

The Rise of Bengal Peasants' India Islamic Nationalism Imagination

LAN Jiang^{[a],*}; YAN Lin^[b]

^[a]Associate Professor, History and Culture College, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

^[b]Postgraduate, History and Culture College, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

This article analyzes why the Bengal Muslim peasants joined in the imagination of Indian Islamic nationalism, which had emerged later than Indian Muslim elites. The imagination of India Islamic nationalism was built by Indian Muslim elites through Education Pilgrimage. And Bengal Muslim peasants' India Islamic Nationalism was mainly through seeking economic rights and protecting Islamic faith, which had attracted many Bengal peasants and led to more and more peasants joined the imagination of India Islamic nationalism. So analyze the reason why Bengal peasants joined in the imagination of India Islamic nationalism could help us get a deeper understanding of why the various sectors of Indian Muslims had joined in the imagination of India Islamic nationalism.

Key words: British-India; Bengal peasants; India Islamic nationalism; Emergence

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INTRODUCTION

For a long time, Chinese scholars had studied why Indian Islamic Nationalism could emergence. Most of the Chinese scholars were from the elite level to precede analysis and few Chinese scholars were from the lower class level, especially from the perspective of Bengal peasants'

demand. Almost all Chinese scholars were lack of an overall study of different sectors of British-Indian society. Such as, Dr. Deng believed that: "Indian national liberation movement, under the combined effect of the differences and the influence of religious culture, religious conflicts and British policy of divide and rule as well as other factors cause the emergence of Muslim community's Islamic nationalism." (Deng, 2008, p.88) Dr. Lan indicated that:

Indian Muslims had constructed their own Educational Pilgrimage, a huge religious and cultural conflicts between Indian Muslims and Hindus, Indian Muslims and Hindus had interest conflicts, together with the British divide and rule policy as well as many other factors caused Indian Muslims emerged the India Islamic nationalism. (Lan, 2010, p.62)

In contrast, the upper contradiction of the Indian Muslims and Hindus in these areas were very obvious. Mostly of the lower class in Bengal were poor Muslim peasants. So, choose the poor Muslim peasants in Bengal as the research object will have a certain representation. Therefore, if we want to study how the Bengal Muslim peasants joined in the imagination of India Islamic nationalism, we had to study from the perspective of the Bengal Muslim peasants' demands.

1. THE REASON WHY ISLAMIC NATIONALISM COULD RISE IN INDIA

Indian nationalism was made up by coincidence between education pilgrimage and administrative pilgrimage (Ibid., p.47). However, due to the conservative idea about learning, Indian Muslim rejected foreign ideas, and then Indian Muslim's modern education started very late; on the other hand, the British authorities had implemented the "divide and rule" policy. This made Muslims and Hindus did not trust each other, resulted in Indian Muslims absent from Indian Nationalism imagination. Eventually, the Indian Muslim had emerged India Islamic Nationalism identification through their educational pilgrimage.

1.1 Indian Muslim Education Pilgrimage

In early 19th century, Britain had implemented Western education in India. The schools in India made the Christian doctrine—"the Bible" as a compulsory religious instruction, and did not set any Islamic religious instruction, and adopted English as the teaching language. Indian Muslims worried Western education would erode their faith so that rejected to accept modern western education. In 1837, English became the official language. "In 1844, the British government promulgated policy of preference for civil servants who could speak English." (Sinha & Banerjee, 1973, p.976) This policy had deprived a large number of job opportunities of Indian Muslim in senior positions. Indian Muslims only could get lower level works, such as repairing pen, messenger. After the 1857 uprising, British rulers actively supported the Hindus, the Muslims had to pay attention to the West education to promote the status of Indian Muslims. "In 1863, the Islamic Society of Calcutta was founded, which was intended to awake the Muslim perception of Western cultural progress and to remind the British government pay attention to the need of Muslim education." (Rahim & Zaman, 1976, p.256) In the same year, Syed Ahmad Khan founded a school in Ghazipur, and set the English as a compulsory course. In the next year, Syed Ahmad Khan established the Translators Association. Its main purpose was "to translate English books into Urdu so that the Muslim understanding of the latest developments in Western academia." (Rahim & Zaman, 1976, p.250)

