

## THE 'BANGIYO MUSALMAN SAHITYA SAMITI': ITS QUEST FOR CULTURAL AWAKENING OF THE BENGALI MUSLIMS (1911-1947)

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### ABSTRACT

*The fact that deep-seated cultural factors had a great bearing on the mental make-up of the Bengali Muslims and their response and reaction to the Bengal Renaissance has not yet received the attention it deserves. Broadly speaking, this cultural question has two aspects: general and the local or the particular. The general problem is related to the evolution of culture and its nature in the history of Islam through the centuries. This is a long and immensely complex problem of which only the bare outline can be delineated here. In the end of the nineteenth century Bengali Muslim middle class was grew up. As a growing western educated cultural community the Middle class Muslims of Bengal patronised Bengali language, literature and setup various cultural society such as 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti'. It was in this back-drop that the role of the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' in cultural awakening of the Bengali Muslims has to be critically examined in this research article.*

**Keywords:** Bengali Muslims, Muslim Middle class awakening, Muslim Samiti in Bengal, Bengali Muslim Literature.

### **Introduction**

Before initiating any discussion on the role of the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' on the cultural awakening of the Bengali Muslims it is necessary to have a perusal at the reasons for their educational and cultural backwardness and their non-participation in the Bengal renaissance and their late exposure to the western education in colonial Bengal. In all spheres of life and thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Muslims in India (and especially in Bengal) were decidedly less advanced than the Hindus. This backwardness was very much in evidence in

the slow growth of political consciousness and national sentiment among the Muslims. That Indian nationalism and political agitation in the last century had a distinct Hindu element cannot be overlooked. One of the weaknesses of the nationalist movement was that it failed to develop a pan-Indian patriotism. This was perhaps unavoidable and natural under the existing conditions, but nevertheless unfortunate. The explanation is, however, not far to seek... English education, it was not realised by the Muslims, was the most important contributing factor to Indian awakening and political awareness and also to that remarkable cultural revolution in Bengal better known as the Bengal Renaissance. "Thus the Muslims failed to fruitfully participate in the general development which owed its origin to liberal Western thought and science".<sup>1</sup>

Again coming back to the issue of the question of non-participation of the Bengali Muslims in the modern western education, Dr. Safiuddin Joardar has elaborated it by saying, "It is possible that the poverty of the Bengali Muslims militated against their taking to modern education which was quite expensive. It should also be remembered that the Muslims of Bengal were predominantly rural, and it was not easy for them to send their sons to Calcutta to receive modern education."<sup>2</sup>

### **Body Text**

The whole range of Islamic history and civilization may, from the cultural point of view, be divided into three distinct periods : (a) the period of conquest and assimilation (roughly upto the eighth century); (b) the period of elaboration and settlement (upto the 11<sup>th</sup> century), and (c ) the period of stagnation and reaction (since the 12<sup>th</sup> century). While during the two earlier periods (a and b), the community along with developing the religious laws also developed an elasticity of mind which did hesitate to borrow ideas and institutions from other countries – notably Greece, Iran and India, from the twelfth century onwards we come across a different situation marked by an unfriendly attitude towards science, philosophy and creative thinking in general and an obsessive fascination for the study of the hair-splitting theological controversies. Except for Ibn Khaldun, one does not find any notable scientist or philosopher in the world of Islam during this period. Intellectual stagnation was the natural sequel. The curriculum of studies in the educational institutions reflected this change in the temper of the society. <sup>3</sup> The renowned Islamic historian Mehdi Nekosteen observed in his book entitled 'History of Islamic Origins of Western Education, A.D 800-1350', "Religious and literary studies and Arabic language and grammar dominated the subject matter at the

expense of philosophy, science, social studies... The colleges were intolerant of innovations, suspicious of secular studies and aloof from creative scholars".<sup>4</sup>

