

Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

The Arabic word *madrassa* generally has two meanings: in its more common literal and colloquial usage, it simply means “school”; and in its secondary meaning, a *madrassa* is an educational institution offering instruction in Islamic subjects, the Quran, the sayings (*hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and law. *Madrassa*, literally means a place where *Dars* (lesson) is given to students. In Arabic speaking-world, the term applies to all sorts of schools and in countries like Egypt and Lebanon, *madrassa* also refers to any educational institution (state-sponsored, private, secular, or religious). In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, *madrassa* commonly refers to Islamic religious schools. In this thesis, the term *madrassa* refers to Islamic religious schools.

Madrassas are broadly of two types, viz *Qaumi Madrassa* and *Government Madrassa*. *Qaumi Madrassas* are the *madrassas* that are run by the *Qaum* or by the community i.e. the Muslim community. On the other hand *Government madrassas* are the *Madrassas* that are maintained by the Government through its own course, curriculum and funding. *Madrassa* was originally meant to be a purely religio-cultural institution, aimed at preserving and propagating Islamic traditions. It was devoid of any political agenda or ideology. However, in Indian context, the political patronage that they were receiving in pre-British period enabled them to influence policy-making in an advisory role. With the passage of time, *madrassas* lost their sheen and utility. Especially the post-Mughal period saw the waning of *madrassas* as ‘centres of knowledge and excellence’. To make matters worse, even the institution got enmeshed in a vice-like grip of orthodoxy and conservatism, leading to its stagnation and subsequent downfall.

During the British era, although the foundation of *Calcutta Alia Madrassa* in 1781 can be described as the beginning of the modern era of *madrassa* education in Indian sub-continent, its role in awakening Muslim consciousness and encouraging political activism was limited. The *madrassa* movement revived once again with the establishment of Dar-

ul-Ulum at Deoband in 1866. The institute played the dual role of disseminating Islamic knowledge and mobilizing the Indian Muslims to participate in the freedom struggle, for the purpose of expelling the British.¹

Madrassas incited Indian Muslims to maintain their identity and entity as Muslims. It helped the Muslims not only to preserve their Islamic identity but also influenced the Indian culture and made a good synthesis in the form of Indo-Islamic culture. After the colonial occupation, Muslims feared the loss of their Islamic culture, thinking that it would either fall prey to the western culture or merge into the majority. It was the madrassas that emerged as a refuge to protect Islam and Muslim cultures. Manzoor Ahmed in his *Islamic Education: redefinition of aims and methodology*, stated,

“The Deeni madaris in India in the last 200 years have played a role, which has no parallel in history. When the British imperialists occupied this country, they drove away the Muslim not only from the seats of political power but also from other areas of influence. The Christian missionaries mounted a ruthless assault on Islam and the Muslim, in the subcontinent. In those turbulent times, the problem of maintaining and deepening the Islamic identity of the recently converted Muslim masses was a formidable task. And this task fell upon the ill-organized and poor ulama in the country. History bears witness to the creditable manner in which the ulama not only checked the inroads being made by the British masters and Christian missionaries in to the cultural life of Muslims but also prepared a generation of freedom fighters.”²

The long struggle for India’s freedom came to an end with the ‘great’ division of the country in August 1947. In this long movement, the *ulemas* of different madrassas played significant role. Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani, the Rector of Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband and the President of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* stated in his famous treatise “*Hamara Hindustan Aur Uske Fazail*” that according to Islam a true Muslim can and

¹ Farhat Tabassum, *Deoband Ulema’s Movement for Freedom of India*, Manak, New Delhi, 2006, p.42

² Manzoor Ahmed, *Islamic Education: redefinition of aims and methodology*, Genuine Publications & Media, Delhi, pp. 31,32,

should never be disloyal to his country.³ Although a section of *ulemas* in the last two decades of freedom sided with the Muslim League or the Partition Movement in creation of Pakistan basing their stand point on the misinterpretation of Quran⁴ but a good number of *Ulemas* especially of Deobandi *ulemas* significantly participated and also led from the front for the cause of the country's freedom. In fact, if the Revolt of 1857 is considered as the 'First War of India's Independence' the worst sufferers of the Revolt were the *ulemas* of India. Their Movement continued till the very last stage of the Colonial Government. But their roles have not been evaluated considerably, taking into extent the amount of sacrifices made by them. Farhat Tabassum stated,

“A number of *Ulema* who mad significant contribution towards freedom movement have remained in obscurity. Moreover, there has been a trend to brand Muslims as separatists and natural supporters of the Muslim League in toto. The general distrust of the entire Muslim community before and even after the Partition has largely resulted in the segregation of the Muslims from the main stream”.⁵

However, there is no denying the fact that Muslim League popularized the idea that in independent India, Hindus by virtues of their majority would deprive Muslims from their rights and their identity would also be in stake, and so they needed their own homeland.

Partition of India was a momentous event in the history of South Asia. Whether partition was inevitable or was there any alternative, this has been a matter of debate since independence. Partition of India in 1947 was not a sudden event or occurrence. There were forces, elements and agencies which generated the situation that made Partition inevitable. One important factor behind the partition was the communalization of Indian politics; communalists tried to use religion to communalise the common man, religious institution and agencies with the objectives of their communal interests.

³ Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madai, *Hamara Hindustan Aur Uske Fazail*, Al-Jamiat Book Depot, Delhi, p.8

⁴ Farhat Tabassum, p.6

⁵ Ibid, p.1

Eastern Indian politics especially the political situation of Assam and Bengal had been volatile from the very last decade of the 19th century. This part of Indian Sub-continent experienced the first physical division in the year 1905, although this was an internal division. Communal situation began to deteriorate steadily after the partition of Bengal under the British policy of 'Divide and Rule'. Communalization of Indian politics had begun in large scale from 1922-1923 only after the annulment of Khilafat Non Co-Operation Movement, on which both Hindus and Muslim jointly moved against the British.⁶

The Deoband Movement which was started with the foundation of *Dar-ul-Ulum*, Deoband brought a new era in the history of madrassa education in India. It was basically established with the aim to preserve the Islamic values from the corrupting influence of the West particularly British.⁷ The Deoband movement played a vital role in the Muslims' socio-political mobilization and it produced the revolutionary *Ulemas* like Maulana Mehmood-ul-Hasan, Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi, Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani and others.⁸ Between 1911 – 1951, they issued 147,151 *fatwas* that directed and guided the Muslims in their socio-political life.⁹ Even in 1888, Rashid Ahmed Gangohi, the Rector of Dar-ul-Ulum, Deoband opposing Sir Syed Ahmed Khan of Aligarh issued *fatwa* in favour of Muslims political involvement with the Indian National Congress.¹⁰ All India Socio-Religious and Cultural Organization like '*Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind*' were organized in 1919-20 under the initiative of the *ulemas* of Deoband with the objective to uplift the socio-political, economic and educational condition of the Muslims of India. The organization was not actually a political organization, but in the freedom movement of India, their role was not less than any major nationalist political party. Under the Presidentship of Hussain Ahmed Madani the organization assumed political character and

⁶ P. Hardy, *The Muslim of British India*, CUP, New Delhi, 1972, p.190

⁷ B. D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India, Deoband: 1860 -1900*, OUP, New Delhi, 1982, p.93

⁸ Farhat Tabassum, pp.7,8

⁹ P. Hardy, *The Muslim of British India*, CUP, New Delhi, 1972, p.171

¹⁰ Sayed Mohammad Miyan, *Ulema-i-Haq Aur Unke Mujahedana Karname*, Vol.-I, Kutubkhanah-i-Fakhriya, Muradabad, p.101

even participated in the Provincial Election.¹¹ Between 1940 – 1947 the *ulemas* of Deobandi madrassas and the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* vehemently opposed the Partition Movement. Seldom before that had the *Ulemas* taken a stand so contrary to the political instinct of the intellectual elite and the masses of the people.¹² Deobandi Madrassas were established throughout the country including Bengal and Assam. During the physical division of the country these madrassas also actively participated in the areas of operation. Communalists in certain extent succeeded in communalizing the religious institutions in favour of the partition but a good number of Madrassas (Deobandi) actively participated in the movement against the partition of the country.

The Muslim League did not receive the support of the majority of the Indian *ulema*, nor even of the majority of the Indian Muslims, who, in any case, did not have any voice in deciding the political future of the country. The League was led by western-educated Muslims, mainly from the landlord and middle classes, who were largely hostile to the claims of the *ulema*. They tended to see the *ulema* as hopelessly ‘obscurantist’ and as major rivals to their own claims to speak on behalf of all the Muslims of India. They envisioned Pakistan to be a Muslim state, but were opposed to the notion of an Islamic polity.¹³ It was for this that Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, who was a staunch Congress man, left Congress and in 1941 without joining the League, formed a separate organization, ‘*Jama’at-i-Islami*’ as an alternative to both Congress and the Muslim League. His opposition to the League was due to League’s proposed state (Pakistan) of Islamic democratic state and not the ‘*hukumat-i-Ilahiyya*, i.e. Allah’s Kingdom or ‘Islamic State.’¹⁴ The League’s philosophy was not derived from the original Islamic sources, the leaders for the League were the politicians who were ambitious for power. Mr. Jinnah acted as an advocate for the small section of elite Muslims.¹⁵ Islam does not encourage

¹¹ Soon after independence in 1947, the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*, stated that it would no longer play a political role now and in future it would limit its role religious reform and advancement of the rights of Muslims. (*Dastur of Jaiat Ulema-e-Hind*).

¹² Aziz Ahmed, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964*, OUP, Bombay, 1967, p.193

¹³ Yoginder Sikand: ‘The Glories of India: The *Ulema* and Indian Nationalism, January 23, 2008

¹⁴ Irfan Ahmed, ‘Power, Purity and the Vanguard: Educational Ideology of the *Jama’at –i-Islami* of India’, in *Madrasas in South Asia*, Edited by Jamal Malik, Routledge, London, 2008, p.145

¹⁵ Maulana Syed Mohammed Miyan, *Asirane Malta*, Al-Jamiat Book Depot, Delhi, 1976, p.171

separatist notion, it preaches religious harmony, and to render selfless service for the motherland wherever, it may be located.¹⁶

On the other hand, many among the *ulema*, particularly those associated with the Deoband school, were vehemently opposed to the League and its Pakistan scheme. Although these Deobandi *ulema* were thoroughly conservative in religious and social matters, they were unflinching in their commitment to a form of Indian nationalism that transcended religious boundaries. In doing so, they insisted that there was no contradiction between being Muslim and Indian at the same time. When the Muslim League suddenly became popular among the Muslims after 1939-40, several Muslim leaders and *ulemas* Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad warned the Muslims regarding the dangerous plan of the Muslim League. Madani, in his lectures, emphasized the importance of Muslims to fight along with their Hindu brethren for the freedom of the country and also discouraged the Muslims for not coming under the influence of the communal agenda of the Muslim League which according to him would harm the entire community.¹⁷

However, a section of modern and western educated middle class Muslim kept themselves isolated from the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* formed in 1919, and tried to minimize the strength of this organization. They were the supporters of the Muslim League which was formed in 1906. Muslim League had its ideological differences with the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*. In their initial years they were liberal in their activities. Although anti-congress in nature they had never raised the issue for separation of the nation. It was only after 1935 that the idea of different nation for Indian Muslim came in their mind and finally in 1940 they formally demanded a separate nation or Pakistan for Indian Muslim and that resulted in the great division of United India in 1947. It may be mentioned here that in December 1930, Sir Mohammad Iqbal in his Presidential address at the Muslim League Session at Allahabad had stated for a separate state consisting of the Punjab,

