

# ISLAM IN BENGAL

( Thirteenth to Nineteenth Century)

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DEDICATED  
TO  
MY TEACHER

**PROFESSOR DR. SUBIMAL CHANDRA SARKAR**

*Who Introduced The Study of Social History  
in Post-Graduate History Syllabus in the  
Patna University and set me on  
to the Teaching of Medieval  
Islamic History in 1932*

Professor Dr. H. K. Sherwani and Professors Dr. K. K. Datta and Dr. A. L. Srivastava encouraged me by their kind words of appreciation of the article published in the Journal of Indian History. Sri Amalendu De of History Department, Jadavpur University and Sri Kshitish Chandra Dey, Proprietor of Ratna Prakashan, and Sri Swapan Basu of Basu Printers deserve my sincere thanks for their help in the matter of quick publication of this book. I am conscious of various limitations of the book for which I crave the indulgence of the readers. It is hoped that this humble attempt will help the reader to understand the socio-political factors in Bengal during the period.

Jadavpur University  
Calcutta-32

Jagadish Narayan Sarkar  
3-6-72

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## PART ONE

### *POLITICAL ISLAM IN BENGAL : THIRTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY : A BIRD'S EYE-VIEW*

#### *1. Period of virtual independence and dubious vassalage (c. 1204—1338)*

Notwithstanding considerable research, the history of early medieval Bengal is in many respects shrouded in obscurity. We are on firmer grounds from the Mughal period onwards. Within the limitations of space imposed this chapter will focus attention only on certain broad features and tendencies in the history of medieval Bengal. This triangular alluvial delta between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal, the Rajmahal hills and pathless jungles of the west and the Garo and Tipperah hills, pierced by the Brahmaputra on the east, has been cut into three physical divisions by the Ganges and the Jumna which have determined her internal political development as well as her external relations and expansive activities. For long periods the history of medieval Bengal did not mean one unified or centralised rule but simultaneous separate jurisdictions. Again, her natural defences, climate, seasonal floods on her numerous rivers, the swampy soil, all determined the course and fate of the invading armies, while her distance from Delhi, natural resources, wealth and facilities for naval warfare were standing temptations to her ambitious and vigorous rulers or governors to defy Delhi with impunity or set up an independent rule. These factors have accounted for a prolonged tug of war between the forces of union and disunion within and between Delhi's aggressive imperialism and Bengal's equally assertive independence, till the fruits of victory fell to a third

party.

The Muslim conquest of Bengal was a very slow process. Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad ibn Bakhtiyar's surprise sack of Nadia (c. 1203-04) and occupation of Lakhnauti-Gaur, the capital of the Senas of Bengal, ten years after Muhammad Ghuri's establishment of Muslim rule in Northern India (1193) was just a beginning, not the culmination. Nevertheless it inaugurated a new age for Bengal. Politically it planted the seeds of Muslim rule there. Socially it opened her gates to immigrant foreigners from the entire Muslim world and thereby affected her society and culture.

The internal history of pre-Mughal Bengal (1204-1576) was, with certain exceptions, —a dreary and sickening story of frequent dynastic or gubernatorial changes, palace intrigues, disputed successions, short reigns, rebellions, usurpations and murders. In these political upheavals, the nobles and the principal officers played an important part, either as king-makers or as active participants in the game of power politics. Sometimes kings reigned but did not rule. An ambitious minister or group of officers or nobles ruled through the medium of the royal puppet. Very often the successful rebel or the assassin of the reigning king secured the throne. Sometimes mutual jealousies of the king-makers or regicides proved to be their undoing. The common populace, Hindu or Muslim, generally remained indifferent to the succession of phantom or tyrannical rulers, palace intrigues and revolutions. Such indifference evoked comments of surprise from Babur.

In the midst of this dark picture a few shining lights, on account of their military achievements, administrative ability and policy and patronage of learning and culture,—shed lustre on Muslim rule in early medieval Bengal, viz., Ilyas Shah and his two successors Sikandar and Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah, Ruknuddin Barbak Shah and Alauddin Husain Shah—to name a few. The last named Sultan is



sometimes considered to be the greatest of the medieval Sultans but his claims to greatness must not be exaggerated. Most Sultans were intolerant but a few showed toleration to their Hindu subjects and appointed Hindus in high posts. Some Sultans were good builders and several best architectural monuments of Bengal belonged to this period.

More important than the internal history of Bengal was the question of her relations with Delhi. The first fourteen decades of Muslim Bengal may be described as a period of virtual independence and dubious dependence on and uncertain loyalty or nominal vassalage to Delhi. Unlike the Delhi Sultanate, the Khalji rule (1204-27) preceded the Mamluk in Bengal. Though virtually independent in the kingdom of Lakhnauti, Bakhtiyar did not assume the title of Sultan. Under him and his immediate successors Lakhnauti remained vassal of Delhi in name till 1211, when Ali Mardan assumed royal title as Sultan Alauddin and restored the political unity of Bengal. Clannish feudalism and military oligarchy, coupled with the struggle for power between the old Khalji nobility and a foreign immigrant soldiery led to a civil war which was quelled by resort to force by the Delhi Sultan Iltutmish, killing Mardan's successor, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Ewaz Shah (who acknowledged the caliph of Bagdad) in 1227.

Then followed nearly sixty years of dependence of Bengal on Delhi under gubernatorial Mamluk rule (1227—c 87). But some of the governors of the *iqta* of Lakhnauti created trouble for Delhi by their pretensions. Bengal had to be reduced to dependence as a province under the iron man of Delhi, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban. He adopted the policy of checks and balances and divided the sphere of jurisdictions. But this could not prevent Tughril's serious rebellion, which had to be sternly suppressed (1278-81). Even Balban's own son, Bughra Khan, though suitably briefed as governor (1281-7), threw off the yoke of Delhi after his father's death and assumed the title of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud (1287-91). This

was the first instance of the unquestioned use of the royal title, Sultan Kaiqubad acquiescing in Bengal's independence which lasted till 1322. Nasir's son Ruknuddin Kaikaus (1291-1301), however, owed allegiance to Alauddin.

Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq of Delhi intervened in an internal feud in Bengal in 1323. As an antidote to her recalcitration he partitioned Bengal into three divisions (*iqtas*), annexing two of these (Satgaon and Sonargaon) and thereby encircling the third, Lakhnauti, which was left under Sultan Nasiruddin Ibrahim. Sultan Muhammad Tughluq reoriented the policy by diluting local rule with a sinister system of checks and balances, reducing the substance of autonomy in Lakhnauti and Sonargaon, while leaving Satgaon under a nominee. This proved partially successful for a time. But Delhi's troubles were Bengal's opportunity. During the Sultan's preoccupations in Multan, the rebel Sonargaon vassal, Ghiyasuddin Bahadur, was killed by his imperial associate. Then for a decade the three divisions of Bengal remained quiet under the imperial associates or nominees.

## 2. Bengal as an independent kingdom (c. 1338—1538)

With Delhi's hands tied up elsewhere, Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah assumed independence in Sonargaon (c. 1337-8) and Alauddin Ali Shah in Lakhnauti (c. 1341-2). During the next 200 years of Bengal's independence (c. 1338-1538), the term *Bangalah* supplanted the term *Lakhnauti*. Periods of comparative political stability, depending on the personal equation of the rulers, alternated with occasional diversions from the normal dynastic channels :

(i) *Ilyas Shahi dynasty* (c. 1342-1414): Unlike the usually short lived dynasties and governorships, this able and vigorous dynasty gained military glory for Bengal and revived her contact with the outside world. Succession was hereditary throughout, though Ghiyasuddin Ahmed

was a parricide. The founder of this line, Shamsuddin Ilyas, undid the partition of Bengal. In vain did Sultan Firuz of Delhi take up the challenge of a reunited, rejuvenated independent and expanding state. His two expeditions to recover Bengal failed,—one in 1353-55 due to Ilyas's admirable defence strategy in the island fortress of Ekdala and the other in 1359 due to Sikandar's resolute defence, backed up by nature as well as by mosquitos. On each occasion the Delhi Sultan had to retire crestfallen after concluding a treaty virtually restoring *status quo*. Weakened, preoccupied and barred by the buffer state of Jaunpur, the Delhi Sultanate was unable to reassert suzerainty over Bengal, which was left in independent isolation for nearly 200 years till the time of Sher Shah Sur.

