



## Urdu Studies

An international, peer-reviewed,  
bilingual research journal  
ISSN: 2583-8784 (Online)  
Vol. 4 | Issue 1 | Year 2024  
Pages: 43-55

# From Calcutta Madrasah to 'Āliyah University: A Journey

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**Abstract.** The history of Muslim education in India since the inception of British rule, is closely associated with the history of Calcutta Madrasah popularly known as Madrasah-e-'Āliyah.<sup>2</sup> It is the main spring from and round which a system of madrasah education grew up in India. The Calcutta Madrasah was the first educational institution in India, established by the British Government for the promotion of education in Theological Science, Oriental Studies, Medical Education, Geological Studies and Islamic Laws among the Muslims of Bengal for the purpose of administration and the judiciary. The institution which has managed to cover such a time period of two and a quarter century has played a remarkable role in the dissemination of knowledge, as well as social and cultural activities. It was hugely affected by the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and lost its earlier prestige and status. Then, owing to continuous movements by the students of the madrasah and votaries of madrasah education, against the ruling government of West Bengal to establish their tradition through this educational institution, the Calcutta Madrasah regained its college status and then has been upgraded to 'Āliyah University in 2007. This paper traces the journey for this institution.

**Keywords.** Calcutta Madrasah, Persian language, 'Āliyah University, Madrasah education, Calcutta Madrasah College

## Introduction

After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the supremacy of British power was established in the entire Bengal Sūbah (Bengal, Bihar and Odisha). On the other hand, the stateless Muslims became crippled and helpless in economic,

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<sup>2</sup> Calcutta Madrasah was established in 1780 by the colonial masters, this Madrasah was made 'Āliyah University in 2007 by the West Bengal Government.

Included in UGC-CARE List since October 2021

Published on August 11, 2024

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social, administrative and religious aspects. This was because, after the Battle of Plassey, power and authority over the geographical landscape were transferred to the British. The authority of the Bengal Nawab ended, and a dual government was established. The Nawāb lost their territory, and their followers became landless farmers, while the British became the landowners following the introduction of the land settlement in 1772. Consequently, the inhabitants of Bengal became stateless. According to the statistics of 1765, a quarter of Bengal's land was allocated to 80 thousand *maktabs*<sup>3</sup> and *madrassahs*<sup>4</sup> (Jaffar 150). The East India Company gradually took away these properties from the Muslims by force and deprived them of all privileges, including government jobs. As a result, the socio-economic conditions of the Muslims in Bengal rapidly deteriorated (Ahmed 36-37). In other words, calamity befell them, their religious institutions and educational culture. Also, as the curriculum of Hindu and Christian missionaries' educational institutions of that time included religious teachings, Muslim students generally did not feel motivated to study in these schools; there was also the fear of losing their faith among them (Marshman 20-21).

However, until then official business was conducted in Persian and trials were conducted in courts according to Muslim law. Due to the inexperience of the British people in the Persian language and Muslim law, difficulties were created in the judicial process of the court (Faridi and Haque 269-270). On the other hand, there was a gap in the field of education, so there was a shortage of qualified people to become judges and officers among local Muslims. Many of those who were eligible for this job were unwilling to serve under the British government. Then the Governor General Warren Hastings (1772-1785 AD) understood this administrative crisis (Faridi and Haque 269-270). Around this time in 1776, an Islamic scholar, Maulānā Majdood-dīn arrived in Calcutta (Mumtazuddin 47). Owing to his proficiency in Islamic knowledge and science, students started crowding around him. Muslims decided to set up an institution for the education of their children and keep such a virtuous person permanently in Calcutta. But due to financial distress, they had neither power to build an institution, nor manage it. Therefore, some eminent Muslim leaders of Calcutta appealed to Warren Hastings to establish a *madrassah* under the leadership of Maulānā Majdood-dīn (Ahmad 7). Then Warren Hastings took quick steps to respond the request of the Muslim leaders and fulfill the administrative requirements. Finally, he founded the Calcutta *Madrassah* (H. Sharp, Ed. 8).<sup>5</sup> It played a historic role defending the ancient Islamic education system and prevented it from extinction. This paper traces

<sup>3</sup> A small primary school where children are given basic lessons in Islam.

