from 1913 to 1918) and Kemal Pasha. *Ichlāmer Itibritta,* which was published in 1934, did not mention the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, but simply bypassed it to talk about the victory of Turkey over Greece in 1897. The book hailed the Turkish race (the Turk *jāti*) as an equal rival to the Christian *jāti* in terms of its modern qualities and attributes. Kemal Pasha seemed to be perceived as an important military icon symbolising the new Muslim nation that had defeated Greece in the Greco-Turkish war (1919–22) even when Greece was supported by the British.

Similarly, Qazi Akram Hosain's narration of the history of Islam in his *Islāmer Itihās* began with the pre-Islamic era, followed by Muhammad's life, the era of the Early Caliphate and the battle of Karbala, culminating in the period co-terminous with modern Turkey, covering within two volumes all the major historical events in Islam in between these episodes. After describing the spread of Islam in Spain, Cordoba, Egypt, Morocco

and elsewhere in different parts of Asia, he declared that in the Republic of Turkey the idea of the "Republic" (*prajātantra*) that Muhammad envisioned had been established, without referring to the abolition of the Caliphate as the basis of such a republic.[140] It may simply be observed that Kemal Pasha was being appropriated into the *jātīẏa* history of the Bengali Muslims without addressing uncomfortable questions about the abolition of the Caliphate. Ahsan Ullah, without getting into the details of a possible dichotomy between the Caliphate (Ottoman) and the Republic (Turkey), ended his *Ichlāmer Itibritta* with an episode on New Turkey (*Nabīn Turaska*) where he even included some sections from Kemal Pasha's autobiography.[141] The book not only had a map of Turkey but also contained a photograph of Kemal Pasha that was added to the previous list of photographs containing the image of the Ka'aba in Mecca, Muhammad's *rowza* in Medina and the Alhambra architecture in Granada.

The *Daily Inqilab*, a Lahore-based newspaper (1927–1949), reported a miraculous event a day after Kemal Pasha died, in which he was reported to have shouted *Allahu Akbar* thrice, before revealing the secret of Islamic life as follows:

> Life is another name for action. The Muslims will remain alive as long as they follow in the footsteps of the Prophet. Choose a simple life. Base it on hard work and avoid ostentation. Do not waste any time. Organise your life according to military discipline, which the Caliph Umar Farooq has laid down for the believers. Seek knowledge of the commands of the Prophet. Use your brains.[142]

This report on the surprising attestation of the Caliphate by a person who had abolished the system shows the tremendous creative energy of the authors in reclaiming the Caliphate after its abolition, and in appropriating a political figure to consolidate the *ummah* who had dismantled the basis of the *ummah*.

The questions of the *ummah*, and national and regional belonging and identification did not spatially overlap, nor were they ideologically coterminous for the Bengali Muslims. They had to constantly negotiate among, and prioritise their national identity or a transterritorial homeland in pan-Islamic terms. In an article titled "Nan-ko-apāreśān bā Asahajogītā" (Non-cooperation or Non-alliance) published in the journal *Moslem-Bhārat*, its author Abdullah al-Azad suggested that the narrow confines of the local *masjid* be opened to pan-Islamic codes and practices. But the author warned his readers not to offend the non-Muslim majority with Islamic essentialism so as to maintain the national unity of India.[143] He tried to resolve the main anxiety of the Muslims in choosing between the transterritorial and the national by laying out various exigencies that may appear: "One should still go against the Caliphate, even as a Muslim, if the Caliph attacks India, or should go against India if India attacks Afghanistan or any other Muslim country."[144] The Khilafat Movement had enabled the

Indian Muslims ("*Bhāratiẏa Musalmān*") to see themselves unified in territorial terms, by allying with the Indian National Congress on a national level. But Mohammad Abdul Hakim, the editor of *Islām Darśan*, reflexively reminded the common khilafatists in 1921 that Islam comes before one's territorial identity ("*deś*"). Hence, *Khilafat* should not be sought at the cost of Islam.[145] The hegemonic polytheistic Hindu rhetoric that Muslims were expected to replicate, or fall in line with the Hindu mainstream as true nationalists, made them extremely anxious about the interpretation of *Khilafat* and the purpose of the Khilafat Movement as charted out by Hindu upper caste political activists of the INC.

4.5 *Ummah*, succession and the Karbala in *Jātīẏa Sāhitya*

> He pabitra Eslām! Je dharmmer janya Hajarat Emām Hosen Kārbālā prāṇtare śahīd haiẏāchilen …. Hāẏ hāẏ Khodātoulār manonīta pabitra Eslām! Musalmāneri haste tomār e ki apamān? Oi dekha Bāṇgālī Musalmān tājiẏā pūjā, kabar pūjā, pīr pūjā, dargā pūjā, nritya gīt, śraban ityādi śerek o bedāt kāryya kariẏā pabitra Eslāmer aṇge kālimā lepan karite kuṇṭhita haiteche nā. Oi dekha, je 10-i Maharam tārikhe Syed baṃśer amūlya nidhi Hajarat Mohāmmad (Sa)-er douhitra Makkā Madinār khaliphā Mahābīr Hajarat Emām Hosen śahīd haiẏāchilen, Jāhār mrityute ākāś, pātāl, antariksha, araṇya, sāgar, parbbat, bāẏu ityādi caturdik haite śok uththit haiẏāchila.
>
> O our sacred religion, Islam, to save you, Imam Husayn became a martyr in the plains of Karbala [...]. Oh our religion! The chosen religion of Khoda! How you are being assaulted! See how the Muslims of Bengal do not hesitate to dishonour sacred Islam by worshipping the *tajiya*, the graves and the *pirs,* indulging in song and dance, and in numerous other *shirk* and *bid'ati* activities. See, on the very day of the 10th of the month of Muharram, when Imam Husayn, the treasure of the Syed clan, the grandson of the Prophet, the Caliph of Mecca and Medina, was martyred, how grief erupted from the sky, how the leaves, the universe, forests, oceans, mountains, and the wind cried in unbearable grief.
>
> (Mohammad Yusuf Ali, *Āhle Hādis*, 1917),[146]

In the *jātīẏa* literary network, there was strong opposition to Shī'ī intercessory piety, as is reflected in the lines quoted above from an essay in *Āhle Hādis*, "Islāmdharme Śerek o Bidāt" (Polytheism and Innovation in Islam). Such invalidation was not only spelt out by citing *sharī'a* texts and behavioural manuals to align the community along the moral codes of Islam, but the authors – from Sufi treatises to historical narratives, from poetry to journal articles – irrespective of their reformist positions, attacked all forms of piety centred upon the performance of Muharram. The various physical expressions of grief connected to chest-beating and

rolling on the ground were categorically chastised as un-Islamic across genres - history, biography, prose and poetry. All these negations of particular forms of physical grieving were targeted at nullifying rival claims over the prophetic inheritance. At the same time, grief over Karbala had to be appropriated within reformist piety to resolve the crisis in the Caliphate marked by the first *fitna*. Husayn's death underwent multiple generic and linguistic innovations and was restaged strategically to meet both poetic and reformist ends. This enabled the authors to exempt the Caliphate from any paradoxes created from the fact that a member of the Caliphate, Yazid, was behind the killing of the grandsons of the Prophet.

A number of literary texts dealing with Husayn's martyrdom, such as *Bilāp Laharī bā Maharam Parva* by Reyazuddin Ahmed (The Waves of Lament, or the Episode on Muharram; a long poetic narrative published in 1911), *Moharram Kānda* by Mohammad Uddin Ahmed (prose, 1912), *Kārbālā Kābya* by Abdul Bari Kabiratna (long poetic narrative, 1912) and *Kārbālā* by Mohammad Abdur Rashid (prose, 1936), refuted the Shī'as categorically, by rejecting the claim of the Imamate via Ali and the physically performed grief over Husayn's martyrdom.

The authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, like those of the Dobhāshī repertoire, tried very hard to save the Caliphate from the disgrace of the battle of Karbala. The pressing question of succession was first dealt with by Sheikh Abdur Rahim in his *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti* (1887). Abdur Rahim, even after writing that Muhammad had not formally assigned the charge of the Caliphate to anyone specific, referred to "a" *hadis*, though without naming it, where Muhammad chose Abu Bakr as his foremost companion and asked his people to keep a window in the mosque open for him to witness Abu Bakr overseeing the *namaz*.[147] As already discussed, for the Dobhāshī Kārbālā repertoire, the authority of presiding over the *namaz* (*emāmatī*) was emblematic of the transfer of legacy from Muhammad. Azhar Ali utilised Ali's unique position in the Caliphate, and also in the mystical discourses, by adding a long list of his exceptional qualities in his *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī* (Biography of the Early Caliphate, 1929). Besides being a devout follower of Hazrat Muhammad, and a true servant of the Qur'an, Ali was described as an unparalleled hero ("*adwitiẏa bīr*"), exceptionally learned ("*asādhāraṇ jñānī*") and a rare scholar ("*asulabh bidwān*"), having immense ingenuity as the foremost servant of Islam ("*atulya karmī*"), an unrivalled orator ("*apratidwandī baktā*"), the leader of the believers ("*amīrul mominīn*") and so on.[148]

At the same time, Azhar Ali, without any ambiguity, marked Wednesday, the 11th day of the Hijri, 28 Safar, as the date on which Abu Bakr received the Caliphate from Muhammad.[149] Neither did Azhar Ali mention Ali's name, nor leave any room for doubt as he added a section after the declaration of Abu Bakr's name by Muhammad as the chosen one where he mentioned that Allah's voice boomed thrice saying "there should not be any dissent about this" and attested it by citing *ta'rīkh al-Khulafa* by the Sunni scholar Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445–1505).[150] Azhar Ali also

utilised Ali's own voice to negate his claims to the Caliphate whenever any debate arose. Azhar Ali narrated one incident in his *Mahābīr Hajarat Ālīr Jībanī* (1914) of Ali entering the city of Basra after the Jang-e Jamal, Battle of the Camels. When asked by the people of the city whether he had been chosen by Muhammad as the first Caliph, Ali answered unambiguously that he had not.[151] In this separate biography of Ali, where he was presented as the mystical head of Sunni Islam ("*śariẏat o tarikater prakrita path pradarśak*"), Azhar Ali took great care to separate the Sunni-oriented Alid-piety across the *mazhabs* from the intercessory piety of the Shī'as. In Azhar Ali's depiction, the Shī'as, in their excessive ("*atirikta*") and unnatural ("*aswābhābik*") devotion to Ali, disobeyed the first three Sunni Caliphs.[152] Azhar Ali, like all likeminded authors belonging to the tradition of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, did not restrain himself from expressing anger towards the Shī'as for their negation of the Caliphate, especially during the commemoration of Muharram. Azhar Ali's antagonism was clear as he disqualified these people as Muslims and called them Rafejis.[153] Azhar Ali emulated the popular language of Vaishnavite piety in his description of Abu Bakr as the sole receiver of Muhammad's attention and the bearer of extraordinary devotion and unparalleled love for the Prophet ("*Atulanīẏa Nabi-bhakti*," "*prāṇ-ḍhālā bhālobāsā*"), as Muhammad's greatest companion and as the mystical replacement of Muhammad, even as he confirmed Ali as the spearhead of all forms of mystical knowledge.[154] Ali's position was secured in the scriptural renditions of Sufism, whereas Abu Bakr's position was rearticulated in the rhetoric of popular mysticism. Abu Bakr's emotional connection with Muhammad as a form of surrender validated his position as the chosen first Caliph too, when the author expressed Abu Bakr's overwrought grief at the very thought of Muhammad's demise in *Mahābīr Hajarat Ālīr Jībanī*:

> In whose separation for a fraction of second I see darkness around, whom I cannot let go beyond my vision, he who has lit my heart with the rays of supreme truth, I cannot live for a single moment without him.[155]

Expressions like "When he [Abu Bakr] touched the sacred limb of the Prophet, blood started gushing through his veins in utter ecstasy" (*Hajarater Mobārak aṇga sparśe tāhār śirā upaśirā samūhe utsāha śonit druta dhābita haite lāgila*)[156] broke the chain of mystical legacy from Muhammad to Husayn via Ali and replaced it with the mystical bond between Muhammad and Abu Bakr. Thus, these authors of *jātiẏa sāhitya* brought Sufi emotion closer to the Sunni Caliphate starting with the presence of Abu Bakr to diminish the charge of a separate Alid-piety. Azhar Ali bypassed the question of succession in his *Hajarat Emām Hāsān Hosener Jībanī* and created an insularity for the *ahl al-bayt* by starting his narrative from the birth of Imam Hasan. He narrativised many critical situations pertinent to the early *ummah*, including the death of the

Prophet. But instead of addressing the question of succession, the author placed Ali in a superior position when the Prophet, on his deathbed, addressed Ali as the protector of *Kaosar* (the waterbody of abundance in heaven).[157]

In this contentious debate over succession after Muhammad's death, the responsibility of Usman in fomenting clannish unrest leading to the first *fitna* also had to be addressed by the authors of *jātiẏa sāhitya* to secure the Early Caliphate as the ideal time of Islamic solidarity after Muhammad. The authors carefully chronicled the conflict of the first *fitna* that was allegedly caused by Usman favouring Muawiya, the Governor of Syria, from the same Umayyad clan. After a series of clashes between Ali and Muawiya beginning with the Battle of Siffin (in 657), Ali lost several territories in Egypt (in 658), and Muawiya rose as the first Umayyad Caliph, resulting in the conflict of succession between Muawiya's Umayyad Caliphate and the grandsons of Muhammad who were the successors of Ali, the last member of the Early Caliphate.

It is also curious how the two very important biographies of Muhammad, *Mostāphā Carit* (1925) by Mohammad Akram Khan and *Biśwanabi* (1942),[158] by the poet Golam Mustafa (1897-1964) of Jessore district, proposed other ways to resolve the crisis in the Caliphate. These two biographies paid no heed to the contentious question of the Prophetic inheritance. Mohammad Akram Khan did not leave any scope for debate or discussion on *khilafat*. Ali was nowhere near Muhammad in *Mostāphā Carit*, when the Prophet, after falling suddenly ill, formally and publicly instructed all his people that Abu Bakr should preside over the *ummah* for *namaz*.[159] Akram Khan did not delve into Muhammad's family life, and his sole focus was on the Islamic political state during the Caliphate. The Karbala battle is almost non-existence as a reference in Mohammad Akram Khan's entire literary repertoire – the translation and annotation of the entire Qur'an and the six *hadis*, and a book on the history of Muslim Bengal, *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās* (1965). It appeared only once in his *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās*, where referring to the first *fitna*, he stated that the "martyrdom" (*shahādat*) of Usman was the first and the biggest tragedy in the history of the Muslim community that had paved the way for various later historical crises like the battle of Karbala.[160] He did not mention the affective-political impact of Karbala there or anywhere else.

Golam Mostafa, too, in his long lyrical narrative, *Biśwanabi*, did not touch upon the affective significance of the *ahl al-bayt*, though it remained one of the most celebrated topics for all the other poets owing to its emotional charge in Muhammad's life. Golam Mostafa declared that the Sunni Caliphate began with Abu Bakr without citing any other interpretation. Nor were there any important appearances made by Ali throughout the narrative. Fatima, together with her sons, Hasan and Husayn, could not be found anywhere in *Biśwanabi*, which, however, invested the whole of Chapter 44 on the charge of adultery brought against Muhammad's wife

Aisha.[161] This episode, which showed Muhammad's anxiety and pain as a husband, could well be representative of a contemporary anxiety over female sexuality, on women's chastity and their ideal role as wives so inherent in the Sunni reformist discourses. Those charges were finally resolved in the narrative and Aisha was relieved of her sins, through several validatory statements by the Prophet's companions, especially Umar.

In order to make a smooth departure from the Early Caliphate to the Umayyad Caliphate, several strategies were attempted in the domain of *jātīya sāhitya*. In some narratives, the transition was achieved through an ideological rift between Muawiya and Yazid. Muawiya was positioned as a close companion to Muhammad and Yazid as a degraded individual indulging in un-Islamic activity like alcoholism and lechery. Or – as Azhar Ali in *Hajarat Emām Hāsān Hosener Jībanī* showed – Yazid was an aberration in the *ummah* and the Caliphate, for being the bastard ("*jāraj*") son of Muawiya. Azhar Ali did not hide his disapproval for Yazid as he declared that having been born on the wrong side of the blanket, Yazid was mean and merciless: "*Jāraj putra baliyā Ejid ati dhūrta, nirdaẏ o nabibaṃśer param śatru*."[162] In some other places, Yazid's charge is lessened to rehabilitate him within the Caliphate as Abdur Rashid showed Yazid repenting and weeping when he heard the atrocities suffered by Husayn in Karbala.[163] For the validation of Yazid's position within the Caliphate, Abdul Rashid does not stop at putting the onus of Husayn's killing on Ziyad, the Governor of Kufa. Rather, he adds a cosmic dimension to the slaying of Husayn by implying it to be an abstract design of Allah, the Creator. The narrator says "[t]o protect whose kingdom, Imam Husayn was killed, He is the actual killer of Husayn."[164]

In the *jātīya* literary network of Islamic reform, as was customary in the Dobhāshī literary repertoire, the Shī'as were given a series of derogatory names of other rival Islamic groups. By calling the Shī'as Rafeji,[165] Khareji,[166] Nechari,[167] the Sunni reformists cancelled out the Shī'as and also these groups as valid Islamic communities. Abdur Rashid, in a narrative twist in his *Kārbālā*, designated the Kufan army as Shī'as to state that the Shī'as of Kufa, the followers of Ali, were actually the killers of Husayn.[168] This remained a recurrent trope in the Hanafi Sunni narratives of Karbala that obliterated the uneasy history of Alid piety in Kufa, which had become the capital city during Ali's Caliphate. After Ali's assassination in the mosque of Kufa by a Kharejite, the governorship of Kufa was bestowed on Ziyad by Muawiya. Eventually, the people of Kufa split when a group of Ali's followers revolted against Ziyad and invited Husayn to Kufa. Husayn travelled from Medina to Kufa to gather military support against Yazid. All these complex and sometimes contradictory episodes were flattened out revealing forms of intra-Islamic rivalry and reaffirming the hegemonic Sunni status of the Muslim public sphere. Convoluted narratives emerged to vilify the Shī'as as the Kufan army was called Shī'a, thereby marking them as the killers of Husayn. Mohammad Babur Ali, the editor of *Āhle Hādis*, unambiguously declared in 1915 that the Hanafis were descendants of the same habitants of Kufa who had

killed the beloved grandson of the Prophet.[169] *Āhle Hādis* was of the view that the preachings of pir Abu Bakr of Furfura, with his "twisted mind" (*bikrita mastishka*), could not conform to Sunni or Hanafi thought and he would produce either the Shī'as or some similarly grotesque creatures (*anurūp kimbhūt-kimākār jīb*).[170] In a similar vein, *Islām Darśan* declared in 1922 outright that the preachers of the Ahl-i Hadis were enticing the ignorant Hanafi brethren into Shi'ism with their preaching.[171]

The cancellation of the Shī'ī form of physical enactment of grief was the prerequisite for the authors of the Karbala narratives to make pain an eligible theme for reformist sensibilities. The authors explored literary means to write on pain with modern generic ploys. Weeping in pain was charted out as one of the main ethical principles of *farz*. In *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī*, Azhar Ali exalted Fatima by addressing her as the Empress of Heaven ("*jānnāter samrājňī*") to express how difficult it was to describe her unbearable pain for her departed father. Her tears kept on flowing ceaselessly but she faithfully followed her father's injunctions and never cried aloud.[172] In *Hajarat Emām Hāsān Hosener Jībanī*, the same author makes Husayn repeatedly assume a didactic role before leaving for the battlefield, instructing his sisters and his wife not to cross the limits of the *sharia* by lamenting aloud and striking their chests if he died in the battle ("*āmār mrityu sambād pāile śoke adhīrā haiẏā ucca śabde krandan kariẏo nā – śariẏater sīmā laṇghan kariẏā bakshe karāghat pūrbak adhairyya haiẏā rodan kariẏo nā*").[173] Azhar Ali could not leave such instructions to the mimetic voice of Husayn alone, he also employed the instructive and persuasive voice of the narrator to address his readers directly. In a conversational mode, he alerted his readers:

> Be aware, O Muslims! It is possible to hold grief within oneself like those sacred figures who were dear to the Almighty for their immense capacity to endure grief with patience. Uttering 'Hay Hasan' and 'Hay Husayn' whilst beating one's chest like the Shī'as cannot be the only path to love Husayn. It will only multiply your sins.[174]

The narrator in Qazi Akram Hosain's *Islāmer Itihās* also changed from a third-person narration to the first in order to directly address his readers, describing the grief experienced by the women after the death of Husayn. As they were lamenting, some fainted, others were immobilised with grief, while the children cried for water.[175] While such descriptions of women's grieving validated the act of mourning in the name of Husayn, it simultaneously prohibited the more physical and sensual expressions of grief from entering literary descriptions and becoming ingrained in the Bengali Muslim public sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Bengali Muslim authors engaged with the "reiterative intervention"[176] of their scriptural past by writing *itihās*

and *jībanī* validating their transterritorial belonging as the *ummah* at a time when territorial nationalism had attained its zenith. In this effort, expressions such as *swadeś*, *matribhūmi* and *janmabhūmi* were adopted from Hindu nationalist discourses but were recontextualised in the transterritorial sense to articulate its connection with Arabia as the originary land of Islam and Bengal as the land of birth for the Bengali Muslims. However, these terms neither carried the same transterritorial or regional connotation for all the authors, nor followed a single formal template. As we have seen, there was much overlap between the genres of *itihās* and *jībanī* due to their thematic proximity and desire for authentication through Islamic sources of history, and also in their creative employment of standardised Bangla and modern generic attributes. In order to achieve historicity, the authors cited their sources, employed the conscious voice of the narrator and used various technical tools like maps and photographs. In this chapter, I traced how, at this crucial moment of self-determination, Bengali Muslim authors of *itihās* and *jībanī* attempted to counter the negative essentialised and unjust portrayal of Muslims in the writings of Hindu nationalists through a strategic and creative use of their sources. For this, they used a plethora of texts to derive historical data which were otherwise threatening for Islam or ideologically distant from Muslim *jātīẏa* fervours. In these endeavours, the authors cited a series of histories written in English by the Orientalist authors where Islam was inherently vilified, or the works of Muslim intelligentsia like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali, whose ideological positions were not entirely emulated by the Bengali Muslim authors. From these polyvalent ways of adaptation, rejection and assimilation of data, themes and generic elements from multiple sources, a dynamic *jātīẏa sāhitya* was created. In this context, the Brahmo literary sphere, mostly discernible in the literary oeuvre of Girishchandra Sen, became a very important source of influence in linguistic and generic terms.

To establish Islam as a morally and politically just and superior system, the Early Caliphate was invoked as having organically emerged from Muhammad's *nabuyyat*, and this translated in affective terms into a pro-Caliphate sentiment. This sentiment started to crystalise politically since the time of the Khilafat Movement, giving rise to a number of publications to aid its dissemination. At this point, the inherent fracture in the Early Caliphate, historically marked in the first *fitna* and culminating in the battle of Karbala without any possible reconciliation, had to be addressed to rescue the Caliphate from falling into disgrace as a politico-moral system. To this aim, the Bengali Muslim authors relied solely on the two genres of history and biography. They did not encourage the writing of historical novels, marking a gap between history and narrative, in turn proposing *itihās* and *jībanī* as the repository of unmediated historical truth.

The final chapter of this book will engage with the polemical production of Husayn's martyrdom in the literary domain, which triggered several debates over the ideal poetic norms for *jātīẏa sāhitya*. It will expand

the debate over the mother tongue by focusing on the many proposals surrounding Sanskritised Bangla to prepare it to carry the multilingual experience of the Muslims and the ethics of Islam. It will also highlight the aspirations of the Muslim authors of the Karbala working in a reformist environment. By following the multiple thematic and generic innovations, and internal rejections and acceptances of the renditions of the Karbala, it will discuss how the Karbala consolidated a modern Muslim literary community.

Notes

1 Daad Ali, *Āśeke Rasul*, Vol. I (Nadia: Yusuf Ali, 1908), 175.
2 Daad Ali, "Pāpīr Param Bandhu," in *Aśeke Rasul*, Vol. I, 153–177.
3 Saiyad Abul Hosen, *Moslem Patākā* (Calcutta: Darbar Press, 1924), iii.
4 Sheikh Abdur Rahim, *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti* (Basirhat, 1887); *Islām Itibritta* (Calcutta, 1910).
5 Abdul Oyahed, *Moslem Pratibhā* (Noakhali: Abdul Gafur, 1909).
6 Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, *Makkā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1906); *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra* (Mymensingh, 1907); and *Madinā- Śarīpher Itihās* (Mymensingh, 1907).
7 Hosen, *Moslem Patākā*.
8 Qazi Akram Husain, *Islāmer Itihās* (Calcutta: Itihas Book Depot, 1924).
9 Ahsan Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta* (Calcutta: Ahsan Ullah Book House, 1934).
10 Sheikh Abdul Jabbar, *Hajareter Jībanī* (Dacca: Albert Library, 1913).
11 Girishchandra Sen, *Mahāmmader Jīban Carit* (Calcutta: Nababidhan Press, 1886); *Emām Hāsān o Hosaỳaner Jībanī* (Calcutta: K. P. Nath, 1901); and *Cārijan Dharmmanetā* (Calcutta: K. P. Nath, 1906).
12 Azhar Ali, *Mahābīr Hajarat Ālīr Jībanī* (Calcutta: Haji Afajudin Ahamed, 1926); *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī* (Calcutta: Maniruddin Ahmed & Sons, 1929); *Hajarat Emām Hāsān Hosener Jībanī* (Calcutta: Solemani Pustakalay, 1932).
13 Mohammad Uddin Ahmed, *Moharram Kānda* (Rangpur: Islam Mission, 1912), x–xi.
14 See for e.g. Krishna Bhattacharya Samaddar, *Indology, Historiography and the Nation: Bengal, 1847–1947* (Kolkata: Frontpage, 2015); and Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: "Primitives" and History-writing in a Colonial Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).
15 See Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Indira Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Saayan Chattopadhyay, "Bengali Masculinity and the National-Masculine: Some Conjectures for Interpretation," *South Asia Research* 31, no. 3 (2011): 265–79.
16 Massimiliano Demata, "Byron, Turkey and the Orient," in *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed., Richard A Cardwell (Thoemmes: Continuum, 2005), 447.
17 *Mahārāshtra Jīban Prabhāt* (The Dawn of Maharashtra, 1878); and *Rājput Jīban Sandhyā* (The Dusk of Rajput Life, 1879).
18 See Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); and Sugata Bose, *The Nation as Mother and Other Visions of Nationhood* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

19 Tanika Sarkar, "Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 37 (September 16–22, 2006): 3959–3969.
20 Such attempts created a tradition of writing history as cultural experience rather than as a rationalist-factual project, which came later, in the early-20th century.
21 Abdur Rahim, *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmaīiti*, 15.
22 Waqil Ahmad mentions how Meyarazuddin, a professor of Arabic-Persian at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta and a *Sudhākar* associate, contributed pieces translated from contemporary Urdu journals. Waqil Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake Bāṇgālī Musalmāner Cintā o Cetanār Dhārā* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2013 [1983]), 341.
23 Later, modern Arabic nationalist thought spread in north India via the Urdu print network which is a still fairly less-discussed domain in the history of modern Urdu literature.
24 C.M. Naim, "Interrogating 'The East,' 'Culture' and 'Lost' in Abdul Halil Sharar's Guzashta Lakhna'u," in *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition*, eds., Alka Patel & Karen Leonard (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012), 189–204, 198.
25 Naim, "Interrogating 'The East'," 198.
26 Hosen, *Moslem Patākā*, ix.
27 Mohammad Abdur Rashid, *Kārbālā* (Mymensingh: Muhammad Abdul Khalek, 1936), i.
28 Introduction to *Durgeśandinī o Trijāraja* (The Chieftain's Daughter or the Three Bastard Women) (Calcutta: Darbar Press, 1922), i. The others were *Kapālkundalā ba Sakher Satīn* (Kapalkundala, or the Imposter Co-wife, 1922), *Jugalāṅgurīya bā Satya Sādhvī* (Twin-rings or a True Chaste Wife, 1922), *Indirā bā Dākinī* (Indira, or the Witch, 1922); *Ikshur Nām Bishabṛksha* (The Sugarcane called Poison-tree, 1922), *Ānandamath bā Nander Fandī* (Anandamath, or the Trickster's Ploy, 1923); and *Sītārām bā Kāgaj Rājya* (Sitaram, or the Kingdom of Paper, 1923).
29 Aghornath Gupta was a scholar of Buddhism and a preacher of the Brahmo Samaj.
30 Sisir Kumar Ghosh was co-editor of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and a Vaishnava devotee. Ghosh was briefly a member of the Brahmo Samaj, where he inculcated knowledge of the modern literary discursive genres and of standardised Bangla, before returning to the fold of Hinduism.
31 Sisir Kumar Ghosh, *Sri Amiya Nimāi Carit: Akhaṇḍa Saṃskaraṇ*, Vols. 1–2 (Kolkata: Biswabani Prakashani, 1983 [1885–1910]).
32 Sudipta Kaviraj, *Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 78.
33 One should not forget the trilogy of poems on Krishna by Nabinchandra Sen – *Raibatak* (1887), *Kurukshetra* (1893) and *Prabhās* (1896) – which show how among Bengali Hindus a nationalist consciousness was being reorganised around the divine figure of Krishna.
34 *Islām Citra o Samāj Citra*, 30.
35 Rashid, *Kārbālā,* ii.
36 Bari, *Kārbālā Kābya* (Noakhali, 1935).
37 Ibid, 2.
38 The significance of the Ottoman Caliphate in the pan-Islamic domain and the aftermath of the fall of the Caliphate have been discussed in Section 4.3.

