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## Pre- Muslim League Muslim Associations of Colonial Bengal: Growth of Muslim Political Separatism from 1877 to 1906.

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### ABSTRACT

The foothold of the All India Muslim League in Dhaka in 1906 CE is marked as a milestone in the development of Muslim separatist politics and the distinct nationalist consciousness in British India. But there are debates regarding the place of origin of Muslim distinct nationalist political consciousness in colonial India. While historiography often highlights the role of the Aligarh Movement and elites Muslim leaders of United Province in this development, this paper argues that pre-Muslim League political associations of Bengal played a foundational and pioneering role in fostering Muslim political consciousness. Beginning in the mid-19th century, some little groups of western-educated, middle-class Muslims of Bengal established some associations which sought to mobilize the Muslim community socially and politically. The associations were engaged with the colonial state, tried to promote English education, and advocated for Muslim representation in regional and national level administration, job preservation in government service and other socio-political rights long prior to emergence of the All India Muslim League. This study explores how the pre- Muslim League Political associations of Colonial Bengal from the early years of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, specifically from 1877 CE laid the ideological and institutional groundwork for Muslim political distinction.

**Introduction:**

The year of the 1906 CE was a milestone in the history of political separatism among the Muslims of Bengal as well as India. That year witnessed the founding of the All-India Muslim League at the soil of Dacca in colonial Bengal. In general, it is said that the inception of the league as a Muslim community centric political organisation was the outcome of the Aligarh movement led by the leaders of U.P Muslims. No doubt, they played a prominent role in the establishment of the All India Muslim league. But some of the Muslim leaders of Bengal like Syed Ameer Ali, Muhammad Eusuf, Nawab Salimulla, Ali chowdhuri, A.K Fazlul Haq and others indirectly and directly had a crucial role in the establishment of the league. Bengal was the largest Muslim populated area than the united province under the colonial rule. U.P Muslims were mere 14 percent of the total population of United Province; on the other hand Bengali Muslims were about 50 percent of the total population of the colonial Bengal. Although, the elite Muslims class of U.P was more educated in traditional education and were economically stabled and politically conscious in a large numbers than the Bengali Muslims. Historian Francis Robinson argued that “for much of the period of the British rule Muslims from both provinces (Punjab and *Bengal*, where the Muslim population were large) contributed little to specifically Muslim politics, their politicians preferring to use other platforms. UP Muslims on the other hand, were at the heart of Muslim separatism. They mainly founded and.... led the organisations which represented the Muslim interest in Indian politics.”<sup>(1)</sup> But, we cannot find any such Muslim political organisations founded by the Muslim politicians of United Province before the foundation of All India National Congress. On the other hand, a small group of English educated and the elite Muslim of Bengal tried to organise in politically the Muslims of Bengal from the middle of the 1870<sup>th</sup>. Even prior to the establishment of the All India National Congress, the Muslim politicians of Bengal, especially of Calcutta and Dhaka founded an all India based political organisation in **1883** which was later designated as *Central National Mahomedan Association*. It is mentionable that in this year the National *Conference* was held in Calcutta called by the Surendranath Banerjee. In the real sense, the Muslim leaders of United Province under the dealership of Syed Ahmed Khan first founded political organisation for opposing the activities of National Congress and to united loyal Muslims in 1889 and 1893 accordingly namely *United Indian Defence Association* and *Mahomedan Anglo Oriental Defence Organisation of Upper India*. But first Muslim political organisation was founded in Bengal at Calcutta in 1877 CE by the Muslim leaders of Bengal under the leadership of Syed Ameer Ali namely National Muhammedan Association.

It is true that the percentage of the upper class Muslims of U P were much educated than the Muslim of the Bengal, as their socio-economical condition was far better than the Bengali Muslim. The middle class



western educated Muslims of U P were also became politically conscious throughout the Aligarh movement. From the 1860<sup>th</sup> they tried come to the close of the British and started to shown their loyalty to the British Raj. In the mean time they tried to organised the western educated and elite Muslims throughout the Aligarh movement and the socio- cultural organisation like Translation Society or Scientific Society of Aligarh (1864), Mahommedan Education Conference (1886) etc. But there are some important questions that are – (a) was there any role of the ‘so called western educated middle class Muslims of Bengal’ to spread the political consciousness or distinct nationalist ideas among the Muslims of Bengal in late 19<sup>th</sup> century? (b) Another related important question is that -what kind of political role played Muslim leaders of Bengal through organising the socio-cultural and the political associations in Bengal? (c) And the last question is that -was the foundation of the All India Muslim League in the soil of Bengal a sudden incident? Or it is the outcome of the political activities of the pre-Muslim league Muslim political associations of Bengal founded by the western educated Muslim leaders of the Bengal?