(ii) Then came the brief, problem-ridden but unique political interlude (c 1415-36) of a local Hindu dynasty,—subsequently Moslemised,—of Raja Ganesh of Bhatuina in North Bengal (*alias* Danuj-mardan), the only Hindu to establish Hindu rule during the whole Muslim period, and of his apostate son Jadu or Jitmal or Jalaluddin, backed up by the ecclesiastical party within and the powerful Jaunpur kingdom outside.

(iii) The stability of the brilliant restoration of the Ilyas Shahi dynasty (sometimes called Mahmud Shahi dynasty, c 1436-87) is attested by its long duration and the undisputed hereditary succession of four generations of rulers descending from father to son.

(iv) A short, dark and bloody period of foreign Abyssinian rule of six years (c 1487-93), the palace guards and protectors turning usurpers. All the four Sultans had violent deaths, the assassin's claim to the throne being recognised as a convention.

(v) The horrid arbitrariness of this reign of terror was ended by a wise but crafty minister Sayyid Hussain (of Arab origin, but long settled in Bengal) who proved to be the man of the hour and became the progenitor of

another powerful and brilliant Husain Shahi dynasty (1493-1538).

### 3. *Bengal under the Afghans (c. 1538-1576)*

The Husain Shahi dynasty was supplanted by the Sur Afghans under the redoubtable Sher Khan, the overbearing minister of Jalal Khan Lohani of Bihar. Surajgarh (1534) made him master of Bihar and then of Gaur. A game of hide and seek ended in Humayun's occupation of Bengal (1538-9). Gaur became the paradise (renamed Jinnatabad) for the opium-eater Emperor. It was, however, only a fleeting and pyrrhic victory. Sher's finesse and force proved eminently successful. Chausa (1539) restored Bengal to Sher, while Bilgram (1540) made him Emperor. Bengal now became a dependency of Delhi for thirteen years (1540-53). Sher Shah had to dismiss his pretentious governor (Khizr Khan Turk) in 1541. He adopted the remedy of division, coupled with central supervision. Bengal was parcelled into several small units under fief-holders or jagirdars but the general superintendence over the whole was vested in one person (Qazi Fazilat). A trunk road was built from Sonargaon to the Indus. But Bengal did not forget the tradition of independence. She broke away from Delhi by taking advantage of the weakness of the successors of Sher's son, Islam Shah. This period of independence lasted for twentythree years, first under the viceregal family of the Surs (1553-64) and then under the usurping Pathan Karrani (Karlani) dynasty (1564-76).

### 4. *Expansionism of Bengal (c. 1204-1576)*

Lakhnauti was to Bengal what Prussia was to Germany. Almost from its very inception this infant Muslim state showed signs of expansionism, illustrated in three stages of raids, occupation and annexation. It was twofold in character. *First*, internal consolidation within

the geographical limits of Bengal ; *second*, trans-frontier expansion. Originally Muslim Bengal (as province or kingdom) was confined to a small area, consisting of South-East Mithila, North Radha, Varendra and North-West Bagdi. It was only later that it extended to West Radha, Satgaon and Bang (Sonargaon, or East Bengal)

*East* : 'Bang' or Eastern Bengal of the Senas continued to enjoy political independence long after Bakhtiyar's capture of Gaur. But it did not escape from successive inroads by the Muslims, and finally came under Muslim occupation under Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz (1301-22). Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1342-59) secured the political unification of Bengal by overthrowing his rival (Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi Shah) at Sonargaon (Eastern Bengal) and annexing it (1352).

*South* : Muslim rule extended to South Bengal under Ruknuddin Kaiqaus and Shamsuddin Firuz (Satgaon-Hughli). Under Nasiruddin Mahmud (1437-59) it spread to Jessore and Bagerhat area of Khulna district, first colonized by the Muslims under Khan Jahan. The Bakharganj district was occupied under Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1465), joining Jessore-Khulna area.

*South-West* Here the strategic Radha country, comprising the modern districts of Midnapur, major portions of Birbhum (Lakhnor or Nagar), Burdwan, Bankura and Hughli was for long the bone of contention between Lakhnauti and Orissa (under the Gangas and the Gajapatis).

As regards trans-frontier expansion and relations with powers surrounding Bengal, some old, some new, we have to note the direction of the aggressive foreign policy of Lakhnauti and the extent of its success. This may be summed up as follows

*North & north west* Bakhtiyar's Tibet expedition failed. After a series of raids, beginning from the time of Ali Mardan, Tirhut was conquered by Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah while Alauddin Husain Shah occupied the whole of

North Bihar up to Saran. Nepal was first invaded by the Muslims under Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah through the Terai and Kathmandu sacked.

*West* : Ilyas Shah advanced beyond Tirhut, conquering up to Benares and threatening Delhi Empire. Relations with Jaunpur were at first friendly (under Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah) but Ibrahim Shah Sharqi invaded Bengal. However, Alauddin Husain Shah offered shelter to the Sharqi ruler Husain Shah against Sikandar Lodi and recovered Magadh (Monghyr and South Bihar) up to Bihar. Nusrat Shah was at first pro-Afghan but later concluded a treaty with Babur to check the Afghans. His attempt to ally with Gujrat against Humayun, however, failed.

*South-east* : The extension of the Muslim empire beyond the Meghna was effected under Muhammad bin Tughluq. Portions of Tipperah and Chittagong were occupied, sometime by Delhi, sometime by the Bengal Sultans but without any permanence even up to the time of Alauddin Husain Shah. Mongoloid Arakan accepted Bengal's sovereignty only when necessary.

*North-east* : The Kamta-Kamrup kingdom, separated from Bengal by the Karatoya, proved to be a barrier against Muslim penetration in the north-eastern frontier areas. Muslim Bengal had to return baffled again and again, notwithstanding occasional raids and temporary successes. The first expansion of Muslim power across the Brahmaputra took place through Mymensingh district under Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah, who conquered Sylhet district (or Surma valley) of Assam (1303). It was lost about 1350 and recovered about 1463. After the failure of Nusrat Shah's invasion of the Ahom kingdom (1527-29) Bengal lost her conquests in Assam and Kamta, which were left free for nearly 130 years.

Even during the period of transition and anarchy (1538-76) Bengal kept up her tradition of expansion. During 1553-60 she invaded Arakan, occupied Jaunpur and pushed towards Agra, but after a rebuff had to maintain

good relations with the Mughals. Under the Karranis Bengal became the most important single power in North-eastern India. Sulaiman Karrani (1565-72), a popular ruler at home, was an opportunist in his foreign policy. Amassing huge wealth by plundering the temples of Puri, Kamakhya and Hajo with the help of his general Kalapahar and collecting a vast army, he increased his territory, occupying the unsubdued districts north and east of his capital (Tanda) as well as Orissa (1568). The aggressive Koches were defeated but later conciliated for checking the Mughals. But he wisely acknowledged the suzerainty of Akbar.