39 Hosen, *Moslem Patākā*, 4.
40 Ibid, 1–2.
41 Epsita Halder, "Mahākorāner Baṅganubād: Punaranubād Bishaẏe Punarbibecanā," *Kolkātā 21*, Year 1, no. 1 (2022): 35–68.
42 *Moslem Suhrid* (Baishakh 1314 BS [April–May 1907]. Quoted in *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās*, iv.
43 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph* (Dacca, 1933), 187. Such sensibilities, expressed in writing, show that while there was now an expansive mobility, made possible by the discovery of the steam engine, which enabled common people to become part of the large oceanic network of the Arabian Sea via Bombay, and which had also created new routes for *hajj*, the people who could not actually afford *hajj* took up reading as compensation for their lack of mobility. For *hajj* in the oceanic network, see Nile Green, "The 'Hajj' as its Own Undoing: Infrastructure and Integration on the Muslim Journey to Mecca," *Past & Present* 226 (February 2015): 193–226.
44 Narratives on the newly mobilised oceanic routes and travel through the non-Muslim and other Muslim worlds, and new technological infrastructure in a new collective with a new sense of health and hygiene can be traced in travelogues like *Haj Jātrīr Patra* (Azizur Rahman, Chittagong, 1936), *Hajer Bishad Bibaraṇ* (Muhammad Salamtullah Sultanpuri, Chittagong, 1938), *Hajj Jātrīr Rojnāmcā* (Haji Abdul Rashid Khan, Calcutta, 1930) etc.
45 In the *Blumhardt Catalogue*, a number of travelogues by Bengali Muslims on their *hajj* travels to West Asia, published in the first decades of the 20th century, are listed.
46 Islamabadi wrote about Constantinople under the Ottoman rule (1493–1922) after travelling back from Turkey.
47 Islamabadi went to Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, Hejaz, Jerusalem and Egypt as part of his travels to the Islamic lands.
48 Bari, *Kārbālā Kābya*, 149.
49 Hosen, *Moslem Patākā*, 4.
50 Bari, *Kārbālā Kābya*, 149.
51 Ahsan Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta*, 29.
52 Ibid, 29.
53 Mohammad Akram Khan, *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās* (Dacca: Azad, 1965).
54 Nagendranath Basu, *Biśvakosh*, 22 vols (Kolkata: Biswakosh Karjalay, 1886–1911).
55 Mohammad Akram Khan, *Mochlem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās* (Dhaka: Aitihya [Reprint], 2010 [1965]), 79.
56 *Islāmer Itihās* (Calcutta: Moslem Publishing House, 1922, title page).
57 Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta*, 5.
58 Husain, *Islāmer Itihās*, 1.
59 Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta*, 1.
60 Husain, *Islāmer Itihās*, 81.
61 Ibid, 1.
62 "Mukhabandha," in Ahsan Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta*, 2.
63 See Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilisation in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Mushirul Hasan & Margit Pernu, *Regionalizing Pan-Islamism: Documents on the Khilafat Movement* (Delhi: Manohar, 2005); Shah Muhammad, *The Bengali Muslims: Khilafat Movement* (University of Oxford Press, 1980); and

M. N. Quereshi, "The Khilafat Movement in India, 1919–1924," thesis submitted to the University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1973, https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/28516/1/10672675.pdf

64 Mohammad Akram Khan, *Mostāphā Carit: Upakramanikā o Itihās Bhāg* (Calcutta: Mohammadi Press, 1925), 35.
65 Jabbar, *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās*, 17.
66 From the "Introduction," written by the poet Kaykobad to *Hajarater Jībanī*, Sheikh Abdul Jabbar (Dhaka: Albert Library, 1913), ii.
67 Sheikh Abdur Rahim, "Preface" in *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmanīti* (Basirhat, 1887), 2.
68 The last revised version of this book was published in 1912 and it was then reprinted in 1923 under the supervision of T. H. Weir.
69 J.M.S. Baljon, *The Reform and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1948).
70 *Islām Darśan* carried a number of articles against Mohammad Akram Khan's critical rendition of Muhammad's life in *Mostāphā Carit* in 1926.
71 Ruhul Amin launched continuous counters against Akram Khan's discursive efforts, ranging from his translation of the Qur'an to his biography of Muhammad. He published them in the form of *fatwas* to be distributed widely among the masses. Amin wrote *Islām o Saṇgīt* (Calcutta, 1940) against Akram Khan's argument on the *Śariẏā – Samasyā o Samādhān* (Problem and Its Solution; 1939) – and "Khān Sāheber Taphsīrer Pratibāde" in *Islām Darśan*, 1926.
72 Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Life of Mohammad* (1870), xix, cited in Antonie Wessels, *A Modern Arabic Biography of Muḥammad: A Critical Study of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's Ḥayat Muḥammad* (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1972), 226.
73 "After reading available books on history and also the historical novels of the Hindu authors, the new educated generation of the Muslim society has imbibed self-loathing and self-negation." Wajed Ali, in his Presidential Lecture at the fifth annual conference of the BMSS. *Baṇgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Samiti: Paṅcam Bārshik Adhibeśane Sabhāpatir Abhibhāshaṇ* (Calcutta: BMSS, 1925), 4.
74 Nurannechha Khatun, *Moslem Bikram o Bāṃlāy Mosalmān Rājatwa* (Calcutta: Mohammadi Press, n.d.), 8.
75 Syed Ahmad Khan, *Life of Mohammad* (1870), xix, cited in Antonie Wessels, *A Modern Arabic Biography of Muḥammad: A Critical Study of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's Ḥayat Muḥammad* (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1972), 226.
76 One anna is a monetary unit literally meaning 1/16th of a rupee. Azhar Ali, *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī* (Calcutta, 1929), 2.
77 The *Blumhardt Catalogue* of the India Office Library has records of only one volume by Nuruddin Ahmed titled *Hajarat Osmān*, published in 1956.
78 Girishchandra Sen, *Tāpasmālā* (Calcutta: Prankrishna Datta, 1894).
79 Sen, *Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī*; *Cārijan Dharmmanetā*.
80 Sen, *Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī*, i.
81 Sen, Introduction to *KorĀn Śarīph* (Sherpur: Mission Press, 1881), ii.
82 Rahim, *Islām Itibritta*, 1910, i.
83 Ibid, 9.
84 Girishchandra Sen, Introduction to *Emām Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī*, ii.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid, 5.

87 Ibid, 6.
88 Ibid, 17.
89 Ibid, 17.
90 Ibid, 37.
91 Ibid, fn. 149.
92 Ibid, 149.
93 Ibid, 64.
94 Ibid, 77–78.
95 Ibid, 160.
96 Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002).
97 Abdul Oyahed, *Moslem Pratibhā* (Noakhali, 1909), xi.
98 The abbreviation of honorific titles was transliterated for all the sacred figures. For Muhammad, it was *Alay-hi's-salām* (Peace be upon Him), with abbreviation: A.S., and for the Caliphs, Fatima and Hasan-Husayn it was *Raḍiya 'llāhu 'an-hu* (May Allāh be pleased with him/her), with abbreviation: R.A.
99 Rahim, *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti*, i.
100 Gérard Genette coined the term *paratext* and discussed it as one of the five types of relationship between literary texts in his *Introduction à l'architexte* (1979) and then again in *Palimpsests* (1982). *Paratext* is a combination of *peritext* and *epitext*. *Peritext* stands for aspects that are relatively closely associated with the book itself, such as the dust-cover, the title, genre indication, foreword and epilogue. *Epitext* consists of statements about the book beyond the boundaries of the book, such as interviews, letters, diaries, correspondences and articles about the text.
101 Ali, *Hāsān Hosener Jībanī*, 20–21.
102 Ibid, 21.
103 Ibid, 247–248.
104 Oyahed, *Moslem Pratibhā*, 1–2.
105 Husain, *Islāmer Itihās*, 81.
106 Ibid, 100.
107 Ali, *Hāsān Hosener Jībanī*, i.
108 Ibid, iii.
109 Rahim, *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti*, 324.
110 Ibid, 367.
111 Oyahed, *Moslem Pratibhā*, 1–2.
112 Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta*, 33.
113 Ibid, 33. This statement resonates one particular dialogue in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's eponymous novel *Rajani*, named after its blind female protagonist. This novel upheld the clash between two knowledge systems – the modern-scientific and the one based on traditional beliefs. When the western-educated husband wanted a surgery on his wife's eyes, the action was critiqued by a sage who defended local miraculous forms of healing by saying that even the telegraph seemed miraculous, but this did not lesson its real power.
114 Azhar Ali, *Baṛa Pīr Sāheber Jībanī o Āścarya Kerāmat* (Calcutta: M. D. Press, 1918), 5–6.
115 Dewan Shah Abdar Rashid, *Jňān-Sindhu Bā Ganje Touhid* (Calcutta: Milan Press, 1891).

116 Shah Abdul Jalil Shikdar, *Prabhu Paricaẏ* (Chittagong: Islamabad Press, 1923), appendix.
117 Jabbar, *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās*, 189.
118 Hosen in *Moslem Patākā*, 145.
119 Khan, *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās*, 178.
120 Ibid.
121 Raj Krishna Mookherjea, *Bāṇgālār Itihās* (History of Bengal for Beginners), 10th ed. (Calcutta: J. G. Chatterjee & Company, 1877), 64.
122 Editorial, *Islām Pracārak* (Ashar 1307 BS [June–July 1900]): 2.
123 Islamabadi, *Bhārate Musalmān Sabhyatā* (Calcutta: Shahjahan & Company, 1914); *Bhārate Islām Pracār* (Calcutta: Altafi Press, 1915).
124 Abdul Karim, *Bhāratbarshe Musalmān Rājatver Itibritta* (Calcutta, 1898).
125 Reformist platforms and Hanafi literati generally critiqued Akbar for his religious syncretic ideas which according to them "weakened" the values of Islam which Aurangzeb later resurrected. Mansur Uddin translated Shibli Nomani's *Alamgir Aurangzeb Par Ek Nazar* as *Aoraṃjeb* (Chittagong: Prabartak Press, 1943).
126 Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, 11.
127 Jamal Malik, *Islam in South Asia: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 434–80; Muhammad Naeem Quereshi, "The Khilafat Movement in India 1919–1924," PhD Thesis (London: SOAS, 1973); and Mushirul Hasan, "Pan-Islamism versus Indian Nationalism? A Reappraisal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 21, no. 24 (June 14, 1985): 1074–9.
128 The *Suddhi* Movement was launched by the Arya Samaj under the leadership of Dayanand Saraswati (1883–84) to reconvert former Hindus converted into Christianity and Islam. As Lala Lajpat Rai said in his article "The Shuddhi, Sanghathan, and Tanzim movements," the tenth of a series of newspaper articles by him under the title "The Hindu-Muslim Problem" (1924): "[t]he aggressive Hinduism preached by the Arya Samaj was not political in its conception. That it has been strengthened by political considerations cannot, however, be denied." See www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_lajpatrai_1924/10part.html, accessed June 12, 2021.
129 Kishori Saran Lal, *Return to Roots: Emancipation of Indian Muslims* (New Delhi: Radha Publications, 2000).
130 For a discussion on Fazlul Haq, see Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims: A Study in Their Politicisation, 1912–1929* (Calcutta & Delhi: K. P. Bagchi, 1991).
131 For a more detailed discussion on the political discourses, policies and electoral issues related to Bengali Muslims at the time, see the works of Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengali Muslims;* Amalendu De, "The Social Thoughts and Consciousness of the Bengali Muslims in the Colonial Period," *Social Scientist* 23, no. 4/6 (April–June 1995): 16–37; Sana Aiyar, "Fazlul Huq, Region and Religion in Bengal," in *Modern Asian Studies* 6, no. 42 (2008): 1213–1249; Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Regi*on: Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal (Delhi: Oxford University Press 2014); Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms*, 2016.
132 For more discussion on this, see Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region*; Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms*.

133 Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987), 96.
134 Jinnah inaugurated the All-India Muslim Students' Federation in Kolkata by dissolving the All-Bengali Muslim Students' League, the Lucknow Muslim Students' Conference and the Aligarh University Union in 1937. See Rashid, *Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, 94.
135 Rashid, *Kārbālā*, i.
136 Garib Shayer, *Jaṇge Rūm Iẏunān arthāt Turkī o Grīker loṛai* (Calcutta: Azizuddin Ahmed, 1905).
137 See Muhammad Gafur, *Sirāj-doulār Kalaṇka Mocan* (Malda, 1938); and Muhammad Salauddin, *Nawāb Sirājdoullā* (Calcutta, 1943).
138 Ahmed, *Palāśīr Yuddha*, 173–6. Publication details were unavailable for this text.
139 Raj Kumar Trivedi, "Mustafa Kemal and the Indian Khilafat Movement (to 1924)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 42 (1981): 458–467, accessed July 14, 2021, www.jstor.org/stable/44141163
140 *Akram Husain, Islāmer Itihās*, 394.
141 Ullah, *Ichlāmer Itibritta*, 295–298.
142 Quoted in Markus Daechsel, *The Politics of Self-Expression: The Urdu Middleclass Milieu in Mid 20th Century India and Pakistan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 137.
143 Abdullah al-Azad, "Nan-ko-apāreśān bā Asahajogītā," *Moslem Bhārat*, Year 1, no. 1 (Falgun 1327 BS [February–March 1920]): 634.
144 Ibid, 666.
145 Mohammad Abdul Hakim, *Islām Darśan*, Year 2, Vol. XI (Falgun 1328 BS [February–March 1920]): 401.
146 *Āhle Hādis* Vol. II, no. 7 (Jaistha 1324 BS [May–June 1917]): 317.
147 Rahim, *Hajarat Mahāmmader Jīban o Dharmmanīti*, 255.
148 Ali, *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī*, 585.
149 Ibid, 117.
150 Ali, *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī*, 117.
151 Ali, *Mahābīr Hajarat Ālīr Jībanī*, 637.
152 Ibid, 639.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid, 45, 91.
155 Ibid, 46.
156 Ibid, 91.
157 Ibid, 26.
158 Golam Mostafa, *Biśwanabi* (Dacca: Ahmed Publishing House, 1942).
159 Khan, *Mostāphā Carit*, 568.
160 Khan, *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās*, 126.
161 Mostafa, *Biśwanabi*, 243–256.
162 Ali, *Hāsān Hosener Jībanī*, 171.
163 Rashid, *Kārbālā*, 185.
164 Ibid, 188.
165 *Rawafid* is the plural of *Rafida*, the term etymologically meaning "the rejectors." It came to denote the Shī'as derogatorily in the Sunni circuits since the ninth century because the Shī'as did not recognise the first three Caliphs of the Sunni Caliphate.

166 The Kharejis were a Muslim sect formed in Kufa during the first *fitna*. They were not satisfied with Ali's standpoint in the Battle of Siffin between Ali and Muawiya, and Ali failed to win back their support. Eventually, Ali was assassinated by the Kharejis.
167 Nechari (naturalist) was a term first coined by the Deoband *ulama* to insult Sir Syed Ahmad Khan for his rationalist interpretations of all Islamic theological issues with the aim of framing Islam as a rational religion.
168 Rashid, *Kārbālā*, 87.
169 *Āhle Hādis* Year 1, no. i (Ashwin 1322 BS, [September–October 1915]): 145.
170 *Āhle Hādis* Year 3, no. vii (Chaitra 1324 BS [March–April 1917]): 303.
171 "Basirhāte Śīẏā-Sunnīr Bāhās Bibaran," *Islām Darśan* Year 3, Vol. ix (Jaistha 1330 BS [May–June 1922]): 348.
172 Ali, *Cāri Āshāber Jībanī*, 582.
173 Ali, *Hajarat Hāsān Hosener Jībanī*, 247, 305.
174 Ibid, 367.
175 Akram Husain, *Islāmer Itihās*, 100.
176 Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilisation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 25.

5 Literature, Modernity, Multilinguality

Prologue

Bhulio nā śikshā, mātribhāshā debi
Jātīẏa-unnati mātribhāshā sebi
Mātribhāshā bare haẏ loke kabi
Labhe atulan gourab dhan;
Bhule mātribhāshā, sebi anya bhāshā
Mite ki maner atripta pipāsā?
Pure ki akshay jaśer uccaśa?
Mānab amar haẏ ki bhabe?

Do not ignore your education, your mother tongue, the goddess
Only servitude to her gives us progress
Only the mother tongue gives poetic excellence
Name and fame in the world come along
If you serve some other tongue ignoring her
Does that quench the thirst of your soul?
Does another tongue bring you poetic acclaim?
Can immortality come through an alien tongue?
(Abdul Bari Kabiratna, *Kārbālā Kābya*, 1912)[1]

At the height of Karbala battle, Abdul Bari's Husayn, after losing his sons, nephews and close companions, suddenly breaks into a eulogy for the mother tongue. In his persuasive voice, Husayn hails the mother tongue as a goddess, and what follows is the poet Bari's complete conviction that only the mother tongue can inspire one to poetic excellence, quench one's emotional thirst and help one gain fame as a creative artist. Poetic acclaim and social progress are left by the way if some other language is used instead of one's mother tongue. Husayn's speech resonates with the emerging debates over the choice between Urdu and Bangla as the public language of the Bengali Muslims (already discussed in Section 3.3); and at the same time, points to the aspirations of poetic acclaim of the individual authors working within the reformist environment. In this chapter, I will follow the progression of these debates to mark how the

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literati conjured up ideas about a composite dimension of Sanskritised Bangla for the Bengali Muslims and broadened the scope for thematic and generic innovations within the reformist sphere to establish the basic tenets of Islamic reform, mainly centred around pro-Caliphate sensibilities and a Husayn-centric devotion.

The status of representation within literary genres – as truth-based narratives and not the truth in itself – generated anxiety over literariness and historicity in equal measure. This culminated in a debate on the authenticity of literary genres and the limits of poetic licence within *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Literary scholars have discussed poets like Nazrul Islam to an extent to comment upon the emerging poetic ideals in the Muslim literary sphere.[2] But in doing so, they have contrasted him, and poetry more generally, with the authors functioning within the purview of reformist literature. As a result, literary and the religious sensibilities appear divided by an unbridgeable gap. By contrast, this chapter highlights the polemics and debates over literary genres of *jātīẏa sāhitya* – prose and poetic narratives on the theme of Husayn's martyrdom – conducted by the *ulama* and the literati. It explores how they defined poetic ideals so as to make literary genres efficacious tools for embodying Islamic ideals. In doing so, this chapter revisits the debate over language outlined in Chapter 3 and develops it further in the context of multilinguality, with the aim of connecting it to the debates over literariness that took place in the periodicals like *Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, *Islām Darśan*, *Āhle Hādis* and so on.

Within the Muslim literary sphere, debates erupted since the 1920s over issues of poetic licence and the definition of poetic values of literature in connection with religious sensibilities. These intensified when a group of scholars, teachers and students of the Dacca University came together to form the Muslim Sahitya Samaj (MSS) to advocate for literary endeavours free of institutionalised reformist religiosities.[3] Authors like Qazi Abdul Odud (1894–1970) and Abul Hussain (1896–1938) contributed to *Śikhā*, the literary mouthpiece of the MSS, and other journals like *Saogāt* which shared similar concerns. The MSS, led by Odud and Hussain, opened up a space for *jātīẏa sāhitya* by reconnecting it to an idea of Islam based on humanism and religious rationalism, for which they relied upon the individual capacity for free thinking, informed by religion, but not fully demonstrated in the existing reformist framework. The associates of the MSS constantly argued in *Śikhā* for a dynamic conception of education, modern literature and social reform; which entailed a rational critique of Islam. Occasionally, its concerns about Bangla as the mother tongue and the Muslim experience as the basis of the Bengali Muslim literary field resonated and overlapped with the modern *ulama* and other literati working within *jātīẏa sāhitya*. But the ideological differences in their positions in relation to the interpretation of Islam were stark and irreconcilable.[4] Qazi Abdul Odud (the editor of *Śikhā*), much like the other members of the MSS, acknowledged

the socio-religious endeavours of the reformist ulama and literati but found their *hadis*-aligned constrictions ("*saṃjam*") imposed from above on Muslims in general in every facet of life, including artistic expressions, a deterrent ("*pratibandhakatā*") to their natural free-thinking abilities ("*chitter swābhābik sphūrti*").[5] The contributors to *Śikhā* brought a paradigmatic shift towards understanding the contemporary relevance of Islam for Bengali Muslims and defined Bengali Muslim literature as a domain, where open, rational knowledge ("*mukta nirbārita jñān*")[6] and poetic innovations were welcomed to convey a Muslim experience. To usher in the emancipation of intellect ("Buddhir Mukti", the name of the literary movement), the scholarly rational approach of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and poetic humanism of Rabindranath Tagore were constantly invoked. In an article titled "Bāṇglār Jāgaraṇ" (Awakening of Bengal, 1928, *Śikhā*), Odud discussed the frameworks of rationalism and humanism as expounded by Roy and Tagore and showed why these two strands were defeated by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's more populist version of nationalism to explain the failed exchanges between the Hindus and the Muslims with the emergence of barriers between them.

Mohammad Akram Khan, as a practitioner of rationalism and individual reasoning following *ijtihād*, did not accept the ideas of rational thinking of the MSS that majorly functioned outside the Islamic scriptural framework. He published a long essay (serialised) in *Māsik Mohāmmadī* against the literary endeavours of the MSS and targeting Abdul Odud for ideation and Nazrul for his poignant use of Islamic elements as free poetic symbols. However, there was no dearth of such antagonisms for Nazrul in the reformist literary sphere, many of which had been patronised by *Mohāmmadī* with the sheer energy of Akram Khan, its editor and also *Islām Darśan*.[7] Narzul's poem "Maharram", exuberant with the visceral pain for Husayn and his family, remained completely ignored in the dynamic intertextual *jātīẏa* literary experience of reception and rejection. The authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, for their staunch negation of Nazrul's poetic ideals, were vehemently critical about Nazrul's ways of vernacularising Islam for the reading masses. Such debates in the public sphere culminated in dissenting standpoints between the MSS and the reformist literary endeavours which the historians and literary scholars finally read as the opposition between the "liberal" MSS and the "orthodox" reformist *ulama* and literati. Eventually, this all-pervasive binary blocked the room for any discussion of issues of literary modernity in the choice of genre and treatment of religious themes in the reformist spheres. In fact, the history of Muslim literary modernity has only been understood as the ideological struggle between the modernist (*Śikhā*) and the orthodox (*Mohāmmadī*) strands foreclosing any further discussion of reformist literature – *jātīẏa sāhitya* – as poetic-aesthetic endeavours.

By going beyond the popular binarism between poetic freedom and religious reform which pits the "modernist" *Śikhā* against the "orthodox" *Mohāmmadī* – prevalent in the study of modern literature of the Bengali

Muslims, I will examine here how the reformist *ulama* and literati consolidated the idea of composite (*miśra*) Bangla as their mother tongue and the public language in a multilingual context and developed a polemic on poetic ideals. For this purpose, I refer to reformist Islamic periodicals, namely *Hānāphi*, *Āhle Hādis*, *Islām Darśan* with occasional references to the Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā (BMSP). In addition, I will also look at how ideas about the popular and the folk emerged in the conceptualisation of *jātīẏa sāhitya* and how the Muslim literati re-engaged with the Dobhāshī repertoire and folk expressions since the 1930s to redraw the contours of literary modernity and redefine Muslim collective identity. In this new turn, the Bengali Muslim literati reinterpreted the position of the scribal *puthis* of the early modern period to restore an honourable position for the Muslim authors of the early modern period and reclaim the position of the Muslims in the history of Bangla literature. Once again, this chapter exposes the polemical nature of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, which negated any kind of popular imagination by calling it inauthentic in order to make a case for the validity of high literature according to the reformist logic – essentially prose and poetry – based on historical events, while at the same time it rediscovered the Battala Dobhāshī *puthis* and reclaimed them as an inalienable part of *jātīẏa* literature. As we shall see, claims of historical authenticity and generic innovation in the long poetic and prose Kārbālā narratives and the acceptance-rejection of the folk and the popular elements to define literary modernity revolved around the different interpretations of *Bishād Sindhu* (1891), the first prose narrative in Sanskritised Bangla on the battle of Karbala by Mir Mosharraf Hossain.

A brief outline of the political context of such a discussion of literary endeavours seems necessary, as starting from the 1920s the consciousness of the Bengali Muslim community began to be aligned with multiple forms of political mobilisations. This is not to let the political overshadow the literary, or to propose a co-constitution of the political and the cultural. We need, rather, to see how the literary-cultural domain can offer a prism through which to re-engage with the political narrative, and to understand how a reading of extant literary genres and linguistic choices reveals the presence of more nuanced and layered deliberations than a straightforward narrative of the Partition and the Two-Nation Theory.

After the Khilafat Movement, several new strands of political and intellectual thought began to take shape in Bengal in the late 1920s. The Bengal Pact of 1923 had ensured a separate electorate based on identity, and religious rights for Muslims. Therefore, its annulment by the Provincial Congress leadership in 1926 disillusioned Muslim leaders about the possibility of a productive alliance with the Indian National Congress (INC).[8] First, Maulana Akram Khan in 1927 and then Maniruzzaman Islamabadi the year after, followed by the majority of the remaining Muslim members, left the INC. Then came the time for the emergence of the regional Muslim political associations with a focus on the inclusion of Muslims peasants into the political fold. The Nikhil

Banga Praja Samiti (NBPS, All Bengal Tenant Association) was founded in 1929 and renamed in 1935 as the Krishak Praja Party (KPP, literally, the Peasant-Tenant Party). It began reaching out to Muslim peasants and middle classes, resulting in the emergence of various *krishak samitis* (small peasant associations) in rural Bengal in the 1930s.[9] Political consciousness grew stronger, especially in Dacca, Pabna, Bogra, Mymensingh, Bakerganj, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Murshidabad, leading to an all-Bengal peasant movement (*kishan sabha*) where the influence of the Communist Party began to be felt.[10] Though some historians have studied the rise of the KPP as a non-communal political party in comparison to the Muslim League (ML),[11] others have observed that Muslim *krishak* consciousness actually consolidated as a Muslim question against the dominance of Hindu landlords under the auspices of the KPP.[12]

As discussed earlier, the rise of a peasant political party could not, however, avoid internal divisions, and in 1936 Akram Khan left the KPP to form the United Muslim Party as a rival political platform. In the same year, Fazlul Huq addressed the rights of both the peasants (*krishak*) and tenants (*ryots*) in the election manifesto of the KPP, which brought a major demographic change to the Assembly Election in 1937, where the KPP trailed the ML by only a very narrow margin. Huq's appeal to the Congress for an alliance was turned down, leaving the ML as the only possible ally. The son of a district lawyer, Huq brought through his leadership of the KPP a temporary change in the political field of Bengal, which had until then been dominated by the Urdu-speaking elite Muslims of the ML and elite Hindu politicians of the INC. But the failure of the INC to respond to the call for an alliance made by Huq prompted him to form a cabinet with the support of the Provincial ML.[13] When the cabinet was formed, Huq's demands for peasant rights were pushed aside and he himself was eventually replaced in the cabinet, which had a majority presence of landowners. Huq's proposal for the abolition of *zamindari* and free primary education was stalled, destroying the possibility of addressing class concerns within the identity-based Muslim political movement.

Simultaneously with the spread of the *krishak samitis* and *kisan sabhas* across districts, the understanding of the culture of the people as *lok* (folk) began to emerge from the 1930s. Its ripples were felt across the districts with folk conferences taking place, and folklorists like Jasimuddin (1903–1976), Abdul Kadir and Muhammad Mansur Uddin (1904–1987), following in the path of Dineshchandra Sen, started travelling to the remotest corners, collecting folk songs and other oral artefacts. Elements of folklore began to be adopted, as new themes and folkloric forms were appropriated into the mainstream, thereby redefining modern literary genres, as is discernible in Jasimuddin's literary oeuvre.[14] This new literary consciousness did not come to be co-terminous with the political conceptualisation of the *krishak*, and the idea of the *lok* was different from the idea of the *krishak* in the *adab* tracts (discussed in

Section 3.1.2). Considering all these, I shall study the different turns in *jātīya sāhitya* that made the journey of the Bengali Muslims, along the path of literary modernity, nuanced and exciting, without subsuming all the strands of religious and literary modernity into a single point of concurrence.

5.1 *Miśra* Bangla: Linguistic identity-in-difference[15]

> It can't be said that Muslims have their own separate literature.
>
> (M. Ansari, *BMSP*, 1921)[16]

In reviews of literature written by the Hindu literati, the use of a flawless Sanskritised Bangla (*tatsama*), without any trace of Arabic-Persian and Urdu, was considered to be an indicator of the highest literary excellence. The widespread acceptance of Mosharraf Hossain's *Bishād Sindhu* (1887–1891) by Hindu readers and reviewers, along with the praise that Sheikh Abdul Jabbar's *Madinā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1907) and Abdul Bari's *Kārbālā Kābya* (1912) received from Hindu reviewers for their excellent use of Sanskritised Bangla, indicates that Islamic themes were welcome as long as those were transformed into cultural expressions and not articulated through Arabic-Persian and Urdu loanwords. The presence of Arabic-Persian and Urdu was seen as an indicator of religious otherness, threatening for the Bengali/Hindu "national" identity. In 1906, the editor of *Baṇgabāsī* did not hesitate to praise Abdul Jabbar's *Makkā-Śarīpher Itihās* (1906), which was written in overwhelmingly Sanskritised Bangla, thus:

> It is a time of pleasure that our Muslim brothers have started to cultivate (*carcā*) the Bangla language. There was no history of Meccasharif in Bangla. Hence, with this book a hitherto present gap in Bangla literature has been fulfilled. Along with the Muslims, the Hindus will be benefited as well by reading this book.[17]

Jabbar's proficiency in *tatsama*, being a Muslim, was praised repeatedly in that review. When Debiprasanna Roychowdhury, the editor of *Nabyabhārat*, stated in 1906,

> Hindus and Muslims are the two children of Mother Bengal and if both the brothers do not work hand in hand for the betterment of Bangla language, it cannot flourish as the *jātīya* language for the Bengalis, and neither can there be any uplift of the Bengalis,[18]

he indicated a deeply Sanskritised Bangla to be the mother tongue of all Bengalis, Hindu and Muslim alike, without any Arabic-Persian (or Urdu) linguistic variation.

Muslim authors, in this context, chose varied paths to formulate the poetic-literary ideals of the Muslim *jātīẏa* literary field. In order to receive validation from the Hindu readership, some of them emulated Hindu poetic rhetoric by appropriating them into cultural idioms, after emptying out their polytheistic moorings. Others, to enforce the monotheistic ideals at the core of Islam, attempted to attain a sovereign (s*watantra*) literature devoid of any rhetoric with polytheistic sensibilities for the Bengali Muslims. Tasadduk Ahmed's insistence, as the general secretary of the MSS, on religious difference in socio-cultural experiences was echoed by reformist authors across varied standpoints – the *Sudhākar*-associates and Akram Khan alike. As Ahmed stated in his presidential lecture at the third annual conference of the MSS in 1928:

> Our religion, our specific history, our community (*samaj*), our customs and behavioural codes, all are different from the other devotees (*bhakta*) of Bangla literature. But Bangla literature is the only form of literature that we Muslims have. In this situation the Bengali Muslims won't survive if Bangla literature cannot be moulded to accommodate our thought, history and experiences. … If we lose our separate identity, we will no longer be able to call ourselves Muslims. It is possible to maintain separateness while belonging to the land that has nurtured us.[19]

In the process of self-determination, no single poetic formula could be discerned. Abdul Hakim, the editor of Hanafi-oriented *Islām Darśan*, like many of his reformist contemporaries, made a sharp demarcation between pure literary renditions of Islamic themes and *jātīẏa sāhitya*. In his 1921 essay "Jātīẏa Sāhityer Ādarśa o Laksha" (The Ideal and Purpose of *Jātīẏa Sāhitya*), fusing a vast time gap of more than 300 years, he studied the early modern poet Syed Ālāol (1607–80) and two contemporary authors, Mir Mosharraf Hossain and Kaykobad, who according to him had emptied out Islamic themes and treated them with the pure aesthetic-poetic values of language. He then prescribed the literary ideals of *jātīẏa sāhitya* and hailed the ideal authors therein, Munshi Naimuddin and Munshi Meherullah.