We can find answers to all these questions by examining the objectives and activities of the pre- Muslim league socio-political associations established by the Muslim leaders of Bengal in late nineteenth century. At that time Calcutta Madrasah College and Hooghly Mohsin College were among the principal Muslim institution of higher education of Bengal. These two institutions facilitated closer co-operation between Muslims and British colonial government .From the beginning of the 1850<sup>th</sup> a small group of Urdu-Persian educated ashraf Muslims and western educated middle class Muslims of Calcutta, Hooghly and Dhaka urged upon Muslims to give up anti-British attitude and to learn English language and modern western education for their material benefit. They blunted the edge of the anti-British aspects of the Faraizi- Wahhabi or jihadi ideology. The Muslim leaders and government job holders of Bengal were also stood against the mutiny of 1857. For their loyalist stand they got encouragement from the Government. On the other hand, this new middle class Muslim of Calcutta were influence by the activities of the pre-Congress socio-cultural and political associations like Bengal British Indian Association (1851), Hindu Mela(1867), Indian League(1875), Indian Associations(1876) founded by the western educated Hindu elite leaders of Bengal. There was a close contract and good relation between Western educated Bengalee Hindu leaders and western Educated contemporary Muslim leaders of calcutta ,such as Surendranath Banerjee and Syed Ameer Ali. No doubt, English educated neo gentry class of the Muslim society of Bengal was very much influence by the cultural and socio-political organizational activities of the English educated Hindu gentry of Calcutta. From 1855 to 1906 the Muslim leaders of Bengal established several organisations in Calcutta Dhaka and various part of Bengal.

**Anjuman-i- Islam of Calcutta (1855):**

Anjuman-i-Islam of Calcutta or Mahommedan Association of Calcutta was the first Muslim association of colonial Bengal founded by the endeavour of some eminent gentry, those who were basically Farsi and Urdu speaking educated elites of the Contemporary Ashraf Muslim society of Bengal. It was established at the initiative of Abdur Rauf. Some English educated Muslim gentry were also associated with this organisation. Some service holders of the Calcutta under company's rule such as Professors, assignee (Quazi of Sadar Adalat of Calcutta) were the chief architect of this society. It was mostly attended by pleaders, government employees and several eminent educated Muslims of Colonial Bengal. On May 6<sup>th</sup> it was founded at Taltala in Calcutta by Abdur Rauf (Head of the Department of Arabic, Calcutta Madrasah), Maulavi Mohammad Wajeh, Abdul Luteef, Maulavi Abdur Samad, Quazi Fazlur Rahman and quazi Abdul Bari (lower of Sarar court of Calcutta) and Muhammed Mazhar (clerk of Calcutta court). Abdur Jubbur, Abdul Salam, Munshi Fazlul karim, Golam Ishaq, Rahmat Ali, Abdul Hamid, Golam Ehayea, Diwar Hossian Ahmad Mirza were the general member of the association. Chief Muhammadan Law officer Fazlur Rahman and Qazi Abdur Bari were elected the president and Vice-president of the association accordingly. The organization was composed exclusively of government officials. For this reason, the Anjuman demonstrated full loyal to the Company's government, and this position was clearly reflect in its programme, which stated that- "No measures should on any occasion be adopted that might in any measure appear inimical to British Government".<sup>(2)</sup>