The life and ideas of the Arab jurist-theologian Taqi-al-Din Taimiya and the activities of the Wahabis would substantiate our foregoing statement.<sup>5</sup> The particular or the local aspect of the cultural question refers to the attitude of the Ulema or the Muslim jurist-theologians towards the history and culture of the countries in which Islam had established itself. The Ulema who often supported the power that be championed the idea of the completeness and self-sufficiency of Islam as a way of life and opposed the acceptance of any strand of local culture which was looked upon as inferior and likely to dilute the true faith. Though the operation of the social dynamics made the mutual interaction between an incoming civilization and the local one inevitable the Ulema were adamant in their refusal to accept this social reality. It is a well known fact that the Islamic mysticism or Sufism as it developed in Bengal was influenced practices of the Hindus and Buddhists. The fundamentalists were not ready to accept this fact.<sup>6</sup> One of them remarked: "Those people (i.e the latter-day mystics) did not have much contact with the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet. It was during their time that the Yoga and tantric ideas of the Hindus, their Siddhants and Vedanta, their monistic ideas and concepts of avatar entered into the Muslim society and corrupted it".<sup>7</sup>

It is due to this unfriendly attitude towards the local culture that the ambivalent attitude of a section of the Bengali Muslims towards the Bengali language is to be attributed. Though in the earlier period persons like Alaol and Daulat Kazi had made significant contributions to the Bengali literature, from the nineteenth century onwards the Muslims began to look upon the language as alien and un-Islamic. It was drummed into the ears of the Muslims that only Arabic, Persian and Urdu were Islamic languages which the Muslims should cultivate. The result was an almost total absence of the Muslims from the intellectual activities through this language in the early part of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Golam Hussain, a Bengali Muslim writer (1873-1964) was puzzled by this attitude of Bengali Muslims and in his book entitled 'Bangadeshiya Hindu Musalman; (1910) remarked: "Ninety nine percent of its (i.e Muslim community's) members never care much to cultivate the Bengali language ... They look upon it something as Greek or Latin so far as any production in that language is concerned... The case is no doubt, very deplorable".<sup>9</sup>

Again we come to know from Prof. Abul Fazal's autobiography that when his father came to know that an article written by him in Bengali had been published, he became very much

angry and advised him to write either in Arabic or Parsian, failing that he was to write in Urdu.<sup>10</sup> Another curious case of this fascination for what was regarded as an Islamic language is related by Syed Murtaza Ali, brother of Syed Mujtaba Ali, the great Bengali litterateur and himself an ex-Divisional Commissioner as well as a writer of some repute, in his reminiscences. He says that when in 1919 Rabindranath Tagore visited Sylhet, organized a meeting in his honour. In that meeting the address of welcome was read out by Syed Abdul Majid in Urdu.<sup>11</sup> This sort of intellectual or cultural back-pull prevented the Bengali Muslims from coming to grips with modernity and with new socio-cultural situations. To try to understand the attitude of the Muslims either towards the English education and new world-view brought by the British or towards the Bengali language and literature without taking this factor into consideration is historically unsound. The view that the poverty of the Muslims and the ungenerous attitude of the government were solely responsible activities is, therefore, not tenable.<sup>12</sup>

One point should be made clear here. The unfriendly attitude of the majority of the Muslims towards modern education did not mean that there was no Muslim representation at all in the new educational activities. There were some Bengali Muslim students in the High English Schools that were being established all over the country to impart modern education, though the number was extremely small.<sup>13</sup>

However for various reasons, not the least of which was a growing awareness that without modern education the Muslims would be lagging behind in the competition for livelihood, the number of Muslim boys receiving modern education began to increase slowly but surely.<sup>14</sup>

