

**Mohammad Rashiduzzaman. *Identity of A Muslim Family in Colonial Bengal: Between Memories and History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2021). ISBN: 978-1-4331-8321-8**

*Reviewer:* Syed Serajul Islam, Professor, Department of Political Science, Lakehead University, Ontario, Canada. Email: sseraji99@yahoo.com

Muslim identity in Bengal is still a contentious subject amongst the social scientists across the intellectual spectrum. Many observers have indeed examined the issue through a variety of perspectives, but few dealt with Bengali Muslim identity expressions from the grassroots during the pre-1947 Bengal. And that's where, Mohammad Rashiduzzaman's *Identity of a Muslim Family in Colonial Bengal: Between Memories and History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2021) has established an intellectual niche, and that is why, this volume deserves an earnest attention from the academia and the probing readers. The author examines Colonial Bengal's Muslim identity by blending his family's intergenerational recollections and experiences with multiple sources of official records, acclaimed memoirs, interviews, and studies including a few of own doctoral and post-doctoral research. Among the multiple facets of identity among Muslims, Rashiduzzaman dwells on the Arab and Persian cultural and religious influences in Bengal during the hundreds of years of Muslim rule over the geographical swathe, bulk of which is Bangladesh now. The cultures and languages associated with them had "strong influence on Muslim identity in Bengal." With a century-old social history in the background, the book matches the family centered wrinkles and configurations with the uphill slog that Bengali Muslims encountered in United Bengal. The author touches the tome's main chord in the Introduction: "While my family recollections aligned with the larger story of colonial Bengal's Muslim experiences, this narrative is wedged in the grim and jaded twilight of the British Raj before the Indian sub-continent's freedom in 1947." (2) His narrative echoes "new voices about identity, existential struggles and Muslim encounters in old and united Bengal under the alien rule." (2)

To this end, Rashiduzzaman has divided the book into nine chapters. Chapter 1 balanced several memoirs including Nirad C. Chaudhury's celebrated *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. Chapter 2 highlighted the life experiences of the author's grandfather's

generation, their feelings of inferiority before the Hindu *Bhadrolok* (gentry) who dominated the local community. Those *Bhadroloks* were an overwhelming majority among the local public officials and rent collectors. The rural Muslims, on the contrary, were small farmers, mostly economically depressed except a few of whom had claimed their Persian Afghan ancestry---they shaped a narrow layer of the upper strata with little or no power. In Chapter 3, the author further observed that the Muslim society's religious and identity contentions of the past are very much alive in the contemporary Muslim world as well. Likewise, those two chapters "poignantly demonstrated that even the rural folks who were not formally educated in those days were substantially aware of the tangible and intangible concerns that affected their personal and public lives." (13). Chapter 4 explained how had different customary dresses of Muslims (*Achkan and Lungi*) and of Hindus (*Dhoti*) too conveyed different identity expressions. In chapter 5, the author detailed the quest for Sufism in a Bengali rural community—a village-level tale of Sufi leanings in old Bengal. The author simplified the Sufi leanings of his father who had a virtually endless dialogue with a friend, named Rezu Chacha, on the fine points of *Sharia* and *Marafat*—a debate that is very much alive in today's Muslim world. Chapter 6 focuses on Muslim identity in Colonial Bengal, bulk of which was erstwhile East Pakistan and Bangladesh since 1971. Into Chapter 7, the author nostalgically "seizes the Muslim unease of being 'othered' while they were inspired by a historical sense of pride of being Muslims in Colonial Bengal." (14) The author highlighted populist Bengali politician, A.K. Fazlul Huq's avowal, "never apologize for being a Muslim!" In chapter 8, Rashiduzzaman recounted his father's obsession with history and legacies where he offered a few of his own historiographical observations, not necessarily tied to academic historians. Finally, chapter 9 summarized the key questions constructed in the book and brought a closure on the narrative with optimistic notes about cultivating memories of the yore.