<sup>4</sup> A school or college where people go to learn deeply about the religion of Islam.

<sup>5</sup> After the establishment of Muslim rule in India, Islamic culture was cultivated for six hundred years. The rulers used Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and Arabic, and the inhabitants adopted these languages out of necessity. However, the inhabitants never used them as their mother tongue. For the first time, an institution was established to spread Islamic education among the Bengali Muslims.

the journey of the institution and its transition from Calcutta Madrasah to 'Āliyah University. It employs the qualitative method that includes a descriptive, compositional, analytical method to focus on a social or human problem.

### The Early Days (1780-1856)

#### Calcutta Madrasah: Administration, Management and Education Policy

The Calcutta Madrasah or Calcutta Mohammedan College, the first educational institution and first Government College in British India, was founded on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1780 by Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of the East India Company, at the request of “a considerable member of Mussalmen of credit and learning” of Calcutta (Sharp 8). It was given its name by Warren Hastings. The main object of the founder was to promote the study of the Arabic and Persian languages and of the Muhammadan law, with a view to qualify the sons of Muhammadan gentleman for responsible and lucrative offices and thereby produce competent officers for the Courts of Justice (*Revenue Consultations* 302.). General Warren Hastings provided a rented building at Baithak Khana near Sealdah for this purpose and engaged the services of Maulānā Majdood-dīn<sup>6</sup> as Superior who was “represented to be uncommonly qualified” for the purpose (Faridi 32-33).

Since its inception, Maulānā Majdood-dīn prescribed the Nizāmīa System of Education (*Dars-e-Nizāmī*) in this madrasah. In the course curriculum, Persian language was given more importance than Arabic, because Persian was the court language during the company period. In 1791, the courses of study were modified by the Managing Committee, to include Natural philosophy, Theology, Islamic law, Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric, Arabic Literature, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Persian (*Revenue Consultations*, Nos. 7-10, March 18, 1791, pp. 15-18). In course of time, changes occurred in the curriculum of this madrasah and it adopted its own syllabus, widely known as Dars-e-'Āliyah and this was subsequently adopted in all the madrasahs affiliated to Calcutta Madrasah, including almost all madrasahs in Bengal (including Assam), Bihar and Odisha (Shahidullah 15).

Due to inconvenience in the rented building, Warren Hastings purchased

<sup>6</sup>Maulānā Majdood-dīn was popularly known as Maulawī Madan. Maulānā Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz commended him saying “*Hazār Shaykh ne dārḥī barḥāī san kī sī, magar woh bāt kahān Maulawī Madan kī sī.*” (A thousand Islamic scholars grew their beards, but how does that compare to the matter of Maulawī Madan?). He began to live in Calcutta by 1776 after completing his study in Delhi and Lucknow to Shāh Walī Allāh and Mollā Nizām al-Dīn respectively.

<sup>7</sup>Dars-e-Nizāmī or Nizāmīa System of madrasah education was introduced by Mollā Nizām al-Dīn (1089-1161 Hijrī), a great Islamic Scholar of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The Syllabus, he prescribed for the madrasahs has proved very effective and is still followed in the madrasahs across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

a piece of land and set up a suitable building for the college at Padmapukur area in 1781 (Ahmad 7). Up to April 1782 Warren Hastings conveyed all expenses of the college from his private purse which was afterwards, the East India Company took the responsibility of the Institution. At the recommendation of Warren Hastings, in 1785, the Board of Directors, assigned by a Sanad named "Madrasah Mahal" in the district of Twenty-four Parganas of the estimated value of Rs, 29000 per annum for the support of the college and introduced certain rules for the management of the College. The Nā'ib Nāzīm was also introduced to recruit students for the college as vacancies accrued in the Foūz Dārī Courts, on production of certificates of efficiency from the Superior (Sattar 38).