Actually as a matter of fact towards the end of the nineteenth century Muslims experienced great heart searching over their failure to accept western education and the consequences ensuing from that failure. Obviously to survive and prosper as a community a renaissance, similar to that achieved by the Hindus, was necessary. The question was how was it to be attained? How were Muslims, on the one hand, to retain their individuality as a religious community, and, on the other, to achieve an equal degree of advancement with the Hindus? It is held by the Bengali Muslims that the educational system in schools and colleges established by the British had by the 1860-s a heavy Hindu-Christian bias. Such education was, orthodox society feared, likely to lead either to conversion to Christianity or to Hinduisation. On the other hand, education in traditional Maktabs and Madrassahs was unlikely to result in employment. In the end, sheer economic necessity made the Muslim community accept

western education. Nevertheless, during the period under study interesting attempts were made to develop a peculiarly Muslim 'national' education upto the University level. This attempt was, however, eventually rendered abortive by a growing awareness of the importance among the Bengali Muslim community of western education and the Bengali language itself. The linguistic burden imposed on Bengali Muslims by this attempt to develop the so-called national Muslim education was increasingly felt to be excessive. Ultimately the wisest path seemed to be to opt merely for English and Bengali.<sup>15</sup>

With the establishment of the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' in 1911, cultural awakening of the Bengali Muslims began to gather momentum. Centering round this institution, Bengali Muslim writers began their first concerted endeavour through their literary pursuits to awaken the Bengali Muslim Society. Therefore, 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' occupied an unique place in the history of the Bengali society and culture. Before the establishment of the 'Buddhi Mukti Andolon's (emancipation of the Intellect Movement) Muslim Sahitya Samaj in Dacca in 1926, Calcutta based 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' was the only remarkable institution whose impact was deeply felt in the Bengali Muslim society.

Commenting on what was uppermost in the mind of the Bengali Muslim writers that led to the establishment of the Sahitya Samiti. Mohammad Shahidulah, the founder Secretary of the Samiti (later on the renowned linguist) wrote in an article, "I have passed the B.A exam in 1910. At that time my contact was established with some energetic youth of Calcutta, among whom were Mohammad Mojammel Haque, Mohammad Yaqub Ali Chaudhuri, Maulavi Ahmad Ali, Moin-ud-din Hossain etc. The most energetic fellow amongst them was Maulavi Mohammad Mojammel Haque. Some fellows amongst us were members of the 'Bangiyo Sahitya Parishad'. Although no distinction was made there between the Hindus and the Muslims, due to our literary poverty, we used to join in its deliberations just like poor relatives attend social functions in the rich men's houses. Therefore, we have felt that we should have a literary organization of our own-of course without severing our contacts with the Bangiyo Sahitya Parishad.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, for the purpose of setting up a literary organization exclusively for the Bengali Muslims, a meeting was held on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1911 through the initiative of the poet Mojammel Haque of Bhola at 9, Antony Bagan Lane, Calcutta, in the house of Maulavi Abdul Rahaman, owner of the binder's establishment named Karim Box Bros. , Maulavi

Abdul Karim, B.A, the then Inspector of the Schools, presided over this meeting. Excepting the above mentioned people, notable one's present in this meeting were Maulavi Mohammad Akram Khan, Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Maulavi Mujibur Rahaman (1869-1940)- the editor of the weekly 'The Musalman', Shaikh Abdur Rahim, Munshi Mohammad Reazuddin Ahmad, poet Mojammel Haque of Shantipur, Mohammad Raoshan Ali Chaudhury – the editor of the Kohinoor etc. Thus 'Bangiyō Musalman Sahitya Samiti' was formed in this meeting with a consensus. Maulavi Abdul Karim, B.A, and Maulavi Mohamad Shahidullah, B.A were elected as the first President and the Secretary respectively this newly formed Sahitya Samiti.<sup>17</sup>

Ever since the establishment of the 'Bengal Academy of Literature' in 1893(This Academy was renamed as 'Bangiyō Sahitya Parishad' on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1894) <sup>18</sup>, some Muslim writers became conscious about this. They have noticed that it is not possible properly to give a concrete shape of the thoughts and imaginations of the Muslim Society, to get an exposure of their literary tradition, to preserve and to publicise it through the Bangiyō Sahitya Parishad. 'Bangiyō Musalman Sahitya Samiti' was born in this backdrop.

