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# Modernization and Islamization among Members of Calcutta's Educated Bengali Muslim Middle Class

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#### CONTRIBUTORS

comparative politics with emphasis on South Asia. He is currently Professor of Political Science at the State University of New York at Albany, USA. Professor Wright has focused his research on the politics of the Muslim minority in India for over fifteen years and is one of the leading authorities on the subject. He has spent two periods of research in India, primarily in Hyderabad and Bombay, which were made possible by the Fulbright Foundation and the American Institute of Indian Studies. He is the author of a large number of papers in international journals and symposia volumes.

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## Introduction

Imtiaz Ahmad

One way I could write this Introduction would be to summarize the findings of the different contributions and formulate in a strictly inductive manner the generalizations that emerge from them about modernization and social change among Muslims in India. But it seems more reasonable to treat these contributions as presenting a non-representative sample of the various ways in which Muslim communities in different parts of India are responding to the forces of modernization and social change. Such a sample cannot be used for warranted generalizations, but if it is used cautiously it can serve to deal with certain questions that do arise in the context of discussion of modernization and social change among Muslims in India. This Introduction will therefore focus on conceptual and methodological problems involved in the analysis and understanding of modernization and social change among Muslims in India.

Modernization and social change among Muslims in India has not received much scholarly attention from sociologists and social anthropologists.<sup>1</sup> For instance, there were a number of small-scale, micro-level sociological and social anthropological

1. There is a general paucity of research on Muslims in India by sociologists and social anthropologists. The general neglect of the study of Muslim social and cultural life in sociology in India and its consequences for understanding social processes not only among Muslims but in Indian society generally are discussed in Imtiaz Ahmad (1972).

## Modernization and Islamization among Members of Calcutta's Educated Bengali Muslim Middle Class

John Eade

Most analyses of modernization within India have been, explicitly or implicitly, set within a functionalist theoretical perspective. They have considered modernization as a cultural phenomenon whereby a 'new faith' based upon rationality, individualism and achievement, for example, is seen to challenge or replace traditional beliefs and as a structural phenomenon with educational, legal and economic institutions introduced from the West helping to transform India into an open, mobile, secular society.<sup>1</sup> Despite considerable differences between such a perspective and the 'structuralist' approach of Dumont or the interpretation of a Marxist such as Bettelheim concerning modernization in India, all share the conviction that ideological and institutional changes are entailed particularly with regard to the caste system (see Dumont, 1972: chapter 11; Bettelheim, 1971).<sup>2</sup>

1. A good discussion of modernization in India is provided by Maloney (1974), particularly in chapters 6, 16 and 17. A searching critique of functionalist theories has been provided by Smith (1973).
2. For a review of 'traditional' and 'revised' Marxist analyses of modernization, see Smith (1973: 90-92).

In one of India's largest cities, Calcutta, where colonial institutions and Western ideas made an early impact and received a vigorous indigenous response (Maloney, 1974: 505-507) the emergence of an English-educated middle class can be interpreted as evidence of the social change resulting from modernization. The existence of classes and class consciousness in Calcutta can be discerned in the early 19th century according to Mukherjee (1970) and the extent to which the importance of caste has declined within the middle class can be appreciated by Beteille's claim that, by the 1960s, 'education, income and occupation (and perhaps even literary tastes and the art of conversation) appear to be more important than caste' (1969: 77), especially among elite members of the middle class.

Yet the contrast between 'traditional' caste society and 'modern' class divisions can be overstated, particularly when associated with a rigid rural/urban dichotomy. Beteille (1974: chapter 6) has also described the long established class categories and cleavages in the West Bengal countryside<sup>3</sup> and the relative simplicity of rural Bengali caste society (Marriot, 1960; Nicholas, 1963) may well have been a factor behind the weakness of caste divisions among members of Calcutta's middle class, who were predominantly descended from rural Bengali high caste groups.

Another aspect of social life in the Bengal countryside which may also have affected the city's middle class was the division between the *bhadralok* or 'respectable people', a high status group whose superiority over the *chhotolok* was based upon its members' cultured, civilised life-style (Sinha and Bhattacharya, 1969). The rapid spread of the English-medium

3. I will follow in this paper Weber's distinction between economic class and social status. He explained that: 'In contrast to the purely economically determined "class situation" we wish to designate as "status situation" every typical component of the life fate of men that is determined by a specific positive or negative, social estimation of honour'. '... class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions', but '... status honour need not necessarily be linked with a "class situation"'. On the contrary, it normally stands in sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property' (Weber, 1967: 186-87). For an analysis of Calcutta society in terms of class see Mukherjee (1970).

educational system during the 19th century was largely due to the efforts of the *bhadralok*, who realised that through English education they could enter the clean, respectable occupations available in the countryside but even more so in Calcutta.<sup>4</sup> The city's 'educated middle class', therefore, was recruited primarily from a rural Bengali *bhadralok* which was in turn composed mainly of high caste Hindus, although membership was open to low caste Hindus and Bengali Muslims. The 'literary tastes and the art of conversation' to which Beteille refers were shaped, at least partly, by the rural *bhadralok* (see Franda, 1968: 263-64). A dichotomy between rural and urban society would not give due weight to the continuities between patterns of social life in Calcutta and rural Bengal. The weakness of caste and the importance of class divisions was not simply due to 'modernization' or 'urbanization' but to a more complex interplay between traditional and modern factors evident both in the city and the countryside. As various scholars have argued, distinctions between rural and urban society or between tradition and modernity can be made so long as they are not presented as necessarily unrelated and contradictory.<sup>5</sup>

My research among Bengali Muslim members of Calcutta's educated middle class had to consider not only their involvement in life-styles determined by their class situation and their possible status as *bhadralok*, but also the influence of social divisions and statuses particular to Bengali Muslim society. High status among rural West Bengali Muslims was based upon secular and religious titles denoting descent from 'foreign' settlers who migrated from North India and even further afield mainly during Muslim rule and found employment as officials, scholar, religious functionaries and soldiers, for example, and received grants of land in the countryside. They constituted the *ashraf* which paralleled the *bhadralok* among local Hindus and

