Bengal Muslims and Colonial Education, 1854-1947: A Study of Curriculum, Educational Institutions, and Communal Politics. Nilanjana Paul. Routledge, 2022. 116 pp. $160. Hardcover ISBN 9780367278281.

The idea of a separate nation-state, as espoused by some elite Muslims of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in British colonial India, leading to the birth of Pakistan in 1947 has received considerable historical attention, but how British-imposed educational policy that aimed to "civilize" the Indian subjects and to fulfill the needs of colonial bureaucracy had contributed to the communal politics that spearheaded the separatist national movement is still an opaque subject. The book, *Bengal Muslims and Colonial Education, 1854-1947,* by Nilanjana Paul is a new addition to the history of the Partition of India that attempts to demystify the intersectionality of colonial education policy, communal identity formation, class and gender politics, and the rise of religious nationalism in undivided Bengal (present-day Bangladesh and West Bengal, India). Two central themes—spread of education among Bengali Muslims and their varied responses to and adoption of English education, especially in the aftermath of Charles Wood's Dispatch of 1854, and the impact of colonial education in strengthening communal solidarity and identity formation—have painstakingly been elaborated in five chapters based on the analysis of historical data excavated from archives, government and school reports, narratives, and case studies. Paul's historical method, as she claims, adopts a multidisciplinary approach and a wider geographical locus that includes not just Bengal's prominent political and cultural centers—Calcutta (Kolkata) and Dacca (Dhaka)—but also the peripheral cities like Chittagong, Comilla, Rajshahi, and Hooghly. Historians of Subaltern Studies may find that Paul's historical writing, resulting from an "elitist" approach which depends heavily on the colonialists and middle-class bourgeoise-nationalists' discourses and narratives, fails to integrate the "voices from the edge," as Gyanendra Pandey (2010) puts it in one of his articles, "Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories." Paul's analysis of class relationship is undergirded on the premise that the middle-class Bengali Muslims—both loyalists and anti-loyalists to the British Raj, many of whom were the products of English education and colonial modernization—mediated and negotiated with the British Raj on behalf of the Bengali masses for their rights and access to education.

The first three chapters of the book are chronologically linked to the historical period, beginning from the mid-nineteenth century when British-imposed English education was introduced and gradually gaining acceptance, among Hindus in particular, to the 1930s, the heyday of divisive communal politics. Chapter four continues the remaining period, from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s, but primarily focuses on education minister Fazlul Huq's role in the spread and reform of education for Bengali Muslims. Chapter five is thematically pertinent, though it does not follow a chronological period, in that it delves into the cases of the avant-garde women who fought for Muslim women's right to education from the early twentieth century.

Colonial education policy that suppressed vernacular language and indigenous education, as evinced in chapter one, transformed the social class in the subcontinent irrevocably. British-imposed English education produced a small group of Muslim middle-class to which, and to Hindu

bhadralok (educated class) as well, Anglicized education and English language were the symbols of upper-class status and "civility." It is important to note that these elite and middle-class Muslims, that included Syed Ahmad Khan, Justice Ameer Ali, and Abdul Latif, by being loyalists to the British Raj failed to realize how divisive colonial education policy defined Muslims and Hindus as two discrete but exclusively religious communities that inadvertently helped the colonizers reinforced the "divide and rule" policy for consolidation of power. After the abolition of Persian in 1835 and the introduction of English education in the late 1850s, the middle-class Muslims had been hit hard thanks to the decline of state support to education and limited employment opportunities. The "Muslim modernists," to borrow a term from Muhammad Qasim Zaman, referring to those Muslims who were trained in Westernized education and sought to adapt Islamic culture and traditions within the changing context of modernization, promoted the restructured colonial education system as a means for uplifting Muslims from their impoverished socio-economic conditions. The British responses to the demands for Muslim education that included foundation of Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College (Aligarh College), a few state-aided madrasas, reform in indigenous education, and inclusion of English into elementary Islamic seats of learning in rural areas had not lessened the educational inequality between elite Muslims and the masses and between Muslims and Hindus; rather, the colonial education produced a group of loyalists Muslim middle-class which supported a separate but religious education for the Muslim masses.

Chapter two interrogates the debates on educational disparity and needs for Muslims in the context of the Partition of Bengal in 1906 that put Muslims and Hindus in two different poles of political spectrum. As Paul convincingly adduced, elite Hindus, those who were against the Partition, opposed British special Muslim education. To some of them, the foundation of a university in Dacca (Dhaka University) would divide the province culturally and undermine the influence of Calcutta University and Presidency College. Oppositional politics of education coalesced with Partition politics deepened the communal divide between Hindus and Muslims. The foundation of new educational institutions, reservation system, and other forms of support had an impact on the gradual but steady increase of educational attainment among Muslims; however, as Paul contends, British policies eventually aided the proliferation of Islamic and "semi-secular" (combination of Islamic and English education) education among Muslims that cemented the ground of political separatism.

