

A Research Proposal
**British Policy and Reform of Madrasah Education in Bengal
(1780-1947)**

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Introduction: With the inception of British colonial rule in Bengal in 1757 and the subsequent introduction of modern education in the sub-continent, reform in the centuries-ages, traditional *madrasah* education become the hot-seed bed of debates. Now these days this has become the burning issue not only in Bangladesh, but also in South and West Asia, America and Europe. The word “madrasah” is extracted from Arabic language. This word stands for a place or centre for Islamic education, research and teaching. In essence, *madrasah* is a seat of learning which like any school and college, plays a pioneering role in the dissemination of knowledge. Majority of the Muslims in this country regard *madrasah* education as the fundamental education of Islam.. During the Muslim age (1204-1757) *madrasahs* of Bengal, generally were the institutes for traditional Islamic higher education. *Madrasahs* providing lower education were known as *maktabs*, where primary level of education was given on religious basis. During that period *maktabs* and *madrasahs* of Bengal were run privately. At that time, to achieve knowledge was considered by each and every Muslim man and woman to be their religious obligation or the means to satisfy the Creator. During the British period (1757-1947) initiative was taken to bring *madrasah* and *maktab* education under government control and to reform this education system for modernisation. In our research we will observe how sciences and other modern subjects including English were introduced in *madrasah* education system under the British Government. In this research an elaborate picture would be drawn about the achievement in modernisation of *madrasah* education of Bengal. We will also focus on the success achieved in the field of reform and modernisation of *madrasah* education of Bengal with the help of public- private effort and evaluate the extent of its failure. Besides, we also attempt to shed light on the reaction and backlash perceived in the education system and Muslim society during the period.

Outline of Research : During the Middle Ages the Muslim rulers, *amirs* and courtiers, *sufis*, ulema, zamindars or wealthy men of Bengal were devoted to education and they involved themselves in the activities of developments and spread of education, in many ways. As a result, a huge number of *maktab-madrasah* centres of education were instituted in different parts of the country. All these *maktabs* and *madrasahs* used to grow mainly keeping the mosques, places of worship, as their nuclei. According to the Provincial Committee of Bengal of the Indian Education Commission (1882), in the whole country there was no such mosque where education centre had not been established. To keep all these educational institutions i.e. *maktabs-madrasah* operational Muslim rulers, zamindars or noblemen used to donate land free of tax. Since no fee was imposed on the students, all section of people, wealthy or poor, did get a chance to educate their offspring’s.

Medium of instruction was Persian, the then state language. But in higher education Arabic was also taught. Besides, since 17th Century teaching of Urdu was also started. The Muslims of Bengal as well as Indian subcontinent introduced here the *Dars-I*

-*Nizamiyya* [a syllabuses of Nizamiya University at Baghdad] following the pattern of education of their predecessor, the education system in vogue during the period (750-1258) of Khaliphas of Baghdad. But in the eighteenth century, the *Dars-I- Nizamiyya*, introduced by Mulla Nizamuddin(1677-1748) of Lucknow, started to be expanded in place of *Darse Nijamiya* of Baghdad, in the subcontinent. This system of education became popular from Bengal to Peshawar (presently in Pakistan) and in respect of standard the system achieved success. Scottish Missionary William Adam (1799- ?) highly appreciated the standard of Arabic higher education introduced during the Muslim period in this report (1835-1838) and said that the whole of the curriculum of Arabic *madrasah* was incorporated, very precisely, with the research based materials of metaphysic to achieve high quality of knowledge for the students [James Long (ed.), *Adam's Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Behar (1835-1838)*, Calcutta: Home Secretariate Press, 1868, p. 215]. Besides, English scholar General Sleeman highly appreciated higher education of Muslims and observed that the manner in which the advancement of education that happened among the Indian Muslims happened in only a few communities of the world. They are getting their instructions through Arabic and Persian medium as were our students through Greek and Latin (W.H.Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollection of an Indian Official*, Vol.II, London : J. Hatchard & Son, 1893, pp. 270-271).