¹⁶ Farhat Tabassum, p.142

¹⁷ Maulana Syed Mohammed Miyan, *Asirane Malta*, p.171

North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan.¹⁸ However, he later cleared his stand that his proposed state was just within the Indian Federation. In 1933, for the first time the Muslims, hitherto called a minority community, were called a 'nation' by a Punjabi Muslim, Choudhury Rahmat Ali, an undergraduate of Cambridge, who gave the movement a shape and a form in a pamphlet '*Now or Never*'.¹⁹ He propounded the idea that the Punjab, North Western Frontier Province, Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan should be formed into a separate Muslim nation called Pakistan. This proposal was different from what Dr. Mohammad Iqbal had proposed in 1930 for that amalgamation of those provinces into a single state forming a unit of the All India Federation.²⁰

During the last seven years before India's independence the Muslims of India were divided into two contradictory political groups. One group was led by *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* and its allies including Indian National Congress and stood for united India while the other group led by Muslim League and its allied groups laid their demand for Pakistan by partitioning India. The Madrassas, being the prime mobilizing agency played a significant role in both the partition and anti-partition movement, since the Muslim masses abide by the instructions of Islamic theologians in every step of their life. Consequently the madrassas become the meeting ground of political activities during the last decades of India's independence. The students, teachers as well as the managing authorities of madrassas were involved in the United India versus Pakistan Movement. The Muslim voters who were susceptible to religious views had traditionally looked up to *maulvis, mullahs, pirs* and *shaiks* for guidance. They started listening to the western-educated leadership of the Muslim League and their supporter *Ulemas*, who were organized under the banner of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam*. The provincial election result of 1946 proved the same.²¹

The Deoband leadership, as well as the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*, had its own perceptions regarding the future of the Indian Muslims. It also had misgivings about the

¹⁸ P. Hardy, *The Muslim of British India*, CUP, New Delhi, 1972, p.219

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi quoted in , *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, Asia Pub. House, Bombay, 1963, p.110

²¹ P. Hardy, p.243

far-sightedness of the League leadership. The doctrine of two nations as propounded by the League was never approved of by The *Jamiat*. Since its very inception, it stood unanimously for a “United Indian Nationalism” (*Muttahidah Qawmiyat*). This was the base of all differences between the League and the *Jamiat*. The *Jamiat*’s stand on this fundamental and controversial point was fully explained by Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani, one of its chief spokesmen and for years its president, in his “*Muttahidah Qawmiyat aur Islam*” in the light of Quran and Hadith. In his presidential address at the annual session of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* at Jaunpur (U.P.) in June, 1940, he declared:

“We, the inhabitants of India, in so far as we are Indians, have one thing in common and that is our Indianness which remains unchanged in spite of our religious and cultural differences. As the diversities in our approaches, individual qualities and personal traits and colour and stature do not affect our common humanness, similarly our religious and cultural differences do not interfere with our common associations with our homeland. Therefore, like other ‘millats’ and non-Muslims religio-cultural groups, it is incumbent upon the Muslims to have concern with and struggle for the attainment of national interests and fight against the evils that hamper the country’s progress and prosperity.... This duty which arises out of our common sharing in the happiness and misery of our motherland is obligatory on all. Religious differences, in no case, serve as an impediment in the way of fulfilling this obligation. This is what I mean by the “Muttahidah Qawmiyat”²²

This basic differences between the League and the *Jamiat* subsequently aroused the latter’s vehement opposition to the League’s demand for the division of the country. Deoband became the stronghold of this opposition. Aligarh turned out to be the training centre of the Pakistan Movement. These two major centres of Muslim education in India had, since their very beginning, represented two different trends in the politico-intellectual life of the Indian Muslims. Now, they finally confronted each other in the moulding of the ultimate destiny of the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. Aligarh, at times, did revolt against the British regime, but ultimately, this proved to be just a temporary phase. The party in power was always cautious, and reluctant to take any step

²² Sayyid Muhammad Miyan, *Ulama-i-Haqq*, Vol. - II, pp.137-38

which would antagonize the British imperialists.²³ A small section of the Deoband School was not in favour of joining the Congress. Maulana Ashraf Ali Tanawi was the chief spokesman of this group. Later Maulana Shabbir Ahmed Usmani, a well disciple of Sheikhul Hind Maulana Mahmudul Hasan, an eminent *alim* of good repute also joined the Muslim League. In 1945-46 under the patronage of Mr. Jinnah, who realized the importance of the *ulemas* amongst the rural masses, he organized '*Jamiat Ullema-e-Islam*', with the aim of counteracting the activities of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*. They were influenced with the strong call of Jinnah for "free India and free Islam." Jinnah declared in 1942:

"Muslim in India fighting and struggling for survival and for its rights to self-determination, whereas the Congress and other Hindu organizations are speeding to assume supremacy and domination over the Muslims as an All India minority by establishing one central government over the whole of India and thus to dominate and control even those zones where the Muslims are in a solid majority...."²⁴

The bulk of Deobandi *ulemas*, nonetheless, kept on following the lead of Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani and the *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* in opposing the demand for Pakistan.

Assam and Bengal were amalgamated as one group by the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946. In Assam, Muslims consisted of only 30% of the population, and they were eventually included in the Muslim League's demand for incorporation in Pakistan.²⁵ Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan, popularly known as Bhasani, a strong nationalist, who joined the Muslim League in 1937²⁶, laid his demand for the inclusion of Assam within the domain of Pakistan.²⁷ In reply to this demand, Maulana Azad wrote,

²³ Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi quoted in , *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, Asia Pub. House, Bombay, 1963, p.104

²⁴ Ibid, p.102

²⁵ Home Poll (I), F. R. Feb. 1947, No. 18/2/1947, NAI

²⁶ Maulana Abdul hamid Khan Bhasani's political entry in to Muslim League was made by Mr. Abdul Matin Choudhury who introduced Maulana Choudhury to Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

²⁷ B. J. Dey and D. K. Lahiri, *Assam Muslim: Politics and Cohesion*, New Delhi, 1985, pp.21-42

“No body can understand why the League placed so much emphasis on the question of Assam, when Assam was not a Muslim majority province. If the Leagues own criterion was applied there was no valid reason to force Assam to join Bengal.”²⁸