The purpose of the establishment of this Samiti was depicted at the time of its birth in the following manner: (1) to discuss about the Bengali literature and its nourishment in the Bengali Muslim Society; (2) to translate religious discussions and historical tracts from the Arabic, Persian and Urdu etc., and their propagation; (3) to collect and preserve old Bengali Muslim literature; (4) to collect the materials for preparing biographical sketches of the Pirs, Muslim Saints and other great men from the different parts of Bengal and its publication; (5) to collect materials for preparing genealogical lists of the historically famous families of the Bengali Muslims, and to collect other materials necessary for the reconstruction of their national history; (6) to encourage the circulation of the periodicals in the Bengali Muslim Society; (7) to encourage the volunteers of literature for the circulation of good books; (8) to establish harmony between Hindus and Muslims in literature; (9) to establish library attached to the 'Samiti' and to maintain a reading room.<sup>19</sup>

The organizers were encouraged at the enthusiasm shown by the Muslims for the Bangiyō Musalman Sahitya Samiti. Within a few years they had arranged quite a number of literary meetings and they also arranged to publish a literary organ of the Samiti. The first annual conference of this Sahitya Samiti was held in 1912. Simultaneously through the initiative of the Sahitya Samiti the first conference of the 'Bangiyō Musalman Sahitya Sammelan' was

held at the Laek Jubilee Institution, Calcutta(29, Mirzapur Street), in which Maulavi Ekinuddin Ahmad of Dinajpur presided. In the meantime, after passing the B.L Examination in the beginning of the year 1914, Mohammad Shahidullah took the job of a teacher in the Sitakund High English School, Chittagong. Therefore due to his absence from Calcutta, the work of the Samiti was temporarily stopped.

Thereafter, a general meeting of the Samiti was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1915 at the Islam Mission Hall in 19, Upper Circular Road, in which Khan Bahadur Maulavi Ahsanullah, Additional Inspector of the Schools, Presidency Division presided. The resignation letter of Mohammad Shahidullah was accepted in this meeting and in his place poet Mojammel Haque of Bhola was nominated as the next Secretary. However, second annual general conference of the Sahitya Sammelan could not be held for a long time because he also went away from Calcutta after sometime. Anyway after the Secretary's return to Calcutta, the second annual conference of the Sahtya Sammelan was held on 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1917 at the Muslim Institute, Calcutta. Mohammad Shahiddullah, M.A, B.L (later on the famous linguist) presided over this conference. <sup>20</sup> The third annual conference of the Sahitya Sammelan was held on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1918 at Chittagong, where Mohammad Akram Khan presided. Munshi Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad (1859-1953) was the President of the Reception Committee in that conference.

Then about ten years after the third conference, the next conference of the Sahitya Sammelan was held. It was because Sahitya Samiti had to face a lot of troubles in the meantime. Then Kazi Imdadul Haque, the litterateur, was transferred to Calcutta as the Headmaster of the Training School. In fact, after his arrival in Calcutta there was a fresh lease of life in the activities of the Samiti. Then in the newly constituted executive body's second meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1918, it was decided to publish regularly a quarterly journal of the Samiti. On the advice of the Samiti's President Maulavi Abdul Karim, the proposed quarterly was named as the "Bangiyoy Musalman Sahitya Patrika". The following six members were appointed in the managing committee of the journal: Kazi Imdadul Haque (President), Mohammad Shahidullah and Mohammad Mojammel Haque)journal's joint editors), Moihammad Reazuddin Ahmad, Moin-ud-din Hossaeen and Mujaffar Ahmad. In April, 1918(Bausakh, 1326 B.S) the first issue of the Bangiyoy Musalman Sahitya Patrika came out.

After a short while, Mohammad Shahidullah joined as a research Scholar in the Calcutta University on 15<sup>th</sup> June, under Dr. Dinendrachandra Sen on Sarat Kumar Lahiry

Fellowship. After coming to Calcutta, he took the prime responsibility in editing the journal. On that capacity he carried on the work of the journal till its third year (1327 B.S).<sup>21</sup> However after the foundation of the Dacca University in 1921, he went there on June '21 as the Lecturer in Bengali and Sanskrit departments. Thereafter Mohammad Mojammel Haque took the sole responsibility of editing the journal from its fourth year (1328 B.S). However, after the publication of the sixth year's second issue, the journal had to be closed down. At different times its publishers were Abu Lohani (1892- 1929), poet Sahadat Hossain (1893-1953), Mujaffar Ahmed (1889-1973) and Dr. Lufar Rahaman.