"In 1867, the famous Hindu in Benares advocated the use of Devanagari to write." (Rahim and Zaman, 1976, p.250) Famous newspaper *The Hindu* stand instead for teach lessons in Hindi. The language movement attracted the attention of Syed Ahmad Khan. Since then, Syed Ahmad Khan put his focusing on the Muslim education. In 1875, Syed Ahmad Khan returned home from Cambridge University to establish the British-Orient Islamic School (also called Aligarh college). In the early time, this college set English as the first teaching language, and set Persian, Sanskrit, Arabic as the second language of instruction. In the late time, this college set Urdu as the main language of instruction. This college also set up Islamic religious instruction, students prayed five times a day and participated in Ramadan in September. Aligarh college put Indian Muslims together with common faith and gradually formed a conception of integration of India Muslims. Aligarh college became a center of India Islamic nationalist enlightenment. "Skilled orators and leaders who dominated the Moslem later were all emerged from Aligarh College." (Malik, 1980, p.215)

In 1877, Syed Amir Ali founded the National Islamic Central Association, reminded the cooperation of the Western culture and the trend of contemporary cultural progress to expand a moral revival movement, and continued to strive for the British India government to recognize their proper and reasonable request. (Rahim & Zaman, 1976, p.261)

Through the development of western education, Indian Muslims gradually emerged the imagination of Indian Islamic nationalism.

1.2 Implementation of the British "Divide and Rule" Policy

In 1857 uprising, the Muslims and Hindus jointed together to fight against the British, giving British rulers a deadly blow, in order to maintain the rule in India, the British government carried out the "divide and rule" policy, supporting the Hindus and the want to completely eliminate the Muslim elites forces in all aspects of India. With the spread of Western education and the Enlightenment, the Indian nationalist ideology began to develop, to the consciousness of Indian nationalism in the 1870s, the development of Indians from scattering toward reunification; the local forces had worked together. In order to seek independence, Hindu nationalists had asked to get rid of the British colonial rule. The British government had to change the attitude towards the Hindus and Muslims. "In 1878 and 1881, Syed Ahmad Khan had twice been appointed as the member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council and had been awarded the Medal in 1889. All these were the elaborate plan of British authorities." (Lin, 1999, p.272) After the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, the British rulers began to support Muslim more actively.

In the late 19th century, Tilak paid much attention on Arya Samaj. And his propaganda attached strong Hindu color to the Indian nationalism. This deepened the religious hatred between Indian Muslims and Hindus. With the enactment of the bill for the division of Bengal, the inherent religious and cultural differences and the sectarian conflict of interest further strengthen the development of Indian Islamic nationalism. At last, the All-India Muslim League was established in 1906. This was the landmark in the formation of organized Indian Islamic nationalism.

2. BENGAL PEASANTS ABSENT FROM THE IMAGINATION OF INDIA ISLAMIC NATIONALISM

Bengal peasants missed Indian Islamic nationalism imagination, because under the influence of zamindar and moneylender exploitation, peasants did not care for western enlighten culture, they only could perceive the world through the traditional religious education.

2.1 Serious Conflicts Between Peasants and Zamindars in Bengal

From 1830s to 1870s, since the implementation of Bengal zamindars tax permanently, so they had no new land reform. The harsh tax system is required to pay the tax in cash. It was limited by the impact of price fluctuations,

especially in poor harvest years, peasants could not afford to pay their taxes and had to sell their land to pay taxes and rent. It also contributed to the development of rural moneylenders. Businessmen and moneylenders saw buying and selling land, growing market crops more profitable. Moneylenders and Jotedars exploited more serious than the old landlord, so under the pressure of taxes and land rent, peasants lost their land, and became hired workers, even some people without life-sustaining work. Protruding contradiction further deteriorated the relationship between peasants and zamindars or moneylenders.

After the peasant insurrection in the second half of the 19th century, such as Indigo peasants revolt, Pabna peasants revolt, Bogra peasants revolt, the Government promulgated the new land regime. The Act Eighth of 1885 had become Bengal tax bill. It provided a tenant holding land in the village might have 12-year fixed lease. Although entitled to a fixed interest rate and tenure landlord tenants could not be expelled, but the bill also preserved the landlord the power to raise the rent through the courts. Soon after, zamindars and tenure holders took advantage of tenant's neglect of the Act, continuing to raise the rent, levy thresholds and seizure threshold tenant property. After 1885, zamindars and moneylenders in this piece of land especially in their rental and stood out. Peasants preferred to care about problems with moneylenders and zamindars more than sectarian conflicts and self-determination issues.