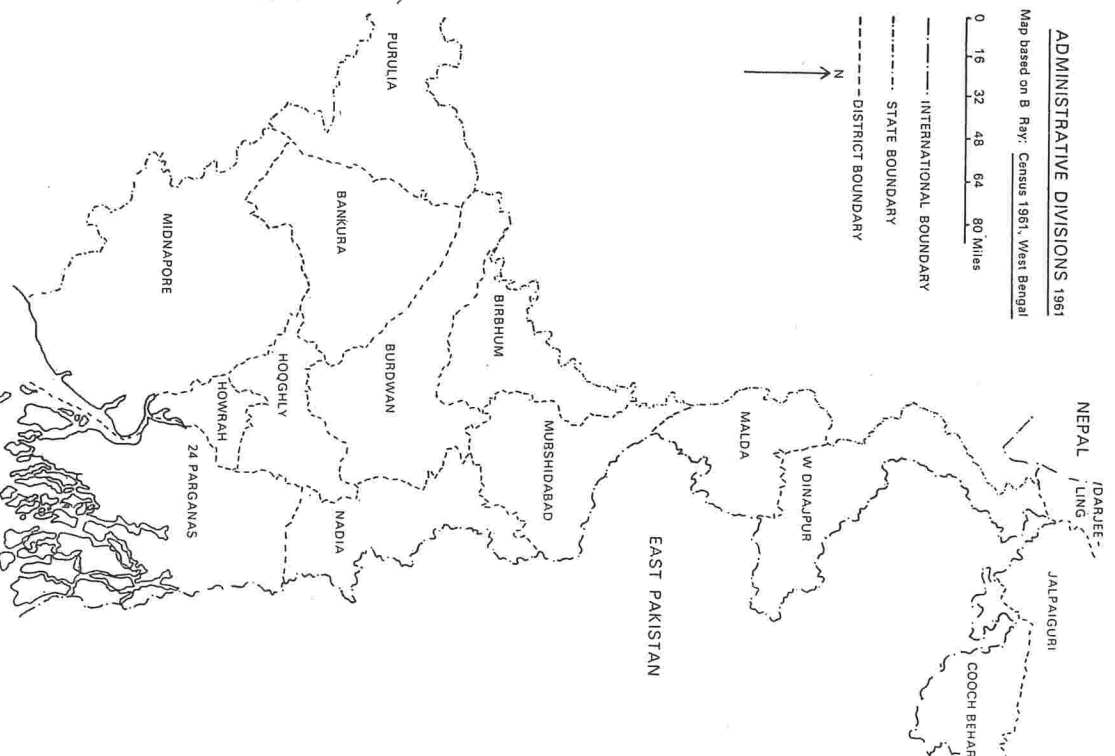
4. A good discussion of the involvement of the *bhadralok* in social and political developments within pre-independence Bengal has been provided by Broomfield (1968).

5. An analysis of the ways in which modernity and tradition 'infiltrate and transform each other' has been produced by Rudolph and Rudolph (1967).

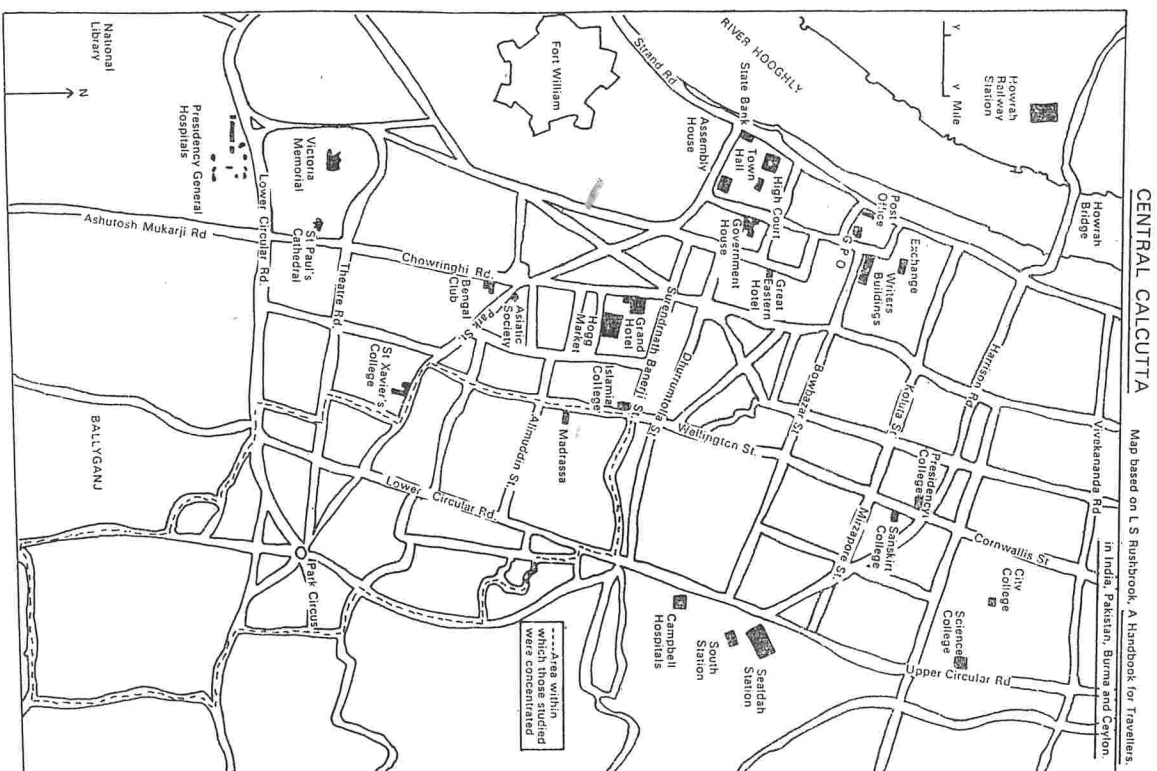
maintained a social distance from the descendants of Hindu converts to Islam.<sup>6</sup> While the Hindu *bhadralok*, in one area of rural West Bengal at least, considered wealthy members of the *ashraf* 'as Bhadrak in a "secular sense", that is in the sense of a non-ritual upper status group' (Sinha and Bhattacharya, 1969: 54), Muslims preferred to describe themselves as *ashraf* because of the Muslim connotations of the Arabic term (Sinha and Bhattacharya, 1969; Bhattacharya, 1963). Hence, despite the similarities between Bengali Hindus and Muslims, and between Hindus and Muslims generally in Calcutta as Siddiqui (1974) has revealed, Muslims wanted to maintain the distinctiveness of their social divisions and to observe certain elements of life-style which were particular to them as Muslims.