Anjuman-i-Islam conducted its official work through the Persian and English language. The primary objectives of the organisation were the protection of Muslims and loyal to the British East India Company. It also advised to Muslims not to join the revolt of 1857. The ideas of this association were propagated by its mouthpiece 'Durbeen', a Persian Weekly under the editorship of Abdur Rauf. According to Ramesh Chandra Majumdar the foundation of the Anjuman-i-Islam was the outcome of the divide and rule policy of Sir Halliday and Lord Elenbora. But British Indian Association expresses its pleaser in a resolution on 31 January in 1856 in the incident of the foundation of the Anjuman-i-Islami and welcomed to the Anjuman for the cooperation with it. The organisation was established exclusively to safeguard the interest and advance the overall welfare of the Muslim community of the colonial Bengal. The members of the organization were fully loyal to the British rule. It was existed perhaps till 1863. It had a great role in creating pro-British attitude and organised the educated Muslims in an association. At the first meeting of the organization, Abdur Rauf expressed his views on the need for Muslims of colonial Bengal to establish a separate organisation. He argued that the Western educated Hindus, having more readily recognized the advantages of collective organization than the Muslims, were



able to conduct their affairs with comparatively greater ease and efficiency. In contrast, the deteriorating condition and social backwardness of the Muslim community resulted in the neglect of its interests, largely due to the absence of adequate institutional platforms for their effective expression. It was therefore considered imperative that a substantial number of influential members of the Muslim community should unite within an organization, with the laudable objective of striving for the welfare and advancement of their fellow Muhammadans of Bengal.<sup>(3)</sup>

According to Dr. Jayanti Maitra, in the early phase of the second half of the nineteenth century, under the altered political conditions of colonial rule, the Muslims of Bengal gradually came to realize that they possessed distinct interests and specific grievances. These concerns, they recognized, could neither be adequately articulated nor effectively addressed through the existing associations dominated by Bengali Hindu elites. This realization necessitated the formation of a separate organization, intended to function along parallel, though not antagonistic, lines. Consequently, the educated ashraf Muslim class of Calcutta became conscious of the importance of collective organization and the promotion of their communal interests, and for the first time resolved to establish an association of their own.<sup>(4)</sup>

### **Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta (1863):**

Muhammedan Literary Society of Calcutta was one of the most impressive socio-cultural associations in the second half of the nineteenth century in colonial Bengal founded by the some renowned Muslim educated elite. It was founded in Calcutta on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1863 CE by Abdul Latif (1828-1893, professor of Anglo-Arabic Department of Calcutta Madrasah, Member of Bengal provincial council, fellow of the University of Calcutta, presidency magistrate). He permanently held position of the secretary of the institution. The institution's head office was located at his residence at 16th Taltala Lane in Calcutta. In the first annual session of the society on May 30<sup>th</sup> in 1864 alongside the adoption of bylaws, an executive committee was duly constituted. The society's executive committee consisted of twenty-three members. Out of the twenty-three members of the executive committee, seven including one president and two vice presidents were member of the exiled royal family of Tipu Sultan (Royal house of Mysore) and Nabab Wajid Ali Shah (Royal house of Oudh) then residing in Calcutta. Muhammad Wazih appointed the first president, and , Kazi Abdul Bari and Hafiz Aziz Ahmed appointed the first joint vice-president of the Literary society respectively. At a later session the office of president was assumed by Prince Muhammad Rohimuddin (member of Tipusultan family of Calcutta) and Prince Mirza Jahan Kader Bahadur (member of Nabab wajid Ali Shah royal family of Metiyaborooz) and Prince Muhammad Nasiruddin Hyder (member of Tipusultan family ) were appointed vice-president respectively. In excess



of five hundred educated Muslims from various parts of India joined to the society as ordinary members. Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir Cecil Beadon had also Patronize the Society. The deliberations of its monthly sessions were conducted in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and English. The activities of the organization were twofold; first, to introduce Western ideas to the Muslim community of Bengal through discussions and presentations on subjects related to literature and science; and second, to refine and advance the intellectual outlook of the educated Muslims of Bengal. On the other hand, through the advice to the Government on various issues related to the society and economy. But the society was not strictly a political body rather than a pressure group Its declared purpose was primarily Social and educational.<sup>(5)</sup>