The process of reform in this country took off in 1757 after the Muslims of Bengal lost their political power to the English East India Company and gradually English and indigenous languages took the place in education system instead of Arabic and Persian. On cessation of political power the Muslim rulers, *amirs*, courtiers and nobles lost the administrative and economic support and as a result the source of income for the *maktabs* and *madrasahs* narrowed and that education system faced great difficulty and was ruined. Downfall of Muslim zamindars and barons was caused due to introduction of various policies of the Company mainly Permanent Settlement and declaration of forfeiture of tax free properties (*lakheraj*) by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 and innumerable *maktabs* and *madrasahs*, consequently closed forever. This is because the Muslim affluent people managed those *madrasahs* mainly depending on the income fetched out of those tax- free lands. In this context, William Hunter (1840-1900), a British civilian, said “Hundreds of ancient families were ruined, and the education system of the Musalmans, which was almost entirely maintained by rent-free grants, received its death-blow”(W.W.Hunter *The Indian Musalmans*, Reprinted from the First Edition, Lahore: 1964. p 139). Under the circumstances it was hard for them to keep running those higher education institutions i.e. *madrasahs* though the Muslims tried and succeeded in keeping alive the primary education of *maktabs* to certain extent.

As the use of Persian language was in existence till 7th March on 1835 in the Law Court it was unavoidable for the Company Government to produce intellectuals in Persian language. Under this condition, in 1780, the Governor General Warren Hastings established the “Calcutta Madrasah” for the first time on its own expenditure based on appeal raised by a group of distinguished Muslims. In 1781 the Company Government took over the governing responsibility of this institution on its own. From this time the reform of *madrasah* education started under the management of the Government. In

1821, the Government introduced the system of examination for the first time. At that time few other *madrasahs* of the country took part in that examination system with a hope to get Government aid and employment. As a result from this point of time *madrasah* education continued to develop in two ways—public and private.

On the other hand, right from the last half of eighteenth century, establishment of private English medium education institutions started in different places of Bengal by the Christian missionaries, Company and indigenous Hindu merchants. In 1817 it was inevitable to establish Hindu College especially because of the increase of interest for learning English among Bengali Hindus. At that time though there was an attempt to introduce English in *madrasah* education in Calcutta Madrasah, it failed because of apathy of Muslim aristocrats and deficiency of proper guardianship on the part of the Government. But at that time the demand for *madrasah* diminished as the use and demand of English were increasing in various fields of the country and society. The necessity of *madrasah* education for government officials ceased when English was declared as the language of law courts in 1835 and as the medium of instruction in place of Persian in 1837. The East India Company in this country wanted to form a servile and docile class from amongst its people, who would only look to their vested interests. During this time tremendous debate and discussions initiated in respect of the future of such education. The Government stopped financial help for *madrasah* education in all levels after it declared English as the medium of instruction and recommendations from different quarters were raised to stop Persian education. Besides, thousands of Muslims youths, having had *madrasah* education, became unemployed after English had become the state language and a psychology of non-cooperation with the Government developed in the mind of those youths.

In 1854, in the Wood's Despatch it was recommended to affiliate the eminent *madrasahs* of the country with the universities, but Calcutta University did not include *madrasah* education in its arena. As a result, *madrasah* education was cornered again and the Muslims were deprived of modern higher education for a long time. During this period no Company government donation was sanctioned for the modernisation of *maktabs* and no effort was made to reform those, though *pathsalas* of Hindus were reformed. Above all, after the Sepoy Mutiny (1857-58) the Calcutta Madrasah was designated by Lt. Governor of Bengal as the breeding ground of mutiny and advocated for its closer. But during this crisis period of the Muslims Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893) raised the necessity of *madrasah* education and placed this demand before the British Government for reformation of this education through the rational discussions held on the various seminars and symposiums in 1867. In this perspective in 1871 Lord Mayo declared a resolution for the uplift of Muslim education in India centrally. The special feature of the resolution in respect of education, declared by the Bengal Government, in 1872-73, was the reform of Muslim education and a decision was taken to reform the *maktabs* and to upgrade the level of government primary schools. But even after that the low standard of *madrasah* education continued to draw widespread attention. In the report (1884-85) of the Director of Public Instruction of Bengal it was stated that the students of *madrasah* hardly got a chance in Government services because of their immaturity in English and Math's. In this respect, loyalty to religion, fondness for