Mujaffar Ahmad and poet Nazrul Islam's association with the Samiti heralded a glorious chapter in its life. Mujaffar Ahmad was a wholtime worker of the Sahitya Samiti from the end of 1918 to March –April 1920. At that time Nazrul was staying in the 49<sup>th</sup> Bengali Regiment's Headquarter in Karachi. From there his contact was established with the Sahitya Samiti and with Mujaffar Ahmad. While staying in Karachi, a poem of Nazrul entitled Mukti was published in the 'Bangiyio Musalman Sahitya Patrika' (Sraban, 1926). That was his first published poem.<sup>22</sup>

After the total disbandment of the 49<sup>th</sup> Bengali Regiment in March, 1920, Nazrul came to Calcutta. After coming to Calcutta, Nazrul used to stay along with Mujafar Ahmad in the Bangiyio Musalman Sahitya Samiti's office at 32, College Street.<sup>23</sup> AT that time Kazi Abdul Wadud and Mohammad Afjal-ul-Haque, who was one of the proprietors of the Moslem Publishing House, was also staying in the office of the Samiti. It should be noted that Kazi Abdul Wadud's books like Naba-Parjay (1926), Rabindra Kavyapath (1927), 'Samaj O Sahitya' (1934) etc., were published from the Moslem Publishing House. Therefore, it cannot be denied that the Samiti had played a special role in the development of Kazi Abdul Wadud's talent.

Moreover, Kazi Nazrul Islam has acknowledged his indebtedness to the Samiti in the development of his literary talent in the following words: "My association with the Samiti was from a long time. I took shelter at the Samiti's office being called in by some friends. There I got as my friends litterateurs like Mr. Mujaffar Ahmad, Mr. Abdul Kalam Shamsuddin etc. We used to chat with full of life and vigour. We were not like the so-called aristocrats or 'Arosto-kak' (stiffened crow). Any way if the Sahitya Samiti did not give me a shelter at that time, then I did not know where I might have gone. I have settled down initially out of this

attachment. So I did not know whether I would have been able to become a poet without this shelter.”<sup>24</sup>

But soon afterwards Sahitya Samiti showed signs of breaking down. In May, 1921,, Kazi Imdadul Haque went to Dacca after being approached as the first Secretary of the newly constituted Board of Secondary and Higher-Secondary Education, Dacca. Then one of the editors of the journal, Mohammad Shahidullah too went away to Dacca in June '21 after being appointed as a Lecturer in the newly constituted Dacca University. Moreover, in the meantime Mujaffar Ahmad left the Samiti's office having decided to form the Communist Party of India and his friend Nazrul also left it along with him.

So it can be presumed easily what would have been the condition of the Sahitya Samiti in the absence of the above mentioned litterateurs and dedicated workers. Moreover rent payable for the Sahitya Samiti's rented office in College Street was in arrears for a long time. Therefore, the landlord filed a case for the eviction of the Samiti's office in the court, and after getting the court's decree in his favour, he had thrown away all the furnitures, the journals and the books of the Samiti on the street. After collecting these materials from the street, Mohamad Yaqub Ali Chaudury had kept these in a rented room at 43, Mirzapur Street. In that way, he had revived the Sahity Samiti. From this place, 'Sahityik' (Monthly), the second literary organ of the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' was published being edited by Mohammad Yaqub Ali Chaudhuri and Golam Mostapha in January 1927 (Agrahayan, 1333 B.S).