The existence of a middle class in Calcutta enabled its members to interact with one another regardless of the divisions of caste and religion. Yet in a variety of situations their behaviour was determined by their status as Hindus or Muslims, for example, and by social divisions particular to Hindu and Muslim society in Bengal and other regions. The discussion of modernization and social change among Bengali Muslim members of the educated middle class would have to take into account changes, if any, occurring within Muslim society both in the countryside and Calcutta. In a city where most Muslims came not from the Bengali hinterland but from the North Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Bengali Muslims may have sought prestige through establishing ties with North Indian *ashraf* migrants, while they may have also been affected by the process of 'Islamization' which Mines detected among migrants in Tamilnadu's northern cities and which entailed the replacement of rural caste-like identities by an ethnic, Muslim identity as they sought to acquire status in an urban context (see Mines, 1974 and 1981).

6. Imtiaz Ahmad (1967) has argued that the *ashraf* category has limited sociological value and Peter Bartocci (1972) found that a variety of high status, religious and secular titles were claimed by lineage groups rather than the classic four-fold Syed, Sheikh, Moghul and Pathan divisions associated with the *ashraf*. Informants in Calcutta also referred to a variety of titles but all appeared to be claims to the 'foreign' ancestry which distinguished them from Hindu converts or *cilaf* (see also Sinha and Bhattacharya, 1969; and Bhattacharya, 1973).







### *Bengali Muslim Members of the Educated Middle Class*

During the fieldwork undertaken between August 1970 and July 1971 and again during August and September 1976, information concerning more than 250 households was collected and 105 were studied intensively. People were contacted through informal ties spreading across the city and into the surrounding countryside. Their homes were concentrated in the Taltola/Park Circus area, but they frequently had to travel to jobs in other parts of the city and even outside Calcutta.

Most of the households contained nuclear families but family size periodically varied with the arrival for brief periods of relatives from Calcutta or the countryside.

**Table 1: Type of Family**

Single	14
Married couple only	3
Siblings only	3
Nuclear family	54
Denuded family	9
Extended family	9
Composite kin unit	13

Although some supplemented their income from property holdings and from the practice of their skills in ancestral villages, most relied upon the jobs they held in Calcutta.

Relatively few females went to work and the range of occupations they performed was narrow. Eighty of these 109 Bengali Muslims had entered government service, the 'professions' (law, medicine and education), banks and large business houses. They looked down upon the small shopkeepers and traders, commercial representatives and religious functionaries who have been included on account of their strong ties with more successful members of the middle class and the high education their children were receiving. Although all could be considered 'middle class' since they avoided the manual jobs pursued by the lower class and had not acquired the wealth of the upper class, they competed



**Table 2: Men's Occupations (current or at the time of retirement)**

Government servants	18
Doctors	14
Business officers	11
School teachers	10
Lawyers	9
Small shopkeepers	6
Managers of own firm	5
Small traders	5
Lecturers/Professors	5
Bank officers	3
Commercial representatives	3
Landlords	3
Religious functionaries	2
Judge	1
Journalist	1
Engineer	1
Accountant	1
	<hr/> 98

**Table 3: Women's Occupations**

Lecturers	6
Doctors	2
School teacher	1
Film actress	1
Model	1
	<hr/> 11

with one another for better education and more prestigious jobs.

The households contacted had found accommodation in *pukka* middle class housing near the predominantly Muslim, lower class *bustees* of the Taltola/Park Circus area. Important Muslim institutions had been established within or adjacent to

this area—the Calcutta Madrassah, Muslim Institute, Baker Hostel, Maulana Azad College and a branch of the Islamia Hospital, for example. (Some Muslims attended the local Christian missionary schools and colleges which attracted other local minority groups too, and all others who sought the advantages they had to offer.) Moreover, the presence of numerous if less distinguished Muslim institutions (*maktab*, *madrassah*, mosque, *khanaqah* and recreational clubs), the existence of a wide variety of entrepreneurs and occupational groups catering to Muslim needs, together with the proximity of large pockets of Muslim inhabitants enabled educated Bengali Muslims, if they wished, to move almost completely within a Muslim environment. Yet Muslims could not totally operate outside the wider community and educated Bengali Muslims were keenly aware of the ideological and material advantages of cooperating with non-Muslims.

Informants liked to describe themselves in English as 'educated middle class' because the phrase emphasized their freedom from 'traditional' social divisions. However, as I have already pointed out educated Bengali Muslims entered a middle class influenced by *bhadralok* norms and values and came from social groups particular to rural Bengali Muslim society. The extent to which they were affected by social statuses unconnected with their class position will now be considered.

#### 'Urbanite' And 'Mofussil' Muslims

Most informants were descended from families based in West Bengal districts close to the city—24 Parganas, Hooghly, Howrah, Midnapore, Burdwan, Birbhum, Murshidabad and Nadia.<sup>7</sup> The oldest settlers in Calcutta could trace their ancestry to people who had come to the city during the late 18th century but the majority were third, second or first generation Calcuttans. The most recent migrants to the city

7. Heads of Households were descended from families in the following districts. *West Bengal districts*: Hooghly 18, 24 Parganas 14, Murshidabad 13, Howrah 12, Birbhum 11, Burdwan 6, W. Dinaipur 4, Midnapore 3, Nadia 2, Bankura 2, Cooch Behar 1 and Malda 1. 16 came from districts now in Bangladesh, 3 came from Bihar and 2 from U.P.

who had arrived since independence (1947) were the most deeply involved in the social and economic life of the villages from which they had come. Pre-independence migrants had gradually come to depend upon the educational and occupational resources of the city and had left their economic interests in rural land-holdings to be looked after by relatives remaining in the countryside. Rather than retire to their 'ancestral villages', they remained in Calcutta to help their offspring benefit from the experience they had gained as members of the educated middle class. Some still periodically returned to their ancestral villages<sup>8</sup> but others had virtually lost all contact with their rural kin. They had become urbanites<sup>9</sup> and they looked down upon the latest entrants into the educated middle class whom they called 'mofussil people',<sup>10</sup> lacking the sophistication and culture of educated citizens like themselves who were brought up or even born in the city.