But the foolish, haughty and inexperienced Daud forsook his father's wisdom and drew upon himself Akbar's wrath by declaring independence and attacking a Mughal province. The Mughal-Afghan contest was a keen one. Worsted at Takroi (Tukaroi) in March, 1575, the crafty Afghan used Orissa, which he was allowed to retain against Todar Mal's advice, as a spring-board to recover Bengal after the death of the Mughal General, Munim Khan. But the irredentist agony of the last independent Afghan Sultan of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa was soon hushed at Rajmahal (July, 1576). Thus ended the independent kingdom of Bengal after 238 years.

## 5. *Bengal as a province of the Mughal Empire* ( 1576-1717 )

### ( a ) *Political unification*

The political problems of Bengal as a Mughal province were, generally speaking, similar to those under the Delhi Sultanate, viz., (a) securing the political unification and internal consolidation of Bengal and suppressing all internal rebellions, (b) securing uniformity of administration throughout the length and breadth of the land, and (c) effecting trans-frontier expansion. But

conditions had somewhat changed now. In some respects the Mughals were in a better position than the Delhi Sultans. The Mughal central government was much stronger, and their military control and the administrative system were so far better organised than under the Sultanate that the latter supplied the basis for the British administrative set-up. Moreover, the instruments of the central authority during the Sultanate period were generally governors, checked at times by imperial nominees or associates and the governors often became rebellious, necessitating the personal intervention of the Sultans. During the Mughal period some of the governors might have been inefficient and most of the generals and officers were quarrelsome but no governor rebelled. No Emperor had to advance personally into Bengal after 1576 for dealing with rebellions.

On the other hand several adverse factors accentuated the difficulties of the Mughals and delayed the progress of the Mughal arms and the process of political unification in Bengal. In the *first* place, the peculiar physical geography of Bengal and the nature of the land,—river system, soil, climate, vegetation etc. adversely affected the military operations, limiting campaigns to six months in a year. In a land of rivers and swamps the Mughals were weak in war boats, and the Mughal horse became paralysed. Local recruitment of foot-soldiers and central reinforcements being alike difficult, the Mughals were compelled to depend on local levies with local sympathies with imaginable consequences. In the *second* place, the political geography of Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir differed from that under the Sultans of Delhi. It was a highly complex structure, a checkered patchwork of splinter jurisdictions. While the Delhi Sultans had to deal mostly with the Hindu states and ambitious Muslim officers or Sultans, the Mughals had to face the resistance movements not only of the Hindu zamindars but also of the powerful Afghans. The latter had tasted successively imperial and royal power,



and tenaciously clung to their rights of self-preservation in a land which had become their last stronghold after expulsion from Northern India and Orissa. These enemies of the Mughals, Hindu and Muslim, were known as the 'Bara Bhuiyas' though their number was not twelve. Their struggle with the Mughals has sometimes been pictured as a war of national independence. But this claim is exaggerated. True, the Mughals were the common enemy of both the Hindu and Muslim zamindars. But no lofty sentiment of territorial patriotism or Hindu-Muslim unity inspired them. They were more concerned with their own individual interests. The most powerful of them, who were accepted as leaders by many associate zamindars Muslim or Hindu, were Isa Khan and then his son Musa Khan occupying half of modern Dacca and Tipperah districts, whole of Mymensingh district and parts of Rangpur, Bogra and Pabna districts. The tales of heroism centring round Rajah Pratapaditya, occupying the major parts of modern Jessore, Khulna and Bakharganj, are fictitious. There were some rebellious Pathan leaders like Bayazid Karrani and Khwaja Usman with Sylhet (Srihatta) as the centre of their power. These anti-Mughal leaders held the major part of the whole area from Rajmahal to Tripura and Chatgaon.

The defeat of the last Afghan Sultan of Bengal and its annexation to the Mughal empire did not mean the immediate extinction of Afghan offensive or resistance of the local Hindu zamindars. The Mughal conquest of Bengal was not effected at one stroke. It involved a protracted struggle between the forces of imperialism and local independence and operated monotonously through alternate ups and downs of offensive and recession. It took nearly forty years (c. 1575-1613), spanned by a dozen governorships of conquering generals and regular administrators, Munim Khan to Islam Khan, working in three different waves of conquest,—to transform Bengal from an armed camp to a settled province, in effect to stabilise Mughal rule and establish Mughal peace. That

transformation took place, not under Akbar but Jahangir. In fact the real credit for conquering Bengal goes neither to Munim Khan, nor to Khan-i-Jahan, nor yet to Man Singh, but to Islam Khan though the former also contributed to it.

Initially, the policy of the Mughal governors under Akbar was to remain satisfied with securing merely nominal allegiance of the zamindars, who were allowed to enjoy practical independence. Hence, they bent down before the imperial tornado but raised their heads and created troubles after it had blown over, at the slightest opportunity. Thus, as imperial governor, Man Singh (1594-1606) had to use both diplomacy and force in order to suppress disorders in Eastern India and Orissa in repeated expeditions. He created a new vassal state of Kuch Bihar as a counterpoise to Isa Khan who submitted notwithstanding some victories. Usman, leader of the Afghans, was defeated and made to disgorge Orissa and at last he fled. The Mughals occupied Malda and Purnea, reestablished Mymensingh outpost (1602) repulsed the Arakan pirates (Maghs, 1603), their ally, Kedar Rai, Zamindar of Sripur (S Dacca), who had broken his promise of loyalty, being killed. By 1604 the disturbances in deltaic Bengal were quenched but only for a time. Man Singh could subdue but not subjugate or crush the disturbers out. Nevertheless his work considerably facilitated the task of Islam Khan.

It was under Islam Khan (Governor of Bengal, 1608-13) that for the first time well-organised and effective measures were adopted to *wipe out* (and not merely to *subdue*) the independent and rebel zamindars of East Bengal. He resorted to the skilful policy of divide and rule. By playing off one zamindar against another diplomatically with hopes of imperial favours or rewards, he prevented united resistance and then, by carefully planned military preparations, he reduced them to vassalage one by one during 1610-12, viz., Musa Khan, the principal enemy of the Mughals along with his helpers, Usman Khan the Pathan,

Pratapaditya and others Sylhet was annexed, while Cachar submitted. In West Bengal three zamindars acknowledged Mughal suzerainty though they did not pay court to the governor,—Vir Hambir of Mallabhum and Bankura, Shams Khan of Pachete and Selim Khan of Hiji. Effective Mughal rule was established over the whole of Bengal by 1613.

### (b) *Administrative organization*

After 1576 Bengal came to be ruled by viceroys as a province of the Mughal empire. But at first in practice Mughal authority was only nominal being limited to the capital Rajmahal and a few *thanahs* under faujdars, some fortified military outposts and the surrounding areas. Outside these might was right. Akbar's efforts at establishing settled government for the empire—the organization of provincial government, introduction of revenue reforms, ban on fraudulent musters and illegal gains of officers—caused the mutiny of the Mughal captains and Afghans alike in Bengal, backed by the partisans of Muza Hakim. During this crisis of the reign (1580-1) Bengal and Bihar were formally cut off from the Mughal empire for about three years. After resolutely suppressing the rebellion, Akbar issued a decree (24 November 1586), promulgating a uniform administration for all provinces with a *Sipahsalar* (governor), a *bakhshi* (inspector general of army) a *Sadr*, *Qazi* and *Kotwal* and others. With its introduction a new chapter began in the internal history of Bengal in 1587. Shahbaz Khan pacified Bengal by his policy of conciliation. Orissa, however, continued under Afghan rule. The imposition of a uniform administrative system on Bengal had to await the establishment of effective control over the whole land by Islam Khan who transferred the capital from Rajmahal to Dacca.