In this regard Syed Imdad Ali wrote in the first issue of the Sahityik: “Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti again began its journey to its way of life. Long live the new life and impulse. Today under a new inspiration they have launched the new monthly 'Sahityik' upon the skeleton of the quarterly 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Patrika', keeping the noble ideal of Islam before it, this rebirth or reawakening of the Samiti was meant for the service of the Bengali language. Therefore by the grace of the Allah this rebirth or this reawakening would be successful and glorious”.<sup>25</sup>

Then after the reconstitution of the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' the fourth conference of the Sahitya Sammelan was held after a long time on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1928 at Basirhat, having presided by Maulana Maniruzzaman Islambadi. The fifth conference of the Sahitya Sammelan was held at Calcutta in December, 1932, in which poet Kaikobad presided. Poet Nazrul Islam inaugurated this conference. Besides the general session, just like the first

conference, in this conference too there were four different sections on Literature, History, Philosophy and Science. Kazi Abdul Wadud, Prof. Jaharul Islam, Prof. Kazem-ud-din Ahmad and Dr. Kudrut-i-Khuda presided respectively in these four sections.

Then seven years after the fifth conference, the sixth conference, the sixth conference of the Sammelan was held on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1939, at the Muslim Institute, Calcutta. The then Prime Minister(Chief Minister) of Bengal, A.K. Fazlul Huq, inaugurated this conference. The General President of this conference was Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad and Khan Bahadur Azizul Haq, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, was the President of the reception committee. The conference was divided into six different sections like Katha Sahitya(Novels and stories), Monan Sahitya (Essays and articles), Sahitya(literature), Sanskriti (culture),Mahila Sahitya(women's literature) and Kavya Sahitya(poetry). Khan Saheb Mohammad Hedaetullah, Kazi Motahar Hossain, S.Wazed Ali, Maulana Mohammaad Akram Khan, Begam Shamsunnahir Mahmud and the poet Sahadat Hossain presided over these six sections respectively. Women's branch of the Conference was held at Sakhawat memorial Girls High School at Lord Sinha Road. Sarojini Naidu(1879-1949) and Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee(1890-1977) participated and delivered lectures in this conference. Poets like Golam Kuddus, Ahsan Habib, Talim Hossain, Nawaz et al. recited their poems in this conference.

In this conference, Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad delivered a speech as a General President which is quoted below:

“I have never acknowledged the barriers of religion and race in literature, to which I still adhere, but I do agree about its diversity. Literature, whether it belongs to the Hindus, Muslims, the Buddhists, the Christians, or to any other race; if it maintains its literary yardstick then it is universal. This universality is born out of the various diversity. In my opinion beauty is an universal virtue, it can be reflected equally in the temples and the mosques alike. The mosques and the temples are only the transparent mediums of expressing the aesthetics. Therefore universal beauty is expressed through both the mediums only in diverse fashions...”<sup>26</sup> He had commented further, “Present literary awakening of the Bengali Muslims is not only the manifestation of progress of this community, but also a great sign of enrichment of the wealth and diversity of the indivisible Bengali literature. Bengali literature is not exclusively that of the Hindus or the Muslims, but it is a combined literature of the both. Is there any doubt that this literature will be only secretarian, if not being

enriched by both the races (means Hindus and the Muslims) by their own religion, education, culture and civilization.”<sup>27</sup>

The Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Sahitya Samiti was held on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1941, at the Muslim Institute, Calcutta, in which poet Nazrul Islam presided. It was inaugurated by the then Premier(Chief Minister) of Bengal, Mr. A.K.Fazlul Huq. The speech delivered by Nazrul as the President of this session is especially memorable, because it was the last speech in Nazrul’s life. In this speech he said, “Why you have nominated this beggar (to preside over this function) in the (silver) Jubilee celebration of the ‘Bangiyu Musalman Sahitya Samiti’, is only known to the supreme Lord of the Universe, the Almighty...?”<sup>28</sup>