The first session of the Society was presided over by Maulavi Muhammad Wazih at 16 Taltala lanes. The regular session of the society were mainly characterized by exchange of ideas and opinions. It organized regular monthly meetings to deliberate on a wide range of subjects, including science, arts, and contemporary social issues, and to explore ways and means for the expansion of Muslim education. Almost every year, society organized annual fairs cum scholarly social gathering for discussion and presentation of literature, arts and the science at the Town Hall of Calcutta. Several distinguished figures from the city, some of the most eminent scientific personalities of the city, including European and local, attended the event to display fascinating scientific tools and experiments. In 1865 a large gathering was held in the Calcutta Town Hall in which the Lt Governor of Bengal was the chief guest. About two thousand delegates - Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Parshi and Jews - attended at annual programme. Soon the Society became a meeting-place of distinguished scholars and learned persons. Distinguished scholars and intellectuals such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Dr. Kanailal Dey, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, Tarapasanna Roy, and Dr. J. A. P. Kols delivered lectures at various conferences of the Literary Society. The Society endeavored to recover the self-confidence that was rapidly eroding among Muslims and to inaugurate a new phase of social development by promoting modern education and intellectual exchange, thereby seeking to establish a reliable bridge between the government and the Muslim subjects of British Bengal. In the contemporary context of Muslim society in Bengal, such socio-cultural organizations were indispensable, even for the initial purpose of popularizing and disseminating awareness of governmental educational institution.<sup>(6)</sup>

Nabab Abdul Latif, the principal architect of the society emphasized the significance of traditional Islamic studies such as Arabic and Persian within the madrasah education system, while at the same time supporting promotion of English education among Muslim youth through the framework of madrasah -



oriented higher education at Calcutta Madrasah, Hoogly Madrasah, Dhaca Madrasah and Chhattagram Madrasah. The Society sought to impart Western learning to Muslims through the medium of English and to equip them to interact on equal terms with educated Hindus and Englishmen in social life. Nawab Abdull Latif drew the attention of the Government to the basic issues confronting the Muslims. Abdul Latif stated in his autobiography that the purpose of establishing of the society that- “Being fully aware of the prejudice and exclusiveness of the Mahomedan community and anxious to imbue its members with a desire to interest themselves in western learning and progress, and to give them an opportunity for the cultivation of social and intellectual intercourse with the best representative of English and Hindoo society. I founded the Mahomedan Literary society”.<sup>(7)</sup> After Latif's death (1893) the activities and initiative of the society decline

Within a few years Muhammedan Literary Society became a powerful platform for the socio-cultural and intellectual advancement of Muslims of colonial Bengal. From the very beginning Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta wanted to secure the educational and job interest of the Muslims of Bengal. The members of the society had a very close relation with Sir Syed Ahd Khan and the Aligarh movement. The member of this society did not agree to join to any political association like Indian Association or National Mahomedan Association. The Literary Society took an anti-Congress stand. It refused to follow an attitude of uneasiness towards the Government. The society opposed the Jihadi activities and Tarika-i-Muhammadiyah movement against the British Raj. The Society considered to the British India as ‘Dar-ul-Islam’ or ‘Dar-ul-Aman’. In 1870 CE at a conference of the Literary society Maulavi Karamat Ali Jaunpuri said that as the British rule in India did not obstruct the religious observances of Muslims, armed jihad against British authority would be regarded impermissible according to the Islamic jurisprudence. He also declared to the British India as ‘Dar-ul-Islam’ and urged Muslim to acquire scientific knowledge and learn to English language.<sup>(8)</sup>

#### **National Mahomedan Association (1877):**

National Mahomedan Association was the first political association of Colonial Bengal as well as British India. It was founded in Calcutta in 1877 CE by Syed Ameer Ali with the primary objective of promoting by all legitimate and constitutional means the well-being of the Muslims of colonial Bengal as well as British India. According to Syed Ameer Ali's *Memoirs*, the National Mahomedan Association was founded in response to the evident deficiency of political consciousness and training among Indian Muslims, alongside the considerable institutional superiority and influence exercised by contemporary Hindu organizations. Nawab Ameer Ali was the president of the association. In 1883 CE, the



Association was renamed as the Central National Mahommedan Association (C.N.M.A.), a change that signified the expansion of its character into an all-India organization. The Association was the first Western-style modern Muslims political organization not only in Bengal but across the British India. The Association emerged as both the *de facto* and *de jure* representative organization of the Muslim community of British Bengal.<sup>(9)</sup>