Although evidence concerning the rural social and economic background of those I contacted was scanty and usually unverifiable,<sup>11</sup> it appeared that informants had come from high status, *ashraf* groups and the two upper levels of the rural class system. The influence of rural status divisions and life-styles was strongest among *mofussil* migrants. They claimed titles classically associated with the *ashraf* (Syed, Sheikh and Pathan), as well as secular and religious titles accorded high status in local systems of ranking—Mir, Mirza, Chowdhury, Kazi, Khondkhar Shah, Lascar, Sircar, Mullah, Mondal and Biswas. Urbanite informants, on the other hand, often declared that they no longer used such titles and were free in Calcutta from local ranking systems of titled lineage groups. They sternly disapproved of the caste-like divisions operating within rural Bengali Muslim society, since they offended both the egalitarian principles of Islam and their vision of a modern Indian

8. Typically during religious festivals and public holidays.
9. A term describing people long settled in the city and dependent upon its resources.
10. *Mofussil* is a word of Persian origin originally used to describe the rural area of a district or region and its local centres, as opposed to the district or regional capital.
11. I could only visit four of the villages from which *mofussil* informants had migrated.

society freed from the traditional shackles of caste.<sup>12</sup>

Urbanites used their *ashraf* titles in certain situations and their attachment to Islamic egalitarian ideals did not prevent them from carefully arranging marriages which would not undermine their reputation as respectable Muslims of good ancestry. Yet in a city where they were free from local lineage groups and rural social hierarchies their *ashraf* titles had become less important than their education, occupation and income. With the migration of so many middle class Bengali Muslims from Calcutta to Pakistan between 1947 and 1952, pre-independence settlers were left scattered and weakened. If they wanted to find partners for their offspring outside the small number of pre-independence settler families, they had to negotiate with 'less sophisticated' *mofussil* Bengali Muslims, their co-religionists from other regions or non-Muslims. In all these cases the prime consideration would have been the educational and, usually, occupational qualifications of the partners. Moreover, if they wanted to gain promotion in institutions dominated by Hindus after independence rather than work mostly among Muslims, their traditional Muslim statuses were again worthless.

Social and economic conditions in Calcutta after independence encouraged well-established Bengali Muslim members of the educated middle class to pay more attention to their class situation than to their ascribed statuses as *ashraf* Muslims. Yet while ties were established with other members of the educated middle class across the divisions of religion, region, caste or caste-like groups, the impact of a predominantly high caste Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* could not be ignored.

Educated Bengali Hindus in Calcutta were proud of the Bengali language and literary heritage whose development had been due so much to the *bhadralok*. Their preference for clean, middle class jobs also revealed the influence of *bhadralok* values, as did their belief that education entailed a knowledge of Bengali culture and cultivated behaviour as well as academic success. Even though urbanite informants spoke English, their

12. Here 'traditional'/religious and 'modern'/secular values were subtly blended, although a few radicals, usually Marxists, claimed to have rejected religious values. The views of radicals, moderates and conservatives are discussed in my doctoral thesis submitted at the University of Oxford in 1978.

mother-tongue was usually Bengali and they had learned the metropolitan dialect accepted by educated Bengalis 'as *chalit bhasha*, the standard colloquial form' (Broomfield, 1968:10). They also took an interest in Bengali culture, listening to *Rabindra Sangeet* on the radio,<sup>13</sup> for example, reading Bengali novels and, less frequently, attending Bengali films and concerts.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, they considered themselves further justified in claiming superiority over the *mofussil* migrants who retained their rural dialects and were less acquainted with Bengali culture and the facilities available in Calcutta for 'cultivated' Bengalis.

*Mofussil* migrants were also seen to be less cultured as *Muslims*. Urbanites criticised their observance of caste-like group divisions partly on the grounds that educated Muslims would realize that such divisions should have no place within Islam. *Mofussil* Muslims did realise the non-Islamic nature of such divisions, but what was significant was the urbanites' claim that *mofussil* informants were less respectable because of their divergence from the urbanite ideal of an educated, cultured Muslim. Urbanites also diverged from the ideal since they did not totally ignore their *ashraf* titles and ancestry, but they sought prestige as educated Muslims rather than as members of an *ashraf* group. In Calcutta's predominantly North Indian Muslim population they could establish contact across regional-cultural boundaries by learning *bazar* Hindi or Urdu, and they could claim prestige among fellow Bengali Muslims by speaking more sophisticated Urdu and becoming acquainted with the rich heritage of Urdu literature. Moreover, they could ensure that their children received a thorough education in the beliefs, practices and history of Islam so that they would behave as orthodox, respectable Muslims.

Urbanites took into account more than simply class factors, such as income and occupation, as the description of

13. *Rabindra Sangeet* were poems written and set to music by Rabindra Nath Tagore, the foremost artistic figure in the 'Bengali Renaissance' which established the high culture with which the *bhadralok* so closely identified.

14. The troubled political period of 1970-1971 was not conducive to cultural visits at night even in a city renowned for its wide range of entertainment.

their views concerning social prestige has revealed. They were affected by *bhadralok* values and by their ideal of an educated Muslim: they interacted with others as respectable Bengalis and Muslims as well as members of the educated middle class. While their attitudes towards *mofussil* Muslims showed how they assessed their own status and the status of certain others, the contrast between urbanites and *mofussil* migrants must not be overdrawn. *Mofussil* informants were taking advantage of the opportunities in Calcutta to become more cultured as Bengalis and Muslims. They were not the unsophisticated rustics that some urbanites liked to suggest. Some *mofussil* migrants preferred to ignore their participation in Calcutta's middle class and to laud the virtues of rural life—the value of a more homogeneous, ordered society where people were more honest and their social prestige was more easily determined. *Mofussil* Muslims could counter the urbanites' ideal with their own in order to refute any claims that they were less respectable.

Before considering the extent to which the differences and similarities between Bengali Muslim members of the educated middle class revealed the influence of modernization and Islamization, four case studies will be presented in order to make those differences and similarities clearer.