In 1788, due to some unavoidable circumstances, Sir John Shore, the then Governor General abolished the post of Superior and undertook the administration of the funds together with the general reformation of the Madrasah. Maulānā Majdood-dīn was made the Head Preceptor (Mudarris-e-Awwal) and was given the charge of internal administration (Ahmed 179).

In 1791, an inquiry was conducted under the Board of Revenue and some serious irregularities and mismanagement in the Madrasah were disclosed. On the report of the enquiry committee, Maulānā Majdood-dīn was replaced by Maulānā Muḥammad Isrā'īl (Rahman 147). A reorganization took place, a Committee of Superintendence for the future government of the Madrasah was appointed and a body of rules for management of the Madrasah was drawn up (Sanail 38). In 1824, in consequence of the unhealthiness and also other inconveniences of the original site of the Madrasah building, the Government resolved to construct a new building in a better locality known as Kallinga (Now Ḥājī Muḥammad Muḥsin Square, previously Wellesley Square) and occupied chiefly by Muslims. Finally, the College moved to its present building (Khan & Khan 3).

An examination system was introduced in this Educational Institution. The first Annual examination was held in the Town Hall on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1821 in the presence of many Government officials and dignitaries of Calcutta. This was the first public examination held in British India (*Revenue Consultations*, Nos. 28-29, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1822, p. 4). Classes for Medical Studies were also introduced in this Madrasah College in 1827 for the first time in British India, under the headship of Dr. Peter Breton, Professor of Medicine. In 1836, when the Calcutta Medical College was established, the medical classes of this College were shifted to it. And the students of the Madrasah were allowed to study Medicine at Calcutta Medical College (*General Committee of Public Instruction*, 1827, 568-73). This is proof of the high standard of education at the Madrasah during those days.

The Madrasah was managed by its Managing Committee from 1791 to 1819. 1819 to 1850 was a period when Secretaries were appointed for the

Madrasah.<sup>8</sup> Captain Irvine, Dr. Lumsdon, Cornell Relay were appointed Secretary of the Madrasah, and they had pioneering roles in adopting reform both in the academic and administrative sections of the Madrasah in keeping with western educational systems (*Revenue Consultations*, Nos. 3-4, Oct. 27, 1820, pp. 4-5). A post of Principal for the Madrasah was created in 1850 and Dr. A. Springer was appointed as first Principal. From 1850 to 1927, all appointed principals were British Civil Servants. Many of them were well-known for their oriental learnings. In 1927, Shams al-'Ulamā' Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad was appointed as first Muslim principal of the Madrasah (Haroon 87).

### Calcutta Madrasah and English Education

Attempts were made in 1826, 1829 and 1833 by the authorities, to introduce English in the syllabus of the Calcutta Madrasah, in place of Persian, but with little success. In 1837, by a Dispatch, the Government abolished Persian to make room for English as the official language for instruction (Ahmed 183). This was like a death blow to the interests and aspirations of Muslims in general and the Madrasah students in particular. An Anglo-Arabic Department was opened in this College to teach English in 1839, but it closed down in 1854. In fact, from 1829 to 1851, the Madrasah produced only two junior scholars: Nawāb 'Abd al-Laṭīf (Founder of Mohammedan Literary Society) and Waḥīd al-Nabī. However, after the great failure of this Department, the British Government opened another department called the Anglo-Persian Department under the direct control of the Principal of Calcutta Madrasah, so that Muslim children could receive much-needed English education (Haroon 87).

### The Revolt of 1857 and Calcutta Madrasah (1857-1946)

Alumni of Calcutta Madrasah were known to have participated in anti-British movements like *Wahhābī*<sup>9</sup> and *Farāzī*<sup>10</sup> but this had had no special

<sup>8</sup> Initially, there was not any principal post, it was controlled by the secretaries who look after this institution of education and administration.