Most of the studies and researches on the issue of the partition of India have so far focused on the division of Bengal and Punjab. Little attention has been paid to Assam which also provides an interesting chapter of study in the history of partition of 1947. Geographically Assam consisted with two distinct regions – the Brahmaputra Valley and the Surma Valley, the names deriving from the two great rivers.²⁹ Brahmaputra Valley consisted of the districts of Darrang, Kamrup, Lakhipur, Nowgong, Sibsagar Goalpara, Gharo Hills, Khasi and Jaintiya Hills and the North East Frontier Agency. Surma Valley, constituted three districts of Barak Valley viz. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi and Sylhet of present Bangladesh, along with Habiganj, Sunamganj and Maulvi Bazar. Surma-Barak Valley which was a part of Assam sub-division, faced this division. There is an interesting account by a Muslim member of Sylhet, supporting the principle self-determination. Dewan Mohammad Wasil Choudhury quoted chapter and verse showing that from the time of Mahabharata to the present day, Sylhet at one time or other, was a part of Assam and that of the kingdom of ancient Assam extended to the bank of Karatoa. As a result, not only Sylhet, but also a part of Eastern Bengal was within the province of Assam. Yet, history was often disregarded as the Assamese themselves supported the demand for Sylhet’s reunion.³⁰

Sylhet, a Bengali-speaking district, historically a part of East Bengal, was joined with Assamese-speaking neighbour Assam in 1874 during the Viceroyalty of Lord Northbrook. The British wanted to make the province (Assam) economically sound and

²⁸ Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, New Delhi, 1988, p.196

²⁹ Surma Valley was divided after partition of 1947 and came to be known as Surma Valley and Barak Valley, after the name of two principal river Surma and Barak)

³⁰ Prof. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *The Sylhet Referendum: A Study in Retrospect*, Silchar, 2006, p.72

self-sustaining.³¹ The gentry of Sylhet opposed the notification of Viceroy and a petition led by Humayun Bhakt Mazumder on behalf of the inhabitants of Sylhet was presented before the Governor General's Council on August 10, 1874 for the cancellation of the order.³² The Governor General in Council refused to accede to the entreaty of the Sylhet gentry but assured them that it would not harm them.³³ Initially, the Muslims of Sylhet jointly moved with the Bengali Hindus for the return of the district, but later on most of the Muslims of Sylhet by and large preferred to remain in Assam as their leaders along with the Assamese Muslims came to realize that they would have a better political scope in the new province than that of Muslim majority Bengal if they returned.³⁴

In between 1874 to 1947, there was much debate on the issue of Sylhet's merging with the Province of Assam. In the early twentieth century the debate reached its zenith. The association called the Sylhet-Bangla Re-union League was established in 1920 under the leadership of Brojendra Kishore Roy Choudhury, Khirode Chandra Deb, Girish Chandra Nag, Ramani Mohan Das and others. The indigenous Assamese too supported the separation of Sylhet from Assam for the entire period considering them as their major competitors due to the latter's advancement in English learning. However, the movement for re-union should be understood in context of united India, as the demand for partition (creation of Pakistan) on communal lines was not anticipated at that time.³⁵ It is for this reason that when the opportunity for a return to East Bengal (later East Pakistan) came in 1947, the Hindus of Sylhet defended their right to remain in Assam (as part of India) while the Muslims of Sylhet wanted to join East Bengal.

The Provincial Muslim League Council which was formed in 1928, opposed the Sylhet's transfer to Bengal issue from the very beginning, and Saadullah, throughout his legislative career, opposed all proposals to transfer Sylhet from Assam to Bengal. He explained the logic of his opposition in clearest term as early as 1926. He argued that as

³¹ Anindita Dasgupta, 'Remembering Sylhet: A Forgotten Story of India's 1947 Partition', in *Economic & Political Weekly*, August, 2, 2008, p.18-19

³² Public Home Department Proceeding, No.258, September 1874, NAI

³³ J. B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British rule in North East India*, New Delhi, 1977, p.145

³⁴ Anindita Dasgupta, p.19

³⁵ Prof. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, p.66

long as Sylhet remained in Assam, the Muslims who constituted one-third of the Provincial population would remain a respectable minority and hold the balance of Assam's electoral politics, but with the Muslim majority Sylhet gone to Bengal, they would lose the position in Assam for ever. On the other hand, that would enhance the population of Bengal Muslims not even by one percent. He thus built a case for an undivided Assam in the larger political interests of the Muslims.³⁶

Assam provides an interesting chapter in India's freedom struggle during its last phase for two important reasons. First, although the 3rd June announcement had suggested the division of Assam, the district of Sylhet was partitioned only after the referendum when a majority of its population endorsed the separation. As the Muslims constituted an overwhelming majority in the district, the outcome of the plebiscite was more or less anticipated. A unique experiment in the context of colonialism, the referendum brought out an interesting dimension of Hindu-Muslim communalism. Secondly, for the Muslims, the campaign during the referendum was just a continuity of the movement opposing the Assam government since it had decided stringently to follow the controversial Line System. Prof. Tanmay Bhattacharjee in his work, *'The Sylhet Referendum: A Study in Retrospect'* stated, "Lord Northbrooke, the Governor General brought Sylhet to Assam by an arbitrary notification in 1874 and the leaders surrendered it to its original position through a referendum in 1947 with chivalrous rejoicing."³⁷

The separation issue of Sylhet became clear in 1945-46 during the campaign of Provincial Election. The performance of the Congress party in Surma Valley in the Provincial Election of 1946 was not encouraging, indicating a wide cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims of the Valley. The situation in the period 1946-1947 had almost polarized the political opinion on the communal line. Though the Hindu leaders in the province had worked in the legislative Assembly along with the leaders of Brahmaputra Valley and together formed the Ministry, their individual aspirations remained valley based. The Sylhet Hindu leaders, in general way, were in agreement with the leaders of