#### *Ismail Khan and Mohammad Sircar*

Both were *mofussil* migrants who had come to Calcutta after independence. Ismail Khan was Muhammad Sircar's tenant, occupying the ground floor of a house which Sircar's father had bought from a Eurasian near large Muslim *bustees* in Taltola. Ismail was a Pathan whose group had dominated his ancestral village in Birbhum both socially and economically. The basis of his group's prestige or *izzat*<sup>15</sup> was its members' supposed descent from Muslims who had migrated to Bengal from the north-west. Although Ismail admitted that poor Pathans did exist in his village, their economic weakness was

15. The word, pronounced by Bengali-speaking people as *ijjat*, referred to 'personal or group prestige or honour' by Bertocci was also considered by him to be 'a manifestation of Weber's notion of status honour *par excellence*' (Weber, 1967: 44).

offset by the large land-holdings of those like his paternal grandfather.<sup>16</sup> The only other group in the village claimed to be Sheikh, but Ismail maintained that its members were really descended from Hindu converts.

The Pathans in Birbhum and other West Bengal districts spoke a particular form of non-standard Urdu, which further distinguished them from local Bengali-speaking converts. Moreover, Ismail Khan had been brought up to behave like a Pathan. He proved a hot-tempered, passionate person, quick to defend his family's honour, forceful in the expression of his opinions, and resolute against any criticism of those opinions—among his friends, at least.<sup>17</sup> His *izzat* was also expressed through the high standards of hospitality he set for himself and others.<sup>18</sup> He reserved one of his three rooms for the reception of guests, whom he regaled with conversation and with food—tea and biscuits or, more lavishly, *kurma*, *chappati*, *brinjal* and *halwa*, which were 'special Muslim dishes', in his opinion, and indicative of his cultured tastes and life-style.

His rural upbringing had a deep influence upon Ismail Khan's behaviour and home life, even though he had lived in Calcutta since the mid-1950s and rarely returned to Birbhum. He believed that his ancestry and refined living made him one of the 'chosen persons', *khas*, as opposed to 'ordinary people', *ahm*, like his landlord, a Sircar from Hooghly, or his wealthy merchant neighbours who were Malick. Even so, his social inferiors could ignore his opinions in Calcutta and Ismail Khan was only prepared to assert his superiority in their absence.

Khan was a teacher in a Muslim secondary school in the dock area of south-west Calcutta, to which he had to travel from his home in Taltola. He occupied a relatively low position in the educated middle class and could not even boast of a

16. His grandfather shared in a family *zaminidari* of 700 *bighas* which had been granted by the British according to Ismail.

17. Although Ismail and his relatives had never visited the homelands of the Pathans, his behaviour was similar to that of his distant 'brothers'. Maloney noted that Pathans 'are imbued with *izzat*' and the individual 'is self-assertive, and a quiet discussion quickly turns into a highly emotional shouting session' (1974: 386).

18. He was quick to detect any lack of breeding shown by other local Bengali Muslims during his visits to them.

university education. At work he had to show respect to those more qualified and more senior than himself, who came from different rural status groups, West Bengal districts and regions. His Urdu dialect might have appeared impressive in the Birbhum countryside, but to North Indian migrants, who taught at the same school in Calcutta, it may have sounded unrefined.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, although Ismail could preserve his rural traditions within his household and content himself with pride in his ancestry and life-style, the social and economic conditions surrounding him in Calcutta prevented his attitudes and behaviour from having any wider significance. He was not part of a locally dominant Pathan group, but was surrounded at work and in his Taltola neighbourhood by Muslims, for whom the values and behaviour of Khan's rural group had little or no significance.

Ismail Khan professed to look down upon Muhammad Sircar, because he believed Sircar to be the descendant of Hindu converts. His landlord lacked the social graces which distinguished those with respectable ancestry in Ismail's opinion. However, in Calcutta Ismail Khan was clearly less economically successful than Sircar and depended, as a tenant, upon his landlord's goodwill. Sircar's father and father's brother had established shops in Calcutta before independence, where they sold embroidered cloth goods (*chikan*) produced by Muslim artisans in the Hooghly countryside. Sircar had been brought up in his village, but after taking a degree in Hooghly Town he had settled in Calcutta finding employment in Govt. service as an accountant. His son had also become a government accountant, after taking his degree at the University of Calcutta. Muhammad Sircar did not refer to the *izzat* of his group or claim a distinctive Sircar life-style. However, he claimed respectability by virtue of his 'foreign' ancestry, the strict purdah which the female members of his household observed.<sup>20</sup>

19. Although I was introduced to his North Indian colleagues, I was unable to talk at length with them. However, in the homes of several North Indian settlers in Calcutta members poured scorn on the 'unsophisticated' Urdu spoken by Bengali Muslims, even those who were highly educated.

20. Among some urbanite families as well as in the countryside one of the most important indicators of respectability was the strict seclusion of the female members of a household (see also Bartocci, 1972; and Guha, 1965).



and the careful attention he paid to the Islamic education of his children, for example. Although he did not refer to local systems of ranking, like Ismail's family he and his relatives had taken advantage of rural economic changes to marry people from nearby respectable groups.

In Ismail's father's generation partners from local Syed, Mia and Chowdhury families were chosen, as well as local Pathan, because the entry of Ismail's relatives into the lower levels of the English educational system and their pursuit of jobs where their new skills could be used led them to look beyond traditionally educated, landowning families. The policy of recruiting people outside the Pathan group continued with Ismail's marriage to a Mia, although her father was a rural Birbhum landowner. Likewise, Muhammad Sircar, who had married a distant relative, sought partners for his son and two daughters from other groups. Sheikh and Mondal also occupied his ancestral village and it was through local Sheikh ties that he negotiated his elder daughter's marriage to the son of a Sheikh small businessman in a nearby village. His elder daughter had been brought up in his village, but his younger daughter went to school in Park Circus and he found for her an accountant who was employed by the South Eastern Railways in Calcutta and whose father was a Mondal from a nearby Hooghly village who, like Sircar's father, sold *chicken* in Calcutta. His son's marriage, which was negotiated in the city, was to the daughter of a Howrah Sheikh who was a clerk in the Calcutta Corporation.

The marriage alliances described above demonstrated the impact of educational and occupational developments both in the countryside and Calcutta upon traditional marriage circles. While previous generations had been content to confine alliances to members of the same group,<sup>21</sup> well educated people with good occupational prospects were now being sought. Muhammad Sircar wanted alliances with respectable, *ashraf* Muslims, but he also wanted his son and younger daughter to marry people familiar with Calcutta and from educated middle class background. He was less interested than Ismail Khan in emphasizing his rural prestige and life-style, because he had

21. So the informants claimed in the family trees they recounted to me.

become more involved in a social milieu where local systems of rural ranking and life-styles, associated with particular *ashraf* groups, were irrelevant.