> Kintu kābya hauk bā upanyāsei hauk, galpei hauk othabā kabitāẏ hauk, jāhāte Musalmāner dharmmanīti o jātīẏa adarśa kshuṇṇa nā haẏ, taṭprati Musalmān sāhityikder sarbbadā satarka drishti rākhite haibe. Moslem jībaner oi mahāsatyer apalāp kariẏā mahākabi Ālāol haite khyātanāmā sāhityik Mir Mosharraf Hossain paryanta bahu śakrtiśālī Hindu kabi o lekhakder nikat sahasra kaṇṭhe praśaṃśita haiẏāo Mosalmāner nikat śraddhā o sammān lābh karite pāren nāi.
>
> Be it poetry or novel, we should always maintain Islamic ideals. From Alaol to Mir [Mosharraf Hossain], their failure to maintain Islamic ideals in their poetry stopped them from becoming dear to the

> Muslims even though they were praised by the Hindus. The respect that Munshi Naimuddin and Munshi Meherullah have received cannot be attained by Kaykobad or Mir Mosharraf Hossain for their adherence to the poetic norms devoid of Islamic ideals.
>
> (Abul Hakim, "Jātīẏa Sāhityer Ādarśa o Laksha," 1921)[20]

But this prescribed demarcation between the literary and the religious could not always be maintained in the literary practices, which ranged from translations of the Qur'an and *hadis* to the writing of history, biography and other literary genres. It is interesting, however, to note here the selective remembrance of Ālāol's oeuvre in order to fit him into the argument that *Islām Darśan* made for *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Hakim did not include Ālāol's *Tohfa* (1663–1664) which is a major contribution in the corpus of scriptural Islam in the early modern period.[21] He declared Ālāol disqualified from *jātīẏa sāhitya* by referring only to his poetic works such as *Padmābatī* (1651) and *Saiphul Muluk Badiujjāmāl* (1659–1669) which enjoyed a wider circulation in the early modern period. Hakim saw only the emulation of pure Sanskritised poetics-aesthetics in these works of Ālāol without noticing Ālāol's exchange with the multiple religious knowledge systems inherent in these two works.

Multiple strands to interpret the issues of Sanskritised Bangla in a multilingual context were embedded in the various formulations of the Bangla language too. Muhammad Shahidullah ideated a coexistence of the Hindus and the Muslims in the Bengal public domain by proposing two separate lexical registers for Bangla – composite for the Muslims and purely Sanskritised for the Hindus – within the common syntactic structure of Sanskritised and standardised Bangla. For such ideation of a composite Bangla, essentially separate from the purely Sanskritised Bangla of the Hindus, Shahidullah did not hesitate to use inherently polytheistic expressions by treating Bangla as a neutral medium. In his presidential lecture at the third annual conference of MSS in 1928, he claimed that Hindu and Muslim religious sensibilities would coexist in the immutable temple of Hindu-Muslim union (*Hindu Musalmāner akshaẏ milanmandir*) by serving Bangla literature separately as well as together.[22] In this lecture titled "Sāhityer Rūp" (Forms of Literature), Shahidullah discussed a separate thematic domain for Muslim literature as well:

> Āmrā anek bār balechi Muslim sāhitya. Tāi ektu kholāsā kare balā darkār Muslim sāhitya balte ki bujhi. Āmāder ghar o par, sukh o duḥksha, āshā o bharasā, lakshya o ādarśa niẏe je sāhitya tāi-i āmāder sāhitya. Hindu sāhitya anupreraṇa pācche Vedānta o Gītā, Hindu itihās o Hindu jībanī theke. Āmāder sāhitya anupreraṇā pābe Korān o hādis, Muslim itihās o Muslim jībanī theke. Hindu sāhitya o Muslim sāhitya Hindur mandir o Muslamāner masjider mata ek sampradāẏer ekchete jinis naẏ. … Bāstabik Baṃla sāhitya Baṃlār Hindu-Muslamāner akshaẏ milanmandir.

> It is necessary to explain what we understand by Muslim literature. Literature that deals with our everyday and social-political life, our pain and pleasure, our aspiration and our ideals. As Hindus derive literary sources from their Vedanta and Gita, Hindu history and Hindu biographies, Muslims will have to draw their ideals from Qur'an and *hadis*, Muslim history and biographies too. Hindu literature and Muslim literature are not exclusive like Hindu temples and Muslim mosques, rather they are inclusive spaces for creating togetherness, exchanges, hence immutable temple of Hindu-Muslim solidarity.
>
> (Muhammad Shahidullah, "Sāhityer Rūp", 1928)[23]

Such individualistic idealism could not smoothen out the all-engrossing anxiety over losing the charge of Islam as a monotheistic religion and Muslim culture to hegemonic Hindu polytheistic cultural nationalism, which the literati thought was an inevitable effect of the use of a linear Sanskritised Bangla. Wajid Ali, B.A,[24] wrote in his 1928 essay, "Sāhitye Swātantra Keno" (Why do we need autonomy in literature?) that the assimilative tendency of the Hindus would only force the Muslims "to offer the flowers of devotion at the rosy feet of Bagdevi".[25] He added that the Muslims had to engage in creating their "own" literature in Bangla in order to save their religious-cultural sovereignty.[26]

In the mainstream Bangla literary sphere oriented along Hindu cultural nationalism, articulation of a Muslim ethos in literary-cultural terms was consistently challeneged and denied. The Hindu literati vehemently rejected such multilingual conceptualisations by marking any such expressions as "communal," furthering the "communalisation" of Bangla language itself. They simply categorised the composite Bangla of the Muslims as "Muslim Bangla", which they used indiscriminately without marking a distinction with Dobhāshī, which was also called Muslim Bangla (discussed in Section 1.2). Rather than looking at the multiple linguistic and spatial dimensions of Muslim experience, they interpreted the proposal for a composite Bangla with Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords as a communal impulse for separatism that hurt the non-communal cohesive idea of the nation, which in reality remained inherently and hegemonically Hindu.[27]

At the same time, the reformist *ulama* and literati had to defend their choice for Sanskritised Bangla lexicon against antagonisms from within the reformist community raised by a group of *ulama*. In his second presidential lecture for the Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti (BMSS) in 1917 at the Muslim Institute Hall in Calcutta, Shahidullah spoke about a group of *ulama* who preferred a unilinear Arabicisation of Muslim identity and literature, without paying any heed to the regional context of Bengali Muslims. Shahidullah wrote, "Those maulavis and maulanas continue to deliver delirious speeches claiming that the scriptures are degraded if they are translated into Bangla marking it as the *kaferi* (non-believer's) language. They themselves refuse to write anything on Islam in it too".[28] But

as already mentioned, a vast majority of the reformist *ulama* advocated writing about Islam in the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims and actually opted to write in Sanskritised Bangla themselves.

5.1.1 Reformist Islam and its claims over the Bangla language: **Āhle Hādis, Islām Darśan, Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā**

The demand for providing access to Islamic knowledge for different social strata in Bengal was a unanimous cry from all quarters of the reformist Muslim public sphere. The *ulama* and the literati expressed the dire need to impart Islamic tenets to the common masses in their mother tongue Bangla for whom learning Islamic ideas in the original Arabic and Persian, or even Urdu, was an onerous task even after the proliferation of madrasas across the districts. In an essay titled "Samājer Paripārśwa" (Surrounding of the Society), Mohammad Ichha, a contributor to *Āhle Hādis*, reflected in 1917 that "[n]o one can deny today that Bangla is the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims. But there is very little about Islam available in Bangla. That is why Bangla-speaking Muslims are unable to learn about Islam" (*Bāṇgālā bhāshāi Bāṇgālī Musalmāngaṇer mātribhāshā haiẏā paṛiẏāche. Bāṇgālā bhāshāẏ tāhāder grantha khub alpa parimāne – kājei Bāṇgālī Musalmāngaṇ adhikaṃśai dharmma bishaẏe abagata haite pāritechen nā.*)[29] In the same issue, Babur Ali, the editor of *Āhle Hādis*, pointed out in an article titled "Hindu o Musalmān" that "owing to the absence of religious material in Bangla, the Bengali Muslims were compelled to read literature written by Hindu authors".[30] Pir Abu Bakr Siddique of Furfura Sharif, the spearhead of Hanafi reform in Bengal, himself explained the Arabic *ayat* of Qur'an and *hadis* and presented all of his sermons in Bangla at the *wa'z* events, instructing his disciples to do the same.[31] Siddique even issued a *fatwa* instructing that the *khutba* (the Friday sermon) must be explained in Bangla following the recitation of the Arabic original to the assembled audience in the *masjid* during *namaz* which was previously done in Urdu.[32] Continuing with this legacy, Abu Bakr's most influential disciple, Hanafi missionary Ruhul Amin always used Bangla for his discursive prose and oratory during sermons, and these were much celebrated among the masses.[33] Ruhul Amin's preference for and proficiency in ornate *tatsama* Bangla is ubiquitous in all his scriptural writings.

Babur Ali, the editor of *Āhle Hādis*, pleaded with his readers in 1915: "Can't the Bangla language attain glory with the names of Muslim authors?" (*Bāṇgālā bhāshāo ki ekdin Musalmāner nāme gourabānwita haite pāre nā?*)[34] Not only did all the *ulama* in this intra-Islamic literary sphere categorise their linguistic choices as *jātīẏa* endeavours, they were also unanimous in using standardised Bangla as the medium of training in *madrasas* which they called *jātīẏa* madrasa, where students were imparted *jātīẏa* Islamic knowledge available in Arabic, Persian and Urdu through "a language the students spoke at home".[35] The insistence on

teaching scriptural Islam through the Qur'an, the *hadis* biographies and history books in standardised Bangla, as well as the vocabulary used in Muslim homes, affirms the relevance of a composite Bangla as the medium of instruction in the *madrasas*. Three periodicals – *Āhle Hādis* (1915, edited by Babur Ali), which was the mouthpiece of the Anjuman-i Ahl-i Hadis-i Bangla, *Islām Darśan*, (1920, edited by Abdul Hakim and Nur Ahmad), the mouthpiece of the Hanafi Anjuman-i Wa'izin-i Bangla, and *Mohāmmadī* (1902, daily from 1922, monthly from 1927, edited by Akram Khan) contributed much to the debate on the linguistic affiliation and the definition of *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

No matter how intense the intra-Islamic antagonism between Hanafi and Ahl-i Hadis grew, Babur Ali of Ahl-i Hadis echoed the Hanafi standpoint of giving primacy to standardised and Sanskritised Bangla. He succinctly articulated in *Āhle Hādis* that only the Bangla translation of the Qur'an could awaken the ignorant Muslim masses of Bengal. But he attacked the Hanafi attempts at translation by alleging that the Hanafi translators conflated the true meaning of Islam with *maẓhabi* interpretations,[36] which for Babur Ali was a failure of *jātīẏa sāhitya*.[37] On the other hand, the Hanafi *Islām Darśan*, which always declared itself a *jātīẏa patrikā* (*jātīẏa* periodical) on the cover, scorned *Āhle Hādis* for not following the *maẓhabi* Imams. The editor of *Islām Darśan* added that by not referring to any of the scriptural interpretations beyond the six *sahi hadis*, the followers of *Āhle Hādis* had "failed to uphold the superior *jātīẏa* values of Islam".[38] The disapproving voice of the editor was apparent in his choice of strong expressions, "*Āhle Hādis*, for its sectarian narrowness (*sampradāẏik saṃkīrṇatā*), autocracy (*swecchacāritā*), shackles of parochialism (*ekadeśdarśītār bajranigaṛ*), cannot be considered the *jātīẏa* mouthpiece of Islam".[39]

Seeking to propose an ideal medium for Islamic knowledge, Mohammad Abdul Hakim, a contributor to *Āhle Hādis*, in his 1915 essay "Abāhaṇ" (The Call) first cancelled Dobhāshī as an older form of language, as the *dharmabhāshā* (the language of religion), which he thought incapable of articulating Islam as a new public discourse. He proposed, instead, the use of standardised Sanskritised Bangla – calling it *karmabhāshā* (the language of practical use) – as a neutral medium free of Hindu connotations.[40] The reformist *ulama* of *Islām Darśan* and *Āhle Hādis* attempted to fill the gap in Islamic knowledge in Bangla by contributing to the periodicals and publishing individually. They translated the Qur'an and the *hadis* repertoires, wrote about the time of the Prophet and the Early Caliphate, and generally on Islam, its ethico-moral codes and education, and educational and social reforms. To imbue their discourses on Islam with an elegant literary flow, the contributors of *Āhle Hādis* and *Islām Darśan* often used stylistic devices of modern genres and resonant Sanskrit loanwords. The editor, to ordain the ideological victory of *Āhle Hādis* over the *maẓhabi* Hanafis, exclaimed in ornate *tatsama* lexicon, with equivalents for various typically Islamic words like *maẓhabi* ("*aṃśībādī*"). He used the metaphors

of the musical instruments with puranic connotations to dramatise the narrative situation, providing complete translation for words like *dīn*, *bedīn*, *haqq*, *batil* in paradigmatically Sanskritised Bangla, and thereby using them as neutral signs of elite literature.

> Islāmer ei mūlmantra touhider birāt śaṇkhadhwanite samagra biśwa dhwanita haila. Śaẏtāner pramod mandirer tablā-bādya ciratare ruddha haila. Aṃśībadīder hāt theke Aṃśībadīder mandirā khasiẏā paṛila. Anācār o aśāntir paribarte jagate śānti o sadācārer punya rājatwa ārambha hailo.
>
> The sound of the conch shell reverberated across the world. The play of the percussion was stopped forever in the temple of sensual indulgence. The cymbals fell from the hands of the factionists. Truth prevailed over false beliefs. There came the end of immorality and discord with peace and ethics.
>
> (Babur Ali, *Āhle Hādis,* 1915)[41]

The new status of composite Bangla based on Muslim multilingual experience was inclined to Arabicisation as necessitated by Islamic reform. Arabic titles were rampant in Dobhāshī *adab* texts and *namaz* manuals which continued in the new period of reform since the 1880s. But it was significant that the authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* did not feel any incongruity in writing in ornate, heavily Sanskritised Bangla with Arabic titles. From Naimuddin to Ruhul Amin, the *ulama* kept the Arabic titles for all of their theoretical treatises,[42] while the textual part relied heavily on Sanskritised Bangla lexicon and syntax, interspersed with Arabic-Persian loanwords. In his *farz* treatise *Jobdātal Māsāẏel* (Zubdat al-Masael, or The Cream of Discourse, 1873), Naimuddin retained Arabic words related to Islamic morality and ethics, such as *gomrahi* and *hedayati*, with the aid of their equivalents ("*supathgamī*" and "*pathhārā byakti*," respectively in parenthesis), and continued to explain Islamic *adab* in sophisticated standardised Bangla no different from any discursive writing available in mainstream literature on social issues and religion by Hindus and Brahmos. Naimuddin did not hesitate to use a very Sanskritised "*parakāler sadgati*" taken from the Hindu equivalent for hereafter to explain his reasons for writing about Islamic *farz* in Bangla for Bangla-speaking Muslims, without referring to Islamic eschatological terms such as *akhira* here. Such *tatsama* equivalents, in this new effort to standardise Islamic knowledge systems in Bangla, were never considered deterrents to reformist Islam.

In this preference for multilinguality the inclusion of Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords varied from author to author. This indicates the presence of multiple literary communities in the multilingual context of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Abbas Ali, in his translation of the Qur'an to Bangla, used more Arabic-Persian and Urdu words than Naimuddin without

adding any equivalents from Bangla.[43] The composite status of Abbas Ali's Bangla indicates that his implied readers were exposed to those loanwords already in circulation via the Dobhāshī repertoire. But it does not narrow down the composite nature of Abbas Ali's discourses to a linear form of Islamisation of Bangla. Instead, simultaneously, Abbas Ali used various words with polytheistic moorings like "*pūjā*"[44] in the place of the Arabic *salat*, which the other translators did not. The other translators usually employed "*upāsanā*," adopted from the Brahmo vocabulary to indicate a monotheistic devotion in place of "*ibādat*"[45] The choosing of such equivalents indicated a more complex formation of composite Sanskritised Bangla in a multilingual ethos.

Within this spectrum, Akram Khan brings another dimension to the debate of Bangla as the mother tongue and Bangla as the medium of Islamic scriptures. He used heavily Sanskritised prose (*tatsama*) and a strictly structured syntax that developed in the elite literary circuits of the Bengal intelligentsia for discursive genres. As the president of the literary wing of the Jatiya Maha-Sammelan (National Meet), a conference organised in Chattagram in 1918 to discuss the issues of Muslim *jātīẏatā* and *jātīẏa sāhitya*, Akram Khan delivered a moving speech reaffirming Bangla as the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims:

> Edeśe Musalmānder prādurbhāb o Baṇga bhāshār uṭkarsha itihāser ek i prishṭhaẏ likhita āche. Musalmānrā Baṇga bhāshāke nijeder matri bhāshā rūpe grahaṇ kariẏāi kshānta haẏ nāi, baraṃ tāhārā je Baṇga bhāshār pratham uṭsāhdātā o prishṭhaposhak chilen itihās tāhār sākhya diteche. … Baṇga bhāshāẏ sastra granther anubāder janya Brāhmaṇ rā jakhan rourab nāmak bhīshaṇ nareker byābasthā karitechilen, Baṇga bhāshār sei ati kaṭhin bipader samaẏ Musalmān-i tāhāke paňca gouṛeśwarer maṇimuktā bikhacita rāj siṃāsane basāiẏā rājrājeśwarī kariẏā diẏāchila. Āmāder purbapurushgaṇ-i Baṇga bhāshār gourab soudher bhittiprastar pratisṭhā kariẏā giẏāchen.
>
> Since the beginning of the incursion of Muslims in this country and the excellence attained by Bangla as a language have been documented on the same page of history as concurrent events. History bears witness that the Muslims were not content to merely embrace Bangla as their mother tongue, they were also the ones to extend their patronage to Bangla. When the Brahmins cursed the translators for bringing Sanskrit *shastras* into Bangla with punishment in Raurab in hell, the Bengali Muslims, at this time of grave peril for Bangla, placed her on a throne embellished with priceless jewels, as the empress of the five kingdoms of Gaur. It was our ancestors who laid the foundation stone of the glorious monument to Bangla.
>
> (Mohammad Akram Khan, presidential lecture, Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti, 1918)[46]

According to Akram Khan, the inclusion of Arabic, Persian and Urdu was the most viable and meaningful linguistic choice to enable Sanskritised Bangla to carry the monotheistic *jātīẏa* essence of Islam. But he never included Arabic and Persian words to the extent that they defamiliarised the formal Sanskritised Bangla. Instead, he provided equivalents to Arabic conceptual words in Bangla in equal measure. In the chapter titled "Echlāmer Moulik Ādarśa" (The Basic Tenets of Islam) in his *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās*, Akram Khan starts by defining religion using the *tatsama* to denote faith ("*biśwas*") and ethico-moral codes ("*alaṇghanīẏa ācār bidhi*") as neutral and universal terms. He then goes on to place Islam in this universal framework, he repeats the words "*biśwas*" and "*alaṇghanīẏa ācār bidhi*" without using *imān* and *farz* for faith and ethico-moral codes. He then explains the values of Islam via *amal* and *ākidā* (aqidah) and goes on to unfold the basic tenets of Islam by introducing and explaining Arabic terms without adding denotative equivalents (gloss) from Sanskritised Bangla. For example, he does not gloss over *tauhid*. He quotes from several Islamic scriptural texts both in Arabic (from the Qur'an[47] and *hadis*[48] to theological treatises such as those of the eighth-century scholar al-Maqrīzī,[49] and so on) and Persian,[50] in the original Arabic and Persian scripts, without adding any transliterations, thereby attesting to the presence of a multilingually evolved readership with direct access to these languages.

There were other authors who formulated templates on the inclusion of Arabic and Persian in Bangla. Sheikh Habibur Rahman Sahityaratna, L. T. (1891–1962), the assistant editor of *Mohāmmadī*, critiqued in his essay "Baṇgasāhitye Islāmī Śabda" (Islamic Words in Bangla Literature, 1921), critiqued the extreme position held by some of the *ulama*, who were not ready to use any equivalents available in the simple everyday ("*saral*") Bangla vocabulary.[51] He advocated retaining phrases, idioms, proverbs and habitual expressions which were already a part of the Bengali Muslim vocabulary. In his argument, the inclusion of Arabic and Persian was inevitable ("*aparihārya*"), but Habibur Rahman agreed with his compatriots on the necessity of a well-thought-out-balance in the replacement of Bangla with the Arabic and Persian lexicon. He emphasised the retention of familiar *tatsama* words that did not excessively hurt monotheistic sensibilities by virtue of their familiarity, but resonated more expressively even if produced through the Hindu hegemonic construct of *tatsama* Bangla.[52] "Just as a single word may hold another ten words and a treasure-house of connotations in strong entanglement, its abrupt amputation may cause harm to the language itself and make it weak," (*ek ektā śabda o bhāb ki bhābe ar daśtā śabda o bhāb sampadke ākṛāiẏā dhariẏā āche, tāhāder ek ektike bād dite gele ār daś tār māẏā tyāg karite haibe. Atakhāni swārtha tyāg kariba āmrā kon lobhe?*) Rahman argued.[53]

Akram Khan, in *Moslem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās*, provided literal meanings for the Qur'anic *ayah*, but besides that, thematically speaking, he always interpreted scriptural sources through independent reasoning,

without adding interpretations of earlier Arabic and Persian scholars. The prevalence of such linguistic structures in his work, which did not utilise transliterations and literal translations, indicates the presence of an implied readership that was exposed to the basic tenets of Islam and was now being familiarised with Akram Khan's own arguments and preference for *ijtihād*.

It would not be farfetched to argue that, irrespective of their separate reformist positions (Tariqah, Ahl-i Hadis and Hanafi), all these authors adopted a composite form of Bangla, combining Arabic, Persian and Urdu and *tatsama* words within the multilingual social context of the Bengali Muslim experience. The *ulama* explained their reformist positions through the methods that they used to choose linguistic equivalents. Naimuddin's attempts to provide *tatsama* equivalents to all the Arabic and Persian words in his discourses may be attributed to his Hanafi *taqlidi* position, which advocated "whenever there is a confusion in religious matters, go to a learned alim for explanation".[54] On the other hand, Akram Khan's discourse, without detailed literal meanings, invited individual readers to engage with religious arguments through their own intellect, affirming the author's *ijtihādi* position.

For Akram Khan, the addition of words from multilingual sources not only broadened the horizon of any single language culturally but also provided nourishment ("*pushti*") to one's mother tongue. He mentioned that such additions, natural and creative, enhanced the beauty ("*rūpbriddhi*") of, and brought diversity ("*baicitra*") and enrichment ("*samriddhi*") to the mother tongue.[55] Akram Khan, who struck a balance between *tatsama* (not necessarily polytheistic) and Arabic and Persian words within a universal framework, reaffirmed the opinion that Sanskritic Bangla was no deterrent to forming Islamic ideals. Akram Khan sacralised Bangla within Islam by saying,

> Bāṇglā bhāshār jñānke āmi āmār ilme lādunni jñān kari. Jihāder astra hisebe āmi Bāṇglā bhāshāke grahaṇ korechi. Praẏojanīẏatā jakhan tībra haẏe dekhā diẏeche, āmār astra temani āro śāṇita haẏeche. Allah āmār janya Bāṇglā bhāshāke ekti dān hisebe pradān karechen.[56]
>
> I consider my knowledge of Bangla language as *ilm-e ladunni*.[57] I have embraced Bangla language as my weapon for *jihad*. As adversities against me increased, so did I sharpen my pen. Allah has blessed me with Bangla language as my weapon.

Another dimension comes from Muhammad Abdul Hakim, the editor of *Islām Darśan* who in his 1920 essay "Baṇga Sāhitye Musalmān" (Muslims in Bangla Literature) claimed that Bangla had been developed by the Muslims of Bengal since its inception. Hakim quoted an unnamed "neutral" (*nirapeksha*) scholar who said that Bangla is an autonomous indigenous (*prākrita*) language, which cannot be more than 500 years old and that this young language was created (*srishta*) under the patronage of Muslim

rulers and authors.[58] This was a direct emulation of Dineshchandra Sen's observation that the Muslim rulers of Bengal had patronised the growth of Bangla language and literature: "We believe that *Baṇgabijaẏ* (victory of Bengal) by the Muslims brought this fortune to Bengali language".[59]

Further, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, at the fourth Annual Conference of the BMSS in 1928 held in Basirhat, voiced the collective indignation of Muslim authors, saying that "Hindus do not care (*dhār dhāren nā*) about the rich multilinguality of Arabic and Persian".[60] The Hindu literati, according to Islamabadi, had never recognised the possibility of a non-unitary and inclusive mother tongue Bangla. But the Muslim literati continued to explain multilinguality as the condition for Bengali Muslim historical-cultural experiences. In this polemic over multilinguality, Arabic and Persian were reconnected and reclaimed multiple times. Mohammad Akram Khan, while claiming Arabic as the *jātīya* language and Bangla as the *matribhāshā* of the Bengali Muslims, undermined the Persianate connections in the formation of a Bengali Muslim identity though he himself consulted a plethora of texts in Persian and referred to them in his discursive corpus. For Akram Khan, Persia was not even developed as a civilisation before the advent of Islam in Iran. Shahidullah proposed another orientation for multilinguality falling back on the Persianate logic as he declared, "Our natural inclinations are towards Persian, if not Arabic, and not towards Sanskrit"[61] but continuously reaffirmed the need for Arabic as the language of religion for the Bengali Muslims. Such a prioritisation of Arabic (Akram Khan) or Persian (Shahidullah) neither called for diglossia, nor proposed any singular model of Arabicisation or Persianisation of the Bengali Muslims' linguistic status. They followed rather the logic of scriptural religion (Arabicate) and literature (Persianate) to propose two separate explanations for the growth of a Bengali Muslim community with ethno-linguistic identification.

While their ideas of the roots and routes for the growth of the Bengali Muslim worldview differed greatly, Akram Khan went close to Shahidullah's proposal for a linguistic model of coexistence for the Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims by suggesting a unique two-tier linguistic model. He conceived linguistic coexistence for Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims by citing the example of English. Akram Khan argued that if English could accomplish literary excellence while having variations in the form of British English and Irish English within a single public sphere, why may the same not be created in a similar fashion for Bangla, with internal variations – a composite language with Arabic and Persian for Muslims and heavily Sanskrised monolingual Bangla for Hindus.[62]

5.1.2 Bangla as miśra bhāshā *and Muslim multilingualism*

By framing an efficacious model of multilingualism, the Muslim literati developed various ethics of intervention into the heavily Sanskritised

Bangla. They worked along two trajectories in laying out the context for multilingualism. First, they cited medieval Bangla language-literature as an example of Muslim multilingualism and literary excellence. They validated multilingualism as a historical phenomenon integral to Bangla literature, which produced Bangla as a composite language with loanwords from Arabic and Persian. Second, modernising scriptural and other discourses (from translations of the Qur'an to writing modern genres) necessitated the inclusion of selective Arabic, Persian and Urdu words to enable Sanskritised Bangla to embody Muslim monotheistic sensibilities – that is, *jātīya bhāb*. Both the *ulama* and the literati developed an elaborate idea of the untranslatable – "*anubād karā asādhya*" (impossible to translate) – as Munshi Naimuddin marked at the beginning of his translation of the Qur'an.[63] This led, in many cases, to expansive linguistic exercises on equivalents, aided by further elaborations on transliteration. In this new linguistic exercise, equivalents to Arabic and Persian words were introduced in Sanskritised Bangla, or the Arabic, Persian and Urdu equivalents were given in parentheses after the *tatsama*. In this section, multiple attempts for a composite Bangla have been discussed, together with the debates over how to choose between Bangla and Urdu as the mother tongue and the public language of the Bengali Muslims. To claim Bangla as the mother tongue, the Bengali literati unleashed their creative energy to the fullest. An example of this is in the poem "Piu Kāňhā" (Where is the Beloved?), where the poet Daad Ali invites the nightingale to forget the lover (the symbol of its native language) whom it had left behind in Delhi and Lucknow during its sojourn to Bengal, and find solace in what Bengal had to offer. The poet was happy to reveal the sensorial beauties of Bangla.

Piu Kāňhā

…

8

Ei Baṇge kena taba agaman
Baṇga bhāshā nāhi kara uccāraṇ
E bhāshā ki hīn? – Sudhā sammelan
Kāke khuja pākhi? Bali 'piu Kāňhā'?

9

Nā nā Pākhi, kabhu tāhā bhābio nā
Baṇga bhāshā bali ghriṇā kario nā
Sudhā pūrṇa eti – nahe pratāraṇā

10

Tyaji taba bhāshā ei bhāshā dhara
'kothā priẏa' bali sambhāshaṇ kara

Where is the beloved

8

Why have you flown down here
If you don't take Bangla to your lips

Is this bitter? No, it drips honey.
Whom do you seek then, ye bird, in your whistling crescendo?

9

No, no, bird, do not mourn the past,
don't deny what Bangla offers to you.
It's a pitcher full of honey
Not an illusion
[...]

10

Forget your own tongue, bird,
your past is left far behind
now indulge in the honey of Bangla.

(Daad Ali, *Aśeke Rasul*, 1917)[64]

Drawing upon the poetic meter and patterns of direct speech common in the lyrical expositions of his time, Daad Ali addressed the bird coming all the way from Persia in search of its beloved in Bengal, but being unwilling to speak in the Bangla language. Thus, Daad Ali simultaneously pleaded with the Bengali Muslims to embrace the tongue of the land, affirming the melodious sweetness of Bangla. However, along with the disagreement of the Hindus on the composite nature of Bangla, there was staunch opposition from some Muslims in Bengal, who lobbied for Urdu as the public language. This hegemonic preference for Urdu among Bangla-speaking Muslims was different from the 19th-century exclusionary ideas about Urdu (Section 3.3). From the beginning of the 20th century, Urdu was imposed from above in the *maqtabs* and *madrasas* as the language of instruction for students coming from all strata of the society.[65] Abdur Rahim (1867–1952),[66] the magistrate of Northern Calcutta Presidency, proposed an ideal *maqtab* with Urdu as the language of instruction, which was also the common practice in the Muslim traditional education system across Bengal. A generation of Urdu-speaking Bengali Muslims emerged from the *maqtabs* and *madrasas*, emulating the culture of the Urdu-speaking elite, to be scornfully dubbed "*khitmadgār*" (servant) by the periodical *Nur al-Iman* to critique their linguistic choice of Urdu.[67] The authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* observed an overall economic deprivation in the districts where Urdu remained the language of the Muslims without any development of standardised Bangla. In his presidential lecture at the second annual conference of the MSS in 1927, Mahmud Hasan, an associate of the MSS, said: "Bengali Muslims have committed a grave mistake by following the path of Urdu. This is the reason why they are less developed than the Muslims of other provinces".[68]

Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, a barrister and politician,[69] said in 1929 that since the Bangla used in remote villages was heavily interspersed with Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords, it was advisable that school-children be taught these three languages, which would then be easier for them to pick up. Otherwise, rural children would have to imbibe

Sanskritised Bangla, which was unfamiliar to them, and which Hindus already excelled in. According to Suhrawardy, due to their relatively low exposure to Sanskrit, Muslims had to struggle immensely to learn Bangla to excel. His advocacy for Urdu was thus different in its reasoning from that of the Urdu-speaking lobby. Suhrawardy was looking for a remedy to the difficulties faced by the rural Bengali masses. Although his choice of Urdu offers a new perspective, his dismissal of Bangla as the medium of instruction for Bengali Muslim students, as proposed by the Mohammedan Education Advisory Committee headed by Sir Abdul Karim Ghuznavi, only intensified the Urdu-versus-Bangla debate.