Although, Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928) was the chief architect of the National Mohammedan Association; he was supported by contemporary influential figures of Bengal such as Syed Ameer Hossain (Presidency Magistrate), and Prince Muhammad Farooq Shah of the Tipu Sultan family in Calcutta, Delwar Hossain Ahmed Mirza (Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector) Kabiruddin Ahmed, Sirajul Islam (Barrister), Mir Mohammad Ali (Zamindar of Faridpur), and Abul Khair (Professor, Calcutta Madrasa) etc. Besides others modern and western educated Contemporary Muslim elite and middle class individuals of Bengal such as Muhammad Yusuf ( Member of the Bengal Legislative Council) , Abdus Salam, Din Muhammad Ghulam Sarwar (Translator, Calcutta High Court), Syed Muzaffar Hossain, Mirza Muhammad Khalil Siraji , Aga Sheikh Muhammad Jilani , Haji Abdullah Dagman, Zahiruddin Ahmed (Doctor), Mir Latafat Hossain (Mukhtar , Calcutta High Court), Abdul Hasan Khan , Ashraf Uddin Ahmed (Motwali , Hooghly Imambara) , Hakim Muhammad Sajjad, were closely associated with this political organization. Syed Ameer Ali was associated with the activities of this organization for almost 25 years. From the time of its establishment, Syed Ameer Ali was nominated as its secretary and Nawab Ameer Ali was appointed its president and Syed Ameer Hossain as its vice-president. The by-laws of the constitution of this Association were quite clear and written. The constitution of the association was composed of 20 main articles and 18 sub-articles. The organisational framework of the Association was comprehensive, consisting of a President, three Vice-Presidents, a Secretary, Joint Secretaries, and a Treasurer. Its Executive Committee was composed of twenty-four members, and both Muslims and non-Muslims were eligible for admission as honorary as well as ordinary members of the Association. According to established custom, non-Muslims were eligible for election as ordinary members of the Executive Committee; however, they were not entitled to participate in voting on exclusively Muslim matters. Among its honorary members were Babu Shaligram Singh, a prominent landlord of Shahabad, and Babu Ganesh Chunder, a distinguished solicitor of Calcutta. Extending beyond the boundaries of Bengal, the Association included members from different regions of India and even from England. Among its life members was Mrs. A. E. Manning, who served as the Secretary of the National Indian Association. The proceedings of the Association were conducted in both English and the vernacular languages.<sup>(10)</sup>



In this context, it is noteworthy that both the grandfather and the father of Nawab Salimullah, namely Nawab Abdul Ghani and Nawab Khwaja Ahsanullah of the Dhaka Nawab family were closely associated with and extended patronage to the Central National Mohammedan Association. Nawab Abdul Ghani, in particular, provided financial assistance to the Association with the objective of promoting proportional representation of Muslims in the fields of education and employment in accordance with their demographic strength.<sup>(11)</sup> In his memoirs, Syed Ameer Ali recorded that at the time of the formation of the Central National Mohammedan Association, he sought the support of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; however, Sir Syed declined the invitation.<sup>(12)</sup> Nawab Abdul Latif likewise maintained a distance from the activities of the Central National Mohammedan Association.

The annual session of the Central National Mohammedan Association was customarily convened in the month of July. Issues related to the interests of the country and the community were discussed in this meeting. In addition, the minutes of the association and the accounts of income and expenditure were submitted here. In general, the executive committee could cooperate with any political party for all classes of people and especially for Muslims. The executive committee organized booklet distribution, discussions, meetings and lectures to spread the political consciousness among the Muslim community. The branch associations could independently manage local affairs and their own income and expenditure, but in the case of questions of the national issues, especially in the case of sending representatives to the government in the national interest, the approval of the Central Association had to be obtained. Such representatives could be sent only through the Central Association. Its members were generally middle-class people educated in modern Western education, but some of the members of royal family of Tipu sultan and Wajed Ali Shah in Calcutta, some of the members of Dhaka Nawab family and some of the Zamindars of Bengal were also associated with it. Further, many government employees became its members. People from other communities could also become its members. Needless to say that its members were quite politically conscious like the western educated Hindu gentry of Bengal and followed the same constitutional way for protecting the rights the socio-cultural and Eco-political interest of the country and their own community.<sup>(13)</sup>