What is more, the book plainly reveals that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bengali Muslims became aware of their political and educational shortcomings. Gradually those Muslims aspired to achieve higher educations as the author's father did his B.A. that contributed towards the measurable gains as well as the maturity of Muslim identity configurations. The Hindu-Muslim interactions were shared at the civil society level but simultaneously, they were also distant in many

respects for centuries as the author delineates across his tale. Despite their differences in religion, both the communities shared similar folk beliefs and local legends, and music—*Bouls*, *Faqirs* and *Sadhus*. Both religious neighborhoods stressed their respective differences in beliefs and customs and yet they had a shared history. The Muslims did not like the Hindu custom of *Choi-na-Choi* (touch and not touch): on account of such customs and contemporary political polarization, periodic violence appeared even in those villages that usually had good neighborly relations. The Bengali Muslims' identity appeared in their spiritual beliefs and customs though both Bengali Hindus and Muslims spoke the same language.

Surely, this book's grassroots angle enhances the understanding the Muslim identity countenances in Bengal. Additionally, this book intensifies a new depth to the comprehension of larger Muslim history in Bengal and the bigger Indian subcontinent. And yet, the author, himself, modestly claims: "this book may fall short of a conventional history volume; even then, the academics as well as the incisive readers will have something to haul out from what I characterize as my father's (also a few others) largely 'unwritten history'—the oral narratives and recollections. The range of recollections, comparable autobiographies, and reliable published materials here offer an out-of-the-ordinary narrative of the pre-1947 social history of Bengal largely from its rural foundations." (7). This is not a chronological dossier of the author or his father or his grandparent. This is indeed the social history built around his families' lived experiences and numerous verifiable sources.

I feel that this book, *Identity of A Muslim Family in Colonial Bengal: Between Memories and History*, should be on the shelf of anybody who wishes to grasp the "ground up" Bengali Hindu-Muslim exchanges in Colonial Bengal. The enthralling elements bring the Hindu-Muslim differences to the fore by offering their social history, not so much by the theological debates. The Muslim identity question in old Bengal is, indeed, central to what the author aims to achieve through his recount. The volume is an encouraging contribution to the genre of identity literature about the Muslims in Bengal and he has exhibited constructive "ways and means" for memory and oral narrative-based research.

Optimistic notes resonate throughout the narrative; early on, the author is unabashed about what he wanted to accomplish in this

work: “Hopefully, this volume will enhance ties between the early and succeeding generations not only in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, but it would also be a learning resource for the growing South Asian expatriates, many of whom are nearly sealed off from the knowledge of their core. Both Bangladesh and today’s West Bengal (Bangla) are the heirs to the two Bengal partitions—1905 and 1947 though the Muslim and Hindu versions of those epoch-making episodes are still shadowed by sharp disagreements. Neither the 1947 partition nor the 1971 Bangladesh independence from Pakistan could, so far, change those historical legacies.”(11)

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**Feisal Khan. 2019. *Islamic Banking in Pakistan: Shariah-compliant finance and the quest to make Pakistan more Islamic*. New York: Routledge, 185 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-77975-3 (hbk), 978-1-315-67024-9 (ebk).**

*Reviewer:* Md Saidul Islam, Associate Professor of Sociology, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Email: [msaidul@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:msaidul@ntu.edu.sg)

*Islamic Banking in Pakistan: Shariah-Compliant Finance and the Quest to make Pakistan more Islamic* is an interesting addition to the South Asian studies. Rather than merely evaluating the performance of Islamic Banking and Finance (IBF), that started in 1986 in Pakistan, vis-à-vis other banking systems, Feisal Khan ventured to link this development with the essential character of Pakistan shaped largely by a polarizing battle and tensions between two competing groups which he calls “Islamic minimalist” and “Islamic maximalist.” Although the battle started long before the independence of Pakistan in 1947, it still continues. With Islamic banking and finance flourishing in Pakistan and beyond, Islamic maximalist sees this, according to the author, as a crucial element of a model Islamic state.

Pakistan’s Islamic banking is a part of the global rise in Islamic banking and finance in recent years. There are over 700 Islamic banks in over 60 different countries across the globe, with over \$1.3 trillion financial assets. The growth of Islamic banking and finance is remarkable, with 150 per cent growth since 2006. Other Western