<sup>9</sup> The Wahhābī movement is a strict and conservative branch of Sunni Islam that originated in the 18th century in the Arabian Peninsula. Founded by Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb, it emphasizes the absolute oneness of God (Tawḥīd) and the importance of following the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth (The sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad). Wahhabism is known for its strict interpretation of Islamic law, its rejection of innovations and deviant practices, and its emphasis on the importance of jihād (struggle) to defend Islam. The movement has had a significant impact on Islamic thought and has influenced various Muslim groups and regimes, including the Sa'ūdī state. Critics accuse Wahhabism of promoting intolerance, extremism, and violence, and its adherents see it as a purification of Islamic practices and a return to the original teachings of the Prophet.

<sup>10</sup> The Farāzī movement was a 19th-century Islamic reform movement in India and Bengal, led by Hājī Shāri'atullāh and his son Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Dīn Farāzī. It emerged as a response to the decline of Muslim rule and the spread of Western

bearing on the educational system of the Madrasah (Moudood 11). Several teachers and students of the Calcutta Madrasah joined in the great revolt of 1857 and this brought disturbances in the Madrasah's academic atmosphere. Owing to their alleged involvement in the revolt the then Lt. of Bengal Governor Sir Frederick Halliday instructed the DPI to stop public funding of educational institutions where anti-government activities took place and to consider whether such madrasahs became helpless owing to the economic embargo. But the then principal of the Madrasah, Sir W. Nasseer Lees, opposed this order and requested continuation of the previous funding. At that time, sort of cold war started between them. As a result, for many years Madrasahs had problems getting government financial support. But in the end the Governor General of Bengal rejected all the proposals of the Lt. governor and accepted the principal's statement and the Madrasah remained in its former state. These disturbances lasted for almost ten years.

Questions were raised regarding the maintenance of Calcutta Madrasah at government cost (*Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, Education Branch*, No. 99, Kolkata, Oct. 27, 1858, p. 495). There were some proposals to close down the Madrasah, or, at least, the Arabic Department, and retain only the Anglo-Persian Department. However, in 1860, the Government of India, rejected the idea of abolition, and recommended instead, an improvement in its management. Calcutta Madrasah continued to exist as before (Haroon 90). Unfortunately, in 1864, the British Government of India by an order quashed the appointment of a Muslim Qāzī or judge who would look after the college and all related problems (Moniruzzaman<sup>42</sup>). This order greatly hampered the interest of the students of the Madrasah who had monopolized those posts so long.

### Elliot Hostel and Muslim Institute

For a long time, the ground floor of the Madrasah building had served as the hostel of the Madrasah, but this space was proving insufficient as the number of enrolments increased. In 1896, Elliot Hostel was founded, with funds raised from donations by the public, for the accommodation of students (Sattar 6). Elliot Hostel was first opened in August 13, 1898 by Sir John Woodburn, the then Governor General of Bengal. He also unveiled the Memorial Table in honor of Nawāb 'Abd al-Laṭīf, one of its principal donors (*Annual Report of the Calcutta Madrasah*, March, 1899, p. 5). In 1902, the

education and culture. The movement sought to revitalize Islamic practices, promote religious purification, and resist British colonial influence. The Farāzīs emphasized the importance of following the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth and Islamic law, and rejected un-Islamic customs and innovations. They also advocated for Muslim education, social reform, and political activism. The movement had a significant impact on Muslim society in Bengal and India, contributing to the development of Islamic revivalism and nationalism in the region. While the movement's emphasis on religious purity and resistance to colonialism was seen as progressive, its rejection of modern education and cultural exchange was criticized by some as regressive.



Muslim Institute<sup>11</sup> was established as part and parcel of Calcutta Madrasah. The Principal of the Madrasah was ex-officio President and Treasurer of the Muslim Institute Hall (Haroon 168-169).