The nationalist movement in the 1920s concatenated with the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements led to a brief Hindu-Muslim unity across classes; however, the communal unity did not last long due to the failure of the movements, as depicted in chapter four. British intervention in the political demise of the Sultan of Turkey, whom many Muslims deemed as the Caliph of Islam, exasperated the *ulama* (Islamic learned men) who joined the bandwagon of political resistance against the colonial power by juxtaposing the national and transnational causes of imperialist's encroachments. Ulama's increasing involvement in nationalist politics, in the aftermath of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements, and their role as custodians of Muslim culture and tradition accentuated the demand for separate but communally defined education for

Muslims. In the following chapter, Paul arduously interrogated Fazlul Huq's role as education minister in Bengal by situating his political career in the broader nationalist and communal politics. Unlike the loyalist Muslim modernists, such as Abdul Latif, who were in favor of promoting Anglicized education, Huq—whose political popularity was based on rural peasantry—demanded separate schools and special privileges in education and employment for Muslims. Huq's contribution to the advancement of Muslim education was incontrovertible, but his policies, not immune to electoral and communal politics, could not undermine the "communalization of education" and the politics associated with it.

The thesis that links Muslim education with political separatism overlooks some broader contexts. Educational disparity and impoverished socio-economic conditions certainly aided the infusion of separatist notion among Bengali Muslims, but it was not the prime mover per se. Rather, separatism was an issue for pan-Indian Muslims who were connected as an "imagined community," to borrow Benedict Anderson's famous phrase, irrespective of their linguistic and ethnic origins. The Urdu-speaking elite Muslims of northern India, educated both in Western and Islamic education, played a pivotal role in popularizing the notion of separatism as some historians, such as Paul Brass and Francis Robinson, reveal. How did the notion of separatism of Bengali Muslims intersect with Muslims in other parts of India? Paul's argument does not frame this broader context of political separatism that emerged primarily in response to their minority status, the demise of their pride and heritage as "rulers" of India, the changes brought by colonial intrusion, and to the fear of a growing Hindu dominance.

The argument that reverberates throughout the book—namely, that educational inequality between Muslim and Hindus and Muslims' demand for separate educational policies and institutions eventually heightened the communal consciousness and identity formation—disregards the impact of broader Islamic revivalist-reformist movements. For instance, the *Tariqa-I-Muhammadia* (the path of Muhammad) of Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786-1831), the Faraizi movement of Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840), and the Taiyuni movement of Karamat Ali Jaunpuri (1800-1873) significantly contributed to the formation of a religion-based parochial, rather than broad cultural and linguistic, identity among Bengali Muslims before the proliferation of British-imposed English education. How did the Islamic revivalist-reformist movements heighten the sense of being Muslims? And how was it linked to the demand for a more religious instead of a "secular" education? These questions are left unanswered in the conceptual framing of the book.

Further, ulama's roles in the spread of education and political separatism are far more complex. Ulama in Bengal were connected to the Urdu-speaking elite ulama of northern India who pioneered the foundation and proliferation of various offshoots of Islamic education, such as the Deobandi school of thought, as a means of resistance to colonial education and power. Bengali ulama also founded proto-typed madrasas modeled upon Deobandi and other offshoots since the beginning of the twentieth century. These madrasas functioned independently without interference by the British educational policy. How did ulama associated with these madrasas spread education among Bengali Muslims? According to Paul's thesis, we can argue that more communally focused and religion-based education enhanced the communal divide and political separatism, but we

should also keep in mind that not all ulama supported the political separatism (such as the ulama associated with the Jamiat Ulama-I Hind, which did not support the Pakistan movement). Ulama's roles are also important to understand the debate over Muslim women's education. As Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon's as well as Gain Minault's works reveal that it was ulama rather than Muslim modernists who made the first move for Muslim women's education to make them better companions to their husbands and better Muslims for moral and ethical guides for their children. This aspect is missing in the chapter on women's education, which documented the shift from home-based schooling for Muslim women in elite families to the growing participation in higher education thanks to the noted women reformers like Nawab Faizunnesa Chaudhury and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. Nevertheless, the book's contribution to unmasking the complex inter-relationships among colonial education policy, communal politics, and political separatism would be appealing not just to the historians but also to the scholars and researchers on South Asian studies.

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