


BOOK REVIEWS

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Bengal Muslims and colonial education, 1854–1947: A study of curriculum, educational institutions, and communal politics

By Nilanjana Paul, Routledge. 2022. 103 pp., \$120 (Hardback), ISBN 9780367278281

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The impact of British education policy on Muslims in Colonial Bengal is explored in this book. It assesses the student composition and curriculum of major Muslim educational institutions in Calcutta and Dacca in order to demonstrate how they develop an educated Muslim middle class. In *Bengal Muslims and Colonial Education, 1854–1947*, Nilanjana Paul looks at the importance of Muslim leaders like Abdul Latif and Fazlul Huq in the growth of education among Muslims, as well as how British-supported segregation in education increased Muslim concern and separatism. She examines how a conflict of interest between Hindus and Muslims over education and jobs fueled Muslim solidarity and anti-Hindu sentiment, ultimately culminating in the demand for a separate nation. She also looks at Muslim women's experiences in Sakhawat Memorial School, Lady Brabourne College, Eden College, Calcutta, and Dacca Universities during a time when many Brahma and Hindu colleges refused to accept them.

Paul begins by highlighting debates on impact of colonial education in Bengal. She also explains historiography around education Bengal Muslim and Muslim women's education. This book is organized into five chapters flanked by an introduction and a conclusion.

The first chapter examines the controversies surrounding the development of English education in Colonial Bengal to demonstrate how the introduction of English was the first step and means to control subjects, reconstruct colonized society, and create a class of Indians who would function as government agents. Access to education, however, remained limited, as higher caste Hindus attended premium institutions such as the Hindu College. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, elite Muslims worked with the British to obtain a status comparable to that of Hindu bhadraloks (Bengali for the new class of 'gentlefolk' that formed in the Bengal region of the Indian subcontinent during British rule). English classes were instituted in the Madrassas of Calcutta and Dacca. The first chapter offers a thorough examination of how inter-elite communal conflict began with the introduction of English schooling. In the process, the study looks at the increased Muslim demand for higher education and the reservation of seats in government institutions, both of which have exacerbated tensions between the two communities. The research also shows how Islamic learning was popularized among Muslim masses in order to garner support for communal policies.

Chapter 2 begins with the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and explains how Partition affected education policies and, as a result, the Hindu–Muslim relationship in Bengal. Following Partition, there was a considerable increase in the number of educated Muslims in East Bengal who participated in politics, which had previously been dominated by upper caste Hindus. With the expansion of education and the rise of political consciousness, a part of the Muslim intellectuals challenged colonial rule following the reunification of Bengal as an administrative unit in 1911. Nonetheless, both loyalists and anti-loyalists accepted the British offer of reserving seats for Muslims in school, reforming madrasa education, and establishing Dacca University to appease Muslims. The second chapter demonstrates that

the extension of semi-secular education for Muslim masses, seat reservations, and the growing rivalry between Calcutta and Dacca universities could not eliminate the educational disparity between Hindus and Muslims. Religious separatism was aided by educational separatism.

Chapter 3 analyzes how, following a brief time of unity during the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat, followed by the Bengal Pact of 1923, policies to reserve seats in school exacerbated Hindu-Muslim competition. This was also evident in the competition between Calcutta and Dacca Universities. The study highlights the execution of the Rural Primary Education Bill in 1930. As the bill split the relationship between Hindu and Muslim leaders in the legislative assembly, urban Muslim elites and *ulemas* (clerics) galvanized rural Muslims against the oppression of Hindu landlords by giving a communal color to the struggle. The third chapter examines the developing rivalry between Hindus and Muslims over primary and higher education, demonstrating how elite-subaltern struggle over education within the Muslim community transformed into a political conflict against Hindus headed by mainstream Muslim leaders.

Chapter 4 discusses Fazlul Huq's critical role in the development of education among Muslim men and women. Huq opposed loyalist politics and chastised the government for ignoring Muslim education and the interests of the community in general. Nonetheless, Huq advocated for Muslim seats in school and jobs. The study demonstrates that his answers to discriminatory colonial education policies and pedagogy strengthened the concept of separate religious identity by evaluating the ambiguities and limitations of his programs. The demand for a separate nation for Muslims grew, which was linked to improved education, jobs, and freedom from Hindu tyranny.

In Chapter 5, we look at how education has spread among Muslim women in Calcutta and Dacca. This study examines the critical role of educational institutions in the spread of education among Muslim women, demonstrating how institutions such as Sakhawat Memorial and Faizunessa Girls' Schools educated Muslim women, gave them agency, and allowed them to maintain their distinct identity as Muslims at a time when many Brahmo and Hindu schools did not include Muslim women. Furthermore, Muslim women defied the stereotype of a sympathetic educated wife by becoming doctors, professors, and writers, and eventually taking part in the national campaign to gain women's rights. Despite having different organizing ideas and curricula, these independent educational institutes prepared Muslim women to fight for gender equality and break through the walls of orthodox society.

The book is very compelling. It makes an essential contribution to the study of colonial education in India by emphasizing the role of discriminatory colonial education policies and pedagogy in intensifying religious separatism. Scholars and researchers who are interested in modern Indian history, religion, education, partition studies, minority studies, imperialism, colonialism, and South Asian history will find it useful.

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