### Reformed Scheme and Calcutta Madrasah

The Government sanctioned the Reformed Scheme<sup>12</sup> drawn up by Shams al-'Ulamā' Abū Nāser Waḥīd, Principal of Dhaka Madrasah and introduced it in 1915 from Class III. This was adopted by almost all Madrasahs in Bengal, but Calcutta Madrasah College retained its old scheme character. From this time onward in Bengal there existed two types of Madrasahs, namely Reformed Scheme or High Madrasahs and Old Scheme or Senior Madrasahs (Abdullah 31).

### Several Commissions for the Calcutta Madrasah

From 1906 to 1946, several committees and commissions were appointed by the British government for the all-round development of Madrasah education in general and the Calcutta Madrasah in particular. Among these were the Hunter Commission (1882), Arle Committee (1907-08), Mohammedan Advisory Committee or Harley Committee (1915), Shams al-Hudā Committee (1923), Momen Committee or Muslim Education Advisory Committee (1931), Maulā Baksh Committee (1938-40) and Sayyid Mu'azzam Ḥusayn Committee (1946). Every committee introduced reforms for this Madrasah in regard to the improvement in syllabi, administration and its all-round development (Moniruzzaman 43). Among these, the most notable is

<sup>11</sup> A parallel body which was established to accelerate the Madrasah and the maximum meeting of the Madrasah were held in Muslim Institute.

<sup>12</sup> Old Scheme or Senior Madrasahs in West Bengal typically cater to students from the upper primary level up to higher secondary level. These institutions offer a blend of traditional Islamic education and modern subjects. The curriculum may include Islamic studies such as Qur'ān, Hadīth, *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and Arabic and general subjects like Bengali, English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The aim is to provide a balanced education that prepares students for further studies or vocational training while grounding them in their religious and cultural heritage. On the other hand, Reformed Scheme or High Madrasah refers to institutions that generally cater to primary, secondary and higher secondary education levels, similar to primary and high schools. The curriculum is more advanced and comprehensive, preparing students for higher education or professional courses. It includes Advanced Islamic studies alongside a robust general education curriculum. Subjects may include advanced levels of Bengali, English, Mathematics, Science (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), Social Studies, and computer education. The goal is to ensure students are well-prepared for university education and competitive exams while maintaining a strong foundation in Islamic education.

In summary, both types of madrasahs in West Bengal integrate religious education with modern academic subjects, aiming to produce well-rounded individuals who are equipped for both religious and secular pursuits.

the Arle Committee's suggestion to start Title Classes or Post-graduate studies in the Madrasah. These began in the year 1909 as the *Fakhr al-Muḥaddithīn*<sup>13</sup> Course. It was later renamed *Mumtāz al-Muḥaddithīn*<sup>14</sup> Course (M.M. Course) (Ali 43).

### Calcutta Madrasah and Madrasah Education Board

The Calcutta Madrasah and West Bengal Madrasah Education Board were closely interconnected. This relationship began when the Government constituted the Shams al-Hudā Committee, in 1921. The orders of the Government on its report regarding administration were issued in 1927; those regarding the syllabus in 1928 (*Vide G.O. No. 232 Edn.* 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1928). According to this report the "Board of Central Madrasah Educations" was constituted for the purpose of conducting various examinations of the Calcutta Madrasah and Old Scheme Senior Madrasahs in Bengal and Assam, including *Ālim*<sup>15</sup>, *Fāzil*<sup>16</sup> and *Mumtāz al-Muḥaddithīn*. The Principal of Calcutta Madrasah, Mr. Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad was appointed ex-officio Registrar and Vice President of the Board. One of the functions of the Board, among others, was to advise the Government on the study programs and courses in the Calcutta Madrasah and the Madrasahs affiliated to it (*Bengal Education Code*, 1931, p. 308). This Board continued till 1946. Thereafter, on the recommendation of the Sayyid Mu'azzam Ḥusayn (1946) it was renamed "Bengal Madrasah Education Board" (Ahmed 23).