Thus in brief, from the political point of view Akbar's reign was a period of preparation rather than of con-

solidation or expansion, while that of Jahangir constituted a 'formative period' and a 'landmark' in the history of Bengal. The harvest of these two reigns was reaped by Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. Bengal now enjoyed an unusually long spell of peace (1627-1717) without any serious internal rebellion or foreign invasion. Out of this period three long vicerealties covered more than half a century. During Shuja's long rule (1639-60) trade, commerce and wealth of Bengal grew. Shaista Khan (1664-88) ruled with a strong hand through able officers and lived in pomp, keeping the Emperor pleased by sending huge wealth, procured by oppression of the people. Monopoly of trade in articles of common consumption, for which the way had already been shown by Mir Jumla, was also a source of income. Shaista Khan was alleged to be avaricious by the English, having collected 38 crores in 13 years. Rice was, however, very cheap (8 mds. to the rupee). But already weaknesses had crept in the imperial political organization of the Mughals. Prince Khurram (Shahjahan) rebelled against his father and ruled over Orissa, Bengal Bihar and Oudh from Dacca as an independent king (1624).

Towards the end of the seventeenth century the decline in the provincial government was reflected in the rebellions of Shova Singh and Rahim Khan Afghan (1696-98), which were suppressed by Azimuddin better known Azmiusshan (Governor 1697-1712).

### ( c ) *Trans-frontier expansion :*

With the attainment of almost unprecedented geographical and political unity under Jahangir Bengal became contiguous to the two powerful frontier states, the Ahom Kingdom in the North-east and the Arakan kingdom in the South-east and it was at their expense that Bengal, as a part of the Empire, could now expand. The subjugation of Kuch Bihar in 1609 and annexation of Kamrup (1612-13) by Islam Khan, pushed the frontier of Mughal empire up to the river Bar Nadi. But both these rebelled during

the time of the next governor, Qasim Khan (1614-17). He failed not only in subduing Kachar but also disastrously in his two principal expeditions against Assam (1616) and Arakan (holding Chatgaon). Under Ibrahim Khan Fath-i-Jang (1617-23), however, Tipperah was conquered (1618), the Arakanese were repulsed in their raids along the Meghna, and the revolt in Hijili was crushed. Under Shahjahan, however, Assam was invaded and Kamrup was reconquered (1637-38), while the Mughals also fought with Arakan (1638). During the war of succession, however, Kamrup and Gauhati were recovered respectively by Kuch Bihar and the Ahoms (1659). The latter even occupied Kamrup (1660). Mir Jumla, as Governor of Bengal (1660-63) recovered Kamrup and occupied the Ahom capital by March 1662. The rainy season, however, suspended his activities and the Ahoms recovered much of their kingdom. Finally Mir Jumla advanced up to the eastern end of Assam, whose Rajah concluded a treaty acknowledging Mughal suzerainty. The death of Mir Jumla in 1663 was followed by disorders taking advantage of which Kuch Bihar was recovered. Shaista Khan (1664-88) reconquered it. His most solid achievement was the conquest of Chatgaon, which was a centre of the piratical activities of the Maghs and the Portuguese under the king of Arakan in 1666.

## 6. *European traders in Bengal*

The Portuguese were the earliest Europeans to begin trading with Bengal. They established factories in Chatgaon and Satgaon (1517), Hughli (1579-80) and had places like Hijili, Sripur, Dacca, Jessore, Barisal and Noakhali as their trade centres. They occupied Chatgaon towards the end of the sixteenth century and Sondip in the beginning of the seventeenth. But their unpopularity, for which their missionaries and pirates were largely responsible, accounted for the impermanence of their rule.

Emperor Shahjahan expelled them from Hughli in 1632. Their trade lingered till the 18th century.

The Dutch began to carry on trade with Bengal from the beginning of the 17th century. Their main centre was Chinsurah (1653) under which there were several subordinate factories inland.

The English secured permission to trade with Bengal in 1650, and soon came to have factories at Hughli (1651) Dacca (1668), Rajmahal, Malda etc. Shuja fixed their annual customs at Rs. 3000. But official interference continued and was not relieved by orders of Shaista Khan and Aurangzeb. The English resorted to a policy of force (1686) to redress their grievances, Fort William was established in 1696. Emperor Farrukhsiyar granted to the English a *farman* (1717) permitting them to trade free of duty, subject to payment of Rs. 3000/-. He also reduced the customs payable by the Dutch and the French (at Chander-nagore) from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. The interpretation of the *farman* of 1717 led to much difficulties. Regarded as the Magna Carta of the English E. I. Company, it really illustrated the bankruptcy of Mughal commercial policy. Wiser than the moles of Delhi, Murshid Quli Khan denied many of its privileges to the English in Bengal.

### 7. Bengal under the Independent Nawabs (1717-65)

The rise of the independent Nawabs of Bengal in the first half of the 18th century was a natural concomitant of the effete Mughal Empire of Delhi. The rule of the Nawabs (the *Nawabi*) lasted till the Diwani grant of 1765. The forty years from the appointment of Murshid Quli Khan as Governor of Bengal in 1717 to the battle of Plassey in 1757 constituted the last chapter of medieval Bengal. In form the Governors of Bengal still owned their posts to imperial sanction and continued to send revenue to Delhi. But in effect Bengal was left free to pursue her

own destiny unhampered by any imperial interference. Two of the five Nawabs down to 1757—Murshid Quli, a Persianised Brahman convert, and Alivardi Khan a Turko-Arab adventurer were exceptionally able and left their impress on Bengal. Under the former who served both as *Dewan* and *Subahdar* the peace which Bengal enjoyed contrasted sharply with the general confusion and unrest elsewhere in India. He reorganised the revenue system of Bengal, which supplied the basis to the British land revenue organisation. He suppressed small rebellions like those of Sitaram Ray of Bhushna and founded an independent provincial dynasty. Alivardi usurped the throne but he could not enjoy the fruits of his action in peace. He first secured Orissa in 1741. Then he had to carry on a protracted warfare with the Maratha (Bargi) invaders who advanced in half a dozen waves during 1742—51 and were at times joined by the Afghan rebels of Bihar. By a treaty with the Marathas in May, 1751 the aged Nawab agreed to pay *Chauth*. Orissa virtually went out of Bengal and became a Maratha province. Nevertheless, as compared to certain places in India this was a passing blast, whose ravages were confined to a fringe of the province. He acted as a bee-keeper to the hive of the European Companies, using their honey but avoiding their stings and tactfully keeping them under control.

His grandson Sirajuddaulah (1756—7) was as much a victim of circumstances as he was himself responsible for his fate on account of grave faults of character and graver mistakes of policy. Initially he showed considerable alertness and enterprise in overpowering his domestic enemies like his aunt Ghasiti Begum, his cousin Shaukat Jang of Purnea and his general, Mir Jafar, and also in dealing with the English. Neither was he biassed against them from before, nor was he actuated by vanity and avarice alone. His conflict with the English was, in a sense, inevitable, having its roots in a complex political and economic background, and being precipitated by Islam in Bengal—2

certain immediate personal and psychological factors, combined with the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in Europe and his apprehensions of the example of Hyderabad being repeated in Bengal. The 'Black Hole Tragedy', following his capture of Calcutta, was not wholly 'a gigantic hoax'. Something like it happened, though its gravity has been exaggerated and the Nawab was not personally responsible for it. But after the first glow of enthusiasm, the young Nawab relapsed into lethargy and indecision. The Treaty of Alinagar (February 9, 1757) between the Nawab and the English was primarily motivated by the former's fears of a north-western invasion of the Abdali and the latter's fears of a French offensive. The Nawab did nothing to ward off the English capture of the French settlement of Chandernagore. Thereafter events drifted inexorably to a fateful conclusion. The secret conspiracy of 1757 was not merely a 'Gentue (Hindu) rising', but a well-laid plot in which the anti-Siraj elements, both Hindu and Muslim, conspired with the English under Clive to substitute Mir Jafar for Siraj. At Plassey, on the morning of June 23, 1757, Clive considered the English cause to be hopeless. But by the afternoon the issue was decided against the Nawab, not in a fair fight but through treachery. The revolution of 1757 implied not merely a change of the Nawab but a change of real rulers of the land. Governors continued but political power virtually shifted to the English. The change was legalised in 1765. After the grant of the *nizam* by Nawab Najmuddaulah (20th February) and of the *diwan* by Emperor Shah Alam to the English (12th August) in 1765, followed by the E I Company's assumption of direct administrative responsibility in 1772, Islam as a political force was supplanted by the rule of the British in Bengal.