The Bengali Muslim community reacted vehemently against the implementation of Urdu as the mother tongue. Akram Khan's response did not hide his agitation: "I find it most absurd when it is asked, what is the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims? Urdu or Bangla? There will always be coconuts on the coconut trees. That is the law of nature".[70] Maniruzzaman Islambadi, in his presidential lecture at the fourth Annual Conference of the BMSS, emphasised the efficacious use of the mother tongue for the overall growth of a regional community.[71] He referred to races (*jati*) that had achieved civilisational peaks – the Arabs, the Turks and the Persians – because, as he put it, their mother tongue and national language were the same. He proposed ways of empowerment for the Bengali Muslims whose mother tongue was not the national language. Islamabadi suggested that by serving one's mother tongue and *jātīya* institutions, it was possible to achieve empowerment as Urdu-speaking Muslims had already done in north India. He cited the exemplary achievements of Urdu-speaking Muslims who manifested their pride as a race (*jātīya gourab*) through institutions such as the Aligarh Muslim University and the Deoband Madrasa, as well as through a modern print culture and an illustrious modern literature. Islamabadi proposed the same for Bengali Muslims in the Bangla language. He historicised the evolution of Bangla as a *miśra bhāshā*:

> Bangla *bhāshā* emerged as a composite form of Prakrit, Pali and Sanskrit. As Persian was the language of administration during the early modern period, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu started seeping into Bangla. Gradually, Prakrit and Pali faded from Bangla, and from the 14th century onwards both Hindus and Muslims started achieving fluency in Persain and then later Urdu.

Islamabadi crossed over the typical references to validate the multilingual parameters of Bangla and discussed the presence of Arabic, Persian and Urdu in Dobhāshī *puthis* as the inherent logic of such multilinguality.[72]

By stressing on the efficacy of Urdu literature in sustaining the multilingual literary networks of *jātīya sāhitya*, Islamabadi reasoned that Bengali Muslims should cultivate Urdu simultaneously with their mother tongue. Like Fazlul Huq, Islamabadi articulated the functional role of Urdu due

to the supra-regional and pan-Indian reach of the language. While Huq elucidated the need for Urdu primarily in political terms, Islamabadi proposed the use of Urdu in cultural, political and other social terms. Emphasising the supra-regional and trans-territorial expansion of the use of Urdu, Islamabadi pointed out, "With the interlocution of Urdu, the Bengali Muslims will be able to communicate with the Muslim in other parts of India and in the cities and ports outside India" (*Urdu-bhāshār sāhājye bhārater pratiti aṃśher ebaṃ Bhārater bāhirer bahu śahar-bandare bhāber binimoy cholibe*).[73] Islamabadi looked at Urdu as a more accessible language which had replaced Persian for Bengali Muslims to become the new intermediary language through which all (*jābatīẏa*) the necessary scriptural resources and other discourses in Arabic and Persian could now be translated into Bangla. He concluded this section by saying, "To embellish our mother tongue with *jātīẏa* splendours and to enrich it with superior *jātīẏa* essences, we will have to bring together our *jātīẏa* treasures, and Urdu is the most accessible resource for that task" (*Mātribhāshāke jātīẏa bhābe śobhita o unnata karite haile jātīẏa sampad saṃgraha ābaśyak. Ebaṃ tajjanya Urddu-i sarbāpeksha sahaj abalamban*).[74]

Islamabadi was also quite annoyed with the racial-cultural inferiorisation of the Bangla-speaking Muslims that was all-pervasive in the writings of the Urdu-speaking elite Muslims of Calcutta. He remarked upon the unpleasant and humiliating situation that the Bengali Muslims found themselves in.[75] Saiyad Emdad Ali, another author and editor of the journals, joined Islamabadi by proposing, in his 1918 essay "Baṇgabhāshā o Musalmān" (Bangla Language and the Musalman) that the learning of Urdu be made compulsory for Bangla-speaking Muslims to bridge the class aspirations that they felt with the Urdu-speaking elite Muslims of Bengal and the Urdu-speaking north Indian Muslims in general.[76] Such advocacy for the learning of Urdu had inherent class aspirations. Similarly, class aspirations in the choice of the form of Bangla, from a colloquial composite Dobhāshī to the composite Sanskritised Bangla of sophisticated literature ("*mārjita sāhitya*"),[77] were evident when Muhammad Shahidullah directly alerted his readers that, while claiming Bangla as one's mother tongue to become Bengali, one should not act like "the grandson of a petty rural weaver" (*Bāngālī haite tomrā Hede Jolār nāti haio nā*).[78]

In an editorial published in 1903, *Islām Pracārak* elaborated on Muslim multilingual connections from the time of the evolution of Bangla as a language, both spoken and written:

> Though Bangla is the daughter of Sanskrit, it has been raised in the lap of its Muslim nurse. Muslims have nurtured the frail countenance of Bangla. Many Bangla words have been derived from Arabic, Persian and Urdu. The spoken form of Bangla has more influence of the Muslim languages.[79]

According to Islamabadi, the composite nature of Bangla was an inevitable condition for the transterritorial status of their religion that accumulated various words in its expansion. He argued that

> Now that it must be accepted that Bangla is not a unitary (*moulik*) language, but a composite language that has been enriched with the admixture of the lexical elements from Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Urdu, Farsi, Arabic, Marathi and Portuguese, no one has the right or reason to show aversion (*ghrina*) towards some specific languages and no one has the right to show such animosity.
>
> ihā jakhan swīkārya bishaẏ je Bāṇgālā moulik bhāshā nahe, baraṃ ekti miśra bhāshā, … Saṃskrita, Pāli, Prākrit, Urdu, Fārsī, Ārbī, Olandājī bhāshār saṃmiśraṇe ihār utpatti o unnati, takhan kono bhāshār prati kāhāro ghriṇā prakāś karār adhikār o kāraṇ dekhā jāẏ nā.[80]

Loanwords from Arabic, Persian and Urdu had been mixed into Bangla so integrally that Islamabadi opined herewith that even the constant and enthusiastic efforts of Hindu nationalists over the previous 50–60 years had not been able to erase the imports in Bangla language. Islamabadi sternly critiqued Hindu nationalist Sanskritisation of Bangla, which he felt was an irrational move. "By expelling the elements of these living languages, Arabic, Persian and Urdu," he said, "now it is the burden of a dead language (*mrita bhāshā*) Sanskrit that is forcefully (*jorjabardasti*) imposed on the existing lexical structure of Bangla".[81]

Like Islamabadi and Shahidullah, Akram Khan also believed that the accumulation of lexical elements from different languages was the strength of any language: "Just as for the nourishment of the body, nutritious diet is needed, so are the words of other languages needed for the growth and diversity of one's own language".[82] Like Babur Ali, the editor of *Āhle Hādis*, Islamabadi was quite direct in assessing the functional capacity of a composite Bangla which could mediate modern exchanges with linguistic communities across cultural regions and demographies, both within and beyond the nation, by including lexical elements from living languages like Arabic, Persian and Urdu. In Islamabadi's opinion, Sanskrit, as a dead language, only placed a burden on Bangla by introducing words that could not fulfil the functional needs of the community. Islamabadi did not hide his surprise at the "lack of reason" in the advocacy for the adaptation of Sanskrit words or their derivatives to form a modern standardised Bangla, which he found artificial and hegemonic.[83]

To discuss the varied logic of adaptation of Arabic, Persian and then Urdu lexicon in Bangla, one can look into how the composite nature of Bangla evolved during various situations. At the same time, there was a

need to identify the transterritorial nature of the Muslim community and demarcate it in linguistic terms. Muzaffar Ahmad, one of the founders of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and a litterateur, wrote in his article "Baṇgadeśe Mādrāsā Śikshā" in 1919 (Madrasa Education in Bengal) that:

> Muslims have no other option than learning Arabic. Muslims are not confined to the citizenship of any particular nation. Muslims can be a part of any nation, but with respect to their inner sense of belonging to a community, national identity becomes a secondary issue.[84]

In his presidential lecture at the third Annual Conference of the BMSS in 1918, Akram Khan affirmed that the mother tongue cannot be the *jātīẏa* language for Bengali Muslims since:

> *Musalmāner jātiẏatā baṃśa, byabsā bā deś gata nahe. Musalmāner jātiẏatā sampūrṇa dhrmma gata. Biśwer sakal Muslim miliẏā ek abhinna o abhedya jāti. Kono mahādeśer, kono deśer ba kono pradeśer Musalmāndiger dwārā kathita bhāshā sei sakal sthāniẏa Musalmāndiger jātiẏa bhāshā baliẏā grihit haite pāre nā.*[85]
>
> Muslim *jātīẏata* is not about their creed, clan or nation. It is completely about their religion. All the Muslims around the world belong to one singular *jati*. The language of the Muslims of one region, one country or continent cannot be the *jātīẏa* language of those Muslims.

Simultaneously, writing about Islam in standardised Bangla was deemed to be obligatory and, as Akram Khan had stated, in serving their mother tongue, the new age *ulama* were also rendering their service to Islam.[86] The need to reclaim Bangla was vehement and all-pervasive in the *jātīẏa* sphere. Shahidullah affirmed the Bengaliness of the Bengali Muslims by saying, "We are the inhabitants of Bengal. We speak, live, dream, fear, love, think and imagine in Bangla. That's why Bangla is out mother tongue" (*Āmrā Baṇga deśbāsī. Āmāder kathābartār, bhaẏbhālobāsār, cintā-kalpanār bhāshā Baṃlā. Tāi āmāder mātri bhāshā Bāṃlā*).[87]

What Emdad Ali assessed in his 1918 BMSP essay "Bangabhāshā o Musalmān" can be considered to be the collective argument of the reformist interlocutors. Ali said that in the face of Hindu antagonism towards the inclusion of Arabic, Persian elements in Bangla, the primary task of Muslim authors should be to spread awareness of Muslim virtues and ideals, even before they could validate their claims and arguments for *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Ali was of the opinion that the inclusion and naturalisation of Arabic and Persian in Bangla ought to be a gradual process; and if the Muslim authors served Bangla literature with their full sincerity, this incorporation would, in time, be accepted by Hindus. This was echoed in the presiding speech made by Tasadduk Ahmed at the first Annual

Conference of the MSS in 1927.[88] They all echoed Emdad Ali's appeal to common Muslims – to treat Bangla, even when Sanskritised, as their mother tongue.[89]

In this multilingual domain, English, despite its limited reception, also became instrumental for accessing the works of the Orientalists, colonial administrators and some of the Indian intelligentsia who preferred to write in English, such as Syed Ameer Ali. In this field of asymmetrical linguistic capacities, Urdu became a functional means of access to Arabic and Persian source texts. At the same time, however, many individuals, with very little or no access to either Urdu and/or English, continued to rely solely upon the mediating capacity of Bangla.

5.1.3 Redefining literary modernity: Recovering puthis*, discovering the folk*

In the thematic and poetic formulation of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, there was a return to Dobhāshī *puthis*, and at the same time, there was a new interest in understanding the lives and cultures of the rural people as the folk (*lok*) that had changed literary paradigms since the 1930s. A formal consolidation of these two themes may be observed in the literary policies at the first conference of the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Samsad (East Pakistan Literary Society) in Dacca in 1943:

1 Reclaiming of the thus-far marginalised Musalmani *puthi* as an integral part of refined literature is necessary.
2 The hitherto-unacknowledged lives of rural Muslims have to be brought in as the themes of Bengali Muslim literature.[90]

Recognising the folk as a shared consciousness for the Bengali Muslims in general and reclaiming Dobhāshī as the popular expression of Muslim identity created a new paradigm of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. The beginning of such conceptualisations around the folk gradually solidified since the 1920s decades to finally determine the cultural-linguistic policies of East Pakistan. To understand the shapes and contours of the discourses dealing with the popular, the folk and the ambivalence of orality-literacy in the domain of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, this section discusses the contributions of Muhammad Shahidullah, Jasimuddin and Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad, along with the curious recontextualisations of the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Husayn in this new configuration.

The *ulama* and the literati began the project of *jātīẏa sāhitya* by distancing it from the early modern scribal-manuscript tradition and the Dobhāshī *puthis* (discussed in Section 1.2). The exclusion of orality and folk expressions was common to the making of a national consciousness through regional canons in other regional *bhāshā* (language) experiences too. The construction of the Kannada literary

canon, for example, had similarly excluded oral poetic traditions and expressions.[91] Similarly, to posit Tamil as a classical language equivalent to Sanskrit, Tamil folklore was marginalised,[92] although there was an ambivalent acknowledgement of the folk connections of epic poems like the *Shilapadikaram* (second–fifth century CE).[93] But Tamil nationalism flourished by marking folk as the exclusive domain of identities based on the oral expression of folkloric communities, thereby freeing it from the clutches of Christian missionaries and colonial folklorists.[94] In the nationalist public sphere in Bengal, there had been initiatives to re-invent the folk as an integral part of the history of Bengal since the late-19th century, which began to look once more at national identity from a regional location.[95] Endeavours towards familiarising and archiving folk elements and traditions begun by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)[96] were carried forward by Aghornath Chattopadhyay (1851–1915) and Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951). Dineshchandra Sen (1866–1939) opened the doors to the hitherto-unexplored domain of Muslim poetic expressions by editing and publishing all the collected ballad scribal manuscripts in a volume titled *Maimensingha Gītikā* (the Eastern Bengal Ballads, 1923).[97] Carrying forward Sen's legacy, his student Muhammad Shahidullah also started collecting scribal manuscripts.[98] Rejecting the general injunctions against the Dobhāshī *puthis* formulated by the mediators of reformist Muslim modernity, Shahidullah, in his presidential speech at the second Annual Conference of the BMSS 1918, underlined the Dobhāshī repertoire as the authentic ("*khāṅti*") expression of the Bengali Muslims, for its insularity from external influences.[99] This opened up a new argument in the conceptualisation of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Shahidullah here included the literary taste of the semi-literate or illiterate strata among Bengali Muslims, centring on the claim of Dobhāshī to be recognised in the *jātīẏa* literary field, which had hitherto been distinctly separate from Dobhāshī. He exposed the internal ambivalence in *jātīẏa sāhitya* by including in it the listening practices of a wide range of common people "from the boatman to the homemaker" who entertained themselves through recitations of the Dobhāshī *puthis* at the end of a long day of excruciating toil ("*hāṛbhāṇgā khātuni*"). Shahidullah observed that among all the stories that made them forget their wretched daily lives amid poverty, the martyrdom in Karbala was the closest to their hearts ("*puthipāṭhak jakhon sur kariẏā puthi paṛite thāke, takhan śrotribarga kakhan Kārbālār śahidgaṇer duḥkhe karuṇ rase galiẏā jāẏ*").[100]

Along with the Dobhāshī *puthis*, Shahidullah recovered the literary glory of Syed Ālāol. He rehabilitated Ālāol by countering the rising antipathy in the *jātīẏa* literary circuits towards him for his choice of "Hindu" themes and his use of Sanskrit aesthetic-poetic devices and diction in *Padmābatī*. Shahidullah reclaimed Ālāol as "the greatest poet of his times,"[101] a polyglot and an authority on several streams of theoretical knowledge, ranging from *Prākrita Paiṇgala* to Natha yoga, *tasawwuf* to music.[102] Shahidullah also

wrote about Saiẏad Sultān, the first Sufi poet to chronicle the life accounts of the Abrahamic prophets (*Nabīvaṃśa*) ending with Muhammad (*Rasul Vijaẏa*) and Sultān's disciple Muhammad Khān, who composed *Maktul Hosen* as the sequel to Sultan's *Ophātnāmā,* the last episode of *Rasul Vijaẏa* based on the death of Muhammad (discussed in Section 1.1).

Thus, Shahidullah carried forward the legacy of Dineshchandra Sen in his understanding of the Middle Bangla *puthis* as integral to *jātīẏa* literature (which included the *Caryāpada*, the *mangalkāvyas*, the *Gītikā* and works by many poets alongside Ālāol). But at the same time, Shahidullah added his own interpretation to trace the roots of *jātīẏa* Muslim literary fervour in Middle Bangla literature. In this new turn to the past, Shahidullah emphasised the coexistence of Islamic themes alongside Sanskrit aesthetics in the literary history of Bengal by restoring the reputations of Saiẏad Sultān and Muhammad Khān.

It was Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad who explored both the great and the minor literary traditions of the early modern period by rigorously collecting thousands of scribal manuscripts from the remotest corners of eastern Bengal. His thematic and linguistic study of the *puthis* in a comparative framework led Abdul Karim to treat religious difference as an important aspect in the history of Bangla literature.[103] *Islām Darśan* praised both Abdul Karim and Dr Abdul Gafur, another researcher of scribal manuscripts, for having created the archives necessary for *jātīẏa sāhitya*, thus filling up an existing lacuna.[104] Abdul Karim published his essays in various journals, from the highbrow *Sāhitya* to more district-oriented periodicals, in order to disseminate awareness about the archives of Muslim scribal *puthis* and their role in Bengal's cultural past. Following in Abdul Karim's footsteps, many literary and cultural religious platforms, namely, *Islām Darśan*, *Mohāmmadī*, the *BMSP* and *Saogāt*, began their own attempts from the second decade of the 20th century to explore the Bengali Muslim identity by tracing literary culture back to the scribal past and the Musalmani Dobhāshī repertoire.

In this return to the Dobhāshī *puthi*s, groups with paltry or no literacy were acknowledged as valid participants in the domain of *jātiẏa sāhitya*. Taking a different stance from the previous antipathy towards Dobhāshī, in an essay titled "Islāmī Bāṃlā o Puthi Sāhitya", published in *Islām Darśan* in 1920, the editor of the journal remarked:

> Bidyasagar-Bankim o Micheal-Hemchandrer pūrbabartī Hindu sāhityikgaṇer sudīrgha samās o Sanskrita śabda-samācchanna kaṭhor o karkaś pānditya Bāṇglār prabal pratidwandī rūpe taṭkālīn Musalmān sāhityik brinda Ārbī-Fārsī śabdabahul jātīẏa bhābmandita madhur o molāẏem Islāmī Baṇglā puthi-sāhityer srishti kariẏāchila …. Durbhāgya baśataḥ, āmrā etodin tāhār kono khojkhabar laite pāri nāi. Puthi sāhityer prati upeksha je āmāder jātīẏa sāhitya o jātīẏa jībane gaṭhaner pakshe ekti mārātmak truti, se kathā kichutei aswīkār karā jāẏ nā.

> Unlike the long-drawn, entangled, grammatically complex, hard and coarse intellectual Bangla of Hindu authors before the advent of Vidyasagar-Bankim and Michael-Hemchandra, Muslim authors who were their contemporaries created a tender and smooth Islami Bangla full of Arabic and Persian words overflowing with *jātīẏa* attributes for the *puthi* literature that they scribed […]. Unfortunately, we did not care to know about that tradition till now. We cannot but accept that negligence towards Dobhāshī *puthis* is a grave dereliction of duty towards our *jātīẏa sāhitya* and *jātīẏa jīban*.
>
> (Editorial, *Islām Darśan*, 1920)[105]

Abdul Karim, in his presidential lecture at the BMSS in 1920, commented that the cheap Battala editions of Dobhāshī puthis were an equally valuable archive of *jātīẏa sāhitya*:

> Anekei bodhaẏ jānen nā je, Kalikatay ebaṃ mafaswale Musalmāndiger paricālita praẏ 40 ti chāpākhānā āche. Sekhāne chāpā samsta pustakkei āmrā 'Battalar puthi' nām diyāchi. … sei nām śuniẏā āmrā ghriṇāẏ nāk kuñcita kari. ... āmader yug yugāntarer sei nīrab sāhitya-sādhanā Islāmer kīrti gāthā bāhan kariẏā ajo ajnata bhābe Batatalay paṛiẏā rahiẏāche.
>
> Perhaps many do not know that in Calcutta and in the *mofussil* towns there are more or less 40 printing presses owned by the Muslims. They publish cheap tracts on Islamic themes; we detest them and call them the Battala *puthi*. The fruits of our age-old meditations in Islamic literature have thus been relegated to the margins under the shadow of a banyan tree without any recognition.[106]

The editor of *Islām Darśan* confessed in an article titled "Puthi Sāhitya" in 1918:

> Etadin āmrā puthi-sāhityer prati upekshā pradarśaṇ kariẏā khub anyāẏ kāj kariẏāchi. Ei prakār upekshā o byānga bidruper paribarte jadi āmrā uhāke saṃskārer dike tāniẏā ānibār cestā karitām, tāhā haile ār āmādigake eman bhābe kaciẏā gandūsh karite haita nā. *Khāñti* Dobhāshī puthi guli āmāder gouraber bastu. Ei puthiguli āj parjanta Bāṇgālār Musalmānke jāti hisābe bācaiẏā rākhiẏāche.
>
> We have committed a grave mistake in neglecting *puthi sāhitya*. Instead of ridiculing and neglecting it, had we brought them under the purview of literary standardisation, we need not have started our endevours to build *jātīẏa sāhitya* from scratch […]. The pure Dobhāshī *puthis* are a matter of our pride. They have sustained the Bengali Muslims as a *jāti*.[107]

In the polemical formations of the literary sphere, along with this reinvigorated interest in the popular Dobhāshī repertoire, there was another curious phenomenon, whereby a group of literati continued to disparage Mir Mosharraf Hossain, the author of *Bishād Sindhu*, and invalidate the first prose narrative on the battle of Karbala due to Hossain's alleged disregard for citation of scriptural sources and the placement of Islamic history in the template of historical novels prevalent in the Hindu nationalist literary sphere. In an article in *Islām Darśan* titled "Nabajuger Musalmān Sāhityik" (Muslims Authors of the New Age), the author reminded his readers of "the problems inherent in Mosharraf Hossain's writings in *Bishād Sindhu* to deal with the Islamic ideals".[108]

Simultaneously, *Bishād Sindhu* was accepted as an example of *jātīẏa sāhitya* for its sheer popularity among the masses. *Bishād Sindhu* transcended its status as a work of prose and became an important source for the popular imagination about the battle of Karbala recited for the semi-literate masses. *Bishād Sindhu*, so far scorned by the religious intelligentsia "for failing to express Islamic spirit in theme and literary style", was now repeatedly referred to as an invaluable resource for spreading Islamic devotion among a vast multitude. A popular essayist, Altaf Husain, in his article in *Islām Darśan* titled "Faridpurer Sāhitya Pratibhā" (Literary Talents of Faridpur) emphasised *Bishād Sindhu*'s remarkable ability to bring the Muslim masses back to the blessed courtyard of *jātīẏa sāhitya*: "The plaintive tune of *Bishād Sindhu* rippled and reverberated across Bengal. Its attraction brought the wayward Bengali Muslims to the auspicious courtyard of *jātīẏa* literature" (*Bishād Sindhur bishād taraṇger karuṇ sur Bāṇgālādeśer ek prānta haite apar prānta parjanta pratidhwanita haiẏāchila. Uhār prabal ākarshaṇ-i Bāṇgālār pathabhrashta Musalmān samājke jātīẏa sāhityer punya khetre akarshaṇ kariẏā laiẏā asiẏāchila*).[109] It is also quite interesting to note how a prose narrative claiming to deal with a historical theme using modern literary devices, and written in Sanskritised Bangla based on the template of Hindu nationalist historical novels, now re-entered the domain of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* by attaining an ambivalent status between print and orality.

Folk themes became a serious concern for Bengali Muslim literature from the 1920s, reflected especially in the poetic oeuvre of folklorist Jasimuddin. This book (introduction) opens with an epigram that Jasimuddin used in his verse narrative *Sojan Bādiẏār Ghāt* (1929), where Jasimuddin portrayed the commemoration of Muharram in all its performative glory.[110]

Abdul Gafur Siddique of Khulna, Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad of Chittagong and Ashraf Hosain Sahitya Ratna of Sylhet collected folklores extensively from their respective regions between 1920 and 1938, which they submitted to the University of Dacca for the creation of an archive. Mansur Uddin, another folklorist, published a collection of 300 songs with the title *Hārā-Maṇi* (The Lost Treasure, 1942),

followed eventually by other volumes. With the Eastern Mymensingh Literary Society organising a folklore conference in Kishoreganj in 1938, a new phase began, with regional conferences strengthening folklore movements across eastern Bengal. Jasimuddin was among the organisers, and the first conference was presided over by Muhammad Shahidullah. With enthusiastic responses from different quarters, the Eastern Bengal Folklore Collection Society was formed at Dacca University, in which Shahidullah and Jasimuddin were both actively involved.[111] Dineshchandra Sen's inclusion of *Nakśīkāṅthār Māṭh* in the syllabus of the Bangla postgraduate course at the University of Calcutta and the introduction of folklore studies at the Dacca University were a result of this folk turn, effecting thereby the formation of the Bengali Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* at this time. Abdul Kadir (1906–84) of Comilla, a member of the MSS and the editor of *Śikhā* from 1946, published his reflections on different folk song repertoires in essays like "Bāṃlār Lok-Sangīt".[112] Abdul Kadir worked on bringing out the literary potential of the medieval *puthis* written by Muslim poets. Between 1940 and 1947, both Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad and Abdul Kadir discussed in *Saogāt* the ancient ("*prācīṇ*") Muslim poets, resulting in a riveting dialogue on the importance of the scribal manuscripts of Middle Bengal. At this time of growth of folklore and other folk repertoire in eastern Bengal, Abdul Kadir wrote three essays, namely "Bāṃlār Prācīn Musalmān Kabi" (1940), "Prācīn Puthir Pāndulipi" (1940) and "Kabi Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān" (1947), attesting to the rising interest in the early modern Muslim poets and adding to the discussion of the poets writing on the battle of Karbala.[113]

In this return to the scribal *puthis* (as proposed by Shahidullah, Abdul Karim and Abdul Kadir), Husayn's martyrdom in the battle of Karbala now offered critical scope to formulate literary history following the Muslim poets of the early modern period. Kadir discussed the themes of Karbala in more detail in the poetic works of Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān, referring especially to his *Imām Vijaẏa*, than Shahidullah had done in his assessment of Muhammad Khan and his Kārbālā poem *Maktul Husen*. Abdul Kadir published his essay "Marsiẏā" (1940) on a cluster of scribal manuscripts on the battle of Karbala, composed and written by the Muslim poets of Middle Bangla, namely Muhammad Khān, Doulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān and Hāmid.[114] Kadir categorised *marsiẏā* repertoire not as *kābya* (poetry), which the genre had originally been categorised as, but as *sāhitya*. For him, *sāhitya* was a new nomenclature for modern literature in general, the word *kābya* did not suffice. In terms of their dissemination, Kadir did not explain whether such manuscripts were recited as a part of the commemoration of Muharram, and thus in his own formulation of *marsiya* placed the narratives on Husayn's martyrdom outside the history of the Muharram ritual-performance. In this emerging historiography, most importantly in the works of Golam Saklayen, who categorised literary renditions on the battle of Karbala under the

generic name *marsiẏā sāhitya* following Kadir, the act of recitation-ritual performance ingrained in this repertoire was never contextualised and historicised. Thus Muharram, as a listening-performative community ritual, remains absent in the framing of *marsiẏā sāhitya* in Bangla literary history via the medieval *puthis* in the new classification and definition of folk or *puthi sāhitya*.[115]

Jasimuddin explained in the introduction to his *Jārigān* (1968) the centrality of the performance of *jāri*, as songs of grief and lament, to the commemoration of Muharram. But here too no history of the *jāri* in the ritual performance of Muharram can be discerned.[116]

5.2 Karbala: Intra-literary reception and rejection

The discussion on the aesthetic-poetic ideals and generic values of *jātīẏa sāhitya* took a polemical shape, which is explored in this section through the reading of literary genres based on the Karbala, essentially prose and poetry. What is so compelling to notice is the complex reception and rejection of *Bishād Sindhu* to standardise the themes related to the Karbala-complex, generic ideals and historical authenticity. Here I will primarily discuss four texts – *Kārbālā Kābya* by Abdul Bari Kabiratna (1912), *Mohārram Kānda* by Mohammad Uddin Ahmed (1912), *Maharam Śariph bā Ātma-Bisarjan Kābya* by Kaykobad (1933) and *Kārbālā* by Mohammad Abdur Rashid (1936)[117] – to delineate the dynamic ways that the authors put forward to settle the issues of literariness and poetic innovation in *jātīẏa sāhitya*. It will mark the very ambivalent and multifarious nature of the Muslim literary field. While *Bishād Sindhu* and the Dobhāshī Karbala repertoire were accepted in order to bring a new turn to the popular, including the orality-print, modern-folk ambivalence within the purview of Muslim literary modernity, it was simultaneously also thoroughly critiqued for its alleged historical inauthenticity and inclination to immoral themes. The aforementioned authors marked *Bishād Sindhu*'s inclination to immoral themes for its blind emulation of the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis*. In this battle over poetics, the Dobhāshī *puthis* were rejected for their stylistic inadequacy and lack of morality.