The National Mohammedan Association (NMA) was explicitly political in character and sought to cultivate political consciousness among Muslims through constitutional and organised means. The Association's objectives were clearly articulated in its first quinquennial report published in 1883, which stated that it had been established "with the object of promoting, by all legitimate and constitutional means, the well-being of the Mahomedans of India. The Association was fundamentally grounded in the principle of unwavering loyalty to the British Crown. Drawing inspiration from the noble traditions of the



past, it sought to function in consonance with Western culture and the progressive currents of the contemporary age. Its overarching objective was the political regeneration of Indian Muslims, to be achieved through moral revitalisation and sustained efforts to secure from the colonial government formal recognition of their legitimate and reasonable demands. According to the historian Ram Gopal, the principal objective of the Association was the political regeneration of Indian Muslims, to be pursued through moral revival and sustained efforts to obtain official recognition from the government for their just and reasonable claims. It undertook campaigns such as the community meeting, prayer- petition, memorandums submission and the welcoming and farewell programme to the British administrators. Like other contemporary Political association founded by the elite Bengalee Bhadrakok , CNMA engaged in petitioning , advising top British officials of the Muslim viewpoint whenever possible and claimed to represent all Indian Muslims. In 1882 CE Association placed an extensive memorial before viceroy Lord Ripon. The association launched a signature movement of 1885 to submit a memorandum to the British Government.<sup>(14)</sup>

Under the tireless leadership of Syed Ameer Ali, the organization rapidly expanded across India. Within a short time 34 branch organizations was opened in various part of India from Madras to Sind. Within five years, its membership rose from 200 to 600, and by its sixth year, the central body had nearly 700 members, while numerous branches across India had their own memberships. Syed Ameer Ali initiated the transformation of the organisation into a pan-Indian body by integrating its various branch associations under the central headquarters in Calcutta. Consequently, in 1883 the organisation's name was revised to the Central National Mohammedan Association (CNMA) to reflect its expanded all-India character. By 1888 CE, around 53 branches were established in various cities and towns such as Karachi, Lahore, Meerut, Lucknow, Surat, Bangalore, Delhi, Badaun , Ajmer , Moha, Allahabad, Cuttack Hooghly, Medinipur, Mymensingh, Comilla, and Rajshahi, among many others. These branches operated actively and some even influenced the formation of other Muslim organizations like the Bombay Anjuman – e - Islam and the Meerut Samiti, which followed the model and ideology of the CNMA.<sup>(15)</sup>

The organisational vitality of the Association weakened subsequent to Ameer Ali's appointment as a judge of the Calcutta High Court in 1890. Internal disputes emerged among the directors of the Association, and by the late 1890s, the Association's activities diminished. After Ameer Ali's retirement in 1904 and permanently settled down in England, his relationship with the members of the Association was almost severed. The CNMA lost much of its leadership and gradually faded. After the foundation of All India Muslim League, the activities of the Association almost ceased to exist. Although, it is known that the Association continued its existence until 1923 in a nominal way.<sup>(16)</sup>



The formation of the NMA was not simply a reaction to British policy but was largely the result of growing political consciousness among Western-educated Muslim intellectuals of Bengal. The political awakening of Hindu society, manifested through organizations like the Hindu Mela, British Indian Association, Indian League and Indian Association, often excluded Muslims or failed to address their backwardness. This marginalization fostered a sense of separatism and competition among Muslim leaders, especially those who saw educated Hindus as job competitors and cultural dominants under British rule.<sup>(6)</sup>

According to Syed Ameer Ali, the educational and political underdevelopment of the Muslim community, along with the absence of representative institutions and leadership, underscored the need for an independent political body. He censured contemporary leaders, including Nawab Abdul Latif and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, for adopting a passive stance in political matters. The National Mahommedan Association was formed with the intention of safeguarding and enhancing the interests of Muslims in colonial Bengal and throughout British India through lawful and constitutional means. The organisation was fundamentally grounded in the principle of strict loyalty to the British Crown. The branches of National Mohammedan Association were established in Hooghly(1883), Midnapore (1884), Rajshahi (1884), Bardwan ,(1887), Rangore (1887) Khunna (1890) and the several part of the East and the West part of the Bengal between 1880<sup>th</sup> to 1890<sup>th</sup>. The Mahommadam Union (1890) and Subarban Mahommadan Association (1891) of Calcutta were also connected with Ameer Ali's Association. In some cases many mofussil associations born out of local needs to work in close cooperation with the Central National Mahommadan Association.<sup>(17)</sup>