The medieval age yielded place to the modern Bengal, the 'Bulghakpur' (city of rebellions) of the Delhi Sultans, the '*dozakh i pur nyamat*' (hell stocked with blessings) of the Mughals, grew to be the 'heart of India' by the



eighteenth century. Once under Murshid Quli it had become a 'milch-cow' to and the feeder of the bankrupt Mughal empire of Aurangzeb's last days. Subsequently it served as the spring-board for the English East India Company to establish another all-India empire. Ultimately a renaissant Bengal became the germinal for the rest of India.

## PART TWO

### *THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS FACTORS : TRANSFORMATIONS AND REFORMIST AND REVIVALIST MOVEMENTS IN ISLAM*

#### *8. Spread of Islam in Bengal*

From the broad survey of the political scene let us now turn to the state of society and religion. The religious history of medieval Bengal is yet to be written from a synthetic use of all classes of sources. The view, generally held, that Islam was spread by the conqueror with the sword in one hand and the Koran in the other, is not wholly correct. True, the religion of Islam began to make headway in Bengal, consequent on and subsequent to the establishment of political Islam and no doubt there were forced conversions. But Bengal's contact with the Muslims, especially in the field of trade, colonization and missionary work, began much earlier than its conquest in the thirteenth century. There are certain unconfirmed traditions which trace Muslim contact with Bengal to early centuries of the Hijrah in the Chittagong area. Many Sufi saints or scholars are believed to have come even before the Muslim conquest, e.g., Baba Adam Shahid of Rampal, Shah Sultan Rumi and others. Thus sometimes the missionary preceded the soldier, and the activity of the former was no less significant than that of the latter. In fact "the Muhammadan proselytization of India did not begin with coercion and bloodshed ; the first conversions were made by its saints."<sup>1</sup>

1 Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal* (down to 1538) chs. 2, 3 pp. 17-18 ; K. M Sen in *Cultural Heritage of India* ; Arnold, *Preaching of Islam* p. 279. 280.

As a result of this peaceful penetration, the nature of the progress of Islam in Bengal was different from that in Northern India. In Northern India, the spread of Islam was largely confined to cities and urban administrative centres, and very few villagers, comparatively speaking, embraced Islam in spite of the severity of some Muslim rulers. Even in the rural areas around Delhi or Agra, the Muslim population was not excessive, because Islamic proselytisation was stoutly opposed by "powerful Hindu tribes like the Jats and Rajputs, intensely conservative and controlled by a strong Brahman hierarchy." The Muslims, again, were "more numerous in North Bihar, the seat of Hindu and Brahmanical domination, than round the old Muhammadan centres in South Bihar, Patna, and Monghyr". In Eastern Bengal Islam spread mostly in the villages. H. H. Risley held that the converts were recruited from the aborigines, for their manners and customs, physical appearance and retained caste distinctions are similar.<sup>2</sup>

Various political, social and religious causes accounted for the progress of Islam in Bengal. The rulers, nobles and officers undoubtedly played an important part in the propagation of Islam and growth of the Muslim society by constructing mosques, *madrasahs*, and *darogahs*, promoting the Islamic spirit, patronising Muslim scholars and saints, encouraging education and literature and performing benevolent activities. A vigorous and highly successful propaganda was carried on in Bengal, especially the eastern and northern districts of East Bengal. But these cannot adequately explain the swelling of the number of the Muslims in Bengal. One principal factor responsible for this was the immigration of foreign Muslims to Bengal. The immigrant foreign Muslims who flocked to Bengal for various reasons, political, social and personal, introduced

2 Titus, *Islam in India and Pakistan*, 44-45, Herklots, Ja'afar Sharif, *Qanun i Islam*. Crooke's edn p 3, H. H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, The People of India, ed by Crooke

new elements in society They married Hindu wives and there were children of mixed marriages<sup>3</sup>

Another factor was the mass conversions of the Hindus mainly among the lower classes, which sometimes took place, as a result of social causes In Eastern India Brahmanical Hinduism sat rather loosely on the people It was not so well organised and consolidated as in northern, western and southern India The people in Eastern Bengal were not fully hinduised and about the time of the Muslim conquest followed a debased form of Buddhism Traditions refer to rivalry between the Buddhists and the Hindus The Buddhists of the Pala period who suffered from the Brahmanical revival of the Sena period, believed the Muslim conquerors to be gods coming as deliverers (cf *Dharma Puja Bidhan*) The worship of Dharma Thakur still survives among the lower classes of West Bengal, mixed up with Tantric and Brahmanical elements<sup>4</sup> Vishnu became *Paighambar* (Prophet), Brahma *Pakambar* (Hazrat Muhammad), Sulpani (Siva) Adambha (Adam), Ganesh Ghazi, Kartick Kazi, Chandika Devi Haya Bibi, Padmavati

3 Karim, *op, cit*, Chapters 2-3 Ja'afar Sharif, p 1, Vijay Gupta *Padma Purana* ed by B K Bhattacharyya p 56 A Karim *Bangla Prachin Punthir Binaran* Pt 1 (Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Patrika, B S 1310 p 159)

As now constituted the Musalmans represent groups drawn from the indigenous races more or less leavened by a strain of foreign blood derived from successive bodies of invaders or emigrants from the regions beyond the north west frontier Even in the case of the earlier invaders their racial purity was gradually lost by intermarriage or concubinage with Hindus, and though a few families claim to have resisted this intermixture of blood, the majority of the Musalman population particularly in Bengal and South India are by race practically Hindus, pure and simple" Ja'afar Sharif 6-7

4 Titus 45 Ja'afar Sharif, Chapter - 'Niranjaner Rushma' in *Sunya Purana* ed by C C Bindopadhyay (1336 B S), See Karim, *Social History*, 143-4

Bibi Nur. Thus gods entered Jajpur in the garb of Muslims and created havoc by destroying temples.