5.2.1 Narrative as argumentative discourse: Mohārram Kānda

In his presidential lecture at the sixth Annual Conference of the BMSS in 1939, Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad asked his audience to consider *Bishād Sindhu* as an efficacious literary model for the dissemination of Islamic ideas. In the same paragraph, Karim offered other literary models, not all of which were co-terminous. Karim praised Mohammad Akram Khan for writing a more discursive biography of the Prophet in *Mostāphā Carit*, as well as Maniruzzaman Islamabadi for writing on the intellectual superiority of the Muslims, and Nazrul for bringing in Islamic themes embellished in

excellent "Persian attire" for Bengali readers.[118] While Abdul Karim and Shahidullah celebrated *Bishād Sindhu*'s wider reception among the masses as a recited text, *Bishād Sindhu* was derided as no better than the Battala *puthi*s by the other representatives of Muslim *jātiẏa sāhitya*. Since the time of the publication of its first volume in 1885, *Bishād Sindhu* had attracted harsh criticism and been accused of not following the basic tenets of *jātīẏa sāhitya* by the *Sudhākar* associates and then again by the majority of the authors who wrote on the battle of Karbala. Their dismissal of the thematic and stylistic concerns of *Bishād Sindhu* exposed various strands of literary ideals struggling to define literature validated with historicity. Maulavi Mohammad Abdur Rashid of Mymensingh, a sub-inspector of schools, clubbed *Bishād Sindhu* with the Dobhāshī *jaṇgnāmā* volumes by marking their lack of historical accountability ("*sthāne satya bikrita o mūl bishaẏ mārātmakrūpe rupāntarita haiẏāche*").[119] Mohammad Uddin Ahmed, in the introduction to his prose narrative *Mohārram Kānda* (1912), cancelled "all" the prior texts, by which he meant the Dobhāshī repertoire that dealt with the theme of Karbala:

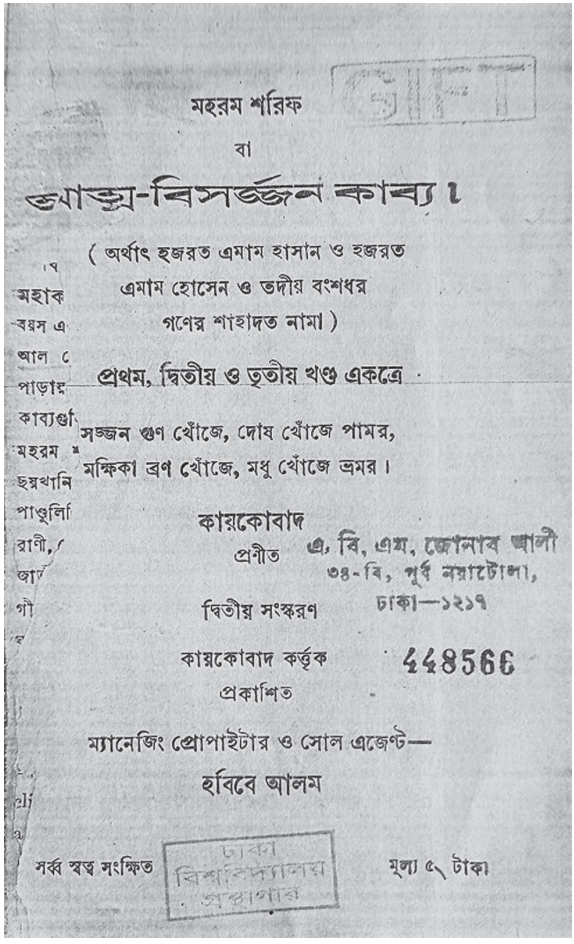
> Ki kāraṇe Emāmdwaẏer nidāruṇ hatyākānda haẏ, taṭsambandhe e paryanta Bāṇgālā bhāshāẏ satya ghatanāmūlak kono pustak-i prakāśita haẏ nāi. Satyata-mūlak kono Bāṇgālā pustak prakāśita nā haoẏāẏ Bāṇgali Mosalmāner pakshe baṛai kalaṃker bishaẏ balite haibe. Ami Baṇgīẏa śikshita Mosalmān bhrātribrinder kalaṃker apanodan mānase o Mosalmāner gourab atīt abagata karār saṃkalpe *Saoẏāhedannabuẏat o Raojātośwohādā* prabhriti sarbajanādrita Ārbī o Fārsī granther abalambane ei 'Mohārram Kānda' grantha janasamāje prakāś karilām.
>
> Till date no book has carried the true depiction of how the Imam brothers were brutally killed. There have been only false depictions that denigrated the Muslims. To remove the falsity imposed on the educated Bengali Muslims and to make the Hindu neighbours aware of the glorious Islamic virtues, I have written *Mohārram Kānda* based on the Arabic *Shawāhid Nabuwwat* and Persian *Rawẓat ash-shuhadā'*, the two sources accepted as authentic by all.
>
> (Mohammad Uddin Ahmed, *Mohārram Kānda*)[120]

Mohammad Uddin Ahmed explained in the preface of his *Mohārram Kānda* why he wrote upon the battle of Karbala. As a response to a letter published in the periodical *Soltān* in 1905, where the sender expressed his indignation at the ritual of Muharram and wanted to know about the origins of such an un-Islamic affair, Uddin Ahmed said to have written *Mohārram Kānda* to offer an "authentic" version of the Karbala.[121] Uddin Ahmed identified himself as a "Mahomedan missionary" on the title page – engaged in the formal preaching for Hanafi *anjuman*

Islam Mission as an *alim*.[122] In keeping with his Hanafi leanings, Uddin Ahmed separated the martyrdom of Imam Husayn from Shī'ī intercessory piety and placed it firmly within the realm of Sunni religiosity and historiography.

One can perhaps speculate on his position as a reformist preacher reflected in *Mohārram Kānda*, where the flow of the episodes emerged out of a skilled act of narrative persuasion. Uddin Ahmed constructed *Mohārram Kānda* along the structure of the apologetics to counter the existing Christian refutation of Muhammad and different Islamic theological matters. He decided to answer the questions asked in the Christian missionary tracts in the context of, and with reference to, the battle of Karbala, and in his argumentative response established Muhammad as the ultimate embodiment of Islamic virtues. He added elaborate footnotes, which sometimes overpowered the main text of *Mohārram Kānda* (for instance, writing a 29-line footnote for two lines of the main text at one place). Here he explained narrative situations, interpreted many theological concepts and cancelled other versions of the Karbala to validate his rendition as an authentic version of history. After accomplishing this in the main text in eight lines, the author added 23 lines in the footnote to scripturally justify Karbala as the ideal site of *shahādat*. He began by responding to two questions which were predominantly asked in the Christian tracts with the intention of refuting Islam and Muhammad (Figure 5.1). The first was that when "Khoda" is not obliged to let mortal beings know their destiny, why did He declare the deaths of the Imam brothers beforehand to Muhammad? Secondly, if martyrdom is a virtue in Islam, why did Muhammad not become a martyr himself, instead of his grandsons? In a parallel explanation in the footnote, Uddin Ahmed reaffirmed the value of *sabr* (patience) and *shahādat* (sacrifice) as the core values of Islam. He also explained that the deaths of Hasan and Husayn were foretold by Allah to give Muhammad a chance to test himself so that he could become the universal template of patience and sacrifice, as the Ultimate Prophet of Islam, by overcoming personal emotional entanglements. He also said that if Muhammad had died a premature death in the form of *shahādat* at the hands of his enemy, the true religion (Islam) could not have spread worldwide.

Secondly, just as in preaching sessions, he explained scriptural theological matters to his implied readers. *Mohārram Kānda* opened with a chapter titled "Emām Dwāẏer Shahādat" (Martyrdom of the Imam brothers) and began the narrative by explaining in the first page the two kinds of *shahādat* – *jaheri* (*zahiri*; exoteric) and *sirri* (*batini*; esoteric) – to situate the martyrdoms of Hasan and Husayn within a doctrinal framework.[123] Thirdly, he developed a rhetorical artifice to cancel other literary renditions of the battle of Karbala, thereby to posit his own as the authentic one. He employed his narrative voice to sway his readers by persuasion to arrive at a fixed interpretation that he himself


মহরম শরিফ

বা

আক্ষ-বিসর্জ্জন কাব্য।

(অর্থাৎ হজরত এমাম হাসান ও হজরত
এমাম হোসেন ও তদীয় বংশধর
গণের শাহাদত নামা)

প্রথম, দ্বিতীয় ও তৃতীয় খণ্ড একত্রে

সজ্জন গুণ খোঁজে, দোষ খোঁজে পামর,
মক্ষিকা ব্রণ খোঁজে, মধু খোঁজে ভ্রমর।

কায়কোবাদ

প্রণীত এ, বি, এম, জোনাব আলী
৩৪-বি, পূর্ব নয়াটোলা,
ঢাকা—১২১৭

দ্বিতীয় সংস্করণ

কায়কোবাদ কর্ত্তৃক
প্রকাশিত

448566

ম্যানেজিং প্রোপাইটার ও সোল এজেণ্ট—
হবিবে আলম

সর্ব্ব স্বত্ব সংরক্ষিত

ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় গ্রন্থাগার

মূল্য ৫৲ টাকা

Figure 5.1 Title page: *Mohārram Kānda* by Mohammad Uddin Ahmed, 1912, National Library, Kolkata.

had deliberately laid out. It was quite apparent that his primary concern was to counter the narrative situations of *Bishād Sindhu*, which he marked as inauthentic but admitted was influential among the masses.[124] Preface apart, he also critically explained several narrative situations in a number of footnotes where he refuted the available renditions of these sequences as false ("*mithyā*") or simply rejected them for their lack of moral standards.[125]

Uddin Ahmed revealed his doubts about the presence of a well in the arid land of Karbala that *Bishād Sindhu* had referred to by saying in an auto-diegetic voice, "how a seven-foot-deep well was created in the middle of the desert, we do not understand".[126] In another place, he again

instigated his readers to think about how Husayn might promise Simar, his slayer, a position in heaven, since no one could allot a place in heaven other than the Almighty ("*Khodātāẏlā*").[127]

Uddin Ahmed entwined the sacred narratives in the Prophet's life with the narrative of his grandsons and made the events of Karbala inseparable from the Prophet's life. He even declared that the prophecy about his grandsons' martyrdom was one among the many prophecies referred to in the Qur'an that were revealed to Muhammad during his journey on the night of revelation.[128] Though he did not authenticate the source of this information, his affirmation was forceful. Uddin Ahmed maintained a strict difference between the Early Caliphate and the Umayyad Caliphate in terms of their different spiritual capacities and attributes, so that Muawiya and Yazid, the persons behind the death of Hasan and Husayn according to Uddin Ahmed, as inferior Umayyad Caliphs, did not unsettle the integrity of the Prophetic time and the Early Caliphate. He went one step further to declare that it was in the hands of Muawiya that the "Islamic Republic" created by Muhammad was terminated and turned into a dynastic rule.

> Pāthak pāthikā brinda! Hajarat Mohāmmad Mostāphā (darud) je sādhāraṇ tantrer pratishṭhā kare jān, je sādhāraṇ tantra pratishṭhita thākile āj bibadānale śata śata Mosalmān rājya o sāmrājya dhwaṇgsaprāpta haita nā ebaṃ je sādhāraṇ tantra laiẏā āj sabhya jagat unnatir uccatama sopāne samārūṛha haiẏāchen, śesh prerita Mahāpurusher antardhyāner triś baṭsar par Hajarat Ālīr netritwakāle Mabiẏādwārāi tāhār mūlocched haẏ. Eslām sāmrājye nirbācan prathāke sthāncyuta kariẏā uttarādhikarī prathār śithilatār bīj Mabiẏāi bapan kariẏā jān.
>
> Readers! If the republic that Hazrat Muhammad created had survived, hundreds of Muslim empires and kingdoms would not have been destroyed in civilisational clashes. The republic that climbed to the zenith of progress in the lifetime of the Prophet was destroyed by Muawiya within 30 years of the Prophet's departure to his heavenly abode. The process of the selection of the emperor and the leader of Islam was replaced by a hereditary system started by Muawiya.
>
> (Mohammad Uddin Ahmed, *Mohārram Kānda*)[129]

Just as Girishchandra Sen, bound by his Brahmo morality, had purged the narrative of all amoral and unsanitary elements, Uddin Ahmed too removed the subplot of "scandalous" intrigue behind the battle of Karbala and turned it solely into a matter of armour rather than amour.[130] Sen's influence is conspicuous at the lexical and syntactic levels too. Authenticating his narrative (for the significance of this authentication see Section 4.2) by citing Sen's *Emām Hāsān o Hosaẏner Jībanī* along with an array of Arabic and Persian sources, Uddin Ahmed streamlined his narrative and wholly excised the theme of amorous rivalry, where

Zaynab is said to have chosen Hasan's hand in marriage over Yazid's, inciting the spurned Yazid to exact revenge by killing Hasan and Husayn. Secondly, among others he omitted a popular episode where Zayeda, another wife of Hasan, was provoked by a slave-woman sent by Yazid into poisoning her husband, out of a co-wifely rivalry with Hasan's new bride Zaynab. These were the two pivotal plot points behind the battle of Karbala in Mosharraf Hossain's *Bishād Sindhu* and were both vehemently opposed by Uddin Ahmed. He utilised sections in the main text and also the footnote to cancel the "immoral" ("*anaitik*") and inauthentic renditions ("*mithyā janarab lipibaddha*") in *Bishād Sindhu* that were unanimously condemned and expunged from the domain of *jātīya sāhitya*.[131] For Uddin Ahmed, immoral issues took precedence over *Bishād Sindhu*'s generic inadequacy owing to its emulation of the format of historical novels written by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.[132] Uddin Ahmed also agonised intensely over how it was morally possible for a Muslim woman to poison her own husband and was so torn over this question that he chose not to rely even upon the records of Hasan's doubts over the matter and left it unresolved in his text. He rebuked Mosharraf Hossain, aghast at his portrayal of Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet, who in *Bishād Sindhu* had kindled the fire of conflict within the *ummah* by sending a proposal of marriage to Zaynab.[133] Uddin Ahmed also critiqued Girishchandra Sen for relying upon the *Rawẓat ash-shuhadā'* in depicting this marriage, thus unwittingly weakening his own authentication, which owed much to the *Rawẓat ash-shuhadā'*. Simultaneously, however, he added another critical layer to the process of authentication, turning the narrative into an argumentative and reflexive discourse. The contours of *jātīya sāhitya* took shape through multiple such acts of rejection and appropriation, individually by different authors, which added to the bigger framework of historical authentication and creation of the poetic ideals of the Muslim literary field.

The authors undertook various strategies to reconcile the crisis in the Early Caliphate leading to the battle of Karbala. Uddin Ahmed unambiguously placed the onus of the battle on Muawiya and Yazid. Mohammad Abdur Rashid in his *Kārbālā*, unlike in Uddin Ahmed's narrative, never used the first-person narratorial voice and instead used the third person diegetic mode to employ various narrative strategies to exempt Yazid from the direct responsibility of killing the Prophet's grandsons. Rashid simply dumped the onus onto Ziyad, the Governor of Kufa, who was a collaborator and not the mastermind behind the massacre in Karbala. Rashid narrated how, "[a]fter knowing how the Karbala martyrs were lying scattered without shrouds and burials, tears flowed incessantly from Yazid's eyes. Then Yazid prayed: let Allah's sceptre fall on Ziyad for his atrocity against Husayn" (*Be-gor be-kāfan śahider kathā suniẏā Ejider cakshu diẏā aśru bahite lāgila. Allahtā'larār abhisampāt Jiyāder upar nipatita hauk*").[134]

These authors took different strategies to confirm the historical authenticity of their narratives. Uddin Ahmed continued with his moralistic

stance and challenged authors who included the false rumours ("*mithyā janarab*") about Zaynab's marriage being the cause for the battle of Karbala. Discussing the scripturally sanctioned norms of Muslim marriage, he refuted any possibility that Hasan actually sent a marriage proposal to Zaynab. And again, Uddin Ahmed employed his narrative voice to resolve any moral question arising against Ali's moral character with regard to Hanifa, the half-brother of Husayn from Ali's other wife Bibi Hanufa, who appeared to avenge the massacre of Karbala. Uddin Ahmed upheld Ali's impeccable moral character arguing that he did not take Bibi Hanufa (Hanifa's mother) as his other wife while Fatima was still alive.[135] This rearrangement of the theme certainly indicates the non-Muslim (Brahmo and Hindu) readers present in the author's target readership for whom such moral justifications were needed. This also indicates the authors' literary aspirations to reach out beyond the confinement of Muslim readership.

Abdur Rashid was very annoyed with Mir Mosharraf Hossain's uncritical inclusion of themes from popular imaginations fed by quasi-historical sources following the Dobhāshī *puthis*. To save the Kārbālā narratives from these quasi-historical sources, Abdur Rashid omitted Hanifa's battle against Yazid, which was the subject of the third volume of *Bishād Sindhu*, titled "Ejid Badh Parba" (The Slaying of Yazid, 1892), and instead included material about the pro-Alid insurgency after the battle of Karbala against Yazid, which he validated by historical evidences.[136] In a clever narrative twist, Abdur Rashid showed that this army actually comprised the Shī'as, who had started to enact physical lament by tearing their hair and beating their chests, all of which were entirely unauthorised by the *sharī'a*.[137] Thus, Rashid shared his position with those Sunni reformists who confirmed a seamless continuation from the Early Caliphate to the later Umayyad Caliphate and shifted the onus of Husayn's killing from Yazid to Ziyad.

The authors attempted to fix what they considered to be historically inaccurate, or a fixture of popular imagination and therefore unfit to conform to Islamic ideals, and whatever they believed was sensual or morally degraded, especially in *Bishād Sindhu* and the Dobhāshī *puthis*, occasionally equating these two completely different literary expositions. In the dynamic argumentative processes of cancellation of pre-existing thematic choices and writing styles, authors of the Kārbālā narrative like Mohammad Uddin Ahmed and Abdur Rashid fixed the generic parameters of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. At the same time, there was even a process of self-redemption in the authors, who rectified their earlier thematic configurations and poetic styles in response to the criticisms that they were offered by the Muslim literati. In this context Kaykobad's revision of his ideas about poetic ideals from his *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* through the writing of the *Maharam Śariph* is testimony to this change in the modern Muslim *jātīẏa* literary field, where aesthetic norms were integral to Islamic values and innovations were only accepted if they highlighted historical authenticity and moral values in Islam more potently.

5.2.2 From Mahāśmaśān Kābya *to* Maharam Śarīph bā Ātma-Bisarjan Kābya: *Kaykobad and Karbala*

Mir Mosharraf Hossain, by way of responding to all the criticisms hurled at him by the reformist literati and *ulama* for writing *Bishād Sindhu*, rehabilitated himself by writing a profusion of texts on Islamic themes following the tenets of *jātīya sāhitya*. These included the life account of Muhammad, *Moulud Śariph* (1894) and *Madinār Gourab* (1906), as well as the biography of Omar, the second Caliph. All of these works were in verse, with a few prose narratives on the glorious military exploits of Islam.[138]

When similar allegations were brought against Kaykobad for his "blind emulation" of metaphors laden with Sanskritised Bangla, polytheistic moorings and Hindu nationalist themes in *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* (The Poem of the Great Crematorium, 1905),[139] he took to course correction. Twenty-eight years after the publication of *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, Kaykobad wrote *Maharam Śariph bā Ātma-Bisarjan Kābya* (The Poetry of Great Sacrifice, 1933)[140] on the battle of Karbala (Figure 5.2) where he answered all his critics by writing on one of the core themes of *jātīya sāhitya* – the martyrdom of Husayn. In the process of self-assertion, Kaykobad confirmed his engagement with the aesthetic norms and generic attributes of long poetic narratives as the authentic rendition of history.

Mahāśmaśān Kābya (1905) narrated the defeat of the Marathas to Ahmed Shah Abdali, the Afghan emperor of Delhi, in the Third Battle of Panipat (1761). Kaykobad's poem was inspired by Nabinchandra Sen's long lyrical narrative "Palāśīr Yuddha" (The Battle of Plassey; 1864). "Palāśīr Yuddha" faced much criticism for failing to glorify Bengali nationalism in the defeat of the last Muslim Nawab of Bengal, and for its sympathetic portrayal of the Muslim Nawab.[141] The apathy of the Hindu literati was clear in the repeated rejection of "Palāśīr Yuddha" by the School Textbook Committee for inclusion in school syllabi.[142]

From the example of Kaykobad's inclination to pure *tatsama*, with negligible inclusion of Arabic-Persian loanwords, it is quite evident that, like Mosharraf Hossain, he too had the Hindu reading public in mind as his preferred readership. Kaykobad's emulation of Hindu nationalist ideas about the civilisational clash between the Marathas and the Afghans to lament over the defeat of the Marathas affirms how effective the hegemonic power of Hindu nationalism could be. To rise in the mainstream literary ranks, Kaykobad internalised the general Hindu nationalist linguistic and poetic norms uncritically.

Due to its linguistic and thematic choices, Kaykobad's *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* was dismissed by the Muslim literati. Although Kaykobad mentioned in his introduction that by writing a *yuddha kābya* (song of war), he wanted to remind the Bengali Muslims of their past glories,[143] in reality he had been thoroughly reprimanded by his Muslim readers for his empathy with the defeated Marathas following the Hindu nationalist rhetoric of loss. Muslim literary critics did not like the sensual depiction

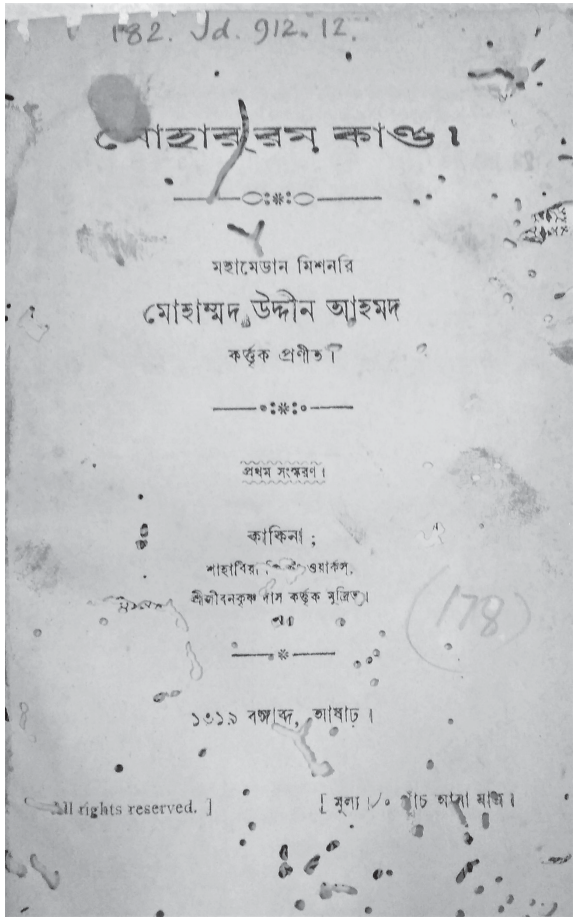


Figure 5.2 Title page: *Maharam Śarīph bā Ātma-Bisarjan Kābya* by Kaykobad, 1933, Central Library, Dhaka University, Dhaka.

of Muslim characters that Kaykobad had adopted from his Hindu literary icons.[144] Two very fierce literary reviews, "Mahāśmaśān Kābyer Bhūmikāẏ Islāmer Abamānanā" by Munshi Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmed and "*Mahāśmaśān* Kābye Anaislāmik o Aślīl Bhāb" by Syed Emdad Ali (1876–1956), saw only indecency ("*aślīlatā*") and a lack of Islamic ethics ("*anaislāmik*") in Kaykobad's *Mahāśmaśān*.[145]

In his review article titled "Mahāśmaśān Kābye Anaislāmik o Aślīl Bhāb" (Un-Islamic and Indecent Elements in the Poem of the Great Crematorium), Syed Emdad Ali, an author of poetry and essays with Muslim *jātīẏa* sensibilities, wrote that "one should not be allured by the great artistic skills of the Hindus. When we have just set out on the path of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, honesty and patience should be maintained, without

aspiring for easy poetic success".[146] He continued to affirm his stance in his other essays, such as in "Baṇgabhāshā o Sāhitya," where he advised: "Don't create meaningless (*arthahīṇ*) and light (*laghu*) literature—as our community is not prepared for it yet. It is unpardonable to create poetic work following popular sensibilities before making our *jāti* confident by offering them glorious Islamic themes". Emdad Ali observed in the same essay that "Kaykobad immersed himself only in all that was pleasurable (*manoram*) and transient (*kshaṇabhaṇgur*) and eventually ended up immersing his readers (*pāthak keo dubāite ceshtā kariẏāchen*) in them". Emdad Ali even went so far as to declare that the first edition should be thrown into the sea and a completely new second version written in its place.[147] The poetic artifices that replicated Sanskrit aesthetic traditions in describing Muslim female characters in sensuous detail were severely critiqued by Emdad Ali as "indecent" (*aślīl*), "grotesque," (*bibhaṭsa*) and "vulgar" (*kuṭsit*).[148] Emdad Ali could not hide a sense of betrayal throughout his essay over a renowned Muslim poet's lament over the loss of Maratha lives at the hands of Muslims. He cited the example of a few contemporary poets such as Muzammel Huq (from Shantipur district) and the much younger Gholam Mostafa (from Jessore), saying that these poets would never hurt the *jātīẏa* sentiments of the Muslims as Kaykobad had done.

This antagonism intensified with the growing readership of *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, as evident in the need for further invalidation of this poem in literary reviews. *Islām Darśan* too, in the following year, carried a refutation of *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* in the two-part essay titled "Mahāśmaśān Kābye Islāmer Abamānanā" (Dishonoring Islam in *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*) by Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmed, a *Sudhākar* associate and a publisher of several genres of *jātīẏa sāhitya*.[149] Kaykobad's choice of polytheistic metaphors and poetic sensuality, which Emdad Ali had construed as Kaykobad's uncritical submission to the Hindu nationalist poetic allure, was interpreted by Reyazuddin Ahmed as his lack of training in *maẓhabi* knowledge – "*majhābī śikshā*" or (Hanafi) religious education.[150] The editor of *Islām Darśan*, in a separate note following the review, seconded Reyazuddin's disapproval of the themes and offered a remedy, while acknowledging Kaykobad's poetic abilities by analysing his work as "bright radiance of poetic excellence (*kabitwer ujjwal ābhā*) in the huge garbage pit (*ābarjanār ādhār*) called *Mahāśmaśān*".[151] Rather, in a bid to utilise Kaykobad's poetic excellence in the service of *jātīẏa sāhitya*, he suggested a second edition after thorough correction and remodelling of the existing poem. If this were not done, the editor gravely intoned, he would not hesitate to wipe this poetic work out of the domain of *jātiẏa sāhitya* with the harshest of criticisms ("*jātīẏa sāhitya haite jāhāte uhār cihna ciradiner janya muchiyā jāẏ, tajjanya āmādigake āro kaṭhin samālochanā laiẏā ābirbhūta haite haibe*").[152]

In the second edition, following the instructions of his reviewers, Kaykobad made a qualitatively different version, which maintained

Islamic ideals. But from the reactions after its publication, it was equally clear that its critics were still not convinced. The *BMSP* continued with its arguments, pitting the welfare of the Muslim *samāj* against the irresponsible aspirations of the individual poet. Emdad Ali asked once again,

> We are unable to understand what has greater value for the Muslims—the poet who has cruelly dealt a blow to the community of his brethren (*samāj o jāti*), or the community of his brethren hurt from this blow? Do they want to nourish (*pushti*) this individual poet, or do they want progress for the community (*jātir unnati*)?[153]

It is quite evident that within the Muslim literary field, *jātīẏa sāhitya* was only possible with stronger and more rigid literary norms that could embody the values of Islam and the glories of Islamic history. Through literary journals like the *BMSP* and reformist and proselytising periodicals like *Hānāphi* and *Islām Darśan*, so influential across the Muslim society, such ideas of literature were spread, orientating the reading public with a fixed taste for literature integrally connected to Islamic scriptural values and ethical actions.

As a response to a barrage of continuing critique, Kaykobad, the pitcher of wretchedness (*dushtaraser bhānda*), as Emdad Ali had called him,[154] came up with the themes of "forgiveness" (*kshamā*) and "patience" (*sahishňutā*)[155] as the valourised qualities of Islam, as the remedy for his previous poetic "transgression". In 1933, Kaykobad published *Maharam Śariph bā Ātma-Bisarjjan Kābya* – a three-volume long lyrical narrative on the martyrdom of Hasan, Husayn and their descendants and companions in the battle of Karbala. In it, Kaykobad overturned all the previous allegations against him by depicting the martyrdom of the grandsons of the Prophet "with utmost historical authenticity" (*itihāser marjyādā purāpuri rakshā*) and "extraordinary poetic excellence" (*barnanā cāturya ati chamatkār*), as Muhammad Shahidullah wrote in the preface to the book.[156] The poet, who had earlier been reprimanded for his choice of themes and poetic style, was now himself reproaching Mir Mosharraf Hossain in the harshest terms for blindly following in *Bishād Sindhu* the historically inauthentic storylines of the Urdu popular tracts on Husayn's martyrdom and the Dobhāshī Kārbālā *puthis*. Kaykobad said that he "felt compelled to take the trouble" (*sei atīt smritir bhashma stūp ghātiẏā sei carbbita carbbaṇ galādhokaraṇ kariẏā*)[157] of writing *Maharam Śariph* as a corrective to *Bishād Sindhu* (*Musalmān dharma o jātir opare kalaṇka kāli lepan, ihār dwārā tini Baṇgīẏa Musalmānder hridaẏe Kārbālār yuddha o Emam dwayer shāhādāt sambandhe kataguli bhul biśwās janmāiẏā diẏāchen, je janya āmāke āj etatā pariśram karite haila*). Kaykobad, whose *Mahāśmaśān* was called "a kick to the sacred body of religious belief" (*dharmabiśwāser pabitra aṇge padāghāt*) by Emdad Ali, now denounced Mir Mosharraf Hossain for plunging "a thunderbolt in the ribcage of Islam" (*Islāmer hridaẏ-paňjare tībra śelāghāt*)[158] by putting

together some "baseless tales" (*bhittihin gālgalpa*) and presenting them as the history of the martyrdom of the Imam brothers. Citing and refuting all the incorrect and un-Islamic elements one after the other from *Bishād Sindhu*, Kaykobad went on to denounce Muhammad Hamid Ali (author of *Kāśem Badh Kābya*, 1905) and Fazlul Rahim Chaudhury (author of *Maharam Citra*, 1918) for their poetic lapses. Expressing his repulsion towards what he considered "vulgar and obscene lies" (*nyakkārjanak mithyā*) used by these authors who have "followed in the footsteps" of Mosharraf Hossain (*Mīr sāheber padāṇka anusaraṇ*)[159] in writing "stinking rubbish" (*pūtigandhī rābiś*), Kaykobad emphasised the need to remain historically true in composing poetry and commented that poetic license should bring out the intensity of the historical situation rather than deviating from it.[160] In his 26-page long preface named "Kaiphiẏaṭ" (*kaifiyat*, Justification), Kaykobad analytically discussed the connections of history to poetry and to the Islamic *jātīẏa* attributes.[161] He vehemently critiqued Nabinchandra Sen, his literary icon during the writing of *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, for his portrayal of Shirajud-Daula in "filthy colours" (*kalushita barṇe raṅjita*) in the former's "Palāśīr Yuddha".[162] By quoting Sen, who had justified his portrayal by saying that "Palāśīr Yuddha" was not history, but poetry, Kaykobad demanded to know how much distortion of truth a poet could afford in the name of poetic license.[163] Kaykobad, in his journey from *Mahāśmaśān* to *Maharam Śariph*, brought himself to the normative bindings of historical and religious truth. To attest to his humility in the field of Islamic learning, Kaykobad set aside his ego as a poet and declared that if any *alim* or *hadis* scholar of Bengal could enlighten him with more historically accurate facts, he would willingly revise his poetry.[164] Thus, Kaykobad not only made room for potential reformist revisions and further authentication of his book, he also reconciled the literary norms upheld in the Muslim *jātīẏa* literary sphere with the autonomy of the poet in matters of innovation by laying bare his creative process – the most contentious issue in the field of Bengali Muslim literary modernity. Kaykobad suggested, conforming to the norms of *jātīẏa sāhitya,* that poetry should be created based on the readings of multiple historical sources, sometimes via contemporary literary renditions, and also through consultation with experts of Arabic and Persian, so as to properly ensure the reliability of his sources.[165] From the maze of transliteration and typological errors in the sources cited in Kaykobad's book, it is still possible to recognise the historical writings of al-Tabari, al-Waqidi, ibn-Khaldul and discursive texts such as *Shawāhid an-Nabuwwat* by Jami, *Rawẓat ash-shuhadā'* by Kashifi, *Sirrul Shahātatain* by Abdul Aziz Dehlavi, *Ta'rīkh al-Khulafa* by al-Suyuti and some original Urdu texts as well. Kaykobad mentioned the exact pages ("461–463") of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon (Vol. V) that he had consulted and cited Maulavi Sheikh Reyazuddin Ahmed's *Ārab Jātir Itihās* (a translation of Sayed Ameer Ali's *The History of the Saracens*). Like the

other authors, Kaykobad too proposed here a strategy of multilingual and intertextual authentication for Bengali-speaking Muslim authors with inadequate access to Arabic, Persian and English. By citing these references, Kaykobad simultaneously aligned himself with the practice of historical authentication in the realm of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. He did not stop there and went on to mention how he had followed the instructions of Syed Shah Ershad Ali al-Qadiri, the spiritual successor of the most influential Qadiriya *pir* of Bengal, Syed Shah Murshed Ali al-Qadiri al-Jilani (1865–1901), to revise the title of his poem from a bare *Maharam* to the sacred *Maharam Śariph*. One may well remember here that how Kaykobad did not pay heed to Reyazuddin Ahmed's suggestion to change the "Hindu" word "*Śmaśan*" (crematorium) in his title to "*Samādhikshetra*" (*tatsama* equivalent to graveyard) in order to Islamise his previous poem. Declaring *Maharam Śariph* as the embodiment of the ideal form of poetry for carrying both historicity and the devotional value of the martyrdom of Husayn and the others, Kaykobad offered this epic poem as a spiritual guide which, like the almanac, every Muslim household must keep a copy of.[166]

This time, Kaykobad began his poetry invoking the goddess of imagination ("*Kalpanādebi*"):

Bheṇge geche bīṇā mor, chiṛe geche tār,
Kemane gāhiba āmi "Ātma-bisarjjan".
Esa go kalpanā debi hridaẏe āmār
Juṛe deo bīṇā mor bhagna purātan
Gaiba se śok-gātha bhāsi aśrudhāre,
Tridiber pārijāt paṛibe jhariẏā!
Bhāsibe samagra biśwa naẏan-ashārhe
Moshlem hrid-piṇda jāibe phātiẏā!
"Hā Hosen – Ha Hosen" baliẏā sakale"
Kāndibe karuṇ sware, śuni sei gān
Nā kede thākite pāre abanī mandale
Āche ki jagate hena niret pashāṇ?