### **Samaj Sammeloni Sabha(1879):**

Samaj Sammeloin Sabha was founded in 1879 in Dhaka. This organisation was founded by Obaidulla – Ul- Obaidi-Surawardi, first superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah College. Nabab Ahsanulla of Dacca was one of the patrons of this organisation. Perhaps, it was the first Muslim organisation of East Bengal Founded by the Western educated Muslim of Dhaka. Its principal objectives were the national development of Bengal and the promotion of communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims of Bengal.<sup>(18)</sup>

### **Dhaka Mahommedan Friends Association (1883):**

The Dhaka Mahomedan Friends' Association Was established by the Western educated middle class Muslims gentry of East Bengal in 1883 in Dhaka. The founders of this organization were basically



associated with Dhaka College. The members of the Association were predominantly progressive and reform-minded figures belonging to the urban middle class and the landed elite. It was organised on the model of National Mohammedan Association. This organisation played a vital role in organising middle class Muslim Bengalee intelligentsia of the Eastern part of British Bengal and laid the base for future political solidarity and community improvement. Through organising the several programmes such as debates, lectures and educational discussion the organisation raise the awareness issues regarding the backwardness of the contemporary Muslim society of the Bengal. This association played a significant bridge role between the Muslim elite leaders of Dhaka and the middle class urban Western educated leaders of the East Bengal. According to some of the scholars Dhaka Muhammedan Friends' Association paved the way to the foundation of the large political organisation of Eastern Bengal such as 'Muhammedan Provincial Union' in Dhaka in later. Nabab Abdul Gani and Khwaja Ahsanulla of Dhaka Nawab family, Syed Awlad Hossian, Abdul Karim Gaznavi, Syed Mahmud, Abdul Halim Ghaznavi were actively associated with this Association.<sup>(19)</sup>

### **Provincial Mahommedan Union (1905):**

Provincial Mahommedan Union was perhaps the first eminent political organisation of Eastern Bengal. It was founded on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1905 in Dhaka by some prominent socio-political leaders of Eastern Bengal. Nabab Salimulla was the main architect of this organization. Muhammad Eusuf of Rajshahi, Nawab Ali Chowdhury of Kumilla and Nawab Ali Chowdhury of Dhanbari, barrister A.K.Fazlul Haq of Borishal, Muhammad of Shrihatta, Abdulhai Aktar of Moimanshing and Khondakar Hafizuddin of Bagura were actively associated with this organisation. It was founded in a very crucial political condition while Bengal was going to divide for the first time by Lord Curzon. In fact, it was established on the day the partition of Bengal officially came to effect. This political organization tried to represent itself as the spokesperson for the Muslim of Eastern Bengal and took the initiative to shape public opinion in favor of Curzon's decision regarding the partition of Bengal. On the very day the Partition of Bengal was implemented and the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was constituted, Nawab Salimullah presided over a significant meeting held at Northbrook Hall, attended by Muslim leaders drawn from across East Bengal. This gathering led to the formation of a political organisation known as the *Mahommedan Provincial Union*, which soon emerged as a major political platform articulating the interests and aspirations of separatist Muslim groups in Bengal during this period. Subsequently, Salimullah, in collaboration with his associates, organised a series of public meetings in both the mofussil areas and urban centres with the objective of mobilising public opinion in support of the newly created province.<sup>(20)</sup>

**Muslim All India Confederacy (1906):**

The emergence of the *Muslim All-India Confederacy* was rooted in the growing and distinct political consciousness of Muslim leadership in Bengal. In 1906, against the backdrop of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka conceived a plan to establish an all-Indian Muslim political organisation under the proposed name *Muslim All-India Confederacy*. A detailed outline of this proposal was circulated among the Aligarh leaders who were participating in the Simla deputation on 1 October 1906 for their deliberation. Following discussions, these leaders resolved that the proposal should be further examined at the forthcoming session of the Mahommedan Educational Conference scheduled to be held in Dhaka. The conception and proposal for establishing the *Muslim All-India Confederacy* laid the essential groundwork for the subsequent formation of the *All-India Muslim League*. Following the conclusion of the All-India Mahommedan Educational Conference held at Dhaka, a special meeting of selected delegates was convened on 30 December at Ahsan Manzil under the chairmanship of Nawab Waqar-ul-Mulk. This meeting was specifically held to deliberate upon the draft proposal submitted by Nawab Salimullah concerning the establishment of a separate Muslim political organisation. Nawab Salimullah in his long speech explained the need and objective of the formation of an all India Muslim political party and placed a proposal to that end. The proposal was seconded by Hakim Azmal Khan and was carried in the meeting unanimously. Thus came into being the All India Muslim League party in the soil of Bengal by all Indian Muslim leaders<sup>(21)</sup>