Those who embraced Islam came from different ranks in society, mainly the lower classes and occasionally from the higher. The lower classes adopted Islam to escape from social injustice or secure social status. To the poor aborigines of eastern and deltaic Bengal, - fishermen, hunters, pirates and peasants, - the impure or unclean out-castes, popularly called the untouchables, spurned and neglected by the caste-proud Brahmanical Hindu society, Islam came as a revelation with its message of monotheism and social equality and offered 'full franchise', an escape from the social disabilities and humiliations and opened avenues of progress. So they readily responded to the preachings or persuasions of the *mullahs*, often backed by varying degree of compulsion.<sup>5</sup>

But even some higher sections voluntarily adopted Islam<sup>6</sup> Again, the ranks of converted Muslims were strengthened by "those who, on account of the breach of Hindu social observances, such as the eating of forbidden food, association with people considered to be impure, violation of some rules of marriage or sexual connection, have been expelled by the community, or to use the popular phrase, have been deprived of the right of smoking tobacco or drinking water with their co-religionists. The case of the Pirali Brahmans in Khulna is a case in point.<sup>7</sup>

5 R. C. Mitra, *Decline of Buddhism*, Visva Bharati, 1954, pp 78-79, 81, Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, 145-147, Ja'afar Sharif, 4, Census Reports, India (1911) 1 128, Bengal (1901) 1 156 f, (1911) 1 202 ff, 248

6 JASB, 1867, p 132, 1952, Intro, Abdul Wali, *The Mohammedan Castes of Bengal*, K. F. Rubbee, *Origins of Musalmans of Bengal*, Chaitanya Bhagavat, Ad 14, D. C. Sen *Hist Beng Lang & Lit*,

7 Ja'afar Sharif, 4, R. C. Majumdar (ed) *Banglar Itihas* (Madhya Jug), Ch 12, p 244, *Hist & Culture of Indian People*, Vol V, ch 16 (by M. W. Mirza), O. Malley, *Khulna Dt, Gaz* (1908) p 68

For them adoption of Islam became the only alternative. Further, the material advantages of embracing Islam were tempting as it ended the political inferiority of the Hindus in the Islamic state and relieved them from an odious poll-tax. The Hindus, lacking social status in their own society, and lacking political status in the state, were too eager to seek refuge in Islam.

There were many who were won over by the saintly lives and preachings of learned and spiritually advanced saints, Sufis, Pirs, faqirs and darweshes. Many of these who were scholars, poets and theologians, came from outside Bengal. They not only served to keep link with outside, but opened new centres of religious instruction and education. Cities which grew up as administrative, educational and commercial centres (like Bihar Sharif, Satgaon, Panduah, Sonargaon and Sylhet) became abode of saints.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries proved to be the heyday of the Sufi missionaries in spreading Islam in Bengal. In fact Bengal became a Sufi stronghold during the early medieval period. The activities of these saints, some of foreign origin and some of Indian origin, were not only confined to the *Khanqahs*, but they exerted great influence outside these, - on the masses of the people, the ruling classes and on the society in general, by imparting religious instruction and organising missionary activities. They helped much to elevate the religious life and thought of Bengal and to increase the number of Bengali Muslims. *Dargahs* were built in villages and towns throughout Bengal by these Sufis and later on by their disciples. Of these Pandua, consecrated to the memory of Alawul Haque and his son Nur Qutb ul Alam, the patron saints of Bengal, was the most important. One of the earliest missionaries of the 13th century Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrezi of revered memory, did considerable proselytization in Bengal till his death in 1244. Some saints like Shah Jalal, the patron saint of Sylhet were believed to have

undertaken conquests <sup>8</sup>

While Islam was spreading in the land as a cumulative result of all these factors a new force arose which was destined to arrest it, at least for some time. The religious life of the Hindus in Bengal, Orissa and even Assam came to be electrified and transformed by a vigorous Hindu revival under the energetic Vaishnava preachers like Chaitanya (1486-1533) Nityananda and the development of a special theology by the *Sapta-Goswami*. Vaishnavism not only effected a moral reformation among the upper and middle classes but it proved to be the saviour of the poor by its emphasis on the dignity of man and uplift of the lower classes of society and the illiterate people through *Nam-Sankirtan* or chanting processions. In Assam and neighbouring hilly areas Sankaradeva and others preached Vaishnavism and converted the people to Hinduism <sup>9</sup>

Vaishnavism influenced the medieval Muslim society in Bengal also, in as much as it tended to weaken the force of Islamic influences there, especially in the interior regions outside the chief urban centres. On the one hand the Vaishnavas converted the despised aboriginal tribes of Bengal and carried the religion to the very doors of the masses through the ecstatic dances and devotional songs. Further, Vaishnavism helped to create a new, popular but vigorous Bengali literature, centering round the two epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, sometimes encouraged by the Muslim Sultans. This Vaishnava literature tended to influence Muslim society. Eleven Muslim poets are said by Vaishnavas to have been influenced by Vaishnavism.

So far as Islam was concerned, the stream of immigrant Sufis or missionaries and preachers had considerably thinned, so that there were only a few who could

8 Karim *Social History* 124. Sukumar Sen *Sekhasubhodaya Bangla Sahityer Itihasa* vol 1. J. Wise JASB 1873 No 3. Arnold, 280. Ibn Batutah. Tr. Yule *Cathay and the Way Thither* IV 151.

9 J. Sarkar (ed.) *History of Bengal* vol 2.

counter the vigour of Vaishnavism, Again, the propagation of Islam in Bengal had not been followed by a corresponding widening of knowledge of the religion among the masses of the people. The Muslim scriptures were in Arabic and were not translated into Hindustani or Bengali to prevent pollution. The masses either had a smattering of Persian or did not know Persian and Arabic and had no knowledge of Muslim scriptures. This was a stumbling block before the Bengali masses in understanding Islam. This general ignorance of Islam among the masses tended to arrest its further diffusion. The Muslim masses, knowing only Bengali, heard the poems and stories in Bengali, witnessed performances based on these at Hindu festivals patronised by Hindu Zamindars. Thus the mental background of the Bengali Muslim was more Hindu than Muslim. V275: 3 (Q7) M L2

This continued till about the 16th century, when it came to be realised that it was necessary to carry the message of the Prophet to the masses in their own language. for "in whatever language God has given one birth, that alone is his highest treasure" The Bengali Muslims organized a literary movement under Sayyid Sultan about the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, to write in Bengali about the lives of the Prophet and saints. To save his conscience and justify himself in the Day of Judgment he wrote the *Nabi-Vamsa* to educate the ignorant masses in the essentials of the religion because "All the Bengalis do not understand the Arabic. None understands the words of your religion. Everyone remains satisfied with (Hindu) tales." (as he wrote in his *Wafat-i-Rasul*) Another Muslim wrote about the Bengali translation of the Mahabharata that Hindus or Musulmans used to read it in every house and that none remembered God or His Prophet <sup>10</sup> 11 0112

10 S. M. Ikram *Muslim Civilization in India* 172-282 3, see also Majumdar, *Bangla Deser Itihās* 247-248



## ❁ *Characteristics of a popular Islamic religion in Bengal*

The immense assimilative capacity of Hinduism failed to absorb the Muslim conquerors as it had done in the case of the earlier invaders. But centuries of contact between the two communities had gradually led to the evolution of a popular religion in India, and especially in Bengal and Bihar, where the Muslim population was more numerous than in many other parts of India. Here the social and religious life of the Muslims,—came to be profoundly influenced by Hinduism and marked by inter-penetration of many local manners and customs of the Hindus and incorporation of certain beliefs, rites and ceremonies which were inconsistent with the Quran and bearing palpable signs of Hindu influence. If there was no absorption, there was undoubtedly assimilation between the the two communities. So great was the extent of this assimilation that the *Hidayat ul Mominin*, a Sayyid Ahmadi treatise of the early nineteenth century, observes that in India, more than in any Muhammadan country, Islam and *Kufi* had been mixed up like *Khichri* <sup>11</sup>

Various factors were responsible for this remarkable transformation in Indian Islam. The utter simplicity of Islam with its monotheistic creed did not quite suit the converts, used to idolatry and ceremonies. The Bengal Muslims lived in isolation from the cradle of Islam while the conquerors lived in constant contact with alien races

11 J. R. C. Notices of the peculiar tenets held by the followers of Syed Ahmad taken chiefly from *Siyatul Mustaqim* written by Moulavi Mohammed Ismail. JASB I (Nov. 1832) 489 ff. See T. P. Hughes *Notes on Muhammadanism* *Dictionary of Islam*. R. C. Majumdar (ed) *Delhi Sultanate* ch. 16. 17. Tarafdar *Husain Shahi Bengal* (1965). Yasin *Social History of India*. S. A. A. Rizvi *Muslim Revivalist Movement in Northern India*. Aziz Ahmad *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (1964).