Although Sircar had become acquainted with the Urdu used among Muslim traders in the city, his mother-tongue was the local Hooghly dialect of Bengali and he could easily communicate with his predominantly Bengali Hindu colleagues and superiors. He had not acquired the deep knowledge of Bengali and Urdu culture which urbanites claimed and he was still involved in village affairs, regularly returning to the Hooghly countryside, but both his son and daughter appeared well on the way to becoming permanent citizens of Calcutta and capable of acquiring the sophistication valued by urbanites.

#### *Abdul Huq and Zulekha Khatoon*

Abdul Huq claimed descent from a family which during the 18th century had owned an extensive area of land to the south of what then constituted Calcutta. His ancestors lost control of that property, but were granted land by the British in Bhowanipore and his great-grandfather in the mid-19th century was sufficiently well-placed to marry the daughter of a celebrated Hooghly *pir*. His grandfather joined a select band of the earliest Bengali Muslim graduates, when he completed his studies during the 1880s, and he proceeded to find employment as a Corporation engineer. Huq's father and three uncles graduated between 1905 and 1920, and by 1947 three of them had considerable success—Huq's eldest uncle had become Principal of a medical school, his youngest uncle had been appointed to a relatively senior government service post, while his father had built up a highly lucrative legal practice. With the creation of Pakistan his father decided not to join two of the brothers, who left for Dacca after the creation of Pakistan, and tried to give his two sons and three daughters the educational and cultural training which would enable them to compete with outsiders. His efforts were rewarded by the entry of his sons into relatively well-paid positions within large foreign-owned enterprises and the qualification of two daughters as doctors.

The professional success of Abdul Huq's father had led to

the building of a spacious residence on the edge of the Park Circus area. Since the father's death, however, most of the house had been rented out to a North Indian Muslim household and to a Bengali Hindu doctor, who used the rooms for his clinic. By 1976 Abdul Huq, who was now unemployed, was living with his mother, sister and brother-in-law in half of the ground floor. The days of splendour, for a time at least, had departed.

Huq's patrilineal ancestors were Sheikh and, although Huq expressed little interest in Sheikh or other titles, his attitudes towards respectability, life-style and ancestry revealed the continuing impress of values associated with rural systems of social ranking. Moreover, decisions made by his father about marriage ensured the continuing influence of such systems.

The preference for alliances with well-born families was clearly expressed in his father's generation. His eldest uncle married the daughter of a Taltola lawyer, whose relatives were *ashraf* living near Huq's ancestral village in Hooghly district, his second uncle married a first cousin, while his third uncle's wife came from an 'educated and respectable' rentier family in 24 Parganas. Yet the most prestigious settlement was that between Huq's father and the daughter of an Urdu-speaking merchant, who had come to Calcutta from Patna, Bihar. He was not only wealthy and sophisticated but also a Syed. A further bonus was his daughter's beauty, largely determined by the fairness of her skin. Before Independence Huq's father and uncles could hold their own in the company of educated middle class Bengali and North Indian Muslims by virtue of their achievements, patrilineal ancestry, marital alliances and life-style. Although they were long established in the educated middle class and moved among outsiders, particularly successful Bengali Hindus, they were eminent Muslims in a community whose leaders wielded considerable power, as well as *ashraf* whose respectability found expression through an involvement in Urdu language and culture, or ties with Bengali and North Indian *ashraf*, for example.

The migration of so many 'respectable' families to Pakistan made it difficult for Huq's father to find suitable partners for his children. He was obliged to accept an offer for his eldest daughter from a newcomer, Dr Reza, who had begun a

promising career but who was the son of an 'uncultured' Sheikh *gomastha* in 24 Parganas. Abdul Huq's brother's wife belonged to a more distinguished Gujarati merchant family living in Calcutta but no reference was made about her ancestry or culture. The main aim was to find well-educated partners who could contribute to the foundation and continuance of a good standard of living. Dr Reza was eager to acquire the social graces which would make him acceptable to older established families and his practice, which attracted wealthy and influential outsiders, encouraged him to develop strong ties within Calcutta society rather than with his ancestral village. He courted the favour of renowned Bengali Muslim literary figures, as well as moved among influential Bengali and North Indian Muslims within the Taltola/Park Circus *bustees*. His brother-in-law, Abdul Huq, was less involved with lower class Muslims and traditional identities, but he identified no less deeply with the Muslim 'community' nor was he unmindful of the traditional values by which respectability could be determined.

Huq's family disclosed another development which had become more widespread after independence—marriage with Hindus, especially Bengalis. His two other sisters had both married Bengali Hindus whom they had met at medical college. They married under civil law and the alliances were tolerated because their husbands were well-educated, their professional prospects were good and they could maintain a high standard of living. The two sisters had also been influenced by 'modern' values, emphasizing the breakdown of religious barriers and freedom of choice for the individual. Yet although informants hailed such marriages as examples of modernization or feared them as signs of assimilation into the Hindu majority, inter-marriage with outsiders did not necessarily signify an inevitable trend toward modernization or assimilation. Alliances were established significantly with high caste Hindus who shared a common culture through their *bhadralok* origins. Cultural, as well as economic, considerations guided people's choices, often unwittingly. Furthermore, the degree of pressure towards assimilation would be weaker if a Muslim girl lived with her Hindu husband outside his natal home. In some cases children were reared as Muslims and given an Islamic upbringing while, in the instances of inter-marriage between Muslim males and

outsiders, it was customary for the offspring to be brought up as Muslims.

Before independence Abdul Huq's father in particular had sought acceptance among North Indian *ashraf* settlers in Calcutta. Although his mother-tongue was metropolitan Bengali, he had some knowledge of the Urdu spoken by 'cultured' North Indians such as his wife. His marriage showed that regional differences could be ignored between English-educated Muslims of good ancestry. The recruitment of non-Muslims after 1947 did not herald the breakdown of religious boundaries and the abandonment of status symbols particular to Muslims. Highly-educated, Bengali-speaking people were brought into households where Muslim customs were still observed. Offspring were brought up as Muslims and the respectability of the family's ancestry traced through the male line was not compromised.