³⁶ Amalendu Guha, *"Planters Raj to Swaraj"*, p.167, Anindita Dasgupta, 'Remembering Sylhet: A Forgotten Story of India's 1947 Partition', in *Economic & Political Weekly*, August, 2, 2008, p.19

³⁷ Prof. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, pp.38-39

the Brahmaputra Valley but remained aloof when specific issues like Line System, the Cabinet Mission Plan were discussed. The Congress in Sylhet and Cachar were with the Bengal Congress. What the Assam Congress circulated before the election, was the programme of the Assam Valley. When the separation of Sylhet was clearly mentioned in the Congress election manifesto in 1945, there was no Sylhet leader to oppose it. It was a fact that the Hindu leadership in Sylhet always wished for Sylhet's return to Bengal.³⁸ The Congress of Cachar and Sylhet was affiliated to the Bengal Congress, and it was a curious phenomenon indeed! The Assam Provincial Congress was virtually the organization of the Brahmaputra Valley having no organizational involvement with the party activities in Surma-Barak Valley. In the vital months of decision making the two Congress committees marched in opposite directions to each other.

After a long period of chaos and confusion finally Sylhet was partitioned and separated from the rest of the Province and attached with East Pakistan. Political and communal leaders and parties like Muslim League commanded the matter, but they invariably got support from other agencies and institutions. However, madrassas having Deobandi ideologies in general and followers of Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani particularly those under the banner of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* strongly opposed the partition plan of the Muslim League. Mustaqim Ahmed Choudhury writing on the socio-economic transformation during the colonial rule states, "The President of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*, *Sheikul Islam* Hussain Ahmed Madani had many disciples and followers in Sylhet and they strongly opposed Sylhet's inclusion within Pakistan."³⁹ However, the well organized League's Programme of Action, management, co-operation of the central committee and assistance of the Bengal Provincial Committee, all together made situations favourable for the League to give the final blow to the Nationalist and the Madrassa *Ulemas*', who in absence of such facilities, were finally demoralized to some extent and failed to compete with the League activists.

³⁸ Ibid, p.50

³⁹ Mustaqim Ahmed Choudhury, "Sylhet on the Socio Economic Transformation During Colonial Rule", article published in Sharif Uddin (Ed.) *Sylhet: History and Heritage*, p.376-377

Though some works at national level were done on the clash of two groups of Muslims viz. Muslim League and *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*, Muslim politics, and the role of Muslims in the freedom movement of the country, but unfortunately no such work has been done so far at the provincial level. Consequently, the present researcher has undertaken the theme under the title “Madrassas and Partition 1940 – 1947 (A Study of the Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley and their Responses to the Partition and Anti-Partition Movement)” with a view to focus some light on the topic.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE;

A good number of academic works in different languages have been brought out in the field of modern history on the question of the Partition of India in 1947. Studies of such books have been made to understand the main contours of political separatism of the Muslims, to set up close linkages between the regional and national leaders and socio-cultural perspectives as means of mass mobilization. The whole debate regarding India’s Partition so far as the Muslim politics is concerned has been surrounded by the uncompromising and historic stand of the Nationalists Muslims for United India versus the separatist and communalist Muslim for Divided India. A good number of works on nationalism and communalism, nationalist and communalist Muslims and the movement for United India, movement for Pakistan, role of *Ulemas*, Muslim Students and the national movement and other related works appeared ceaselessly as more and more information come to historical arena.

B.D. Metcalf’s *Islamic Revival Movement in British India Deoband, 1860-1900* (OUP, 2002) did indeed try to understand the *Ulema*; to the extent it is ever possible to understand anyone else, from the perspective of the *Ulema* themselves. The *Ulema* emerged as reformers and revivalists in the main whose vision was shaped by their participation in a great religious tradition, who lived in the ‘Company of Prophet’, who had a clear view of life, and how it ought to be lived, who stood for a standard which was quite different from that of the imperialist, who used the technical advances of modernization to seek Islamic ends, and who embraced the great changes of modern

times, political, economic and social within an Islamic frame. Metcalf tried to understand the movements in its own terms. Metcalf has focused on way how Deobandi Madrassa was central in the articulation of Indian Muslim identity during the 19th century. Farhat Tabassum's *Deoband Ulemas Movement in the Freedom of India* highlighted the role of *Ulemas* in Indian politics between 1857 to 1947. Her indepth study focused on the multi-dimensional personality of the *Ulemas* and their political contributions. Her micro study over the role played by the *Ulema's* in the freedom struggle has either been relegated to the negligible margins in the pages of history or ignored. Her work takes into account the multidimensional personality of the *Ulemas*, their distinguishing political contributions for national integrity and communal harmony. Mohammad Tayyib Qasim in the two volumes of his *Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband ki Sad Salah Zindegi*, has vividly given the systematic account of *Dar-ul-Ulum*, Deoband. The work begins with the origin of madrassa education and how it gradually developed. Volume one provides detailed account of *Dar-ul-Ulum*, Deoband while volume two mainly deals with the important personalities related with Deoband movement and Deoband Madrassa and their role in the freedom movement of India too. On the other hand Sanyal's work has focused on how *Ahl-I Sunnat wa Jama'at*, through the writings of Ahmad Riza Khan constructed its identity against Deobandis and the *Ahl-I Hadith*. Both the scholars tried to show that Indian Muslim identity itself has been a site of contest, among different social groups and different interpretation of texts but they have not focused on the origin of their differences. While Arshad Alam's *Inside a Madrassa: Knowledge Power and Islamic Identity in India* which focused over an Ashrafia Madrassa of Mubarakpur, Uttar Pradesh, he argued that madrassas, despite their medieval and pre-colonial roots, are 'modern' institutions. After the colonial encounter, the *ulema* internalised the modern understanding of religion as something to be relegated to the private sphere. Alam's discussion of the modernity of madrassas goes beyond the formulations of Barbara Daly Metcalf whose writing on Deobandi ideology and *ulema*, have revealed that the madrassas accept certain notions of modernity in so far as these concepts help to sustain, or increase, their authority.