My veena is broken, its strings torn
How do I sing my song on the pain of Muharram?
Come, O the goddess of imagination, come to my heart
Tie these strings, mend my veena.
I will sing the saga of pain, with flowing tears
The parijat flower of Shiva will fall as a boon
The whole world will be deluged with tears
The hearts of the Muslims will shatter.
They will chant "Ha Husayn – Ha Husayn"
And cry in their torment
Is any stony heart that won't melt in pain?
(Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*)[167]

This was structurally similar to the invocation in *Meghnādbadh Kābya* by Michael Madhusudan Dutt, but there were no repercussions as Kaykobad had carefully balanced the polytheistic figurative speech by immediately following it up with a few lines quoted from Gibbon to qualify the pain of grief ("Is there any stony heart to not to lament") in the footnote.[168]

Poetics was a precarious zone for the Bengali Muslims to devise literary modernity. With the adaptation of poetic ideals, metaphors and idioms from high Bangla literature, inherent figurative affect with polytheistic moorings continued to be present in the poetic expressions of the Muslim authors. The authors accepted them as neutral cultural idioms, framed in Islamic religious truth and history, creating an ambivalent dimension of poetic ideals. A reformist scholar like Azhar Ali, who had published 24 books and tracts, including Islamic biographies, *adab* manuals and *tasawwuf*, did not hesitate to portray Ali pleading to Muhammad in a polytheistic rhetoric: "bless me, so that when I die, I get my humble place at your lotus-feet" (*Āśirbād karun, mrityur pare jena āpnār caraṇ-kamale sthān pāi*), a metaphor of figurative devotion so familiar in a similar situation in the Hindu literary canon.[169] Similarly, Sheikh Abdur Rahim described Muhammad as "appearing with a pitcher of nectar (*amrita kumbha*) for the pain and suffering-laden crematorium (*śmaśān*) called this world"[170] which resembles the puranic depiction of the churning of the cosmic ocean from which the divine physician Dhanwantari (considered to be an avatar of Vishnu) emerged with a pot of nectar (*amrita*). Kaykobad described Hasne Banu, the wife of Hasan, in her white attire with a garland around her neck, "as if she were the idol of a goddess" (*debī mūrti jena*) to recreate the aura of her chastity. In the same chapter, Hasan is seen to be instructing his wife with the moral behavioural codes meant for the chaste Muslim wives to secure a place in heaven, and hence the metaphor of the goddess did not create a disruption. Neither did Hasan's instructions for the wife to consider the husband "a god" (*debatā*) receive any reproach. Moreover, when Hasan fell asleep on the night he was poisoned, he saw in his dreams an unmistakenly polytheistic divine triumvirate (*debdebī-trayẏ*) descending towards him – Muhammad, Ali and Fatima.[171] Kaykobad also repeatedly employed the *tatsama* equivalents to the Sufi idea of *nur* – "jyotirmayẏ" for Muhammad, "jyotite ālokita" (glowing with the reflection of radiance) for Ali and "jyotirmayẏī" for Fatima to balance their figurative divine placement. Such uses were permitted, as in each case, the Muslim authors actually treated Sanskritised Bangla as a neutral medium and balanced the apparent figurative rhetoric with various innovative devices so as to sanction them through Islamic reformist values a place in *jātīya sāhitya*.[172]

In the Muslim literary field, the validity of literature based on historial sources but not on history (like *itihās* and *jībanī*) was repeatedly questioned. In the broader Hindu *jātīya* sphere, there was much

discussion about it already, which managed to affirm the efficacious role of literature – essentially that of historical novels and long poetry – in imparting historical consciousness, even if they did not belong generically to history. Akshaykumar Maitra (1861–1930), historian and social reformer, raised the question in 1897 about the liberties that could be taken in the name of poetic license to distort historical truth.[173] When Jadunath Sarkar (1870–1958), one of the major historians of Bengal, in 1939 wrote introductions to several of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's historical novels, from *Durgeśnandinī* (1861) to *Sītārām* (1886), he attempted to resolve this contentious issue by prioritising poetic creativity over historical truth. Sarkar saw in Chattopadhyay's historical novels the capacity to carry nationalistic moral sensibilities and the high idealism needed to awaken a *jāti* from degeneration.[174] Sarkar's position did not resolve the crisis altogether. Historians continued to argue over the conflicting nature of the relationship between history and literature, and between historical facts and the historical novel. Along with Sarkar's validation of imagination and poetic truth "to educate people" through the creative treatment of situations and characters in historical novels, the Bengali Muslims had to invoke the bindings of history and insist upon the creation of prose or poetry as history, thereby minimising the possibility of their becoming "fictional" (*kalpita*) in any way.

Maharam Śariph is divided into three volumes, with sections episodically arranged in blank verse, which indicates the direct influence of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. The text opens at Damesque, the kingdom of Muawiya, who raised the issue of clannish rivalry between Banu Hashim and Banu Umiyya, first featured in the Dobhāshī *puthis*. The narrator instantly took up this issue in the footnotes and explained it using a reference to the Bangla translation of *The History of the Saracens* by Simon Ockley, complete with page numbers. This remains the narrative structure in *Maharam Śariph*, where the author explained all the necessary elements of history and introduced all the characters and sequences in the footnote section, thus endowing the poetic narrative with researched discursivity.

The poetic flow of the narrative progressed uninterrupted through multiple and complex storylines and a large number of characters, with the intervention of regular footnotes to explain any unfamiliarity. When in the poem the author wrote about the assassination of Osman, he readily added a 76 line-long footnote spread across four pages to explain the event.[175] The footnotes covered further elaborations on situations, provided more specific information and citations of sources. Structurally, this method of thick annotations, followed by poets like Mohammad Uddin Ahmed and Kaykobad, and authors of *itihās* and *jībanī*, was co-terminous with that used in the *tafsirs*. It can be said that authors like Uddin Ahmed and Kaykobad were trying to approximate the style of annotation in the *tafsirs* and reformulate them in their poetry as a modern generic element of *jātīya sāhitya* that authenticated their poetry as religious discourse.

To create a distinction between the spiritually inclined Imam brothers and the militarily aggressive Umayyads, Kaykobad separated their paces of action and posited their stances using long speeches. In Hasan's long speech, encompassing 173 lines of a *sarga* (chapter), Kaykobad not only clarified the historical context of the event but also affirmed the integrity and philosophical outlook of Hasan for whom any military conflict was the last step.[176] Long speeches were employed to discuss issues of *adab* and *farz* and also to propose Islam as a religion of superior values. Kaykobad changed the location of Hasan's poisoning from his own house to Husayn's to erase the popular version that Hasan's wife had poisoned him. Here, Hasan was shown reciting the Qur'an, uttering words like "the shower of pearls" (*Muktā barshaṇ*). Hasan continued to explain the five precepts of Islam, *iman*, fraternity and egalitarianism in Islam, taking the poetic narrative closer to an *adab* text.[177]

In Kaykobad's narration, the Imam brothers never initiated or willingly engaged in bloodshed within the Islamic community.[178] All their military moves were made after much provocation or persuasion from the Umayyad end. When Muawiya did not accept Hasan's proposal of Husayn as the next Caliph, validated by a peace treaty, enmity heightened, leading to Hasan's poisoning. This attitude was clear in Hasan's voice. ("*Āpni e sandhi patre haile swīkrita, sandhi patra saha hethā āsiben cali, ubhaẏe āmrā tāte kariba sākshar. Anyathā calibe yuddha—doshī nahi āmi*").[179] Referring to sections from Mohammad Uddin Ahmed's *Maharam Kānda* and to authentication drawn from *Rawẓat ash-shuhadā'* and Girishchandra Sen's *Emām Hāsān o Hosaẏaner Jībanī*, Kaykobad dismissed outright any possibility of the Ummayyads being the legitimate possessors of the Caliphate.[180] He added sections to the footnotes portraying Muawiya as a person without any Islamic virtues, and Yazid as having inherited all his father's vices, each a complete antithesis to Hasan and Husayn. In such instances, Kaykobad did not always authenticate his elaborations on the vices of Muawiya or Yazid with citations to historical sources.[181]

Jātīẏa literature thus grew among the Bengali Muslims by developing an ethics of writing prose and poetry as history and managed to strategically use an authoritarian version and cancelled what it considered inauthentic or inappropriate.

5.3 Poetry as *Kaiphiẏat*: *Kārbālā Kābya* and *Maharam Śariph*

Kaiphiẏat (*Kaifiyat*, originally Persian, but popular in Bengal as an Urdu word which means justification) became a generic term for many authors who were putting forward their arguments on *jātīẏa* literature, or validating the poetic or political dimension of their own literary work. Thus, they turned their writings into argumentative social discourse by themselves. Qazi Abdul Odud's article "Kaiphiẏat," Nazrul's poem "Āmār Kaiphiẏat" (1926, in his anthology of poetry *Sarbahārā*), or Kaykobad's introduction to *Maharam Śariph* titled "Kaiphiẏat" all reveal this urge to justify, through

impassioned argument and analysis, individual poetic choices (for Nazrul, or Kaykobad) or a particular definition about literature (for Abdul Odud). Whether pieces on literature had *kaiphiẏat* in their title or not, writings on literary ideals themselves became ideological battlegrounds, where self-articulated justifications were made for one's writings and that of others invalidated in doctrinal and aesthetic-poetic terms. This section explains how the authors of the Kārbālā actually expanded the generic scope of *kaiphiẏat*, by using several parts of their writings, both the paratextual (like the preface) and the textual parts comprising characterisation and dialogue to assert their specific ideas of reformist *jātīẏa* literature. In this process of justification, the authors actually attempted to resolve the crisis in the Caliphate, invalidated the Shī'a, defined *jātīẏa sāhitya* in reformist terms and affirmed Bangla as the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims, all in a dynamic argumentative framework.

In his *Kārbālā Kābya* (1912) Abdul Bari affirmed historical veracity for his poetry through characterisation and utilised expressive and dramatic dialogues of the characters to present an argument for religious morality. Rather than diegetic description or narrative interlocution, Bari assigned long monologues to Muhammad, Hasan, Husayn and also Yazid to convey ethico-moral issues and resolve the crisis called the Karbala battle.

Bari's Husayn himself said that it was greed of "*Ejid-śaẏtān*" (Yazid the Devil) to hold power over Islam and the Muslims that he wanted to kill Husayn. Here Husayn brought a unique interpretation to his willingness to die in the battle of Karbala in order to posit himself as the protector of the *ummah*. When he realised that Yazid was about to strike Medina with his mighty army, in order to avoid bloodshed and the casualties of a great war, Husayn willingly exiled himself ("*swecchānirbāsita*") and chose Karbala as the place of battle to embrace *shahādat*, so that peace might prevail in Arabia for the Muslims.[182] In the same long monologue, Husayn described himself and his brother Hasan as the "humble progeny of the Prophet" (*dīn baṃśadhar*) who were not greedy for material wealth, were dedicated in their servitude to Islam and believed in renunciation, compassion and forgiveness as the core values of Islam.[183] This monologue, in describing their attributes, also simultaneously posited Yazid as the antithesis of the superior Islamic virtues embodied in the two Imam brothers. He also remarked that a race attains "*jātīẏa unnati*" with the strength of *dharma*, and one can witness how this *unnati* had been achieved under Islam in the Arab lands. And if the Bengali Muslims wanted to attain *jātīẏa unnati* in the same way that the early Muslims had done in the Arab lands, they should not forget that only by serving the "*matribhāshā debi*" (the goddess of the mother tongue) could *jātīẏa unnati* be attained and past glories restored.[184] He also added that no language other than one's mother tongue could quench the thirst for poetry, and no other language could bring fame to the poet.[185]

Abdul Bari began his eulogy for mother tongue Bangla in the invocation itself, directly engaging with the Bangla-versus-Urdu debate and in a

burst of patriotic emotion towards Bengal, he refused to call stepmother Urdu (*bimātā*) his true mother, which was Bangla.

> Ogo baṇgamaẏī mātribhāshā mor, kara dine ei āśīsh dān;
> Tomār gourab karite bardhan pāri jena āmi sapite prāṇ!
> Je deśer bhūme labhechi janam, deha pushta jār samīre, jale,
> Se deś-bhāshāke bhu'le dākiba ki, bimātāke mor jananī bole
>
> O my mother tongue Bangla, endow me with your blessing;
> Make me sacrifice my life to enhance your glory!
> This land where I was born, grew up with its air and water
> Shall I call stepmother mother by forgetting the tongue of that land?
> (Abdul Bari, *Kārbālā Kābya*)[186]

Keeping some Arabic and Persian words untranslated in his heavily ornate poetic language influenced densely by Michael Madhusudan Datt, and poets with intense nationalistic overtures like Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay and Nabinchandra Sen (the three poets whom he mentioned as his inspiration in the first line of his poem), Abdul Bari exudes his poetic passion and passion for the Karbala in an ornate Sanskritised poetic language. At the same time, through his poetic expressions, Bari managed to offer a prescriptive template for his Muslim readers and countered the Orientalist version of Islamic conversion. In the middle of the battle of Karbala, Husayn, just before engaging in his last military exchange, gave instructions to the women of his family not to cry in grief with their heads unveiled and their hair loose. He took the poetic license of depicting Husayn delivering a speech on reformist values that was both argumentative and discursively interpretive, in the spirit of the *jātīya sāhitya*. In a 120-line-long monologue delivered in the heat of battle, "in a thunderous voice" (*garjjilā Emām kāpilā Kārbālā jathā Bhīm megha-dhwani*) which made Karbala "tremble and shudder" (*śiharilā, kāpilā*), Husayn debunked the Orientalist representation of Islam as a religion of the sword and the negative portrayals of Muhammad in Orientalist-Missionary discourses ("*Islām-pracār bāhubal-guṇe, tīkshṇa tarabāri dhāre, ekathā je bale śatabār bali ghor mithyābādī tāre*").[187]

Kaykobad, in his *Kaiphiẏat*, and also in a footnote inside the main text, offered a critical comparative thematic study of a set of Kārbālā narratives written in prose published from the 1880s and assessed their eligibility as *jātīya sāhitya*. In a separate invocation section named "Āllāh Ho Ākbar," Kaykobad transformed the traditional *hamd* into a modern lyrical exposition, in which the poet/narrator addressed Allah in an intimate devotional speech. This section starts with an Arabic couplet of a prayer, following its Urdu pronunciation and transliteration in the Bangla script, thus placing *Maharam Śariph* in a multilingual context hinting at an implied readership supposedly proficient at least in Urdu (the language of translation) script and meaning.

On the cover, Kaykobad added an epigram where he directly and expressively answered the critics of *Mahāśmaśān*, by immediately calling them "flies in search of pimples" (*makshikā braṇa khoje*) and as "insects of hell" (*naraker kīt*), and thus emerged with his revisionist poem *Maharam Śariph* with an invincible poet's ego. *Maharam Śariph*, then, became a reconstruction of his reputation as a poet and a reformulation of his literary ideals that took a departure from the aesthetics of pure poetry to arrive at the strict ethics of *jātīẏa sāhitya*. Kaykobad's text is exceptional in the way each narrative situation is imbued with magnificent sensory invocation, very closely approaching the poetic style of the mainstream Bengali literary field. Locale, interior, action, season and time – all came alive with dramatic affective sensuality. As an instance of his poetic exuberance, he painted prepared the night with uncanny silence and eeriness personified in the motionless sleep of humans and animals.

Rajanī triyāmā; stabdha prakriti sundarī
Nāhi jāge jīb jantu; jana kolāhal
Nāhi ebe, mritaprāẏ nāgarikgaṇ.
Spandanhīn, nāhi kothā śabda eto tuku
Nā naṛe gāchher pātā, nā bahe paban

The night is deathly quiet; the lady of nature is silent
No animal or human is awake, no sound
Of life can be heard, the dwellers lie like dead,
Paralysed. No, no sound anywhere
No leaf stirs, the wind has died
(Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*)[188]

As Kaykobad described the city of Basra in all its architectural splendour, set in a landscape of nature's bounty, he also added further details of Basra's town planning, its water supply, how it was protected from the outside, and cited his sources of such information:

Sātel Ārab-tīre e kon nagarī
Śobhita golāb-kuňje? – karo lo kalpane
Sudhāmukhī, – āmodita madhur sourabhe?
Prakriti-rānīr snigdha niśwāser mato
Golāber madhumākhā swargīẏa sourabh
Bhāsiteche cāridike mridul samīre
Sthāne sthāne kuňjaban, surabhi kusum
Śobhiteche ki sundar taru-latā śīre,–

What is this spendour in the bed of roses
By the river Shatil Arab fragrant with aroma,
Tell me, Oh fancy, the moonfaced lady

> The heavenly honeyed scent of the roses
> floats like the sweet breath of the nature queen.
> Fragrant flowers are strewn here and there
> Adorning the crowns of the creepers atop the trees
> (Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*)[189]

Along with this poetic exuberance, Kaykobad explicated the conceptual issues and historical contexts of Islam discursively both in the main text and in the explanatory footnotes. At the same time, he arranged his narrative strategically to steer the readers along his deliberations. When Kaykobad described Basra at the peak of its glory during the Caliphate of Umar over seven long pages, he praised Umar as the maker of an Arabic Islamic cosmopolitan culture, which he added in the footnote.[190] Similarly, whenever Medina appeared in the poem, the city's unsurpassed beauty was described, sometimes over as many as six pages, and it was hailed as the abode of Hasan and Husayn. But Damascus, the citadel of the Umayyad Caliphate, never enjoyed such favour.

Other than such narrative persuasions, Kaykobad was also direct in orientating his readers along the division between good and evil. He used a series of invectives for Yazid, who was described as ill-willed, merciless,[191] a murderer, alcoholic, lecherous, anti-Islamic, anti-*ummah* and a beast in human shape (*Atatāẏī*, *surāpāẏī*, *lampat pradhān*, *dharmādrohī*, *jñātidrohī*, *narākriti paśu*),[192] and his allies (especially Ziyad) as hellish (*nārakīẏa*), murderers (*hatyākārī*) and beasts (*paśu*).[193] Here, too, a sharp distinction was made between the Early Caliphate and the later Umayyad Caliphate, and Kaykobad described how the transition was made by Muawiya and carried forward by Yazid through the violent and unethical murders of the grandsons of Muhammad. To support his narration of the treachery and despotism of the first two Umayyad Caliphs (Muawiya and Yazid) as the sole cause for the massacre of Karbala, Kaykobad did not hesitate to quote from the French and American Orientalist writings against which he had been constructing this counter-narrative, to stake his claim on *jātīẏa sāhitya*.[194]

As discussed earlier (Section 4.5), Kārbālā *authors* variously explained Husayn's killing in the battle to exempt Yazid from the responsibility of the rampant killings in Karbala in an attempt to secure and legitimise Yazid's position in the Islamic Caliphate. Yazid was incorporated to secure a smooth continuity from the early to the contemporary Caliphate in Turkey via a smooth transition through the Umayyad Caliphate. For such a thing to happen, Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, was made responsible for the Karbala massacre. Abdur Rashid raised a moral issue and in a footnote hinted that Ziyad was Muawiya's illegitimate son, who under Yazid's directions became the chief conspirator behind the tragic event in Karbala in the Kārbālā narrative and remained unrepentant even when Yazid began to suffer from guilt at his deeds.[195] Azhar Ali was direct in declaring that "because he was an illegitimate child, Ziyad was cunning

(*dhūrta*), merciless (*nirdaẏ*) and the ultimate enemy of the clan of the Prophet (*nabi baṃśer param śatru*)".[196] Kaykobad even quoted twice from Washington Irving's *Lives of the Successors of Mahomet* (1850) in his footnotes[197] to substantiate his statements about Ziyad.[198]

Some authors considered Muawiya and Yazid to be responsible for the destruction of the superior system of the Early Caliphate, and for starting dynastic rule in Islam. Kaykobad never wasted a single occasion to remind his readers how, unlike the spiritually superior grandsons of Muhammad, Muawiya and Yazid embodied the epitome of conspiracy and treachery. By citing references from the French Orientalist author Louis-Pierre-Eugène Sédillot, he even marked the Umayyad clan to be treacherous as a whole, using the Orientalist essentialisation of the Arab clan to fulfil his own reformist poetic aims.[199]

Kaykobad did not elaborate upon the individual Early Caliphs. Only Umar's contribution in the town planning of Basra was mentioned. In comparison, Kaykobad's descriptions of the spiritual heights attained by Ali were lengthy and elaborate. Ali's achievements and attributes were hailed in none other than Muawiya's speech, which continued for an entire page. Such narrative instances clearly show Kaykobad's preference for Ali over the first three Caliphs. This may well be a sign of Kaykobad's allegiance to an Alid-piety over and above the devotion expressed for the Early Caliphate. However, it cannot be concluded with any degree of certainty how far, or if at all, Kaykobad's Alid-piety and Husayn-centric piety coincided with the Shīʿa veneration of Husayn and its position in Muharram-centric devotion. Kaykobad did not venture further along the line of Imamate to refer to the assassinations of the Shīʿa Imams at the hands of the Umayyad rulers when he marked them as cruel and treacherous.

Things came to a full circle as Kaykobad, by offering an "authentic" version of the battle of Karbala through the *Maharam Śariph,* retrieved his position in the reformist circles that had scorned him for not having any Islamic education and debunked *Mahāśmaśān* as a "text opposed to the religion of Islam" (*Islām dharmer biruddha*).[200] At the same time, in an ironic twist, he restored his individualistic position as a poet who did not fully subsume his creativity to doctrinal norms. In a free poetic spirit, Kaykobad metaphorised Karbala as a "śmaśān" (Hindu crematorium), the same polytheistic expression that he had been reprimanded for using in the title of his *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* by his reviewers. Kaykobad opened the third volume of *Maharam Śariph* with an emotive description of Karbala on the third day of the month of Muharram, with Husayn camped at the side of the Euphrates. The description went on for nine pages before Husayn began to speak in a deeper reflective voice on the superior values of Islam. The emotive refrain – "Is this that Karbala – is it that crematorium?" (*Ei ki Kārbālā sei? Ei se śmaśān?*) – occurred no less than nine times in the nine-page long vivid diegetic description of the arid landscape of Karbala.[201]

Kaykobad described the physical brutality of the slaying of Husayn and the grief that it unleashed, and his impassioned narrator's voice brought alive all the elements of the landscape – the trees, the sand, the earth, the sky. The survivors lamented the deaths and the narrator himself joined them by alternatively chanting the *istirja darud* "inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un" and exclaiming "*Hāẏ Hāsān Hāẏ Husayn*". In the footnote, Kaykobad changed his usual discursive explanatory tone and instead adopted an intimate and affective voice to confess how difficult it was for him to withstand the severity of the pain of Husayn's *shahādat* and to convey this in words to the readers. The poet's pain over Husayn's martyrdom was not exhausted even when the poem ended, and Kaykobad added an epilogue to explain to the reader how brutal the murders were, how sacrilegious the public parade, in which the grieving women of the family of Husayn (the extended family of the Prophet) were made to walk as prisoners of war from Karbala to Damesque, Yazid's kingdom, thereby making his readers aware of the magnitude of the injustice which made even Allah's throne tremble. Kaykobad replicated the refrain in the name of the Imam brothers – "*Hāẏ Hasan! Hāẏ Husayn!*" – passionately lamenting their demise, which was, he said, repeated by "all the Muslims of the world" on the Day of Ashura.[202] "Till there are Muslims, till the Day of Judgement," he wrote, "these tears will not be exhausted".[203] One should notice that Kaykobad identified *Maharam Śariph* as a poetic articulation of Husayn's *shahādat e-jaheri* (martyrdom), which was the Sunni concept of martyrdom and not Shī'ī intercessory piety. However, the epilogue also indicates that Kaykobad may have harboured a form of devotion that could not be fully appropriated and exhausted into the Sunni reformist ideas and rhetoric that apparently framed his book.

But this acute and sensory description of grief and the performative lament that Kaykobad described does not necessarily indicate that he approved of the Shī'ī commemoration of Muharram. Instead, his text stands as a unique example of narrativisation of ritual grief. In a narrative that resembled the Sunni reformist literary sensibilities Kaykobad expanded the mimetic capacity and the sensory charge of language to accommodate the physical dimensions of performing grief into script, to bring pain from the body to the book. The grieving voice of the individual poet now replaced the lamenting voices in the Muharram ritual.

Dr Abul Hosen, in his history of Islam titled *Moslem Patākā*, did not suppress any of the narrative excesses that touched upon the supernatural. He described how the day of Ashura became apocalyptic after the death of Husayn:

> Jedin Hajarat Hosen śahid han, se din sūryye eman sarbbagrāsī grahaṇ lāge je, joharer samaẏ samudaẏ jagat rātrikāler nyāẏ andhakār haiẏā jāẏ. Byaẏtul Mokāddaser prastar o kāshṭhādite rakta dekhā giẏāchila. Suryakiraṇe rakter ābhā o samagra ākāś raktabarṇer meghe chaiẏā giẏāchila … rakter brishtio haiẏāchila. Tin din dhariẏā mrittikā

> krishňa barṇa dhāraṇ kariẏāchila … Hajarat Husener bipakshe jataguli lok Kārbbālār yuddhe jogdān kariẏāchila, tāhārā ābāse āsiẏā anekei pīṛāgrasta ebaṃ sei jantranāẏ asthir haiẏā prāntyāg kore ebaṃ sei yantranāẏ ātmaghāti haẏ ebaṃ anekei parspar yuddha kariẏā mare.
>
> The day became darker than night when Imam Husayn was martyred with a sudden solar eclipse that no almanac had predicted. The darkness was terrifying. Blood began to ooze out of the stones and the wooden panels of the Baitul Moqaddas. The sky clotted with blood-red clouds; the sun was dripping blood. The earth turned black at that moment and stayed like that for the three whole days. People who raised their weapons against Husayn fell severely ill after the battle of Karbala and died of unbearable physical pain. The rest turned mad in excruciating pain and died by fighting with each other.
>
> (Saiyad Abul Hosen, *Moslem Patākā*)[204]

What propelled such appropriation of the grief of Muharram into Sunni reformist literature? Were we being directed to take into consideration Kaykobad's Alid-piety that had bypassed the question of the Early Caliphate without succumbing to Shīʿī piety, by exploding into lament for the martyrs of Karbala? One should remember here how Saiyad Abul Hosen constantly harped on his own Syed lineage to validate his devotion towards the progeny of Fatima as the Saiyads.[205] He incorporated the Shīʿa Imamate into the genealogical exposition of the history of Islam in *Moslem Patākā* (an exception in the *jātīẏa* literary field of biography) without letting the Karbala become a justification for Shīʿi intercessory piety.[206] Abul Hosen negated outright any Shīʿī claim by marking them as intercessory – having *pouttalik buddhi* (devotion for the figurative) – and thus ineligible to participate in the new reformist public sphere now overtly identified with reformist Sunni Islam. Within the sphere of Hanafi *jātīẏa sāhitya*, such narrative variations hint at internally diverse devotional orientations and individual methods of poetic justification intended to appropriate Husayn's martyrdom as the universal trope for the "Muslims" – a category majorly identified with the Sunnis, to which Shias were not legitimately allowed to belong. Abul Hosen was therefore suitably direct in his declaration, in the middle of his description of early Islam, that "the way Muhharam is commemorated in Calcutta and its suburbs is an absolute form of *bida't*".[207]

Conclusion

This chapter elaborates upon various issues of Muslim literary modernity by focusing on multiple renditions of the Karbala in literary genres in prose and poetry. Here I have attempted to chisel out the complexities pertaining to the choice of Bangla as mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims. For that

I have explored how the Muslim literati and *ulama* emphasised the composite (*miśra*) nature of the Bangla language and validated the inclusion of Arabic, Persian and Urdu loanwords. At the same time, they underlined the need to connect Bangla with the Urdu supra-Indian literary network and thus expand cultural and political experiences of the regional Bengali Muslims. This was a paradigmatically different stance from the early reformists' use of Urdu as the language of mediation. Thus, the ideators of Bangla as the mother tongue for Bengali Muslims proposed a unique and functional idea of a dual-language system within standardised Bangla – split along the different religious-cultural experiences of the Hindus and the Muslims. The Bengali Muslims considered that only a dual-language system could create a workable coexistence of the Hindu and the Muslim linguistic-literary fields, while maintaining their essential religious-cultural differences intact. The fear of succumbing to the hegemonic form of Sanskritised Bangla saturated with polytheistic emotion as the medium of Muslim literary modernity compelled the Bengali Muslims to differentiate between lexicon (*bhāshā*) and idea (*bhāb*), and to adopt Sanskritised Bangla as a neutral medium, endowing it with Arabic, Persian and Urdu words to render it suitable for the articulation of Islamic *jātīẏa* values.

From the furious debates over the ideal poetic norms of *jātīẏa sāhitya* demanding fixed authentication and claims of historicity, it is clear that it was not an easy task to ascertain fixed poetic norms for literary genres based on history and validated by the reformist norms. Authors of *jātīẏa sāhitya* continued to experiment with poetic metaphors and generic templates to accommodate primarily Sunni reformist values. They accomplished such literary innovations imbued with reformist sensibilities to resonate with the paradigms of literary modernity ideated by Hindu nationalist authors. The struggle between poetic exuberance and religious authentication remained one of the major issues in formulating the definition of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, which went through various metamorphoses from the later decades of the 19th century till the 1940s. However, all such literary attempts, with their multiple poetic innovations and narrative strategies of historical-scriptural authentication, uniformly invalidated Shīʿī intercessory piety and the physical enactment of grief. Together, by scripting an enormous amount of affect towards Husayn, the ideal martyr in Islam, the Bengali Muslim authors secured the claims of the Early Caliphate as the central axis for a new Muslim public at a time fraught with socio-political upheavals that would go to shape and re-shape the history of Bengal and the whole Indian subcontinent.

Notes

1 Abdul Bari Kabiratna, *Kārbālā Kābya* (Noakhali: 1912), 130.
2 Gopal Haldar, *Kāzi Nazrul Islām* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1973); Priti Kumar Mitra, *The Dissent of Nazrul Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture and Islam in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

3 For a detailed discussion of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj, see Khondkar Sirajul Huq, *Muslim Sāhitya-Samāj: Samāj Cintā o Sāhitya Karma* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1984); Pradip Kumar Lahiri, *Bengali Muslim Thought, 1818–1947: Its Liberal and Rational Trends* (Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1991); Shahadat H. Khan, *The Freedom of Intellect Movement (Buddhir Mukti Andolan) in Bengali Muslim Thought, 1926–1938* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region*; Samarpita Mitra, *Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture: Bengal at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020); and Ankur Barua, *The Hindu Self and the Muslim Neighbours: Contested Borderlines on Bengali Landscapes* (London: Lexington Books, 2022).