He went on to say, “Believe me, I do not come (to this world) to be a poet or, a leader, I have come to shower love and to get love, - since I did not get that love, I am going away forever silently with a heavy heart from this loveless, unsympathetic world.”<sup>29</sup> He again said, “(In this world) There is constant hostility between the Hindus and the Muslims, animosity among the different races(nations), wars and conflict. On the one hand there is abject poverty, on the other hand there is vast amount of wealth of the greedy demons accumulated in the Bank. I have come (to this world) in order to eradicate this inequality and differences. I have established differenceless aesthetic equality all through in my poetry, music and in my life. I have come to forgive those without any beauty (i.e the evil persons) and to crush the demons. Both you and my Ultimate eternal Beauty (i.e the God) are witnesses to my endeavour. (Though) I do not crave for any name and fame, establishment or leadership – still when you lovingly place me on the throne of leadership, I could not check my tears. Although I did not get His (the God’s) order, yet again along with you alike Rudrasundar (the Lord Shiva, the Hindu God and the destroyer of the demons and the evils) I would like to kill these ugly demons.”<sup>30</sup>

The Seventh Conference of the “Bangiyu Musalman Sahitya Sammelan” was held on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1943 at the Islamia College, Calcutta, under the auspices of the Sahitya Samiti. Maulana Akram Khan inaugurated this conference. The General President, President and the Secretary of the reception committee of this conference respectively were Saiyid Emdad Ali, Sir Ahmad Fazlur Rahaman and Mohammad Habibullah Bahar. This conference was divided into different sections like literature, journalism, punthi-liteterature, story-literature, children’s literature, education and culture, science, economics, history etc. The different sectional Presidents respectively were Mohammad Barkatullah(1898-1974), Abul

Kalam Shamsuddin(1897-1978), Dr. Abdul Gaffar Siddiqi (1872-1959), Mahbub-ul-Alam(1898-1981), Begum Sham-sun-nahar Mahmud(1909-1964), Ibrahim Khan(1898-1970) etc. Besides them, notable persons like Hirendranath Mukherjee, Abu Sayid Aiyub(1906-1982), Bishnu De(1909-1982), Chinmohan Sehanobis, Abu Muhammad Habibullah, Shaikh Habibur Rahaman(1890-1961), Shaokat Osman(born 1920), Abbas-ud-din Ahmad (1901-1959), Abdul Moudad(1908-1970) etc., also attended that Conference.

Sir Ahmad Fazlur Rahman as the President of the Reception Committee said in this speech, "... The necessity of the Muslim Sahitya Samiti was felt in order to provide encouragement to the promising Muslim litterateurs and to focus their works before the public. This Samiti is now attaining much success. Promising (Muslim) litterateurs are now-a-days occupying high places in Bengali literature and thereby brightened the image of the society. It is not unknown to you how much this was due to the untiring efforts and the single-minded devotion of this Samiti. The purpose of founding this Samiti was crowned with success. The debt of our society and the Bengali literature is unpayable to its untiring workers."<sup>31</sup>

After the partition of the country in 1947, difficulties arose in the life of the Sahitya Samiti. Most of the members of the Sahitya Samiti were Muslim government servants. After the partition since most of them opted for Pakistan, the main source of income of the Samiti was stopped. Moreover the enriched library which was being managed by the Samiti for a long time also had to suffer a lot due to the negligence of the members at that time. Many books of the library were lost in the midst of the confused state of affairs of the partition. Naturally therefore the office and library of the Samiti had to be closed down. At that time Mohammad Habibullah Bahar and Ainul Haq Khan were joint secretaries of the Samiti. Since Janab Bahar was associated with politics, he had no time to look after the Samiti at that period. Therefore Ainul Haq Khan had to bear the entire responsibility of the Samiti.

After the restoration of normalcy Ainul Haq Khan again tried to revive the Sahtya Samiti along with its library. In 1950, he along with Abul Mansur Ahmad(1898-1979) with the help of Dr. Abul Ahsan, an eminent physician and devoted man of culture of Calcutta relieved the Samiti from all of its financial liabilities. In the changed circumstances, the necessity of changing the name of the Sahitya Samiti was also keenly felt. Regarding this, Ainul Haq Khan said, "There was a discussion already with me, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Dr. Abul Ahsan regarding the management of the Sahitya Samiti. All of us unanimously agreed that in the present condition, it is not possible to run successfully in Calcutta, any unofficial