2.2 Bengal Peasants Have Low Literacy

While in the 19th century Hindus and Muslims had to accept Western education, but "the following figures for 1893 are very instructive and significant: While in that year, according to the census in Bengal, for instance, the proportion of Moslem graduates should have been 45.9%, it was in fact only 3.4%." (Malik, 1980, p.215) Overall,

The poorer classes in general were apathetic to any education, whether it was the pathsala variety or the English system. Just as the cultivating classes of the Hindus, the Namasurdras, could not afford any education, neither could the Muslim peasant. A Muslim educational officer confessed in 1900 that the "average pupils (in makhtabs) after years of study fail to write letters or keep accounts correctly; the pupils of the pathsalas after going through the second or third Bengali primers in about two years are able to write letters and keep accounts satisfactorily" Therefore, anybody desiring to give his children some useful education had often to take recourse to the Hindu pathsalas, whether they liked it or not. But very few apparently passed the gates of Maktab or pathsala to come to the higher schools of education. (Rafiuddin, 1981, pp.139-140)

Since Bengal had many tenants, most of them were Muslim, so the Muslim peasants had suffered from hunger through rural Ulema traditional education based in Quran and textbooks, in general, Muslim peasants lack of a higher level of education, they still lack the cognitive ability and recognition capabilities.

On the other hand, Bengal rural information was closed. All the villages in Bengal, unless residents really need, peasants and the villagers did not have public meeting places. Villages were very far from each other. In fact, there was no business. Market only opens two days in a week. Peasants who went to the market were not for buy something. Their main purposes were to meet friends and to know the neighbors including the nearby village of messages. "In some prosperous villages, mostly trading centers and river ports or Ganjes, there were daily bazaars too. Villagers in the neighborhood of towns had connections with them by waterways or highways." (Taj Ul-Islam Hashmi, 1992, p.26) "The Muslim peasants attended religious meeting or waz mahfils and milads, which were addressed by local and visiting Ulema. The topics of discussion varied from the purely religious to political." (Ibid., p.28) Muslim and Hindu peasants took most of the time part in local or visiting bard and producing music in folk theater. Sometimes these folk theater also staged performances and songs against the British colonial rule.

During the rainy season and the moonlit night, peasants listened to lyrical folk tales of Bengal. These stories were often described as Muslim heroes of the forth Khalifat Ali and Muslim Saints. Typically, the main hero told about Muslim humiliation and defeat non-Muslims, especially the stories about defeated the Hindu gods and goddesses. Ulemas and educated village leaders told these stories, and it was the root of Muslim masses to consolidate public unity and territorial expansion. Ulema instigated Muslim peasants to establish "the reactivation of Islamic glory" public front. "Some scholars think that most Muslim peasants did not live for the future but for the past, which was always 'happier than the Present'." (Ibid.)

3. BENGAL PEASANTS PARTICIPATED IN THE IMAGINATION OF INDIA ISLAMIC NATIONALISM

3.1 Muslim Ulema and Elite Have an Important Role

Until the late 19th century, Muslim elites failed to have a place in the Government. The main reason was that Muslims believed that there was no equal access to the Government. They did not get the protection of the rights and interests. In this case, the Islamic Association got together with Ulema and government officials. Rich and Government officials were controlling the Islamic Action Association. "Rafiuddin found that to the rural rich this collaboration was all the more important view about their growing conflict with the Hindu land-holders over the control of the local government bodies." (Ibid, p.29) He explicitly stated that the Muslim moneylenders "through

clever using the influence of Mullah and many Ulema or Muslim landowners mobilized rural Muslim peasants joined the United Front of the Islamic Association, the Islamic Association of Muslim religious schools, called Zakat and donations, maintenance of local mosques. Loans offered to poor Muslim had no interest and organized the Ulema Islamic doctrine. Therefore Muslims cared more from 1905 to 1911 in dividing Bengal was further compounded the hatred between Hindus and Muslims in India. With the advent of the Caliphate movement, the Muslim elites, although were forced by religious and political pressures, and led peasants to participate in the movement, due to the top leaders of the Muslim elite (aristocracy), commerce and who had a vested interest in links, they all opposed the nonviolence and noncooperation movement. Muslim elites united with government incited against the Hindu nationalists and feudal landlords. "This was reflected in the following lines of a satirical Urdu poem published in the Aligarh Institute Gazette on 8 November 1922 to ridicule Gandhi for this idea: "How can khaddar break the shackles of slavery? Gandhi has probably said so as a joke." (Ibid., p.54)