**Conclusion:**

The early Muslim organization such as Muhammedan Literary Society, Anjuman-e- Islami, and other educational-cultural platforms of Bengal helped develop the primary consciousness of the Muslims of Bengal, but they were not political in orientation. But, Ameer Ali's National Muhammedan Association marked the first organized step toward a distinct Muslim political consciousness in Bengal and laid the groundwork for subsequent separatist political developments, including the emergence of the Muslim League in 1906. It can therefore be contended that the emergence of the *All-India Muslim League* in 1906 was neither abrupt nor an isolated development; rather, it represented the culmination of several decades of sustained Muslim political activity in Bengal. Long before the League's formal establishment, Bengal had experienced the gradual emergence and consolidation of a distinct Muslim political consciousness, fostered by a Western-educated middle class that sought to articulate and defend separate Muslim identity and interests within the colonial political framework. Associations like the National Muhammedan Association and Muslim All India Confederacy became crucial platforms for articulating



community-specific demands, promoting modern education, and engaging with the British state. Bengali Muslim leaders such as Syed Ameer Ali, Nawab Abdul Latif, and Nawab Salimullah not only shaped regional Muslim politics but also laid the foundation for distinct Muslim political aspirations. Thus, the roots of Muslim political separatism can be traced to Bengal's unique socio-political conditions and initiatives. From 1877 to 1906 a lot of political branch association of CNMA and other organisation were formed in Bengal by the Muslim leaders and through their political activities the sentiment of separatist political nationalism grew-up in Bengal as well as in India. Dr. Aziz Ahmad has observed that the nature of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Muslim separatism in India was neither revivalist nor exclusivist in character; rather, it was fundamentally co-existential. Between 1867 and 1884, Sir Sayyid consistently advocated Hindu–Muslim amity. However, the introduction of Gladstonian liberal reforms under Lord Ripon, particularly the move towards self-governing institutions in India, altered the political context by raising the prospect of an impending competition for power between Hindus and Muslims. In response to this changing political reality, Sir Syed, in his anti-Congress speeches delivered at Lucknow in 1887 and Meerut in 1888, stressed that Muslim representation in representative institutions should correspond proportionately to their demographic strength. In this sense, he emerged as the first modern Muslim thinker to articulate the notion that Hindus and Muslims constituted two distinct nations within India.<sup>(22)</sup> But from the very beginning of the establishment of the Central National Mahommdan Association, Syed Ameer Ali, through the activities of his association, consistently promoted and reinforced the concept of Muslim separate nationalism in British Bengal as well as British India. Dr. Jayanti Maitra has similarly argued that the origins of the Muslim separatist movement in India can be traced to Bengal, where its early foundations were laid. She points out that Bengali Muslims, even before their widespread engagement with Western education and considerably earlier than their co-religionists in other regions of India, had begun to recognise both the importance of Western education and the necessity of organising themselves through political associations. Dr. Maitra further observes that Amir Ali was among the earliest Muslim leaders to recognise and articulate the position that, despite the existence of certain common interests shared by all communities, Muslims possessed specific interests that were uniquely their own. Consequently, he argued that it was neither feasible nor desirable for Muslims to subsume their distinct identity within that of any other nationality. Reflecting this conviction in practice, Amir Ali declined to associate himself with Surendranath Banerjea's Indian Association. It was such an attempt that may be regarded as one of the earliest instances of Muslim refusal to participate in a nationalist organisation largely dominated by the Hindu intelligentsia of Bengal.<sup>(23)</sup> It is especially noteworthy and significance that, In 1888, Syed Amir Ali initiated an effort from Western Bengal (Calcutta) to organise



an all-India conference of Muslims; however, this initiative ultimately failed due to the opposition of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Nawab Abdul Latif. Had this conference materialized, the history of the Muslim League would have been anticipated at least twenty years earlier”.<sup>(24)</sup>

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