having individual cultures. The comparative numerical inferiority of the conquerors and the immigrants to Bengal amidst a hostile population made it necessary to win the local people either by conversion or pacification. This naturally implied some sort of compromise with the local beliefs and customs. Conversions of Hindus to Islam were sometimes incomplete; they were not attended with complete knowledge of and conformity to the doctrines of the new faith and complete breach with the past. As a matter of fact such convert Muslims remained wedded to their time-honoured beliefs, manners and customs and continued to practise them in their daily life and especially in villages. The Census Report of 1911 records the existence of communities which were "neither Hindus nor Muslims but a mixture of both." The ascetic Aulechand (d. 1769) the founder of the Kartabhaja sect, preached the Satya Dharma (True Religion) in the Nadia district of Bengal, and had as his disciples Muslims as well as Hindus. A *muqaddam* of a Muslim village in Bengal told a missionary (c. 1855) that Prophet Muhammad was born in a Bengali Brahman family. Intermarriage or concubinage with the Hindus implied 'continuous amalgamation of the foreign with the indigenous elements in the Muhammadan population'. The personal liberalism of some rulers also largely helped the two communities to come closer to each other. Garcin de Tassy speaks of this amalgam as a concession which Islam made arising from circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever might be the cause, Islam, as practised by the Muslims in Bengal about the mid-eighteenth century, had many popular elements, though it must be admitted that orthodox Islam was also practised in Bengal, in mosques, *madrashas*, observance of fasts, and books were

12 A. Karim, *Social History*, ch. 5, 158-159, 162; *Census Report* (1911) I. Pt. i- 118; *Enc. Islam* ii. 491 K. K. Datta, *Survey*, 4; Wylie, *Bengal as a Field of Missions*, 318; M. A. Khan, *Faraizi Movement in Bengal*, Ch. 1, 2, Sec. B.

written on *hadis* or *fiqhs* <sup>13</sup>

### (i) *Saint Worship (Pirism)*

One of the most significant features of muslim worship in India and perhaps 'the most important element of popular Islam in Bengal' was saint worship (*pirism*) in every town or village. The word *pir* meaning 'old' denoted a 'mystic guide' (cf *Shah, Shaikh* or *Murshid* or *ustad*) or sufi who initiates disciples (*murids*) in mystic orders. But while all *pirs* are sufis, all sufis are not *pirs*. This belief in saints and worship at their shrines did not originate in India but were imported from Afghanistan, Persia and Iran by immigrants along with their religious orders. But in India there were certain factors which facilitated the penetration of the concept of saint-worship into Muslim society. The long settlement of foreign Muslims side by side with the Hindus and converts enabled it to strike its roots deep in society. The worship of local gods or goddesses largely contributed to it. Garcin de Tassy held (1831) the saints (called in Hindustan, *Pir* or *Wali*) to be "substitutes for the Musulmans in the place of the numerous gods of the Hindus. As amongst the saints, venerated by the Musulmans there are some personages who professed the faith of the *vedas* so several of the Musulman saints of India, are venerated by the Hindus". Thus the tombs of Shah Lohaumi at Monghyr and of Shah Arzani in West Patna were visited by Hindus and Muslims alike. Again, the pre existing *Guru chela* relationship found a kindred ideal in *Pir murid*. To the converts the *Pirs* resembled the Tantric Gurus and their tombs and *dargahs* (shrines) were paralleled by the chaityas or stupas of the Buddhists. The 'saints' of Islam established *dargahs* and *Khanqahs* deliberately on

13 Information supplied by Bengali literature *Chaityanya Bhagwat*, Vijay Gupta, *Padma Puran* Mukundaram, *Kavi-Kankan Chand*, 345-346, A Karim *Social History* Ch 5 158-175

Hindu or Buddhist sites. The Sufis and Pirs were believed to possess supernatural powers, to give relief to the poor, destitutes and patients, to be present at different places at the same time to revive the dead, or kill people and to foretell the future. No wonder that the credulous made offerings to the Pirs or to their departed souls, that the Muslim masses performed the worship of the saints more zealously than the obligatory regular religious practices and that the *dargah* (tomb or shrine) of the Pir was a place of pilgrimage. Even rulers constructed their shrines and arranged for their maintenance.<sup>14</sup>

14. There was one difference. While Pirism tended to be hereditary the successors of Sufis were at first selected on merit. *Enc. of Religion and Ethics* X 40. A. Karim *Social History* 162-70, 201-88, 90-134 ff. M. Garcin de Tassy, *Mussalman Saints of India* in *Asiatic Journal* (1831) iv (1831-75) 6. Vol. 6 (Aug 1831) p. 222. M. A. Khan *Fatwa Movement* Ch. 1. Sec. B. K. R. Qanungo in *History of Bengal* Vol. 2, 69-70 observes:

The Balban regime was not only a period of expansion but one of consolidation as well. It was during this time that the saints of Islam who excelled the Hindu priesthood and monks in active piety, energy and foresight began proselytising on a wide scale not so much by force as by the fervour of their faith and their exemplary character. They lived and preached among the low class Hindus then as ever in the grip of superstition and social repression. These new converts in rural areas became a source of additional strength to the Muslim Government. About a century after the military and political conquest of Bengal there began the process of the moral and spiritual conquest of the land through the efforts of the Muslim religious fraternities that now arose in every corner. By destroying temples and monasteries the Muslim warriors of earlier times had only appropriated their gold and silver but the sword could not silence history nor carry off their immortal spiritual treasure wherein lay rooted Hindu idolatry and Hindu nationalism. The saints of Islam completed the process of conquest moral and spiritual by establishing *dargahs* and *khanqahs* deliberately on the sites of these ruined places of Hindu and Buddhist worship. This served a double purpose of preventing the revival of these places of heathen sanctity and

By the beginning of the 19th century 'belief in efficacy of prayers to saints had become almost universal' among the Indian Muslims. They solicited the intercessions of the living Pir for favours and sought amulets to ward off dangers. Both Hindus and Muslims regarded tigers and leopards to be the symbols of saints. In the Sunderbans 'Muslim devotees pretended to possess charm against the malice of tigers' so that both Hindus and Muslims gave them food and cowries to gain their good will <sup>15</sup>

Of the numerous tombs of the saints of all-India fame about eight were specially venerated by people of Bengal and, Bihar (i) Abdul Qadir born near Baghdad, having power of working miracles, (ii) Sultan Sarwar prayers at whose tomb were believed to have cured the blind, the impotent and the leprous, (iii) Shamsuddin Danial whose tomb at Depaldol

later on of installing themselves as the guardian deities with tales of pious fraud invented by popular imagination. Hindus who had been accustomed for centuries to venerate these places gradually forgot their past history and easily transferred their allegiance to the *pirs* and *ghazis*. The result of this *rapprochement* in the domain of faith ultimately created a more tolerant atmosphere which kept the Hindus indifferent to their political destiny. It prepared the ground for the further inroad of Islam into Hindu society particularly among the lower classes who were gradually won over by an assiduous and persistent propaganda regarding the miracles of these saints and ghazis which were in many cases taken over *in toto* from old Hindu and Buddhist legends. Perhaps the most notable example of the invasion of the sites of Hindu worship by Muslim saints is the transformation of the *Sringi Rishikund* into the *Makhdum-kund* at Rajgir and the translation of the miracle working Buddha of the Deva-datta legend into a venerable Muslim saint Makhdum Sahib. We shall elsewhere discuss in detail the process of the spiritual conquest of Bengal by Auliyas and lesser saints whose tombs and *asthanas* lie scattered over the land."