Ulema appeared as a political identity for the Muslim community. Ulema had injected a new religious fervor in this area. Ulemas were bridges between Muslim elites and Muslim peasants. In the end of the Caliphate movement, rural anti-British colonial resistance was mainly organized by the Ulema. Under the influence of Pan-Islamist leaders of the Ulema and Anjuman-i-Islamias, many Muslim peasants believed that commitment to their change economic conditions and protect their equal and free society would come.

Yet another Muslim bard vilifies the Hindu zamindars and their agents: Of the great zamindar, who does not recite the name of Allah even once in a month. The raja, the zamindar and all their amla (servants), such the Proja like jackals and dogs. (Ibid., p.87)

Rural folk reflected the attitude of the Muslims of Hindu zamindars and moneylenders. At the instigation of Muslim Ulemas and elites, Bengal Muslim peasants began to participate in the Indian Islamic nationalism imagination.

3.2 The Deteriorating Economic Conditions Accelerated Bengal Peasant Identity

Although in August 1914, the outbreak of war in Europe did not immediately implicate in the defense of India, but as part of the British Empire, India was naturally involved, and it made brilliant contributions to British victory. It not only sent troops, transported military goods, it also responsible for a million war debts. (Sinha & Banerjee, 1973, p.1038)

During the First World War, the further development of the Indian jute industry had created very favorable conditions. The demand for jute product was very huge. The price of jute products increased very sharp. But the prices of raw jute changed very little, or even below prewar level. (Diakov, 1972, p.44)

In the rural areas, due to lack of means of transport and merchants dominated the market price of agricultural products,

everywhere were under low pressure. Peasants could not get the benefits of rising food prices, but to promote the merchants' speculation. Due to the extremely harsh tax charged rent, plus many provinces were experiencing famine in recent years, resulting in abnormal rampant usury, peasants' indebtedness was more serious than prewar. (Lin, 1984, p.476)

One account by Sir Abdel Kerim Ghuznavi suggests that a certain Naziruddin of Chandpur, Tippera, who had borrowed Rs 22 from a local Hindu mahajan(moneylender) in 1915, was in 1928 asked to repay Rs 26,000. Sometimes peasants borrowed paddy from the richer peasants or landlords. For each maund (about 38 kilograms) they had to repay one and a half or two maunds after harvest. (Taj Ul-Isl Am Hashmi, 1992, p.44)

As the rise and fall in the prices of jute and rice did not take place correspondingly, the state of despondency of the lower peasantry could well be imagined from the reports of an increasing number of violent incidents of hat (village market) looting in the country side in early 1918.

Despite the rise of jute price, the per capita net availability of rice was sharply declining during 1916 to 1921. From 1916 to 1917, while the per capita net availability was 4.81 maunds(1 maund =38 kilograms approximately) per year, in 1918 to 1919, it was only 3.63 maunds and in 1920 to 1921, it was no more than 4.65 maunds. There was a sharp decline in the total yield of rice in Bengal. From 1918 to 1919, it fell by about half a million maunds from the level of 1917 to 1918. Consequently there was a rise in the price of rice. Taking the prewar price of rice as 100, it stood at 162 in early 1919, 192 in early 1920 and 147 in late 1921. Meanwhile, there was a substantial decline in the jute price. In 1921, it dropped to six rupees per maund from twenty-five rupees in 1919. In 1921, there was a sharp decline in the jute production as well; from between eight and ten million bales in 1913 to 1919 it dropped to four million bales in 1921. During the period immediately following the First World War, on the average there was an increase in prices of almost all non-agricultural goods by about 50% without any corresponding rise in wages. During the period when the well-to-do classes became even better off, the poor became poorer. (Ibid., pp.50-51)

In 1922, due to reduction in jute cultivation, jute prices rebound. Good harvests made peasant life in this year very quiet, but in 1923, jute prices drop again. Unpredictable prices of jute to the rural economy brought enormous uncertainty. Bengal peasant rebellion happened in high frequency, under the instigation of Ulema and Muslim elite on the road to against moneylenders and Hindu landlords.