Urdu and Persian and apathy to secular education of the Muslims were made responsible. The Government continued support for *madrasah* education on the plea from Abdul Latif in spite of recommendation made by a section of Muslim leaders including Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928) and Syed Amir Hossain (1843-1912-13) for its discontinuance. In sum, although *madrasah* education was a main subject of discussion of the society in Bengal was during the whole of the nineteenth century, no progress of its reform was achieved.

In the beginning of 20th century, specially after partition of Bengal in 1905, the case of reform of *madrasah* education came forward anew together with an increase of interest among the Muslims to co-operate with the Government in the field of education. At this time a 'Madrasah Reform Committee' was constituted with Abu Nasar Wahid (1872-1953), the then principal of Dacca Madrasah, as its secretary in the first conference of the Eastern Bengal and Assam Provincial Muslim Education Association on 1906. This Committee placed a strong demand to upgrade this education through introduction of modern knowledge and science and other subjects together with English in *maktab* and *madrasah* education. Mainly because of the demand of this committee, in 1914, the British Government introduced the 'New Scheme Madrasah Course' making English compulsory and excluding Persian language with the aim of elevating the *maktabs* and *madrasah* to the standard of modern institutions. Later, the 'New Scheme Madrasah Education' was brought under the control of a university by formation of the 'Islamic Studies Department' in Dacca University, established in 1921. As a result *madrasah* education became under control of modern university education for the first time in Bengal as well as in India. On recognition of New Scheme Course by the Calcutta University, in 1927, these students got a chance to be admitted not only in the Islamic Studies Department of Dacca University but also in other general departments of Calcutta University. Besides, the Muslim Education Committee, formed by the Government in of 1930 and 1938, extended their co-operation in the activities of reform of *madrasah* education. As a result the popularity of English education among the Muslims grew in a big way. According to the Muslim Education Committee (1930) of the Government such popularity had never been seen during the last century (*Report of the Moslem Education Advisory Committee*, Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1934, pp.83-84).

But the Government did not affiliate the Calcutta Madrasah in 'New Scheme Madrasah Course'. Hence the followers (lesser *madrasahs*) of Calcutta Madrasah course were identified as the 'Old Scheme Madrasah'. Besides, there were *madrasahs* that continued to follow the old *Darse Nizamiya* completely financed by private source and they did not follow either the Old or the New Scheme. All these *madrasahs* were designated as 'Kaomi (community) Madrasah'. In modern India a large influential *madrasah* of this kind was first established in Deoband in 1867. That is why all the 'Kaomi Madrasahs' of Bengal used to follow the syllabus of Deobandh Madrasah. This way by the end of the British era mainly three types of aforesaid *madrasah* education were in vogue. As a result various problems were created in the way of true reform of *madrasah* education. In spite of getting momentum of popularity for the 'new scheme' course, a controversy surfaced against the pressure of multi-language study on the students. The followers of 'old scheme' and *kaomi madrasah* criticised the modernity of the 'new scheme'. Patronisation of British Government to a separate education was also