### The Post-Independence Period: Calcutta Madrasah (1947-2007)

The Partition of India in 1947 caused a series of damages to the state in various fields. As far the educational institutions were concerned, the Calcutta Madrasah suffered badly. According to decisions made by the Separation Council, the Calcutta Madrasah, the Bengal Madrasah Education Board and Elliot Hostel were shifted to Dhaka (East Pakistan) with all documents, certificates, books and furniture on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. These were renamed Dhaka Āliyah Madrasah, under the control of the new Government of Pakistan (*Order No, 877 SC*, dated 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1947). On the other hand, the Calcutta Madrasah in India closed down; there remained nothing but the old dilapidated building which actually retained its past glory. This was a setback to Madrasah education in India (Shahidullah 29).

However, the Government of West Bengal was considerate enough to set up the interim West Bengal Madrasah Examination Board on 20<sup>th</sup> February

<sup>13</sup> The pride of Ḥadīth experts.

<sup>14</sup> A prominent Ḥadīth scholar. It is a 2-year degree course equivalent to a PG degree in any college or university.

<sup>15</sup> It means learned in Islām. This degree is equivalent to class X standard of any Central Board Examination in a state.

<sup>16</sup> A virtuous Muslim. This degree is equivalent to the class XII standard of any Central Board Examination in a state.



1948, to control the “orphaned” West Bengal Madrasahs, in Hooghly, with the Principal of Hooghly Islamic Intermediate College as its ex-officio Registrar. This Board conducted the High Madrasah, Islamic Intermediate College, ‘Ālim, Fāzil and M.M. Examinations in 1948 and 1949 (Moniruzzaman 44).

### Reopening of Calcutta Madrasah and Madrasah Board

Responding to the demands of the leading Muslims of West Bengal, Maulānā Abūl-Kālam Azād, the first education minister of independent India, and Dr. Bidhān Chandrā Rōy, the Chief Minister of Bengal, were able to give a new lease of life to the Calcutta Madrasah. Owing to their efforts the Calcutta Madrasah was reopened in April 4, 1949 (*Vide G.O. No. 4828 Edn. Dated 20-12-1948*) as Calcutta Madrasah College. It started with appointments of a new principal, new teachers, students, new furniture and also, new aspirations. Mr. Wajāhat Ḥusayn, the Head Master of A.P. Department, a school under Anglo Persian Department which is only for the school students, was given the charge of the principal (Bari 4). After the reopening of the Madrasah, the Educational Board at Hooghly was transferred to its original home in the Calcutta Madrasah with Maulānā Sa’īd Aḥmad Akbarābādī, the new Principal of Calcutta Madrasah College as Registrar (Shahidullah 29).

However, from the very beginning, of the Madrasah several eminent scholars and distinguished personalities of international repute, including Dr. Alloy Springer, H.F. Blockman, Sir Denison Ross, Mr. Alexander Hamilton Harley, Khān Bahādūr Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad, Maulānā Hidāyet Ḥusayn, Sa’īd Aḥmad Akbarābādī and Prof. Abū Jamāl Abū Tayeb served as its principals and learned *‘Ulamā*<sup>17</sup> and Islamologists like Maulānā Majdood-dīn, Muḥammad Isrā’īl, ‘Abd al-Ḥayy, Wilāyāt Ḥusayn, Muftī Sayyid ‘Amīm al-Iḥsān, Sa’ādat Ḥusayn, Shaykh al-Hind Sayyid Ḥimād al-Dīn, Maulānā Abū Maḥfūz al-Karīm Ma’sūmī to mention only a few, rendered invaluable service as Professors of *Ḥadīth*<sup>18</sup> and *Tafsīr*<sup>19</sup> (Mudarris-e-’Awwal).<sup>20</sup> Besides the prominent educationist and reformer of this Madrasah Khān Bahādūr Nawāb ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, a large number of intellectual giants like Waḥīd al-Nabī, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, Rashīd al-Nabī Wahshat were associated with this earliest institution of Islamic and other learning in the subcontinent. Amongst the luminous alumni are ‘Ubayd Allāh ‘Ubaidī Sahar Wardī, Abū al-Ma’ālī ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Waḥīd, ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Nashāq and ‘Abd al-‘Alī Durri deserve special mention, for they have left indelible marks on the intellectual history of Muslims of Bengal (Ahmad 17).