Farzana Sheikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation Colonial India 1860-1947* (1991), has opened the debate arguing that the evolution of Muslim politics and eventually their demand for partition were derived from the fact that the Muslims had a long history of their own as an exclusive political entity separate from others, an awareness of the ideal Muslim brotherhood, a belief in the superiority of Muslim culture, and a recognition of the Muslims' right to live under Muslim government. The Muslims had their own culture and tradition, quite distinct from another society, for which the Muslim community or nation deserves to live with their identity. Such interpretation focused the idea of Islamic framework as a starting point for determining the place and status of Islam and Muslims of India.

Peter Hardy in his *The Muslim of British India* (1972) has attempted a general history of British India's Muslims from a deeper perspective. He shows how the interplay of memories of past Muslim supremacy, Islamic religious aspirations and modern Uttar Pradesh, British rule before 1857 and even the events of the Rebellion of 1857-58 had not been economically disastrous for most of them. He stresses upon the force of religion in the growth of Muslim political separatism, showing how the 'modernists' kept up the debate among Muslims with regard to the Islamic postulates, underlining the role of the traditional scholars in heightening popular religious feeling.

Mushirul Hasan's series of documentary volumes vividly described the political turmoil situation and the conflict and contrast among the Indians with major reference to the two contradictory forces of the Muslim viz. nationalist and communalist on the eve of India's Independence. In his work *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India 1885-1930* he mainly concerned himself with analyzing how various segments among Muslims related to and defined their relationship with nationalist forces spearheaded by Indian National Congress. It also discussed about the part played by the colonial Government in defining political identities in religious terms and translating them in to constitutional arrangements. Hasan identified the nationalist Muslims who worked for united India's freedom, either being involved in Indian National Congress or remaining outside the Congress. He dealt with the ideals and principles of the nationalist Muslims and their

historic determination to the cause of oneness of India's nationhood and unbelievable commitment to the unity and integrity of India. While discussing the nationalist Muslims, he also critically studied the factors that paved the way for a section of Muslims to proceed towards the arena of separatism. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's *India Wins Freedom* (1988), basically deals with the concrete issues that led to the partition of India. It throws light on many historical unknown facts and reveals his uncompromising stand on the question of unity of India. His work opened a new era of debate on the Congress and British responsibility for the partition of India, as till then, the Muslim League was blamed solely for the same.

In her work *The Origin of the Partition of India 1936 – 47* (2006) Anita Indar Singh provides useful insight into the strategies and tactics of the Muslim League, Congress and the British. She lays stress on the activities of three parties on the eve of the independence on the transfer of power issue. She also describes the situation that forced the Congress and the British to create the boundaries of Pakistan. On the other hand, Francis Robinson in his *Separatism among the Indian Muslims* (1994), held the policies of the British Government as unique to the gradual evolution of separatist politics. His works emphasized on the activities in United Province which played the pivotal role in Muslim movement during colonial period. He confined his facts by citing two examples of upper Indian Muslims who turned to separatist politics with a view to safeguard themselves from British educational policies, bureaucratic reforms and Hindu revivalist mission. He too provided detail biographies of a good number of Muslim leaders who were active in politics in the second half of 19th century and early 20th century.

M. Kar's *Muslim in Assam Politics* (1990) is a pioneering work on the politics of Assam. He basically deals with the early Muslim settlements in Assam, inclusion of Cachar and Sylhet to the formation of Assam as a new province, and the immigrant Muslim settlement in Assam. He studied the politicization of Sylhet separation issue and the Muslim immigrant cause by the communal forces of Assam.

In his work *Rajniti te Bongio Ulamar Bhumika* (1995), Dr. Mohammad Abdulla mainly concerned himself with the role of *ulemas* of Bengal from 1905 to 1947. In his work he showed the role played by the *ulemas* in Pan-Islamic movement Kilafat Movement, Tanjim and Tabligue Movement, Peasant Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement and on partition and anti-partition movement. In his work, we find that in the Khilafat Movement, *ulemas* unanimously fought against the British. However on the issue of partition they were divided and Deobandi *ulemas* under the leadership of Hussain Ahmed Madani and Abul Kalam Azad made their every effort against the partition. Dr. Abdullah rightly discussed how the *ulemas* came forward in the field of politics with religious identity. The *Ulemas* performed a lot of works like forming socio-political organization like '*Anjumane-Islamia, Anjumane Ueama Bengal, Jamiat Ulama Bengal O Assam*'; publishing papers and journals, teaching students in '*maktabs*' and '*Madrassas*' and mobilizing the Muslim masses in the political field. They also dealt with the various grievances of the Muslims which contributed to widening the communal gap between Hindus and Muslims. To him most of the *ulemas* and Muslims of Bengal were in favour of the creation of Pakistan but only a small number of *ulemas* were against it and they were against it just to please their *murshid* Hussain Ahmed Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Sunil Kanti Dey's "*Anjumane Ulama Bengali Muslim Samaj 1913-19*" carefully studied the versatile role of *ulemas* of Bengal and Assam in socio-political and religious matters. It dealt with role of *ulemas* and their divisions. The author argued that while many reputed Muslim scholars stood and fought for united India, a section of Muslims *Ulemas* went to support the division of India on plea that the existence of Islam will be in danger in post independent India. J. B. Bhattacharjee in his "*Cachar under British Rule in North-East India*", argued that the *ulemas* and the majority of Muslims of Cachar were with nationalist group and stood strongly against the communal group.