3.3 Strengthen Bengal Muslim Peasants' Imagination of India Islamic Nationalism

"Bengal Leasing Act Amendments Act" enacted in 1923, had become fierce Hindu targets. Hindus often depict it was anti-nationalist bill. The demand for Swaraj has become so acute and unavoidable that it is now necessary to divert the minds of the people from politics to something else, observed one Hindu newspaper.

Hindu zamindars and jotedars enacted the policy of the "divide and rule" policy. Just like one Hindu newspaper thought that the Tenancy Bill was communal in nature, as it apprehended that "Muhammadan peasants will try to take advantage of this opportunity to place the zamindars in a tight corner." (Ibid., p.89)

At first, the "Bengal Leasing Act Amendments Act" was opposed by the parties, but in the May 1923, the government had abolished some rules which were a threat to the interests of the provisions of the Jotedar. We thought that "Autonomy could only get through them and the tenants obtained." So the subject would be lost even their underwear and this threat was imminent. On the whole of the "Bengal Leasing Act Amendments Act" expanded the rift between Hindus and Muslims, in particular to further expand the relationship between the intermediary and the zamindars. After May 1923, the Hindus against Muslims under the Bill supported it. Muslims and Namasudra also strengthened their unity.

Namasudra and Muslims unified by Indian elites' fierce criticism. They pointed out that Muslims agitated and cooperated with Hindu lower caste peasant were to oppress the Hindu upper classes; the other hand by suppressing the upper, lower Indian Hindus became Muhammad followers. Despite Hindu elites opposed to "agitate" them became Muslims, but Namasudra paid little attention to them. Hindu elites opposed to give equal rights to Namasudra on district elections, further limiting the right to vote, which ignored the electoral interests of the upper Namasudra. "Ignoring communal provocations and enticements from the Hindu bhadrak, Namasudra leaders like Revati Mohan Sarkar MLC, remarked that as lower class Hindus and Muslims, the lower classes, irrespective of their faith, should unite "on a new economic basis." (Ibid., p.100) In general, Namasudra refused to cooperate with the Hindu and Muslim elites arguing cooperation until 1928. This appeared to be the government and some Muslim elites ignored the cultural level of peasants and supported the liberation of the peasants. But Namasudra distanced from that high caste Hindus had played an important role.

So far as the relationship between the Muslims and the non-Muslim tribal peasants was concerned, in spite of the latter's numerical strength, as they constituted about 40% to 50% of the total population of Dinajpur, 20% to 30% of Rangpur and 10% to 15% of Mymensingh, the Rajbansis, Santals, Oraons, Garos and Hajongs could not challenge the overlordship of their landlords. (Ibid., p.101)

Environmental changes in the late Caliphate days, when peasants had once again attracted by Muslim elites, Ulema as well as intermediaries in order to protect their beliefs and protect economic rights of the slogan when attacked against governments targets left.

The propaganda of opening against Hinduism's high castes had a huge impact. At the end phase of Caliphate Movement, Muslim peasants preferred against Hindu landlords and moneylenders than government officials, especially the police itself more actively than against the rule. Muslim peasants did not ignore the economic background of the Hindu high castes and treat them as a target. The degree of resistance from Muslim peasants unhappy with the resistance was not only larger than the

elite political dissatisfaction and peasants against real or imagined "enemies". Muslim peasants got together with Namasudra reinforced the identity of Indian Islamic nationalist.

CONCLUSION

Above all, the Indian Muslim emerged their own nationalism imagination through pilgrimage education, as Bengal peasants severely affected by the traditional education, their Indian Islamic nationalism imagination emerged later than Muslim elite. With the deterioration of the Muslim elite and Ulema uninterrupted agitation and living conditions, Bengal Muslim peasants attracted by the ideals of equality and freedom society, thus enabling Bengal Muslim peasants to spearhead the struggle from the British rulers turned to Hindu moneylenders and zamindars. Through analyzing the rise of the Indian Islamic nationalism in Bengal, we could know that nationalism in different classes were very different, due to each class wanted different demands, only common "enemy" could unite them to resist. Once they had a conflict of interest, it was re-lock of their demands. This would decide who was enemy. Just as in the Pakistan movement, peasants continued to support the conversion of the leaders, set off a political wave after another.

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