4 For the discussion of these differences, see Mitra, *Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture*; Bose, *Recasting the Region*.

5 Qazi Abdul Odud, "Bāṇgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā," reprinted in *Anirbān Sei Agnisikhā*, ed., Bulbul Ahmed (Kolkata: Chhoya, 2016), 33–41.

6 Odud, "Bāṇgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā," 37.

7 Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmed, "Loktā Musalmān nā Śaẏtan," *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. 2 (Jaishtha 1329 BS [May–June 1922]); and, Muhammad Azizur Rahman, "Islām o Nazrul Kābya Sāhitya," *Mohāmmadī* Vol. II, no.3 (Asharh 1335 BS [June–July [1928]).

8 For a detailed discussion see Ujjwalkanti Das, "The Bengal Pact of 1923 and Its Reactions," *Bengal Past and Present* 88, no. 1 (1980): 29–45; Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20–36; and Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms*: *Bengal 1905–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

9 Goutam Kumar Dey, "The Formation of Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha and the Role of Communist Party," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 75, Platinum Jubilee Edition* (2014): 623–627; and Bose, *Recasting the Region*.

10 Dattatreya Narayan Dhanagare, "The Politics of Survival: Peasant Organizations and the Left-Wing in India, 1925–46," *Sociological Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (March 1975): 29–54; D Bandyopadhyay, "Tebhaga Movement in Bengal: A Retrospect," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 41 (2001): 39015–07.

11 Harun-or-Rashid focuses on the organisational matters, policies and inner-party conflicts of the Bengal Muslim League to argue that there emerged a regional consciousness in the imagination of Pakistan that was very much based on the Bengali Muslim identity, different from the national paradigm. Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906–1947* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1987).

12 Chandiprasad Sarkar, *The Bengal Muslims: A Study in Their Politicization, 1912–1929* (Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi, 1991), 225.

13 "It could muster enough support within the legislature to form a ministry, had the leadership of the Bengal Congress responded to the appeal of Fazlul Huq to join his ministry as coalition partners". Abul Mansur Ahmad, cited in Sarkar, *The Bengal Muslims*, 243.

14 Jasimuddin, after completing his M.A. from the University of Calcutta, accepted a position as the Ramtanu Lahiri Assistant Research Fellow, working under Dineshchandra Sen from 1931 to 1937. He not only assisted Sen in the latter's project to collect ballads from Mymensingh, but himself also

collected more than 10,000 folk songs, which became iconic representations of different folksong repertoires and was published in collections such as *Raṇgilā Nāẏer Mājhi* (1934), *Jārīgān* (1968), *Murśidā Gān* (1977), among numerous others. He emerged as the most important collector and builder of folksong repertoires, later joined by Mansur Uddin and Abdur Kader, and Abdul Gafur Siddique, who created a copius archive of the folk repertoire of Bengal.

15 By *miśra*, the literati signified composite.

16 "Sāhitye Baicitra," *Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, Year 4, Vol. iii (Kartik 1328 BS [November–December 1921]).

17 *Baṇgabāsī* (11 Magh 1313 BS [25 January 1906]) quoted in Waqil Ahmed, *Uniś Śatake Bāṇgālī Musalmāner Cintā o Cetanār Dhārā* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1983), 315.

18 *Nabyabhārat* Vol. 23, no 11 (Falgun 1313 BS [February–March 1906]).

19 Tasadduk Ahmed, "Abhibhāshaṇ" reprinted in Habib Rahman, ed., Muslim Sāhitya Samāj-er Bārshik Adhibeshaṇ: Sabhāpatider Abhibhāshaṇ (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2002), 23–31.

20 Abdul Hakim, "Jātīẏa Sāhityer Ādarśa o laksha," *Islām Darśan* Year 2, no. xi (Phalgun 1328 BS [February–March 1921]): 3.

21 Alaol translated *Tuhfa-i-Nisai*, a Persian ethical treatise by Shah Yousuf Gada, an *alim* of late 14th-century Delhi, as *Tohfa*, but Alaol's Islamic scriptural orientation was never discussed in the reformist circles in colonial Bengal.

22 Muhammad Shahidullah, "Abhibhāshaṇ," Third Annual Conference of Muslim Sahitya Samaj, Dhaka, 1335 [1928]), in *Śahidullāh Smārak Grantha*, eds., Samsuzzaman Khan et al, (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2015 [1985]), 182–5.

23 Ibid, 185.

24 Wajid Ali was a Bachelor of Arts from Aligarh Muslim Anglo-Oriental College (MAO).

25 Bagdevi, another name for Saraswati, is the Hindu goddess of learning.

26 Muhammad Wajid Ali, "Sāhitye Swātantra Keno," *Saogāt* Year 6, Vol. v (Agrahayan 1335 BS [November–December 1928]).

27 Pareshnath Bandyopadhyay, "Baṇge Hindu o Musalmān," *Bharati* (Shraban 1310 BS [August–September 1903]): 386–99.

28 Muhammad Shahidullah, "Presidential Lecture," *Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* Year 1, no. i (1918): 6.

29 *Āhle Hādis* Year 3, no ii (Kartik 1324 BS [October–November 1917]): 70.

30 *Āhle Hādis* Year 3, no iv (Chaitra 1324 BS [February–March 1917]): 99.

31 Abu Bakr himself shifted to Bangla as his preferred medium for writing from Arabic and Urdu, which he had used in his early career for Islamic discourses. Ruhul Amin collected and formalised many speeches of Abu Bakr and shaped them into written volumes. For more details, see Baqibillah Siddique, *Pir Sāheber Jīban Caritra* (Dhaka: Hera Publications, 1973), 12.

32 Ruhul Amin, *Baṇganubād Khotba* (Calcutta: Hanafi Press, 1927), 50–60.

33 Muhammad Abdus Salam, *Māolānā Ruhul Amin: Jīban o Karma* (Dhaka: Ifaba, 2005).

34 Babur Ali, *Āhle Hādis* Year 1, no. i (Ashwin 1322 BS [September–October 1915]): 18.

35 Babur Ali, "Editorial," *Āhle Hādis* Year 2, no. viii (Baishakh 1324 BS [March–April 1917]): 370.

36 Hanafi, Malaiki, Shafi'i and Hanbali, these four Sunni *maẓhab*s (schools of fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence) were initiated by the four scholars, namely *Abū Ḥanīfa, Malik ibn Anas, Muhammad al-Shafi'i* and *Ahmad ibn Hanbal*.
37 *Āhle Hādis* Year 2, no. ii (Kartik 1323 BS [October–November 1916]): 60.
38 Editorial, *Islām Darśan* (Baishakh 1327 BS [March–April 1920]): 3.
39 Editorial, *Islām Darśan* (Baishakh 1327 BS [March–April 1920]): 2.
40 Muhammad Abdul Hakim, "Ābāhan," Year 1, no. 2 (Aswin 1322 BS [September–October 1915]): 15.
41 Babur Ali, Editorial, *Āhle Hādis* Year 1, no. I (Aswin 1322 [September–October 1915]): 12.
42 For instance, two of the treatises written in Sanskritised composite Bangla with Arabic titles by Munshi Naimuddin are *Jobdātol Māsāẏel* (Calcutta: B. P. M. Press, 1874) and *Ādellāẏe Hānāphiẏa phi Radde Majhabiẏā* (Karatiya: Mir Atahar Ali, 1894). Ruhul Amin continued this legacy by writing tracts with Arabicate titles: *Chāẏekātol Mochlemīn* (Calcutta, 1913); *Borhānal Mokallādin bā Majhāb Mīmāṃsā* (24 Parganas, 1914); *Sāẏkātol Mochlemin* (Calcutta, 1922); and many more.
43 Abbas Ali, *Korāṇ Śarīph* (Calcutta: Altafi Press, 1907).
44 *Pūjā* signifies worship of a Hindu deity.
45 *Ibadat* means worship of the Almighty.
46 Akram Khan, presidential lecture at the third annual conference of Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti, 1918–1919, quoted in *Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* (Magh 1325 BS [December 1918–January 1919]): 296.
47 Mohammad Akram Khan, *Mochlem Baṇger Sāmājik Itihās* (Dhaka: Aitihya, 2010 [1965]), 77, 157.
48 Khan, *Mochlem Baṇger*, 98, 121.
49 Ibid, 87.
50 Ibid, 133.
51 *Islām Darśan* Year 2, no. viii (Agrahayan 1328 BS [November–December 1921]): 283.
52 Ibid, 285.
53 Ibid, 286.
54 Naimuddin, *Māsāẏel*, 8.
55 Quoted in Abu Zafar, "Ek Ananya Sādhāraṇ Pratibhā," in *Māolānā Ākram Khān*, ed., Abu Zafar (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 1982), 305.
56 Abu Zafar, "Ek Ananya Sādhāraṇ Pratibhā", 116.
57 *Ilm-e ladunni* (Ar.) stands for knowledge inspired and bestowed upon the individual by Allah.
58 *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. xi (Poush 1327 BS [December–January 1920]): 387.
59 Dineshchandra Sen, *Baṇgabhāshā o Sāhitya*, 9th ed. (Calcutta: West Bengal State Book Board, 1986 [1896]), 129.
60 Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, presidential lecture at the fourth annual conference of BMSS, 1928, quoted in *Jege Uṭhilām*, eds., Amzad Hosain et al, (Kolkata: Biswakosh Parishat, 2019), 29.
61 Shahidullah, in *Śahidullāh Smārak Grantha*, 183.
62 Akram Khan, presidential lecture at the fourth Annual Conference of the BMSS, in *Baṇgīẏa Mussalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* (Magh 1325 BS [December 1918–January 1919]), 297.

63 Naimuddin, *Korāṇ Śariph* (Karatiya: Mahmudiya Yantra, 1887), ii.
64 Daad Ali, *Āśeke Rasul*, Vol I, 4th ed. (Nadia: Mohammad Yufus Ali, 1917[1908]), 89.
65 For a detailed overview of *madrasa* education, see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims*, and Nilanjana Paul, *Bengal Muslims and Colonial Education, 1854–1947: A Study of Curriculum, Educational Institutions and Communal Politics* (London: Routledge, 2022).
66 Mr. Abdul Rahim, as he was addressed in *Mihir o Sudhakar*, was educated at Presidency College and studied law in Britain. His lectures on law were published in a book titled *Principles of Muhammedan Jurisprudence*. He wrote in both Urdu and English.
67 Editorial, *Nur al-Iman* (Bhadra 1307 BS [August–September 1903]), 25.
68 Mahmud Hasan, presidential lecture at the 2nd Annual Conference of the MSS, quoted in *Muslim Sāhitya Samāj-er Bārshik Adhibeshan: Sabhāpatider Abhibhāshan*, ed., Habib Rahman (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2002), 52.
69 Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (1892–1963), an important politician, held the positions of prime minister of Bengal (1946–1947) and prime minister of Pakistan (1956–1957).
70 Abu Zafar, ed., *Māolānā Ākram Khān* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986), 193.
71 Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, presidential lecture at the fourth Annual Conference of the BMSS, reprinted in Amzad Hosain et al, ed., *Jege Uthilām*, 19–38.
72 Ibid, 26.
73 Ibid, 28.
74 Ibid, 27–8.
75 Ibid, 28.
76 Saiyad Emdad Ali, "Baṇgabhāshā o Musalmān," *BMSP* Year 1, no. ii (Jaishtha 1326 BS [May–June 1918]), 80–1.
77 Sheikh Habibur Rahman Sahitya Ratna, "Baṇga Sāhitye Islāmī Śabda," *BMSP* Year 1, no. viii (Agrahayan 1328 BS [November–December 1921])
78 Muhammad Shahidullah, presidential lecture at the Second Annual conference of the BMSS in 1917, quoted in *BMSP* Year 1, no. ii (Jaishtha 1326 BS [May–June 1918]): 7.
79 *Islām Pracārak* (Shraban-Bhadra 1310 BS [July–August–September 1903]), 78.
80 Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, presidential lecture at the fourth Annual Conference of the BMSS, reprinted in Amzad Hosain et al, ed., *Jege Uthilām*, 24.
81 Ibid, 31.
82 Ibid, 24–5.
83 Ibid, 25.
84 Muzaffar Ahmad, "Bāṇgladeśe Mādrāsā Śikshā," *BMSP* Year 2, Vol. iii (1919 [1326 BS]): 232.
85 Akram Khan, "Jātiẏa Bhāshā o Mātribhāshā, "Presidential Lecture at the 3rd Conference of BMSS, *BMSP* Year 1, Vol. iv (Shraban 1325 BS [July–August 1918]): 310.
86 Ibid, 306.
87 Shahidullah., Presidential Lecture at the 2nd Conference of BMSS, *BMSP* Year 1, Vol. i (Baishakh 1325 BS [April–May 1918]): 6.

88 Tasadduk Ahmed, quoted in *Muslim Sāhitya Samāj-er Bārshik Adhibeshaṇ: Sabhāpatider Abhibhāshaṇ*, ed., Habib Rahman (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2002), 23–31.
89 *BMSP* Year 1, Vol. iv (Shraban 1325 BS [1918]): 43–51.
90 Saidur Rahman, *Purba Bāṃlār Rājnīti- Sanskriti o Kabitā* (Dhaka: Dhaka Biswabidyalaya, 1983), 25–6.
91 Doddaballapura Ramaiah Nagaraj, "Critical Tensions in the History of Kannada Literary Culture," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South India*, ed., Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2003), 323–82.
92 Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).
93 Norman Cutler, "Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed., Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2003), 271–322.
94 Jawaharlal Handoo, "South Indian Folklore Studies: Growth and Development," *Journal of Folklore Research* 24, no. 2 (May–August 1987): 135–56; and, Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism*.
95 Frank Korom, "The Role of Folklore in Tagore's Vernacular Nationalism," in *Tagore and Modernity*, eds., Krishna Sen and Tapati Guha (Kolkata: Dasgupta & Pvt Ltd, 2006), 34–58; Rituparna Basu and Ritaprava Basu, "The Folk Arts of Bengal and Evolving Perspectives of Nationalism, 1920s–40s: A Study of the Writings of Gurusaday Dutt," in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*. 70 (2009–2010): 512–520 accessed June 22, 2022 www.jstor.org/stable/44147698; Roma Chatterjee, "Scripting the Folk: History, Folklore, and the Imagination of Place in Bengal," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45, no I (November 2016): 377–394, accessed May 21, 2022 https://ssrn.com/abstract=2858838 or http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102214-014108
96 Tagore wrote four essays between 1885 and 1899 on the importance of folk literature in Bengali *jātīẏa* life, which were later compiled in his *Lokasāhitya* (1907).
97 Dineshchandra Sen, ed., *Maimansiṇgha Gītikā* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1923).
98 Shahidullah took up a project to reconceptualise the Dobhāshī *puthis* as an inalienable component of Bengali Muslim literature even before he became a Sharatchandra Lahiri Research Fellow (1919–21) at the University of Calcutta under Dineshchandra Sen.
99 By external influence, Shahidullah intended to mean the elite Sanskritised literature by the Bengali Hindu authors. Shahidullah, Presidential Lecture at the 2nd Conference of BMSS, quoted in *BMSP* Year 1, vol. i (Baishakh 1325 BS [April–May 1918]): 8–9.
100 Ibid.
101 Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṃlā Sāhityer Kathā*, Vol. II (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1965), 133.
102 For a detailed discussion of Alaol, see Thibaut d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
103 Ibid, 41.

104 "Islāmī Baṃla o Puthi Sāhitya," *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. xii (March–April 1920 [Chaitra 1327 BS]): 535.
105 Ibid, 535.
106 Abdul Karim, Presidential Lecture at the sixth Annual Conference of BMSS of 1920, quoted in *BMSP* Year 1, no. iv (Chaitra 1327 BS [March–April 1920]): 291.
107 "Puthi Sāhitya," *BMSP* Year 1, no. iv (Shraban 1325 BS [July–August 1918]): 309.
108 *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. xii (Chaitra 1327 BS [March–April 1920]): 534.
109 Altaf Hussain, "Faridpurer Sāhitya Pratibhā," *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. xii (Chaitra 1327 BS [March–April 1920]): 561.
110 Jasimuddin's *Sojan Bādiẏār Ghāt* is a chronicle of how the Muslims used to engage in the recitation of *jāri*, and danced along with it while the lower caste Hindus (Namasudras) joined in the broader ritual space. *Sojan Bādiẏār Ghāt* (Calcutta: Gurudas Chattopadhyay & Sons, 1933 [1929]), 26–34.
111 Ashraf Siddique and A. S. M. Zuhurul Haque, "Folklore Research in East Pakistan," in *Asian Folklore Studies* 23, no. 2 (1964): 7–8, accessed February 26, 2021 AE (asianethnology.org).
112 Abdul Kadir, "Bāṃlār Lok-Sangīt" in *Bāṃlār Lokāẏata Sāhitya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985), 1–15.
113 Abdul Kadir, "Bāṃlār Prācīn Musalmān Kabi," *Saogāt* Year 22, no. v (Bhadra 1346 BS [August–September 1939]); "Prācīṇ Puthir Pāndulipi," *Saogāt* Year 23, no. ix (Poush 1347 BS [December–January 1940]); and "Kabi Daulat Ujīr Bāhrām Khān," *Saogāt* Year 29, no. viii (Agrahayan 1354 BS [November–December 1947]). See also Abdul Karim Sahitya-Bisharad, "Prācīṇ Puthir Pāndulipi," *Saogāt* Year 23, no. vii (Kartik 1347 BS [October–November 1940]).
114 Abdul Kadir, "*Marsiẏā*," in *Saogāt* Year 24, no. vi (Aswin 1346 BS [September–October 1939]).
115 Golam Saklayen is the only relatively contemporary scholar to have produced a comprehensive study, in 1969, on the long lyrical narratives on the battle of Karbala, which he categorised under the broad generic name *marsiẏā sāhitya*, over the period spanning from Middle Bengal to 1947. See Golam Saklayen, *Bāṃglāẏ Marsiẏā Sāhitya* (Dacca: Pakistan Book Corporation, 1969).
116 Jasimuddin, *Jārīgān* (Dacca: Kendriya Bangla-Unnayan Board, 1968).
117 Kabiratna, *Kārbālā Kābya*; Mohammad Uddin Ahmad, *Mohārram Kānda* (Rangpur: Islam Mission, 1912); Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph bā Ātma-Bisarjan Kābya* (Dacca, 1933); and Mohammad Abdur Rashid, *Kārbālā* (Mymensingh: Muhammad Abdul Khalek, 1936).
118 Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad, Presidential Lecture at the sixth annual conference of BMSS, 1939, quoted in Amzad Hosain et al, ed., *Jege Uṭhilām*, 49.
119 Mohammad Abdur Rashid, *Kārbālā*, i.
120 Uddin Ahmed, *Mohārram Kānda*, ii.

In Bangla transliteration, *Shawāhid an-Nabuwwat* of Jāmī was written as *Saoẏāhedannabuẏat*. To establish the authenticity of his sources, Ahmed described this volume, originally written in Persian, as written in the Arabic instead. Thus, he repeated the tendency of citing thick references to

authenticate literary production, following the ethics of reformist Islam and *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

121 Uddin Ahmed, Preface to *Mohārram Kānda*, i.

122 The Islam Mission, with Mohammad Reyazuddin and Maniruzzaman Islamabadi as its secretaries, was established to carry out missionary activities focussed particularly on preaching at the grassroots and publishing reformist tracts and booklets.

123 In the Qur'an, *batin*, the hidden or interior meaning of Islam, has been placed in contrast to *zahir*, its exterior or apparent meaning. In Sufi philosophy, *batin* is the inward self of the individual, signifying one's spiritual journey to elevate oneself. In Shī'ī Ismailism, the *zahir* form and *batin* essence coexist. The Shī'as believe that Imam Al-Mahdi is the figure of *batin*, or esoteric essences. However, it is yet not clear which theological path of Sunni reform Mohammad Uddin followed.

124 Uddin Ahmad, *Mohārram Kānda*, 1912, ii–iii.

125 An array of footnotes took up the maximum volume of individual pages, like from 23 to 30, to refute the existing renditions of the narrative situations in minute details, especially marking *Bishād Sindhu,* as falsified version of the Karbala history, derogatory to Muslims. Uddin Ahmad, *Mohārram Kānda*, 23–30.

126 Ibid, 35.

127 Ibid, 40.

128 Ibid, 21.

129 Ibid, 43.

130 In most of the narratives, including *Jaṇgnāmā* by Heyat Mamud, Dobhāshī *puthis* and *Bishād Sindhu*, Yazid and Hasan were both suitors of Zaynab. Zaynab chose Hasan for his spiritual wealth over Yazid, who was a man of material and political power. The battle of Karbala thus became strategic revenge exacted by the rejected suitor Yazid.

131 Uddin Ahmad, *Mohārram Kānda*, 25.

132 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*, 13.

133 Ibid, 30.

134 Abdul Rashid, *Kārbālā*, 185.

135 Uddin Ahmad, *Mohārram Kānda*, 51.

136 Abdur Rashid, *Kārbālā*, 205–6.

137 Ibid, *Kārbālā*, 206.

138 Mir Mosharraf Hossain, *Moulud Śariph* (Tangail: Maniruddin Ahmed, 1894); *Madinār Gourab* (Calcutta: Mir Ashraf Hosen Brothers, 1906); *Hajarat Omarer Dharma Jīban Lābh* (Calcutta: Ibrahim Hosen, 1905); and *Moslem Bīratwa* (Calcutta: Reyazuddin Ahmed, 1907).

139 Kaykobad, *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* (Calcutta: Rajanikanta Kabiraj, 1906).

140 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph bā Ātma-Bisarjan Kābya* (Dacca: Taherunnesa Khatun, 1933).

141 Rosinka Chaudhuri, "The Politics of Poetry: An Investigation into Hindu/Muslim Representation in Nabinchandra Sen's Palashir Yuddha," *Studies in History* 24, no. 1 (2008): 1–25, accessed August 2, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1177/025764300702400101

142 Ibid, 25.

143 Kaykobad, Introduction to the second edition, *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* (Dacca, 1917 [1904]).
144 Samarpita Mitra, by focusing on the multiple poetic receptions of Kaykobad's *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* published in different periodicals, discusses in detail the efficacy of writing historical literary genres in the context of Bengal. See Mitra, *Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture*, 243–255.
145 Munshi Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmed, "Mahāśmaśān Kābyer Bhūmikāẏ Islāmer Abamānanā," *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. v (Bhadra 1327 BS [August–September 1920]); and Syed Emdad Ali, "*Mahāśmaśān* Kābye Anaislāmik o Aślīl Bhāb," *BMSP* Year 2, no. i (Baishakh 1326 BS [April–May 1919]).
146 *BMSP* Year 2, no. i (Baishakh 1326 BS [April–May 1919]), 2.
147 Ibid, 4–5.
148 Ibid, 7.
149 *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. v (Bhadra 1327 BS [August–September 1920]); and *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. vi (Aswin 1327 BS [September–October 1920]).
150 *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. v (Bhadra 1327 BS [August–September 1920]): 208.
151 *Islām Darśan* Year 1, no. vi (Aswin 1327 BS [September–October 1920]): 273.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 *BMSP* Year 2, no. 1 (Baishakh 1326 BS [April–May 1919]): 7.
155 Kaykobad, "Introduction," in *Maharam Śariph*, ii.
156 Shahidullah, "Maharam Śariph Samālocanā," in *Maharam Śariph bā Ātma-Bisarjjan Kābya*, 2nd ed. (Dacca: Published by Kaykobad, 1949 [1933]), 2.
157 "Kaiphiẏat," Preface to *Maharam Śariph*, 2nd ed. (Dacca: Taherunnesa Khatun: Published by Kaykobad, 1949 [1933]), 2.
158 Ibid, 2.
159 Ibid, 4.
160 Ibid, 14.
161 Ibid, 2–26.
162 Ibid, 23.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid, 25.
165 As his interlocutor, Kaykobad referred to Maulavi Saiyad Abul Khayer Mohammad Shaser al-Jalali, who cross-checked the scriptural references that Kaykobad used. Ibid, 21–22.
166 Ibid, 30.
167 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph* (1949 [1933]), 1–2.
168 Ibid, 2.
169 Azhar Ali, *Mahābīr Hajarat Ālīr Jībanī* (Calcutta: Haji Afajudin Ahamed, 1914), 167.
170 Sheikh Abdur Rahim, *Islām Itibritta* (Calcutta, 1910), 2.
171 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph* (1949 [1933]), 16.
172 Yazid defamed the Arab land with his vices, making him an anti-hero in *Kārbālā* poetry. An individual's folly was thus used to explain the internal conflict in Islam. But when Azhar Ali described Yazid's weakness for war, intoxicants and women with the words "*tri-śakti sādhanā*," a phrase with

direct tantric religious connotations, it was simply used as a literary expression, emptied out of religious connotation.

173 Rosinka Chaudhuri, "History in Poetry: Nabinchandra Sen's Palashir Yuddha and the Question of Truth," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 4 (November 2007): 897–918, accessed March 15, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/20203236?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

174 Jadunath Sarkar, Introduction to Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Anandamath*, ed., Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1937), i–vii.

175 Ibid, 8–11.

176 Ibid, 56.

177 Ibid, 84–93.

178 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*, 2nd ed. (1949[1933]).

179 Ibid, 56.

180 Ibid, 152.

181 The exuberance of poetic language in portraying the thirst that tormented Husayn and his family, the brutal killing of the men in his family and finally of Husayn himself, followed by the subsequent grieving of the women, requires a detailed discussion which is beyond the scope of the present work.

182 Abdul Bari, *Kārbālā Kābya*, 12–3.

183 Ibid, 15.

184 Ibid, 130.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid, 2–3.

187 Ibid, 53.

188 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph* (1949 [1933]), 114.

189 Ibid, 71.

190 Ibid, 71–8.

191 Ibid, 140.

192 Ibid, 153.

193 These expressions were already in circulation to qualify the enemy in the *tatsama* Bangla repertoire created by the Hindu authors.

194 Kaykobad repeatedly referred to sections from *Lives of the Successors of Mahomet* (1850) by Washington Irving and *Histoire des Arabes* (History of the Arabs, 1854) by Eugène Sédillot to validate his interpretation of Islamic history.

195 Abdur Rashid, *Kārbālā*, 185.

196 Azhar Ali, *Hajarat Emām Hāsān o Hosener Jībanī* (Calcutta: Soleimani Pustakalay, 1932), 151.

197 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*, 27, 146.

198 Ibid, 186.

199 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*, 142.

200 Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad, "Mahāśmaśān Kābyer Bhūmikāẏ Islāmer Abamānanā," *Islām Darśan*, Year 1, no. v (Bhadra 1327 BS [August–September 1920]): 208.

201 Kaykobad, *Maharam Śariph*, 250–8.

202 Ibid, "Pariśishta," iii.

203 Ibid, iii.
204 Saiyad Abul Hosen, *Moslem Patākā* (Calcutta: Hasen & Kashem & Co), 456.
205 Ibid, 145.
206 Ibid, 145, 442.
207 Ibid, 456.

Afterword

300 Karbalas and Beyond[1]

My aim in this book has been to trace the emergence and growth of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* in Bengal in the wake of territorial nationalism in South Asia, a development which facilitated the consolidation of the Bengali Muslims as a community entrenched in Islamic reformist ethos. Looking at the Bengali Muslim public sphere between the late-19th and early-20th centuries allows us to observe linguistic choices and imaginations of collective identity and literary modernity beyond the unilinear trajectory of the idea of nation as a geopolitical territory. *Jātīẏa sāhitya* emerged in the 1880s, through the active efforts of the new generation of reformist *ulama* and literati who built a substantial corpus of literary material in standardised Sanskritised Bangla. They did so by producing translations of the Qur'an and the *hadis* repertoire, volumes of *sharī'ati* discourses, behavioural manuals and *adab* tracts, modern generic expositions like history and biography and a whole range of other prose and lyrical genres. These authors, with their multilingual exposure to Islamic scriptural genres and modern literary poetics available in the Hindu nationalist and Brahmo literary spheres, envisaged integral links between religious reformist sensibilities and literary modernity. Through the production and circulation of new genres in an expanding standardised print culture linked to periodicals and the *anjumans*, *jātīẏa sāhitya* ushered in a paradigmatic shift in the Bengali Muslim public sphere. *Reclaiming Karbala: Nation, Religion and Literature of the Bengali Muslims* traces how Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* began and then evolved as a complex response to Orientalists, Christian missionaries, the Urdu-speaking Muslim elite, and Brahmo and Hindu intelligentsia. It shows how Muslim authors strategically appropriated, negotiated with or rejected thematic and generic-linguistic elements of those discourses in order to create their own *jātīẏa sāhitya* to uphold the superior values and past glories of Islam. Unlike Bengali Hindus, for whom loss was based on a territorial racial binary relationship between "us" and "them," for the Muslims the sense of loss was multi-temporal and multi-spatial, relatively complex to recover from. For a community, with the tripartite pulls of pan-Islamic, national and regional dimensions, the logic of the recovery of an imagined homeland called "*Bhāratvarsha*" through a singular territorial national identification

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in the Hindu rhetoric, could not apply. Additionally, the Bengali Muslims had to counter the derogatory representation of Muslims in the discourses of the Orientalist, Christian missionaries and Hindu nationalists through their *jātīẏa sāhitya*. They did this by collating, interpreting and appropriating Islamic themes from multilingual literary sources and from multiple spaces and times. Such multi-temporal and multi-spatial connections with Islamic themes made the imagination of the Muslim public in the local and the regional context unique.

The experience of the Muslim literary sphere had been transterritorial since its inception in early modern Bengal. But Islamic reform made those connections tangible and logical for the formation of a regional Muslim identity as the modern community of the Prophet, which needed to be connected to the moral attributes of Muhammad, his *sunnah* and the Early Caliphate as the ideal form of governance. To understand how Bengali Muslims crystalised as a community. *Reclaiming Karbala* has traced the dynamic thematic and generic transformations of the literary trope of the battle of Karbala and the *shahādat* of Husayn in three definite phases of Bengali literary history – that of the early modern scribal *puthis* on the battle of Karbala, the Dobhāshī Kārbālā repertoire, and *jātīẏa sāhitya* in Sanskritised Bangla. By engaging with the multiple renditions of the battle of Karbala from scriptural and discursive genres to literary expositions in Sanskritised Bangla, this book has shown that a diachronic history of the renditions of any theme, here specifically that of Karbala, is complex and difficult to inscribe in an evolutionary frame. *Reclaiming Karbala* makes the *jātīẏa sāhitya* written by reformist *ulama* and Muslim literati an integral part of Bengali literary history. Once we view it as such, the normative dissociation between religious writing and modern genres does not stand anymore. Muslim *Jātīẏa sāhitya* offers a much more complex model of literary history than a linear evolutionary growth of Muslim literary modernity from the more orthodox domain of Islamic reform to the liberal and rational interpretation of Islam generally celebrated in the literary endeavours of the Emancipation of Intellect movement (*Buddhi Mukti Andolan*) led by the Muslim Sahitya Samaj. The constant entanglements of reformist religious ethics and poetic-aesthetic strategies, scriptural authentication and generic innovations in the domain of Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* also question the definition of literary modernity through the Euro-centric lens. *Reclaiming Karbala* suggests that such entanglements and tugs between religious indoctrination and poetic allure, through the authors' persuasive use of literary genres to articulate religious ethics and moral prescriptions, expose other definitions of literary modernity in Bengal. Moreover, literary history, with its own nuances and layers, is not equivalent to the history of the nation or processes of nation-making, though literary deliberations are susceptible to and meaningful in the broader context of the changes in the public sphere.