under scrutiny and many believed that these activities of the Government were taken from political motive. In spite of all hindrances the progress of New Scheme course was a matter to be mentioned. As an example, it was evident in the report of the Director of Public Instruction (1934-35 & 1941-42) that in 1934-35 the numbers of new scheme high and junior *madrasahs* recognised by the Bengal Government were 583 and total numbers of students were 57,169. In 1941-42 the numerical figure of *madrasah* increased to 724 and students to 80,540 (*Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1934-1935*, Calcutta Bengal Secretariat Press, 1936, p.27. *Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1941-1942*, Calcutta Bengal Secretariat Press, 1943, p.26). Besides, in 1941, the complete transformation of all the recognised *maktabs* (old and new scheme) of the country into general primary schools by the government was an epoch-making step towards modernisation of *madrasah* education. Simultaneously, the prosperity of old scheme of *madrasah* education survived in a competitive way with the new scheme. The popularity of old scheme was in the rise though the government did not extend any financial assistance to *madrasahs* of the 'old scheme' except Calcutta Madrasah for a long time after introduction of new scheme course. As per report of the Director the numerical figure of old scheme *madrasahs*, followers of Calcutta Madrasah, was 130 and of their students was 10,252 in 1934-35. During 1941-42 the numbers of old scheme *madrasahs* and students were 309 and 22,209, respectively (*Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1934-1935*, p.27. *Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1941-1942*, p.26). Though the detailed statistics of *kaomi madrasah* could not be traced, we may note the establishment,--completely private and unhindered--of Hathazari Madrasah (1901), Patia Madrasah (1910) of Chittagong Kanaighat Madrasah (1904) of Sylhet, Lalbagh and Chawkbazar Madrasah (1931) of Dhaka, Unisia Madrasah (1907) of Brahmanbaria and Gazalia Madrasah (1935) of Bagerhat during the first half of the 20th century.

Therefore, it is evident that during the British era the *madrasah* education of three forms sustained in spite of different hindrances. Introduction of new scheme *madrasah* was an epoch-making due to reform of the Government in the field of *madrasah* education. In this new scheme both types of education, religious and modern, were synthesised and because of this a part of *madrasah* education achieved substantial modernization

Objective of Research: In general, the prime object of this research is to appraise the desires, successes and failures of the British Colonial Government through analysis and evaluation of their role towards reform and modification of *madrasah* education of Bengal during the period under consideration. Side by side, the role of non-Government efforts will be analyzed and evaluated in this connection. The research work shall be organized according to the following system.

- a. To search the historical background in respect of origination and blooming of *madrasah* education in Bengal and Indian subcontinent as well;
- b. To mark the condition and crisis of *madrasah* education in relation to consolidating colonial rule;
- c. To review the education policy of the Government at the start of British rule, and to ascertain the object of establishing Calcutta Madrasah and introduction of English in this *madrasah*.

- d. To ascertain the place of *madrasah* education in modern education introduced by the British Government in 1835. Finding out the points of conflict and resolution between the followers of *madrasah* education system and British education policy.
- e. To review the structure of reform for *madrasah* education introduced by the Government, especially the origin and spread of 'New Scheme Madrasah Course' (1914) and modernisation of *maktab*.
- f. To take account of various aspects of evolution of old scheme and *kaomi madrasahs* and to pin-point the cause of failure on the part of the Government as well as Muslim Society in respect of reform of these *madrasahs*.
- g. To assess the role of the Muslim *ulemas* in the reformation of *madrasah* education in Bengal.
- h. 'Evaluation' of reform of *madrasah* education in advancement of Muslim education and discussion of the influence and reaction of reform of this education on the society and politics.
- i. To discover the real motive of the Government behind patronising *madrasah* education and separate education for the Muslims, whether there was any political evil motive of British Government behind the issue. or was this education helpful for the growth of communalism or Muslim separatism in subcontinent?
- j. Was it necessary for *madrasah* or religious education to present development for human knowledge and the worldly life connection? Is it obstacle to modern education? The object is to find the answer of such questions based on the contemporary source-materials for convincing evidence.