<sup>17</sup> A group of Islamic scholars.

<sup>18</sup> A subject that is attributed to the Messenger of God, Muhammad, in terms of words, actions, reports, or descriptions.

<sup>19</sup> A subject that seeks to explain the meanings of the words of the Qur’ān in terms of their significance to the intent of God Almighty.

<sup>20</sup>Principal or head teacher.

### Proposal for an Islamic University

In the Post-independent India, several committees and commissions were constituted for the development of the Calcutta Madrasah and Madrasah Education in Bengal. Among these are the Review Committee (1969), Muṣṭafā bin Qāsim Committee (1980) and the Dr. A.R. Kidwai Committee (2001). On the basis of their reports, Madrasah education had been changing bit by bit, over time. The Dr. A.R. Kidwai Committee made a great impact on Madrasah education especially on the Calcutta Madrasah. This Committee suggested a number of changes for the Calcutta Madrasah which were absolutely historic and fruitful. Among the many changes, the significant recommendations of this committee were:

1. The *Fāzil* class would be a two-year course equivalent to higher secondary education, and the *Kāmil* course will be extended to three years instead of two years, making it equivalent to a B.A. (Hons). These courses should be started.

2. The '*Ālim, Fāzil, Kāmil*'<sup>1</sup> and M.M. courses will be respectively equivalent to Secondary, Higher Secondary, B.A. (Hons), and Post Graduate levels as recognized by the university.

3. New *Kāmil* and M.M. courses will be started in these three senior madrasahs: Furfura Senior Madrasah (Hooghly), Beldanga Senior Madrasah (Murshidabad), and Batna Senior Madrasah (Malda) under the West Bengal Madrasah Education Board. The revised syllabus for these courses should be implemented in these madrasahs.

4. Additional teaching posts should be created in these madrasahs for teaching at the Master's degree level.

5. Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes reserved posts in madrasahs will be abolished and merged into the general category, and these positions should be filled quickly and so on.

All these proposals were accepted by the government and proved to be very fruitful in the field of madrasah education.

During the 1970's there were demands for further modernization of Madrasah Education vis-à-vis the educational reconstruction of Calcutta Madrasah, so that it could be transformed into an Islamic University (Bari 5). In response to these demands, the West Bengal Government constituted the Kidwai Committee headed by Hon'ble A.R. Kidwai for the all-round progress of the Madrasah Education in the state and improvement of the Calcutta Madrasah. The Kidwai Committee laid down fruitful suggestions for upgrading, improving and modernizing the education system in Calcutta Madrasah and in some senior Madrasahs where the *Kāmil* (under-graduate) and M.M. (post-graduate) courses are being taught. It was suggested that the

<sup>21</sup> The Arabic word "Kāmil" translates to "complete," "perfect," or "whole" in English. It can describe someone who is full of knowledge in Islām.

existing theology scheme be strengthened along with Higher Centre of Language Study. This Committee recommended that the Calcutta Madrasah should offer courses in Islamic Studies and modern social sciences and humanities through different units. It should continue higher learning and research in Islamic Studies, including Kāmil and M.M. courses at Maulānā Abūl-Kālam Azād Institute of Islamic Studies. Modern subjects like Economics, Sociology, Political Science, and History should be under the Faculty of Social Studies. Languages such as Arabic, Persian, English, French, German, Chinese, and Japanese should be taught at the School of Modern Languages and Literature. Journalism courses should be under the Institute of Mass Communication and Journalism. B.Ed. and M.Ed. courses should be under the Faculty of Education and Education Technology. Thus, Calcutta Madrasah should develop as a leading center of higher education in Eastern India. (Hosain, Ed. 14).