"*The Partition of Bengal and Assam 1932 – 1947*" (2004) by Bidyut Chakrabarty provides a review of constitutional and party politics as well as of popular attitudes and perceptions. The basic aim of his book is to unravel the intricate socio-economic and

political processes that led to partition, as both the Hindus and Muslims were eager for the new power that they are going to enjoy with transfer of power or independence. To him, Hindus and Muslims had been cleft apart by their socio-economic differences and partition was inevitable. Joya Chatterji in her “*Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932 - 1947*” provides a re-evaluation of the events of 1932 – 1947, focusing on the political and social process that led to the demand for partition in a Muslim majority province, Bengal and tracing the rise of Hindu communalism. The author shows how the demand for separate homeland for the Hindus, which was fuelled by the ‘*bhadralok*’ (respectable people) society within Bengal, was seen as the only way to regain their influence. In 1905, when Bengal was partitioned, a storm of protest was raised and that forced the government to annul the same within six years. In 1947, when the same Bengal was partitioned again following the horrific communal clashes, hardly a voice was raised in protest. On the contrary, the second and definitive partition of Bengal was preceded by an organized agitation which demanded the vivisection of the province on the basis of religion. This movement was led by the same section of Bengali society that had dominated its nationalist politics since the time of the Bengal’s first partition. Her book mainly explained these changes in *bhadralok* politics and interpreted their apparent shift from ‘nationalism’ towards ‘communalism’.

Habibullah Mazumders unpublished Ph.D. thesis on *Nationalist vs. Communalist: A Study Politics of the Muslims in Assam (1920-47)* has mainly focused on the forces and elements that led to the development of nationalism and communalism among the Muslims of then Assam. He has stressed on issues like how the Muslims of Assam were politicalised and mobilized both by the nationalist and communalist Muslim groups. Binayak Dutta in his *Religion in Politics: Eastern India 1905 – 1947*(2009) has mainly focused on the role of the *ulema* in the movement leading to the partition of the eastern part of the country in 1947 in which some references have been made about the intervention of some local Madrassas in anti-colonial politics.

In addition to the above, there were other works like, Amalendu Guha’s *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* (1977), W.

W. Hunters *The Indian Mussalman*, A.M.Zaidi, *The Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*, Y. Tamizi's *Sufi Movement In North-East India*, Sham Mohammad's *The All India Muslim Educational Conference*(2003) etc. which focused on the issues related to the Partition, Muslim politics and Communalism.

All these aforesaid works have dealt much with various related aspects of the present study. Yet, no exclusive study exists on the role played by the local Madrassas in the politics and process of partition. The present study is an attempt to supplement or fill up the gap in the area of the 'freedom movement and Muslims' of Eastern Bengal and Assam in general and Surma-Barak Valley in particular from historical perspective. Scholars have already discussed the role of Muslim and the *ulemas* in the freedom movement, here focus is made on the *Madrassas*, their role and responses in the partition and anti-partition movement.

OBJECTIVES:

The chief objectives of the present work may be enumerated thus:

1. To bring out the circumstances that led to the foundation of the Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley.
2. To focus on the socio-political role of the Madrassas in mobilizing the Muslim masses.
3. To bring to light the role played by the *Madrassas* of Surma-Barak Valley in the partition of the country.
4. To focus on the ways the Madrassas responded to the communal mobilization in the pre-partition days. To analyse whether they contributed in communal tension or contributed in defusing the same?
5. Why a large section of Muslims of Surma-Barak Valley who were nationalist prior to the decade of independence suddenly sided with the Communal party, Muslim League after 1940?

6. How and why a section of Madrassas in spite of severe opposition of their co-religionists, participated and organized anti-partition movements?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How Islam came in to Surma-Barak Valley?
2. What was the system of Islamic education when Islam came in this region?
3. How the Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley were established in colonial period?
4. How the Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley responded to the political events during colonial period?
5. What were the factors that led the *Ulemas* to participate in the political movement?
6. Who were the *ulemas* of Surma-Barak Valley who participated in the partition and anti-partition movement?
7. Why political parties used religious scholar of mosque, maktabs and madrassas to mobilize masses?

SOURCES & METHODOLOGY:

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are based mainly on archival sources, pamphlets, memorandum, news papers, journals and other such documents of Muslims socio-cultural, religious and political organizations and other secondary sources.

Besides the census data, 1891-1951, Education Departments files, Home Political files, Police Files of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Educational Progress Report etc have also been consulted.

The Secondary source materials comprises the published works of other scholars and the authors closely related to the theme of the present work. However the major sources of this study are basically oral archival sources.

So far methodology is concerned both Historical and Empirical method is employed for the work. For this research work primary and secondary sources have been used. Various articles published in dailies, periodicals, reports, magazines, local souvenirs, seminar papers, books scholarly articles etc were consulted and interviews were also conducted to find out the facts.

ORGANIZATION:

The out come of the study is organized into six co-related chapters.

Chapter – I: Introduction: The introductory chapter begins with the conceptual definition of term ‘Madrassa’, its meaning, the political situation of India on the eve of the partition, and an attempt is made to link these with the present subject of study. Besides, the chapter gives a brief account of the research methodology used for the whole work and an outline about the sources. Glimpse is made over the geographical location of the Surma-Barak region which faced this physical division in 1947.

Chapter- II: Advent of Islam in Surma-Barak Valley: Advent of Islam in Surma - Barak Valley had a history right from the arrival Iktiar-ud-din Bakhtiyar Khilji in the beginning of 13th century. Although Islam came to Bengal and Assam politically and formally with Iktiar-ud-Din Bakhtiyar Khilji, it came to known to the people of Bengal and Assam even before that through Arabian merchants, who came for trading purpose and settled in the different ports and adjoining areas of Bengal.

A number of factors contributed to the rapid growth of Muslims in Bengal and basing on these factors several theories have been developed by scholars like Richard

Eaton, Mohammad Mohar Ali, H. Beverly and others in late 19th and 20th centuries. The chapter focuses on these theories that may possibly explain how and why Islam expanded into the Bengal delta. These theories have been briefly discussed under following headings:

- (1) Immigration Theory.
- (2) Military conquest;
- (3) Economic and social mobility;
- (4) Social Liberation Theory.

Advent of Islam in Surma-Barak Valley was not an isolated development but was integrated with the rest of Bengal and rest of Assam as socio-cultural aspects and prospects could not be constrained within the political territorial boundary. Migration and conversion were mainly responsible for the growth of Muslims in this region. The chapter also focuses on the impact of Sufism in propagating Islamic religion in this region. While discussing the advent of Islam in Surma-Barak Valley the chapter also throws glimpses on the archaeological sources that are found at different places of the region. Some old mosques, *maqtabas*, *khankahs* provides us the information regarding the Islamic institutions.