Rationale of Research: During the middle age *madrasah* education was considered to be the essence of education of Muslims of Bengal and this education was inextricably related with their religion.. During the whole British period the subject of probable future of *madrasah* education in reconstruction of education system of Bengal, even of India, was a much discussed issue. In fact regarding this education reform argument and counter arguments continued among the Government, Muslim society or intellectuals of other communities and political personalities in such a manner which had not been experienced for other reform work of the Government. Because of this contemporary intellectuals and Abul Hossain (1897-1938), Professor of Dhaka University at its founding time (1921), designated the problem of Muslim education as national problem of India [Abul Hossain, *Bangali Mosalmaner Sikhsha Samssa* (The Education Problems of Bengali Muslims), Dhaka : Modern Lebrary, 1928, p 23]. So, the government and Muslim society attributed importance most to the reform of *madrasah* education for the progress of education of this country. Besides, as there was no significant progress in reformation and modernisation of *madrasah* education the rise of modern educated middle class in the Muslim society of Bengal was delayed. Specially, in comparison to their neighbouring Hindu society they lagged behind by 60/70 years in socio-economic context. But, in perspective of achieving independence of Bengal or India, the progress of education of the Muslims was very important which was agreed in the report of education (1912-1917) of the Government (*Progress of Education in*

Bengal 1912-13 to 1916-17, Fifth Quinquennial Review, Calcutta : Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918, p 133).

Detailed research is necessary regarding the condition of *madrasah* education of Bengal as a whole during the British period. At present, an extensive discussion is going on even in Bangladesh regarding various problems and reforms of *madrasah* education. Today, the subject of reform of *madrasah* education in Bengal as well as in South Asia is recognised to be the demand of the age in respect of Muslim thoughts-sensibility, epoch-making of activities of modernisation. For, the present world together with Bangladesh thinks that the students educated in *madrasah* are responsible for terrorism; and to some extent it is, of course true. For this reason, *madrasah* education needs reformation for the save of national and international security. Moreover no complete research work has been done, till now, on the proposed subject. There are, however, some published books with some references to the *madrasah* education in Bangladesh. Among them *An Introduction to Islamic Education in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Muhammad Brothers, 1992) by Muhammad Sekandar Ali Ibrahimy; *History of the Traditional Islamic Education in Bengal Down to A.D. 1980* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1983) by A. K.M. Ayub Ali; *Bangladeshe Madrasah Siksha O Samaj Jebane Tar Provab* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 2004) by Md. Abdus Sattar etc are mentionable. But during the period under consideration no detailed description is made available in these books regarding British policy and reform and modernisation of *madrasah* education. Besides, in these analyses very little statements from Government documents and contemporary journals and periodicals have been considered as the primary reference. But in presentation of a documentary research and in implementation of the object of research it is very important to use the dependable sources, which are generally reflected in the contemporary journals and periodicals together with Government documents. It is necessary to keep in consideration that a well-arranged framework for analysis is important in respect of education system of British period to make the *madrasah* education time filling. This is because under the British set-up *madrasah* education was included with University education for the first time. Personalities who are educated from new scheme *madrasahs*, later, offered their leadership in social and political movement in this sub-continent. So the importance and necessity of analysis of *madrasah* education cannot be ignored not only social history of this country but also political background of Bengal. Considering all these aspects, we believe, the proposed research shall be extremely reasonable and time befitting.

Methodology and Source of Research: In this research mainly historical and analytical methodology shall be followed. Moreover philosophical aspects of reform of *madrasah* education together with distinguished features of its structure shall be analysed and reviewed. In the process of analysis of the research we shall take the opinion from eminent scholars. Besides, to make our research most authentic we shall apply various scientific methodologies followed in social and historical research. In respect of source-materials of research we shall mainly consider unpublished official educational proceedings, and annual and five yearly education reports, commission reports regarding *madrasah* education as the primary sources. Besides, this research work shall be completed with the help of various proceedings of official, demo-official/autonomus, and private associations, articles and statements published in

contemporary newspapers and periodicals and writings and statements and opinions of political personalities and intellectuals regarding Muslim education. The above mentioned source-materials abundantly available in India Office Library at London, British Museum Library at London, Bangladesh Secretariat Library, National Archives of Bangladesh, National Library of India, West Bengal Secretariat Library and Archives in Kolkata etc. To obtain facts and we shall also be utilized modern technologies like email, website including reference centres.