Zulekha Khatoon's ancestors had been employed at the Nawab of Murshidabad's court, she claimed, and during British rule her family had quickly adapted to new conditions of government service. Her grandfather graduated from Rajshahi College in the late 19th century, entered the Bengal Civil Service and finally retired as a Police Magistrate in Taltoila where he had built a house. The house was situated close to the *khanquah* of a *pir* to whom he had become attached. He married twice. His first wife was the daughter of an East Bengali lawyer from Barisal district, who practiced in Calcutta and was the brother of another lawyer, Fazl ul Huq, whose fame was to spread far and wide as the most important Bengali Muslim political figure between 1920 and 1947. He married again after his first wife's death, choosing a widow from a Barisal rentier family, but information about this alliance was scanty as Zulekha was the daughter of his eldest son by the first marriage.

Zulekha's father, Syed Aftab, went to Calcutta's premier college, Presidency College, and entered the Bengal Civil Service. His rise to a relatively senior post was probably assisted by his mother's brother, Fazl ul Huq, and his prestige was further boosted by his marriage to one of the Nawab of Dacca's daughters. During the 1930s Syed Aftab was closely involved with the social and political Bengali Muslim elite and consciously

identified with an Islamic culture, which was usually considered to be synonymous with Urdu culture. His father had already learnt Urdu and a mixture of Urdu and Bengali became the family's mother-tongue. Although the family had also become devotees of a Bengali Muslim *pir*, Urdu was the *lingua franca* of the *khanquah* and devotional rites were performed in the 'Islamic' languages of Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Syed Aftab's wife came from an aristocratic Urdu-speaking family and her mother's second child, a daughter, entered the strictly secluded, traditionally cultured, world which some noble Bengali Muslim families tried to maintain when she entered the *khanquah* on her marriage to the *pir*'s second son.

Yet Syed Aftab was to scandalize his respectable Muslim friends by divorcing his wife and marrying his first cousin, Zulekha's mother, who had in turn divorced her husband, a sub-deputy magistrate, who hailed from Barisal district. Zulekha's mother was a formidable personality and Fazl ul Huq, her relative, decided to use her talents within politics, using her as his parliamentary secretary. Her commitment to the modern education of Muslim girls found expression through the foundation of Lady Brabourne College near her home in Park Circus, while her own children (Zulekha and two sons) received a liberal upbringing and a university education—Zulekha attended Lady Brabourne College while the sons went to Presidency College.

Zulekha's parents married less than ten years before independence. The families, which had been so shocked by the marriage, were broken up by migration to Pakistan after 1947 and Zulekha was brought up in a world where the success her parents had enjoyed before independence had to be gained through co-operation with outsiders. Her parents had won many friends within the Bengali Hindu middle class, and her mother's reputation for modernity and secularism among the Congress political elite helped her to win the party nomination to contest a seat in the Murshidabad countryside in 1957 against a distant relative, notorious for his 'communal' utterances.<sup>22</sup>

22. I have discussed her political career and the careers of fourteen other Bengali Muslim politicians since independence in a paper titled, 'The West Bengali Muslim Political Elite since Independence—Cases from a Passing Generation' (forthcoming).



Hence, when both Zulekha and her elder brother decided to marry educated Bengali Hindus, her parents did not seriously demur. There were extensive similarities between the two alliances. Both fathers-in-law had achieved high honour. Zulekha's husband had been brought up in Madhya Pradesh, where his father had risen from the ranks of the lawyers to the High Court bench and the Vice-Chancellorship of Nagpur University, while her sister-in-law's father had become Federal Accountant-General. Both her husband and her brother had entered the I.A.S. and, by 1976, were occupying the same government block south of Park Circus. Moreover, Zulekha and her sister-in-law taught at the same institution, Lady Brabourne College, and although all four could speak Bengali fluently, Urdu, Hindi or the particular mixture of Urdu and Bengali handed down from Zulekha's parents was used, as the Hindu partners had learnt Hindi or Urdu in Nagpur and Delhi.

Although Zulekha came from an unconventional, highly modern family, she had also strong ties with very traditional households and she clung tightly to her identity as a Muslim. She was a fervent supporter of the *khanquah* and invited relatives and friends to celebrate major Islamic festivals in her flat. Her husband also attended these domestic ceremonies and behaved in a manner which lead strangers to suppose that he had become a Muslim. He claimed to reject all institutional religions but was willing to support his wife in her attempt to maintain her identity and prestige among Muslims. Her brother criticized her 'excessive' religiosity but, despite the unconventionality of many of his beliefs and actions, he too observed crucial Islamic rituals and both brother and sister ensured that their children were brought up formally as Muslims.

In the case of Zulekha and her family there was no contact any more with ancestral villages or with titled caste-like groups. Education, income and occupation were essential components of their social status and differences between themselves and non-Muslims, particularly Hindus, were relatively few. However, their Islamic identity was still important to them and their marriages to Bengali Hindus had neither undermined that identity nor the religious identity of their children. Zulekha and her brother were still Syed too, and their ties with the *khanquah* helped them to maintain the culture and the

prestige of sophisticated respectable Muslims. They were enabling traditional identities to be expressed in modern forms; they were caught up in the continual interaction between what appeared to be contradictory identities and statuses.

### Conclusion

Educated Bengali Muslims in Calcutta did not interact with one another or other citizens as members of titled lineage groups which were hierarchically ranked, although secondary evidence as well as my own visits to informants' ancestral villages indicated that the position would have been different when they returned to the countryside. Yet as the Ismail Khan and Muhammad Sircar case studies suggest, relations between rural status groups had changed in response to educational and occupational opportunities in the countryside as well as in Calcutta, at least as far as marriage was concerned.

My research laboured under the disadvantage of not being able to investigate the rural social and economic backgrounds of all but a few informants. The continuing influence of statuses based upon rural class positions was not clear, even among those who had recently migrated from the countryside. However, people were prepared to discuss their membership of rural titled lineage groups and local ranking systems. Family histories provided by Ismail Khan and Muhammad Sircar suggested that educational and occupational changes in rural Bengal had already led to inter-marriages between members of local *ashraf* groups in similar class positions. Alliances between *mofussil* migrants in Calcutta from different districts and *ashraf* groups were not necessarily due to urbanization or a process of modernization confined to the city.