Chapter – III: Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley: The Chapter begins with the history of the madrassa education, how it evolved when it was started in India and then a brief account is provided regarding the development of the madrassa education in India till the beginning of the British period. Traditional system of Madrassa began to decline in the beginning of the British period. Although the East India Company Government established Calcutta Aliya Madrassa in 1781, it failed to face the new challenges.

The Revolt of 1857 changed the Indian political scenario and that affected the Muslim educational system too. The foundation of Dar-ul-Ulum, Deoband (1866), which led to a new trend of Madrassa system in India, was also an indirect result of the Revolt of 1857. the Aligarh Movement, Nadwatul *Ulema* emerged in favour of modern

education for the Muslims but they did not succeed in reaching the Muslim masses as much as the Deoband Movement. The chapter also focuses on the circumstances behind the establishment of the Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband, its objectives, principles, ideologies and analyses how it went on to become a movement. It also discusses about the ideas, thought of Deoband School and its spread to other parts of the subcontinent including Bengal and Assam. The Chapter then discusses the types of the madrassas in Eastern Bengal and Assam. Broadly Madrassas of Eastern Bengal and Assam can be classified in two categories, viz. Government Madrassa and Private/Public Madrassa. Government Madrassas are run, regulated, maintained by the Government through its statutory body while Private/Public Madrassas are runs and maintained by the public popularly called '*Qaum*' i.e. community through contributions and donations. It has been observed that most of the madrassas of Surma-Baraka Valley were started and maintained in colonial period basing on the ideologies and principles of Dar-ul-Ulum, Deoband.

The chapter provides information about the different madrassas established in Surma-Barak Valley between 1850 – 1900 and 1901 – 1947. Focus is made on the madrassas established before Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband, the Madrassas established following the ideologies of Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband, and other madrassas which were established in broader Sylhet and Cachar during the colonial period.

Chapter – IV: Madrassas and Muslims Socio-Political Mobilization:

The chapter discusses about the role of Mosques and Madrassas in socio-political mobilization of the Muslim masses in the context of nationalist and separatist politics. Dar-ul-Ulum, Deoband brought a new era of Muslim mobilization. With the foundation of Deoband Madrassa, madrassa become an important agency of Muslim mobilization. The *ulemas* of this Madrassa were not only the leaders of the community but were great patriots too. The Madrassa not only imparted religious education but also imparted lesson on nationalism and patriotism and remain anti-Colonial till the very last day of colonial rule. The Deoband movement and the Deoband Madrassa propagated its messages throughout the country and that mobilized the Muslim masses in general and *ulemas* in

particular and it is for this Deobandi Madrassas were established through-out the country in late 19th and in 20th century.

In the beginning of the 20th century ideological conflict was raised on certain issues amongst some of the leading *ulemas* regarding interpretation and understanding of *Quran* and *Hadith*. Although different Schools of Thoughts in Islam have been there from the subsequent days of Prophet Mohammad but in this chapter focus is made mainly in context of India and where the conflict is within the same *Hanafi Mazhab*. This difference led to a long debate between the Deobandi *ulemas* and the Barelvi *ulemas*.

Besides, glimpse is made over the challenges met by the Deobandi *ulemas* since the last two decades of 19th century, their counter part was the modern educational institution, the Aligarh Anglo-Oriental College. Deoband Movement was strongly against the British from the very beginning and had close connection with Indian National Congress since its inception, where as Sir Sayad Ahmed and his Aligarh Movement always remained loyal to British and opposed Indian National Congress. The Deobandis were in leading in the formation of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* in 1919/20, whereas Aligarh Movement to a large extent contributed in the formation of Muslim League in 1906. Till the division of the country in 1947, their rivalry continued most of the time.

The chapter further focuses on *ulemas* of Madrassas and *Imam* of mosques who had profound influence over the common Muslim masses of Surma-Barak Valley. They have high socio-religious prestige as was sanctioned in the Islamic theology. *Ulemas* due to their closeness with the common masses through different means of socio-cultural life played significant role in mobilizing the Muslim masses.

Chapter-V: Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley in Partition:

The chapter after a brief discussion over Bengal and Assam's political situation discusses in details how Madrassas responded to the partition and anti-partition movement and what was the role played by the Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley during the physical division of united India in 1947. In addition to the active role of the *ulemas*

of the Madrassa, Masjid, Maqtab, Idgah and other such agencies were used symbolically to raise the emotional sentiment of the Muslims. With the formal demand of Pakistan Indian Muslim by Muslim League in 1940, Madrassas of Surma-Barak Valley also took two stands on this issue.

The Deobandi Madrassas were the supporter of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind* and strongly participated in the anti-partition movement. But, by raising the emotions of Muslims by using religious sentiments, the Muslim League were also successful in the later stage of the movement in communalizing and politicizing some of the Madrassas to win them over to their side. It is interesting that most of the Madrassas and *ulemas* were the supporters of the *Jamiat Ulema Hind* and United India while the modern, English educated Indian Muslims were the creators of Pakistan.

The English educated Indian Muslims used religion for political benefit. They tactfully used religious leaders to convince the simple rural Muslim masses of Surma-Barak Valley. Madrassas which supported the Pakistan Movement issued '*Fatwa*' against their co-religionists who were supporters of anti-partition movement. The main target of their movement were the *Jamiati* Muslims who were very staunch supporters of the United India. In the last phases of the freedom movement some of the *ulemas* who were Deobandi ideologically, and were associated with *Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*, suddenly took the side of Muslim League. This migration mainly took place in between 1945 to 1947.

Chapter – VI: Conclusion: The concluding chapter discusses on various aspects of the major findings of the research. Besides, subsequent issues relating to Madrassas and role of Madrassa in the contemporary Muslim society and socio-political mobilization are also highlighted in this chapter.