To meet the requirement of research tables and forms shall be used. Help of statistical facts and figures regarding education shall also be taken.

Justification of Selecting the Period of Research: Muslim education was initiated in the subcontinent under the care of British Government through foundation of Calcutta Madrasah in 1780. After two years British Government started to bring into play its education policy for the first time by taking the Calcutta Madrasah under its control. That is why we have proposed to fix the initial time for research from that mark (1780). Besides, we decided to fix the end of the period of research up to 1947. Because in the year of 1947 the British rule came to end in Bengal and in the subcontinent as well.

Contribution of Research in National and International Development, Implementation of Project and Development of Human Knowledge: *Madrasah* education in Bangladesh has been reared up as a tradition for almost one thousand years. But most of the students passing from *madrasahs* fail to obtain a good government or any other job of a high value. The reason is almost half of the *madrasah* in our country follow the ancient education system and are supported by non-government funds and boards. There are no arrangements in their institutions to teach their students English, Mathematics, modern science and their education system is not acknowledged by the government. According to the government report at best ten percent of students passing from these institutions get the chance of serving in mosques or related *madrasahs* and their salaries are very poor. The rest ninety percent remain unemployed. Consequently, they fail to present themselves as ideal citizens in the society or in the country, and they can't play any significant role in the development of the nation or of the world. So at present the *madrasah* students of Bengal are getting involved in various types of anti-social activities and a quarter of the intellectuals demand the complete eradication of *madrasah* education in Bangladesh. But we think Muslim students will not accept modern education immediately if the *madrasah* education is eradicated with a suddenness. To the Muslims religious education is more important than that of the neighboring Hindu Sanskrit (*Report on the Progress of Education in Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1907-08 to 1911-12*, Vol. I, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariate Book Depot, 1913, p.133). Noticing this fact British government also did not close the *madrasah* education completely. Actually, subjects of modern science and technology should be included in the curriculum of *madrasah* education so that students can keep pace with the whole world. Then the comparatively standard *madrasahs* may be brought under university control. It is only then that Muslims will remain no longer conservative but will be well educated, liberal, and peaceful religious minded through *madrasah* education. So, for the reforms of present *madrasah* education in Bangladesh it is very

reasonable and, of course, important to examine the modernization of *madrasah* education in the British period and take necessary steps after that.

During the mentioned period introduction of 'New Scheme Madrasah Course' was the most successful step towards reform and progress of Muslim education. This is because through this introduction *madrasah* education was included in University education for the first time in this subcontinent. As a result a huge number of befitting scholars and leaders appeared in the Muslim society who offered their leadership in social and political movement of Bengal and subcontinent as well. But no such responsible and able person was seen from old scheme or *kaomi madrasah*. On the other hand, the students from those kinds of *madrasahs* did not get any employment and proved to be a burden to the society and still it is seen the students of Calcutta Madrasah followers and *kaomi madrasah* became the victims of backwardness. As a result the subject of *madrasah* education becomes the matter of discussion repeatedly in respect of education reform of Bangladesh. But still it is not solved entirely. We shall discuss in details what sort of failures were in the activities of reform of the old *madrasahs* by the Government and Muslim society during the concerned period. Simultaneously it would also be analysed in a broader way what appropriate steps should have been taken to reform *madrasah* education, which could help *madrasah* education to be affiliated to University education. We hope, the result /findings of our research, based on the present reform of education of the country, would suggest the right direction all classes of *madrasahs* of Bangladesh for timely reform. Moreover, the end product of our research shall be able to satisfy the needs of reform of *madrasah* in the subcontinent as well as in the Muslim world. Also we hope effective findings will come out from our research for the present education reform movement and *madrasahs* in Bangladesh will play an important role in the national development and planning programs as well as in the enrichment of human knowledge.