By mapping the literary formations in Dobhāshī and in Sanskritised Bangla, *Reclaiming Karbala* shows the emergence and hegemonic growth of Sunni reformist ideologies that appropriated the battle of Karbala as integral to their Muhammad-centric piety in the context of intra-Islamic reformist polemic. Husayn's *sabr* (patience) and *shahādat* (martyrdom) were celebrated as two basic Islamic ideals at a time when the Muslim masses were taught *farz* (ethical duties) and *adab* (moral action). The crisis in the Early Caliphate that culminated in the battle of Karbala also had to be resolved in order to align the community with the Caliphate, a new transterritorial identification for the Bengali Muslim community since the late-19th century which solidified during the Khilafat Movement in the early 20th century. *Reclaiming Karbala* shows how Sunni reformist authors across generations attempted to resolve this crisis in the Early Caliphate, but also how a Husayn-centric piety was placed at the centre of reformist sensibilities by cancelling out Shīʿī intercessory piety and physical forms of mourning integral to the commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom during Muharram. This book is a detailed study of how the pain felt at the martyrdom of Husayn, performed physically during Muharram, was appropriated and recalibrated as an affective experience in the varied genres of Sunni reformist literature. The process was initiated by early generations of the reformist *ulama* in Dobhāshī literature and consolidated and formalised when Bengali Muslim literati began writing in Sanskritised Bangla. This book has observed the polemical nature of the reformist ethos for its inherent intra-Islamic rivalry, and emphasised the overarching anti-Shīʿa rigidity shared by all reformist groups. No matter how strong the internal debate was among the Sunni reformist groups, their invalidation of Muharram as an Islamic ritual was equally fervent and non-negotiable. The book affirms that the doctrinal debates in the Islamic reformist environment in Bengal across the decades of 19th and 20th centuries over the *right* path to follow the *sharī'a* were also an argument over issues of literary modernity and choice of language in a multilingual context.

Bengali Muslims adopted Sanskritised Bangla of the Hindu nationalists and the Brahmo literati as a medium for writing about Islam in modern genres so as to posit their claims both as Bengalis and as Muslims. They proposed to include Arabic-Persian and Urdu loanwords in Sanskritised Bangla to make it a *miśra* (composite) language, capable of accommodating Islamic religious and cultural experiences. Simultaneously, Bengali Muslims defied the hegemony of Urdu which was strong in the late-19th century in Bengal to reclaim Bangla as their mother tongue, and its Sanskritised standardised register as their public language. However, Muslim literati also considered access to Urdu essential to the Bengali Muslims in order to facilitate their supra-regional and transterritorial mobility. Thus, a practice of multilinguality which included Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bangla and English became the core experience of the regional Muslims, different

from the Hindus whose linguistic experience was tied to a bilingualism of Sanskritised Bangla and English. Bengali Muslim literati offered a two-tier model of Bangla, in which a composite Bangla for the Muslims and a monolithic *tatsama* Bangla for the Hindus would cohabit. But any identification as Muslim, even if entirely based on an inclusive idea of Bengaliness, was reprimanded and rejected by the Hindu intellectuals, who vehemently affirmed a hegemonic (Hindu) public sphere where only the willing self-erasure of the Bengali Muslims as Muslims would make them acceptable as Bengalis. In this journey, the Muslim intelligentsia of Bengal rediscovered folk as a shared consciousness for the Bengali Muslims and included the Dobhāshī repertoire as the popular expression of the Muslims to create a new paradigm of *jātīẏa sāhitya*.

Karbala, a multilingual local and world literature

This study of the Karbala as a literary trope across time and genre, fulfilling different literary and reformist purposes of Bengali Muslims, also offers a revision of the hegemonic definition of Indian literature. This hegemony can be understood via a reading of Aijaz Ahmad, who marks the presence of Brahminical logic and cross-fertilisation among prominent texts/textual traditions across the Indian language-cultures that marginalise the other literary traditions.[2] This exposition of the literary endeavours of regional Muslims, attempted in this book, can be read as responding to Ahmad's call for celebrating Indian literature within "other sorts of histories."[3] No matter how ardently the Muslim *ulama* and literati wanted to familiarise their Hindu neighbours of more than 700 years with Muslim history and culture via literature, Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* remained unfamiliar, at an incommensurable distance from the predominantly Hindu mainstream.

As a new avant-garde literary community formed in Calcutta around *Parichay*, a little magazine published in 1931 by the poet, essayist and critic Sudhindranath Datta (1909–60), based on the idea of trans-border cosmopolitan exchanges with world literature – in French, German and American English - the idea of an identity-based Muslim literature once again appeared essentially parochial. To emphasise the importance of acquainting oneself with *viśwa-sāhitya* (world literature), Datta referred to Rabindranath Tagore's definition of *sāhitya* which Tagore had coined in his pathbreaking lecture "Viśva-Sāhitya" (world literature).[4] Datta ideologically aligned himself with Tagore's explanation of *sāhitya* as "a movement of affect which binds human beings together,"[5] going back to its etymological form *sahita*, meaning *being with*. Resonating with Tagore's idea of the world-making capacity of literature, Datta concluded his preface to *Parichay* in 1931 by saying that no "solitary being" could produce literature, as language was a "collective construction."[6] By solitariness, like Tagore, Datta too indicated a parochial, national, regional idea of literature that claims to be sovereign in itself and embraced instead the idea of literature's capacity of *being in the world*.

A politically dynamic and multilingual community of actors from different echelons of artistic and intellectual practice clustered in Calcutta around *Parichay* by invigorating this idea of transculturalism through translation and critical review of literature in standardised Bangla.[7] In this new radical literary sensibility, which welcomed "the thought-streams of the world, old and new, to flow through the fields of Bengali literature,"[8] one can definitely see the cosmopolitanism of the local.[9] In this literary cosmopolitanism, acquaintance with literatures from other languages beyond territorial confinement was considered to be the virtue of *tulanāmūlak sāhitya* (comparative literature), as put forward by Buddhadeva Bose (1908–74), Datta's collaborator and one of the most influential poets, scholars and critics in the post-Tagore era. In this vision of literature beyond any narrow identitarian discourse of *being with* the world, a conception like "Muslim" *sāhitya* only seemed to recall the boundaries that world literature must transcend. Bose, founder of comparative literature as a pedagogy in India, clearly expressed his vehement defiance against the idea of a Muslim *sāhitya* in his 1942 essay, "Sāhitye Pākistān Asambhab" (Pakistan in Literature is Impossible).[10] In this essay, Bose had suggested that Muslims of Bengal accept mainstream Bangla literature as a neutral field in which an author would survive on talent and literary competence, and not any communitarian privilege.[11] Bose invited Muslim authors to emulate Nazrul and Jasimuddin, who called themselves poets first and then Muslims. As the possibility of the Partition of Bengal started looming large in the early 1940s, Bose encouraged Muslim authors to embrace Bangla language and literature ("*Bangla bhāshā o sāhityake āpan bale*") by breaking the confines of Muslim literature ("*Muslim sāhityer gandī*"). For this, he believed that only the coexistence of the literatures of the Hindus and the Muslims could defy their imminent political-territorial separation that eventually came about in 1947. But Bose neither historicised nor critiqued the inherent Hindu hegemonic polytheistic moorings that had historically diminished the possibility of Muslim participation in Bangla literature. Nor did he challenge the Hindu-dominated literary field and institutions which kept their doors closed to Muslim history and culture as literary tropes. He simply critiqued Bengali Muslims for demanding a Muslim literature to articulate their culture and history, without scrutinising why they needed a separate literature in the first place. He did not question the Hindu literati who had asked Bengali Muslim authors to opt for Urdu as their medium of literary expression if they felt uncomfortable with Hindu-scented ("*Hindu-gandhī*") Bangla. Taking these silences into account, Bose's argument seems to fall short of his own ideas of comparative literature based on the Tagorean ideas of "*sahita*" (being with), when he declares earnestly in the same essay that Hindu authors cannot write about Muslim experiences as they are not familiar with Muslim culture and everyday lives. At a time when the cosmopolitan elite literati of Calcutta opened their arms to embrace the unfamiliar waves of literature from West Europe and North America beyond the confines of national literature and nationalism, frontrunners like Bose were

not self-reflexive enough to see the internal contradictions of their idea of a *viśva* (world) which perennially excluded the Muslims in Bengal.

In the polemics around Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya*, neither the idea of *avant-garde* cosmopolitanism represented by *Parichay* and *Kabita* (editor Buddhadeva Bose, 1935–61), nor the modern rationalism of *Śikhā* or the socialist ideas of *Lāngol* (1925, editor Nazrul Islam), *Sāmyabādī* (1922–25, Khan Bahadur Moinuddin and Mohammed Wajed Ali) could be found. My proposal is that, though bereft of all these elements of cosmopolitanism, the Muslim *jātīẏa* literary field too can be considered a very productive site to understand the pluralities of literary contact, and the coexistence of temporal and spatial multiplicities beyond the linear West-East transactions underpinned by the constant invocation of nation and national literature. A focus on the trope of the Karbala as a transcultural field accommodating a multiplicity of stories that invoke other realities of contact can bring onto the stage of world literature the unacquainted and unfamiliar local or/and transterritorial cultural ethos of the Bengali Muslims. The theme of the battle of Karbala reveals eclectic references, exchanges and movements within Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* – often overlapping with or in contradiction to each other – and brings forth the significance of its location and connections with multilingual experiences across time and space, over and above the binary relationships between the centre and the periphery, the cosmopolitan and the provincial, the global and the local.

The multiple renditions of the battle of Karbala affirm how complex, strategic and poetic such retellings were, within a complex web of multilinguality and multiple deliberations. The purposes of individual authors differed with their varying inclinations to the processes of indoctrination, intra-Islamic orientations and treatment of poetic language and genre. The reception and appropriation of Husayn's *shahādat* attests to multiple contact zones, but only a few emerged from direct connections. This book has tried to stage and trace the literary experiences and expressions of Bengali Muslims playing out on a multilingual local, which has so far largely remained invisible and insignificant in the otherwise prolific histories of cultural nationalism in the Bengali public sphere, and almost entirely unexplored in the existing scholarship on literary modernity, the question of cosmopolitanism in world literature notwithstanding.

The argument can be extended to the end that Muslim *jātīẏa sāhitya* can be an arena of local cosmopolitanism, for its ability to encapsulate multiple genres of literature (translations of the Qur'an, *hadis*, and *tafsir*, the writing of critical annotated volumes of the Qur'an, Islamic history, biographies of the Prophet, his companions and the *ahl al-bayt*, several other genres on Islamic codes and moral values, and creative genres including prose and poetry) without distinguishing between the didactic and the poetic on many occasions. While being locally and temporally produced, the patterns of multilingual experiences place *jātīẏa sāhitya* within different networks of literary circulation, some local and some spatially temporally distant, some defined and some surmised.

The journals and periodicals, facilitating the creative energies of Islamic scholars, literati, poets, historians, folklorists and political figures within an ever-expanding multilingual network, offer viable examples of the cosmopolitanism of the local.

It can be said that Bengali Muslims' multilingualism functioned as the preferred experience of world literature, and not as a unifying factor, but a domain with different degrees of access of the authors to languages and genres.[12] Such differences in access, and different experiences of reading based on aesthetic and/or reformist choices, also underwrite their own hierarchies within, and together constitute the multiple textures of literary activities.

For instance, the 20th-century scholar, essayist and novelist Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914), who was born a Lebanese Christian, worked in Cairo, was a proponent of pan-Arabism, and influenced his contemporaries in Bengal such as Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Akram Khan. Multiple strands of Zaydan's thoughts on Islam were accommodated (Azad) and contested (Khan).

Within the multilingual framework of Bangla, Husayn's *shahādat* in Karbala is part of the aforementioned "significant geographies," of literary reception and adaptation[13] bringing the local to the discourse of world literature in order to explore, critically and creatively, the intriguing and complex histories of Bengali Muslim multilingualism. The cartographies of literary exchange can be placed beyond the normative understanding of difference as under-development, as Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini have illustrated,[14] by interrogating the "simplistic" "grand narrative" of European "centres" and Asian and African "peripheries" articulated in some definitions of world literature.[15] Their proposition of a located approach – the multilingualism of the local – complements David Damrosch's approach to world literature based on global circulation.[16] But as Laachir and Orsini have argued, confirming Damrosch's theory, this circulation never means any easy domestication of texts travelling and dwelling in the local, within significant geographies. In this book, I have attempted to explore various lateral exchanges that the Bengali Muslims imagined and engaged with to de-parochialise the geography/ies of Bangla literature. I have tried here to envisage a methodology to explore the complex polemic of identity formation of the Bengali Muslims from varied perspectives which are locally situated and comparative. For this reason, I did not want to embark on a teleological journey, which bore the risk of subsuming the local into the grand narrative of the *ummah*, the Islamic republic.

Sādhārantaṇtra *and the republic*

The term "sādhārantaṇtra" (the republic) was first used in the Bengali Muslim literary sphere when Muhammad, in Ismail Hossain Siraji's *Mahāśikshā* (1898–1910), consoled a grieving Fatima by saying her son

Husayn had sacrificed his life to save the *sādhārantaṇtra* of Islam.[17] Syed Ameer Ali, in his *A Short History of the Saracens* (1898), had already designated the governance of the Early Caliphate as "The Republic" that had been far superior, spiritually and politically, to the later Umayyad Caliphate.[18] *A Short History of the Saracens* was translated into Bangla by Sheikh Reyazuddin Ahmed as *Ārab Jātir Itihās* (2 vols., 1911 and 1913), and he also used *sādhārantaṇtra* to designate the Early Caliphate.[19] The idea of the Early Caliphate as the Greater Caliphate was one of the central tenets of reformist Islam, and it had come to Bengal through multiple receptions of Wali Allah's thoughts. This idea of the Greater Caliphate, extolled for its spiritual superiority, combined with superior governance, helped Muslims resolve the greatest moral crisis of early Islam, the *shahādat* of Husayn. At the same time, the Republic/Early Caliphate stood as the ideal form of governance – ideated by Muhammad for his *ummah* and actualised by his four companions – which established Islam as a political enterprise unparalleled in the whole world. In the Sunni theorisation of the Caliphate, the shift from the Early to the Umayyad Caliphate was considered as a shift from a "Republican" structure to an Islamic Empire based on a hereditary dynasty – a lesser version of the spiritual-political system sustained by the morally guided Caliphs.

Abdul Bari's comment, in his *Kārbālā Kābya* (1909), that Husayn had sacrificed his life to save his "swadeś," was definitely inspired by the political-poetic rhetoric of the time, influenced by the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1903–08). However, Bari used such poetic licence to actually signify the Early Caliphate, which in his narrative was threatened by the later Umayyad Caliphate.[20] Moulavi Khondakar Golam Ahammad declared explicitly in his *Moslem Jātir Itihās* (1908) that at the hands of Muawiya "*Eslāmer Sādhāraṇ Tantra o Śāsanpraṇālī*" (Islamic Republic and Governance) was completely destroyed.[21] In *Mohārram Kānda* (1912), Mohammad Uddin Ahmed repeated Siraji's Bangla equivalent *sādhārantaṇtra* for Ameer Ali's "Republic" and said that Husayn's *shahādat* defined the end of *sādhārantaṇtra* in Islam, the end of the sovereignty of Mecca and Medina.[22] Addressing his readers, Mohammad Uddin Ahmed remarked that the end of Early Caliphate marked the end of the Republic that Muhammad had established and commented that "if Islamic republican governance had continued rather than breaking up into various Muslim kingdoms, there would not have been such internal fissures in the history of Islam, neither would there be so many Islamic states and kingdoms emerge and collapse one by one worldwide."[23] What Uddin Ahmed had articulated was echoed as a general principle in the literary expressions of *jātīẏa sāhitya* to establish beyond doubt the moral-political superiority of the Early Caliphate. Bengali Muslim authors, by continuing to construct the Early Caliphate in modern terms, affirmed its status as a contemporary system.

The idea of a separate literature co-terminus with the territorial nation state of (East) Pakistan had begun to foreshadow the Bengali Muslim

literary sphere since the mid-1930s, reflected in the commentaries of litterateurs like Abul Mansur Ahmed (politician, editor, author, 1898–1979) and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin (journalist and politician, 1897–1978). This was also discernible in the pages of *Mohāmmadī* and *Azād* (editor, Mohammad Akram Khan). Such separation of literary ideals and linguistic choices in territorial terms solidified after the creation of East Pakistan in 1947. Pak-Bangla became the signature name in literary commentaries and discourses for the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan. Abdul Rashid Khan, author and journalist, in his speech "Pūrba-Pākistāner Ādhunik Kābya-Sāhitya" (Modern Poetry and Literature of East Pakistan) delivered at the Islamic Sanskritik Sammelan (Islamic Cultural Meet) in Dacca in 1952, stated unequivocally that "the literary tradition of East Pakistan should be essentially different from that of West Bengal or a unified Bengal."[24] He stressed the difference in thematic ideals and linguistic registers in the two versions of Bangla prevalent on the two sides of the border. In 1958, in a special issue of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, which carried reports on the Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sammelan (East Pakistan Literary Conference) held in Chittagong earlier that year, Akram Khan in his editorial identified Islamic *tamaddun* (Ur., cosmopolitan style of living) as the essential attribute of the literature of Pak-Bangla. He advocated for its a *swatantra* (autonomous) form that should defy *golāmī* (subservience) to the hegemony of the Hindu literature of West Bengal. He described the journey of Pak-Bangla literature along "*sirātul mostākim*" (Aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, the right path of Islam).[25] Akram Khan was overtly against the celebratory reception of Rabindranath Tagore to create literary ideals for a unified Bengal, irrespective of the latter's literary genius, and held that Bangla literature created by Hindu authors of West Bengal in general was inadequate to bear the Islamic ethos for the Muslims of East Pakistan.[26]

However, the anxiety of the Bengali Muslims over Bangla as their mother tongue did not subside with the formation of East Pakistan as they had imagined it would, as Bangla's relationship with Urdu as the new language of power in East Pakistan grew more and more contentious.[27] Against the dominant and hegemonic employment of Urdu from above by the largely Urdu-speaking administration, the decision that Urdu would not be declared the official language of East Pakistan was taken at the working committee session of the Bangiya Pradeshik Muslim League (BPML) on December 5, 1947. When session members had gathered at the residence of Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin, agitating masses laid siege to the house until the proposal to declare Urdu as the national language of East Pakistan was set aside.[28] In a press declaration, Abul Kasem reported what Mohammad Akram Khan, then-president of the BPML, had stated in his discussion on the issues of language and multilingualism for the Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan in the aforementioned session. He was reported as having said, "East Pakistan was ready to declare insurgence if any language other than Bangla was forcefully declared the

national language of East Pakistan. And he (Khan) announced that he himself was ready to lead that insurgence."[29]

From the increasing unease and counter-arguments that followed, it is not difficult to gauge the dominance of the Urdu lobby in the administration with whom several Bengali Muslim leaders like Akram Khan had had to negotiate or resort to defiance, in order to establish claims over their mother tongue Bangla in East Pakistan.[30] The issues of multilingualism were clearly defined in Akram Khan's proposal on languages for East Pakistan published in his own newspaper *Āzād* (1936–) in December 1947. There, after stating Bangla to be the mother tongue of the Bangla-speaking Muslims of East Pakistan, he proposed Urdu as the compulsory second language for East Pakistan. He unambiguously pointed out the relevance of Urdu in religious, political and social matters, and hence declared the need for Bengali Muslims to learn Urdu. He also proposed that the learning of Bangla be made compulsory for the students of *madrasas* till the intermediate level. The last point of his seven-point proposal emphatically affirmed the necessity of learning English for the empowerment of the Bangla-speaking Muslims of East Pakistan, and strictly declared that in the matter of English, no conservative position would be allowed.[31] In his position, a new pragmatic logic of multilingualism comes out for a new nation.

It is indeed illuminating how the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan from the Two-Nation Theory of religious identities resulted in the linguistic chauvinism of Urdu, compelling Bengali Muslims to recast their focus on Bengaliness as the main axis of identity. *Reclaiming Karbala* secures that Bengaliness, from language reforms to the creation of national-level institutions, all efforts were invested in structuring mother tongue Bangla and preserving all forms of Bengali culture (oral, scribal, folk, performative) across East Pakistan. Along with these efforts, literary and folk conferences were also proposed. Muhammad Akram Khan was a pivotal figure in these initiatives as the president of the Purba-Bangla Bhasha Samiti (East Bengal Language Committee, established in 1949) and the first president of Bangla Academy when it was formed in 1955. The name Bangla Academy was first coined by Muhammad Shahidullah, who was among the first batch of intelligentsia of East Pakistan to articulate the need for a national-level institution for research and documentation of Bangla literature and culture across time and region. Akram Khan wrote an editorial in *Āzād* in April 1952, citing the urgency for an autonomous academy dedicated to Bangla literature and culture. In his editorial, titled "Āmāder Atīt" (Our Past), Akram Khan boldly articulated the most crucial internal conflict in Pakistan that political sovereignty as Muslims may not bring cultural sovereignty for Bengali Muslims.[32] In this editorial, returning to reclaim the *jātīẏa itihās* of the Bengali Muslims, but now in a different context of East Pakistan, Akram Khan invited the authorities of Dacca University in 1952 to form a Bangla Academy. He said at the convention,

> The *tamaddunik* (Islamic cosmopolitanism) life of the Bangla-speaking Muslims of East Pakistan has arrived at a moment of utter crisis. Political rights, by themselves, do not promise the liberation of human society from slavery. Till date, the glorious and vast history of the Bengali Muslims has been shrouded in the darkness of ignorance. To defy any form of slavery, the social and *jātīya* history of the Bengali Muslims has to be retrieved, structured and written. This should be the primary concern of the intelligentsia of East Pakistan now.[33]

The Bhasha Andolan (The Bangla Language Movement) in East Pakistan had broken out earlier that year on February 21, establishing Bengali Muslims' claim over their mother tongue and cultural identity, thus exposing the ethnic-linguistic-regional cleavages within the imagination of a regional Islamic *ummah*/Republic. The Bangla *bhāshā* that had sparked a nationwide movement in 1952, claiming its recognition as the national language of East Pakistan, was again a composite form of Bangla, a form that had continuously been imagined as the mother tongue of Bengali Muslims since the 1880s. Bangla as the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims was finally reclaimed as the marker of political identification and fully owned with the formation of the new nation-state in the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh against West Pakistan. But afterwards, the composite nature of Bangla entered a different dynamic in Bangladesh through deliberate distancing of the intelligentsia from religious authorities and institutions, furthering an incommensurable gap within the Bengali Muslim public sphere in the country.

Husayn: Found and lost and found

Husayn, the beloved grandson of Muhammad, became the ideal figure for all the intra-Islamic reformist groups in the Muslim public sphere, second only to Muhammad, and carried forward the ethico-moral codes of Islam that Muhammad himself had symbolised. The battle of Karbala became the signpost around which other codes of morality associated with quotidian Islamic life and its eschatological issues evolved. Loyalty to Muhammad, his political associates and his family, and especially to the figure of his daughter Fatima, and the duties of women and feminine virtues were all explicated in the narratives of the battle of Karbala. The narratives had the special responsibility of establishing Muhammad as the ideal redeemer of sins on behalf of Muslims, as exemplified in his sacrifice of his grandsons. The charge of Muhammad's sacrifice was carried forward through the figures of Hasan and Husayn, and especially the latter, who are depicted time and again in the pangs of separation from Muhammad after his death, eager to meet him in heaven. The idea that Muhammad was waiting for Hasan and Husayn in heaven, with love and eternal bliss, was again an affective narrative template to reaffirm Muhammad as the saviour of the Muslims in the Hereafter. Before that,

when the most fearsome Day of Judgement came, Muhammad would be the interlocutor between an awe-inspiring Allah and his *ummah*, to save them from the tortures of hell. For the sake of the *ummah*, Muhammad left behind his *sunnah*, as well as Hasan and Husayn, who resembled him in their attributes and virtues.

When Husayn finds his new dwellings in Sunni reformist discourses and popular devotionalism, with Muharram prohibited as an un-Islamic practice, who will carry the *ta'ziyeh* for Husayn? Who will travel till Karbala lamenting his death, or perform his last rites? From the vehemence of the anti-Muharram statements coming from all the Sunni reformist groups over the timeframe covered by this book, up to the 1940s, one can discern the continued presence of the performance of physical lament for Husayn's *shahādat* beyond the Sunni-Shīʿa divide. I have not, in *Reclaiming Karbala*, looked at the performative aspects of Muharram in Bengal over the same period but wish to acknowledge the arguments proposed and disseminated by the Shīʿī *ulama*, such as Syed Sibte Hasan Naqvi (d. 1935) and Syed Ali Naqi Naqvi (1905–88), both from Lucknow, who remained extremely influential in structuring and modernising the commemoration of Muharram in north India. Syed Sibte Hasan Naqvi formalised the rituals by introducing elements such as sermon-preaching, and Syed Ali Naqi Naqvi theorised a Husayn-centric piety, "Husainology."[34] As respondents to the inherent anti-Shīʿa thrust of the Sunni reformist endeavours, both these scholar-clerics attempted to transform a more fluid Shīʿī Muharram commemoration into a structured set of rituals, invigorating the Shīʿi public sphere in north India and in other regions. In Bengal, however, the ripples of such Shīʿī reformist religious mobilisation were hardly felt till the first half of the 20th century.

I end here, only to begin a new quest to understand the Shīʿas of Bengal, and their habitation in a multilingual local that this book did not cover. To walk with them in their Ashura processions, and to arrive at the local Karbalas. As the journey of this book ends here, I embark upon a new search for the many Karbalas in Bengal, to understand how the Shīʿas, with their many forms of mourning, some older and some newly conceived, make places livable for their community, and seek to present themselves as a public on the maps of other significant and multilingual geographies of Bengal in supra-Indian and transterritorial contexts.

Notes

1 This title is inspired by A. K. Ramanujan's essay, "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation," which appeared in *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan*, ed., Vinay Dharwadker (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), where he talked about the internal diversity and contradictions within South Asian traditions, so apparent in the multiple renditions of the themes of Ramayana. Ramanujan exposes a notion of unity

that does not lie in an Ur-text but emerges via the retelling of a theme across multiple times and cultures.

2 Aijaz Ahmad, "'Indian Literature': Notes towards the Definition of a Category," in *Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1993), 244–245.
3 Ahmad, "'Indian Literature'."
4 Rabindranath Tagore, "Viśva-Sāhitya," *Rabindra Racahanābalī*, vol. X (Calcutta: Shiksha Sachib, Government of West Bengal, 1989), 324–333.
5 Supriya Chaudhuri, "Which World, Whose Literature?" *Thesis Eleven* 162, no. 1 (2021): 84.
6 For the preface written by Datta, I have used Supriya Chaudhuri's translation in her "Which World, Whose literature?" 75–93.
7 For a detailed discussion of the "local cosmopolitan" as embodied by the polyglot literati of Bengal in their explorations of the other critical tenets of world literature, see Chaudhuri, "Which World, Whose Literature?"
8 Ibid, 76.
9 This idea has been repeatedly discussed by Francesca Orsini in her theorisation of world literature in multilingual local contexts to emphasise the varied local forms of the cosmopolitanism. Also see Chaudhuri, "Which World, Whose Literature?" 75–93.
10 Buddhadeva Bose, "Sāhitye Pākistān Asambhab," reprinted in *Pūrba Bāṇglār Bhāshā*, ed., Ebadur Rahman (Dhaka: 2007), 372–377.
11 Abul Mansur Ahmed published a counter-argument to Bose's propositions. See, Mohammad Azam, "Ābul Mansur Āhmeded Khoje: Buddhadeva Bose-er saṇge tarker sūtra dhare," *Dhaka Biswabidyalay Patrika* 97 (June 2018), 45–55.
12 Ibid, 5.
13 I have strategically broken off "significant geographies," a concept used to define the significance of the local as a new category of world literature in the article "Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies: For a Ground-up and Located Approach to World Literature," by Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini, *Modern Languages Open* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1–8, accessed July 14, 2019 https://doi.org/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.190
14 Laachir, Marzagora, and Orsini, "Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies," 6.
15 Franco Moretti, "Evolution, World-Systems, Weltliteratur," in *Studying Transcultural Literary History*, ed., Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (Berlin & New York: W. de Gruyter, 2006), 113–121.
16 Laachir, Marzagora, and Orsini, "Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies," 6.
17 Ismail Hosain Siraji, *Mahāśikshā* (Calcutta, 1898–1910).
18 Syed Ameer Ali, *A Short History of the Saracens* (London, Bombay and Calcutta: Macmillan and Co. 1916 [1899]), 20–55.
19 Sheikh Reyazuddin Ahmed, *Ārab Jātir Itihās* (2 vols., 1911 and 1913).
20 Abdul Bari, *Kārbālā Kābya* (Noakhali, 1935 [1912]), 13.
21 Moulavi Khondakar Golam Ahammad, *Moslem Jātir Itihās* (Kolkata, 1908), 89.
22 Mohammad Uddin Ahmed, *Moharram Kānda* (Rangpur: Islam Mission, 1912), 15.
23 Ahmed, *Moharram Kānda*, 16.

24 Quoted in Rezwan Siddique, *Pūrba Bāṃlār Sāṃskritik Saṃghaṭhan o Sāṃskritik Āndolan* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1996), 201.
25 Akram Khan, Editorial to *Māsik Mohāmmadī: Sāhitya Sammelan Saṃkhya* (Asharh 1365 BS [June–July 1958]): 855.
26 Akram Khan, "Rabindranath o Māolānā Āzād," in *Āzād*, May 17, 1961.
27 Mussarat Jabeen, Ali Ameer, Amir Ali Chandio, and Zarina Qasim, "Language Controversy: Impacts on National Politics and Secession of East Pakistan," *South Asian Studies* 25, no. 1 (January–June 2010): 99–124.
28 Bashir al-Helal, *Bhāshā Āndolaner Itihās* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1985), 191.
29 Rezwan Siddique, *Pūrba Bāṃlār Sāṃskritik Saṃgaṭhan*, 53.
30 Afroza Anwary, "Frame Alignment and the Dynamics of the National Language Movement of East Pakistan: 1947–1956," *Journal of Asian History* 45, no. 1/2 (2011): 163–191.
31 Cited in Bashir al-Helal, *Bhāshā Āndolaner Itihās*, 193–194.
32 Mohammad Akram Khan, "Editorial," in *Āzād*, April 18, 1952.
33 Bashir al-Helal, *Bāṃlā Academy'r Itihās* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1986), 10–15.
34 For Naqvi's Husainology, see Justin Jones, "Shīīsm, Humanity and Revolution in Twentieth-Century India," in Justin Jones and Ali Usman Qasmi, eds., *The Shi'a in Modern South Asia: Religion, History and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 80–104.

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