The Committee stated:

... a stage has come to look into the total review of the entire field of Madrasahs Education. So that the Madrasah System of Education is able to promote its unique socio-cultural identity vis-à-vis interacts well with the mainstream of general education. These are moments in history when a new direction has to be given to an age-old process. That stage has come (Refatullah & Sattar 15).

And again, in the context of the historic Calcutta Madrasah College it suggested that: “Calcutta Madrasah be recognized as an autonomous Institution of higher education. It suggested also that the Government may consider upgrading the autonomous Calcutta Madrasah as a Deemed University with suitable academic staff comparable to those of the universities” (Refatullah & Sattar15).

### **Transformation of Calcutta Madrasah to ‘Āliyah University through the XXVII of 2007**

The Government took several initiatives in pursuance of recommendations of the Kidwai Committee.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the ‘Āliyah University Act was passed by the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 2007. The Act came

<sup>22</sup> This Committee recommended that ‘Āliyah University should offer courses in Islamic Studies and modern social sciences and humanities through different units. It should continue higher learning and research in Islamic Studies, including Kāmil and M.M. courses at Maulānā Abūl-Kālam Azād Institute of Islamic Studies. Modern subjects like Economics, Sociology, Political Science, and History should be under the Faculty of Social Studies. Languages such as Arabic, Persian, English should be taught at the School of Modern Languages and Literature. Journalism courses should be under the Institute of Mass Communication and Journalism. B.Ed. and M.Ed. courses should be under the Faculty of Education and Education Technology. Thus, ‘Āliyah University should develop as a leading centre of higher education in Eastern India.

into force on 5 April 2008. It is notified in Kolkata Gazette as:

WHEREAS it is expedient to upgrade Calcutta Madrasah College, (erstwhile Madrasah 'Āliyah) one of the oldest institutions of higher learning and culture in India and to that end – to established and incorporate a teaching University at Kolkata, to dissolve the “Calcutta Madrasah College,” a Government Madrasah College and to transfer to, and vest in the said University all properties and rights of the said college. (*West Bengal Act XXVII of 2007*, Wednesday, February 20, 2008, p. 1)

As per 'Āliyah University Act 2007, Section 3 (3), it has been conferred the status of a Minority Educational Institution and also an autonomous university under the Department of Minority Affairs and Madrasah Education, Government of West Bengal. 'Āliyah University began its journey from the 2008-09 academic session with great potential and immense opportunities for growth.

It may be observed that Calcutta Madrasah from its early days imparted traditional teaching in both the subject of Islamic theology and that of modern sciences, social sciences, and humanities. To keep alive this tradition of teaching, 'Āliyah University offered courses in traditional Islamic Theology, Islamic Studies, and Arabic along with English, Bengali, History, Geography, Economics and branches of Science (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Statistics, Computer Science) as well as Engineering (Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Electronics and Electronic Communications, Computer Engineering), Management, Journalism and Mass Communication Studies, B.Ed., M.Phil. and Doctoral Programs are also offered (Hosain 15).

### Conclusion

It was, however, the year 1807, whence the necessity of imparting modern sciences in the Madrasah was first felt and its preceptor recommended so. In 1907, the opening of the Mumtāz al-Muḥaddithīn (M.M) class was made and the year 2007 fulfilled the long-coveted dream of the Madrasah becoming a university. After intervals of hundred years each, the Calcutta Madrasah got upgraded to its present status.

This paper sheds light on the background of the Calcutta Madrasah and its historical significance. It emphasizes that the transformation of its name is not merely superficial; rather, it reflects a deeper transformation of identity. The establishment of the Madrasah marked a pioneering effort for the Muslim community of the Bengal Sūbah. Despite the departure of the British from India, over time, the institution has continued to function, serving as a beacon of light for Muslims in eastern India. Even today, this university remains a cornerstone institution for disadvantaged and minority groups, overseen by the Minorities Affairs & Minorities Education (MA & ME) Department of the Government of West Bengal. While facing challenges, primarily stemming from political issues, its impact on society remains

significant, echoing its historical importance. The institution's core educational objectives have endured despite changing times and tides.

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