Nevertheless, the gradual involvement of Sircar and his offspring in Calcutta's educated middle class and the considerable freedom of urbanite informants from *ashraf* group divisions suggested that certain conditions operating within Calcutta prevented the emergence of titled lineage groups, hierarchically ranked, among an admittedly minute section of Calcutta's educated middle class. Such evidence could fit models of urbanization and modernization, but the particular conditions affecting educated Bengali Muslims after the migration

of so many colleagues to Pakistan following independence had also to be considered. Among lower class Muslims in the neighbouring *bustees* caste-like divisions were still strong, partly because people from the same rural locality or even the same village could live near one another and retain traditional institutions (see Siddiqui, 1974). Although Ismail Khan could jealously guard his Pathan life-style at home, the Muslims he knew in Calcutta came from other districts and regions and different rural social orders. While he might consider his landlord to be inferior by virtue of his 'Hindu' origins and life-style, there was no local consensus which could support his personal opinion.

Despite the absence of local *ashraf* groups outside the *bustees*, even urbanites were influenced by *ashraf* values and wished to maintain their 'respectable' ancestry. The migration of *ashraf* from other regions, particularly North India, enabled educated Bengali Muslims to recruit respectable partners from the Muslim 'community'. The adoption of Urdu as their mother-tongue by some Bengali Muslims and the familiarity of other Bengali-speaking Muslims with the Urdu language reflected the importance of Urdu as a means of communication within Calcutta's diverse Muslim population, as well as the desire of respectable Bengali Muslims to identify with a language and a literary culture which they considered to be the expression of Indian Muslim culture and the Muslim community. Evidence from the Abdul Hug and Zulekha Khatoon case studies suggests the presence of an Islamization process similar to the one described by Mines in Tamilnadu. The movement from rural caste-like group identities to an ethnic, Muslim community identity in Calcutta also affected *mojussil* migrants such as Ismail Khan and Muhammad Sircar.

However, none of the four tried to interact with others simply as Muslims. Social prestige was determined by class factors and by norms and values distinctive of a regional status group, the Bengali *bhadralok*. The differences between urbanite and *mojussil* informants were determined partly by an involvement in a Bengali high culture, whose development had been due principally to the efforts of the *bhadralok* before independence and which still attracted the support of Bengali Hindus within Calcutta's educated middle class (see Broomfield, 1968;

Franda, 1968). While informants sometimes referred to themselves in Bengali as *bhadralok*, they did not belong in the city to a cohesive *bhadralok* group. As with *ashraf* groups, the *bhadralok* did not constitute a social group controlling the activities of those contacted, although its impact could be seen in urbanite attitudes towards education, culture and respectability.

Islamization did not appear to be due solely to the need for urban Muslims to acquire status. Political and economic competition with non-Muslims may well have encouraged an emphasis upon 'Muslim' culture and the 'Muslim community'. The marriages contracted by relatives of Abdul Hug and Zulekha Khatoon came before independence during a period of considerable political competition between Hindus and Muslims. Educated North Indian Muslims enjoyed considerable prestige within Calcutta and alliances with them were attractive to members of an expanding educated Bengali Muslim middle class. Changes following independence encouraged educated Bengali Muslims, who wished to maintain or improve their social position, to co-operate rather than compete with non-Muslims, especially Bengali Hindus, whom they could even marry without necessarily jeopardizing their prestige as respectable Muslims.

The use of the term 'Islamization' to analyze social processes within urban centres can also conceal the effect of ethnic identity upon rural Muslims. *Mojussil* migrants were well aware that divisions between titled lineage groups offended against the ideal of a united, egalitarian Muslim community. Reformist movements designed to stamp out syncretic traditions and 'un-Islamic' social customs had long been active in the Bengali countryside.<sup>23</sup> Educated urbanites were not the only ones to be knowledgeable about Muslim beliefs, practices and history.

23. A discussion of a reformist movement among Bengali Muslims will be found in Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan (1965). Shariatullah, a major figure within the movement, wanted the abolition of *pirs* because of the miraculous powers attributed to them and the 'unusual reverence attached to their persons' (Khan, 1965: LXXII). Both Hindus and Muslims prayed at *pir* tombs and Hindu influence was seen in a variety of local Muslim customs concerning worship, marriage, menstruation, and funerals (Khan, 1965: LXXVII).

Political mobilization both before and after independence had encouraged a consciousness of being Muslims and members of a distinctive community among rural Bengali Muslims, particularly in localities where they formed large concentrations.<sup>24</sup>

A thorough analysis of Islamization and modernization would require greater detail about rural social processes than I was able to collect. However, sufficient information was gathered to reveal the complex interplay between rural and urban, traditional and modern factors. The importance of economic class as a determinant of social prestige among informants was evident, but the influence of other status groups—the *bhadralok* and titled, *ashraf* groups—had also to be considered. The *bhadralok* upheld values deep-seated within rural Bengali society, although its political and economic significance had increased during the 19th and 20th centuries through 'modern' economic changes affecting both Calcutta and the countryside. Modernization had not entailed the emergence of an educated middle class isolated from changes affecting people as Bengalis and as Muslims. If Islamization encouraged people to identify with one another as Muslims in certain situations, in other situations people could share a common class or regional identity. Modernization and Islamization describe only part of a complicated social situation determined by historical developments particular to Calcutta as well as the Bengali countryside.

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24. In Murshidabad district Muslims were actually in the majority, while in many localities within other districts, even in Calcutta where they constituted only 12.80 per cent of the population in 1961, they could form a majority.

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## Inadvertent Modernization of Indian Muslims by Revivalists

Theodore P. Wright, Jr.

It is incumbent upon a scholar employing the term modernization to define it in a way distinguishable from westernization. The most generic definition I have found is John Kautsky's:

(It is) the process by which a society comes to be characterized by a belief in the rational and scientific control of man's physical and social environment and the application of technology to that end (1972:20).

Careful authors have admitted that the human costs exacted by modernization are heavy. Myron Weiner (1966:3) lists 'tensions, mental illnesses, violence, divorce, juvenile delinquency, racial, religious and class conflict.' To these one might now add crime, drug abuse, heart attacks and cancer. But few academics, until the coming of the ecological movement of the 1960s, challenged either the inevitability of the process or the normative superiority of modernity over traditionality. A recent textbook on the related concept of political development, however, has defined 'a healthy political system (as one which) will provide a great many of its citizens with a basic human need—a stable personal environment' (Gamer, 1976:8). This viewpoint contradicts the modernists' fundamental assumption that change is, on balance, good. It behooves those