organization bearing the name of the Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti. However no decision was taken yet regarding a new name to be given.<sup>32</sup> He again said, "After that, again all three of us met in a discussion meeting another day. It was decided after a prolonged discussion that the Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti's name will be changed to Nazrul pathagar. We have also decided that the forth-coming birthday of Nazrul would be celebrated in a befitting manner and in that meeting the establishment of the Nazrul Pathagar would be formally announced."<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1951, Ainul Haq Khan, one of the Secretaries of the Samiti, with the help of the poet Abdul Kadir, made arrangements to celebrate Nazrul's birthday at the Paramount Cinema in the Upper Circular Road, Calcutta. Kazi Abdul Wadud inaugurated this function. Poet Narendra Dev(1889-1971) presided on it. In this function, litterateurs and journalists like Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay(1898-1971), Bibekananda Mukhopadhyay(1904-1993), Sabitri Prasanna Chattopadhyay (1894-1965), Pabitra Gangopadhyay(1893-1974) et al. were present. Thus the Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti after getting a new lease of life is still alive by the name of Nazrul Pathagar (situated in Surya Sen Street, formerly Mirzapur Street).

Mujaffar Ahmad, one of the founders of the Communist Party of India, who was also closely associated with the Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti as its Assistant Secretary and who also worked as its whole-time worker for a couple of years, made some interesting remarks: "Although from its very name, 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti', it might seem to be communal, yet in reality it was not a communal organization. It was not even a rival institution to the Bangiyo Sahitya Parishad either. I was a member of the Bangiyo Sahitya Parishad too. Perhaps once I had become its executive committee member, though I could not recollect it properly. One of the particular aims of the Samiti was to project various facets of the Islamic civilization before the Bengalis especially the Bengali Hindus. Many Bengali Hindus too wanted that particularly from the Muslims."<sup>34</sup> He again said, "Generally educated Bengali Hindus did not know anything particular about the Islamic civilization. It was not that the Bengali Muslims know anything much about it. Moreover, the knowledge of the Hindu neighbours was very limited about the special customs and usages of the Bengali Muslim families. Dr. Sir Devaprasad Sarbadhkary admitted about this one day to me. He said that Muslim writers should write all such novels through which vivid picture of the Muslim families would be projected before the eyes of all. Kazi Imdadul Haq progressed much about

writing such a novel entitled 'Abdullah'. It was quite unfortunate that he could not finish that during his lifetime."<sup>35</sup>

Mujaffar Ahmad also said, "The writings of the Hindu authors were also published in the Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Patrika. Hindu poets and the writers also used to attend the meetings of the Sahitya Samiti. Poet Sasnkamohan Sen and Jogindranath Chattopadhyay, the editor of the 'Hitabadi' (father of Dr. Harindranath Chattopadhyay) and many other delivered lectures in the meetings of the Samiti. Hindu authors donated many of their books (writings) in the Samiti's library. Famous novelist Provat Kumar Mukhopadhyay was not used to donate the books written by him to any library as a rule. However he also donated all of his works to the Samiti's library. Besides this, Sureshchandra Samajpati also used to review the articles published in the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti Patrika' with a lot of interest in his monthly named 'Sahitya'."<sup>36</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Actually Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti was not a communal institution. One of the main aims of this literary society was to encourage and to organize the backward Bengali Muslim litterateurs. Besides that the Samiti also aimed at getting reflected through literature different facets of the Muslim society. It was not possible for the Hindu litterateurs to fulfill this shortcoming of the Bengali literature because their knowledge about the Muslim society was very limited.

It is crystal clear from the history of the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' that this literary institution by organizing the activities of the Muslim writers, inspired them for literary pursuits. 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Patrika' (1918-1923), 'Sahityik' (1927) and the various literary conferences were the different facets of this enterprise. Therefore the role of the 'Bangiyo Musalman Sahitya Samiti' was unique in the cultural awakening of the Bengali Muslims to get the Bengali Muslim society acquainted with the modern life and the world, to free it from the shackles of superstition and to guide it by reason and intellect and to acquaint it with all the aspects of art and culture.

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