15 Titus 131, A. R. Mullick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal (1757-1858)* 10-11, *Asiatic Journal* vi (1831), 355, Hamilton, *East India Gazetteer*, II 608

in Lahore was guarded by the Hindus, (iv) Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235 A. D.) (v) Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariyah (of Multan), (d. 1262 A. D.) (vi) Farid ud din Ganji Shakar (1175-1265) of Ajodhan whose holy looks were believed to be enough to convert clods of earth into lumps of sugar, (vii) Shaikh Nizamuddin of Delhi (d. 1325 A. D.) and (viii) Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti (d. about 1236 A. D.) whose tomb at Ajmer was a place of pilgrimage of both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>10</sup> Further there were patron saints associated with each province or each district. Of the numerous saints in Eastern Bengal, the following were comparatively more important than others, e. g.,

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| i) Shah Jalal of Sylhet (to be distinguished from Shah Jalal of Gaur and Pandua) |  |   |
| ii) Panch Pir  |  |   |
| iii) Munnah Shah Darwish   |  |   |
| iv) Khondkar Muhammed Yusuf of Sonargaon   |  |   |
| v) Shah Wali Baghdadi of Mirpur  |  |   |
| iv) Pir Badr of Chittagong   |  |   |
| vii) Shah Jalal Dakhini of Dacca   |  |   |
| viii) Adam Shahid of Vikrampur   |  |   |
| ix) Shah Langar  |  |   |
| x) Akhi Siraj ud din   | } Their dargahs in Bengal and Bihar were locally revered. (Blochman) |   |
| xi) Alauddin Ala ul Huq  |  |   |
| xii) Nur Qutb Alam   |  |   |
| xiii) Chisal Ghazi   |  |   |
| xiv) Badr ud din Badr i Alam   |  |   |
| xv) Makhdum Shah Jalal   |  | } of Malda. miracle working (Buchanan) but of more than local importance. |
| xvi) Qutb Shah   |  |   |

16. M. Garcin de Tassy, 'On certain peculiarities in the Mohammedanism of India' in *Asiatic Journal*, vi(1831), 222-228, 352-6; vii(1832), 144, 57; Ja'afar Sharif, 432-4; A. R. Mullick, 11-12.

People showed veneration also to shrines with relics of saints (e. g. Abdul Qadir in Mansurganj at Gorakhpur). The veneration to the saints' shrines by Muslims and Hindus alike used to take the form of offering ripe rice (by way of gratitude) after a rich harvest, rice or *batasa* (sugar cake) to avert a calamity or illness. Sometimes the tombs of saints were frequented more than mosques by the local people.<sup>17</sup>

Supporting and endowing *dargahs* was considered to be a pious act by the rich aristocracy of the land. Those of Shah Makhdum and Shah Qutb in Maida (at present Rajshahi) had rent-free endowments of 28,000 *bighas* of land. The tomb of a local saint Mulla Atauddin in Dinajpur had 200 *bighas* and of Abdul Qadir at Mansurganj 100 *bighas*. Processions were taken, prayers given and offerings made, pikes (wands, lances or banners) carried with a piece of cloth fastened. The *mela* was frequented by all classes of people—devotees, musicians, jugglers, courtesans and dancing girls, idlers and libertines, rogues and swindlers,—very much like the *mithas* of the Hindus. The Muslim pilgrims to the *dargahs* like their Hindu counterparts to Jagannath and Brindaban came either for religious merit or fulfilment of vows or of worldly desires (children, health, fortune or honour).<sup>18</sup>

Worship of the dead *Pir* was paralleled by or even excelled by devotion to the living *Pir*. Every *Pir* belonged to a mystic order. The Muslim veneration for the living

17 J. Wise *The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal* in IASB vol. 3 (1894) Pt. 3 No. 1 37 Blochmann *Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal* in JASB vol. 42 (1873) Pt. 1 No. 3 236 302 pt. III No. 1 280 1<sup>4</sup> JASB vol. 43 (1874) Pt. 1 No. 1 p. 89 96 Buchanan in Martin *Eastern India* II 635 638 640 644 46 660 666 667 669 357 (Gorakhpur) III 423 447 No. (vi) and (xiv) were identical. The tomb of Badruddin called Chote Dargah is in Bihar Shrif Patna dt.

18 Martin *Eastern India* II 645 352 660 III 59 *Asiatic Journal* vol. 6 (1831) 355 6 IASB I (1832) 489 93 vol. 63 (1894) Pt. 3 No. 1 p. 37

*Pir* had its counterpart in the Hindu reverence for the *Guru* or *Gosain*. The *Sijdah* (prostration) of the *murid* to the *Pir* was comparable to the *sastanga pranipath* of the Hindu chela to the *Guru*. This was considered as most sacrilegious by the orthodox Muslims. The *Pir* was supposed to possess miraculous powers, curing disease, making sterile women conceive and even reviving the dead to life and causing rain to fall (as Shah Karim Afi of Jagannathpur reportedly did in Tippera).<sup>19</sup>

### (ii) *Footprints*

Mosques containing the footprints of the Prophet (Qadam Rasul) as on the bank of the Lakhya, east of Dacca, may be compared to the Vishnupada temple of Gaya and *Dharma Paduka* in Burdwan district and the *Mutawalli* to the Gayawal Brahman. The *Qadam Rasul* building of Gaur exists today. Outside Eastern India such stone representations existed in Damascus (Ibn Batutah), Ceylon and Delhi. Perhaps imported from outside it got stuck up in Bengal.

The *dargah* of Shah Langar at Muazzampur containing his footprint attracted crowds of pilgrims. Monuments were erected over the relics of Ismail Ghazi at Pirganj in North Bengal.<sup>20</sup>

### (iii) *Mystic Cults*

Various local cults grew up in Bengal with traditions

19. *Asiatic Journal*, vol. 6 (1831), 354; *JASB* vol. 43 (1874), Pt. 1, No. 1, p. 96; vol. 63 (1894), pt. 3, No. 1, p. 38.

There is a *dargah* of a famous local *Pir* Machandali Saif (? Sharif) near Gangasagar. He is credited with causing death of a barber for disbelieving his account of refloating a boat that had run aground. *Census 1951 W. Bengal Dt. Handbook 24-Parganas*, xlv.

20. J. Wise in *JASB*, vol. 63 (1894), Pt. 3, No. 1, p. 236, Blochmann in *JASB* vol. 42 (1873), pt. 1, No. 3, p. 238; Martin, *Eastern India*, iii. 458; *Siyarul Mutakherin*, ii. 359; Karim, *Social History*, 173-5.



and legends round some *Pirs* and mythical personages of uncertain identity, which became very popular both among the Muslims and Hindus

(a) Khwajah Khizr was believed to have "discovered the source of the water of life", being an expert in prediction and the protector of mariners from shipwreck His festival (*Khawaj, Bera* or *Bhera*) was observed in *Bhadra* (Aug—Sept) by Muslim and Hindu boatmen and fishermen, floating lights on the water This festival was celebrated by Sirajuddaulah, and witnessed by William Hodges (1780-3) near Murshidabad on the Bhagirathi It was also observed by the Nawab of Murshidabad in 1821<sup>21</sup>

(b) The name of one Pir Badī (as a water god) was invoked by every sailor or fisherman before journey or during storm in Bengal His *dargah* in centre of Chittagong where he performed the *chilla*, was frequented by pilgrims on 29th Ramzan He lies buried in Choti Dargah in Bihar Sharif He has been variously identified with Badruddin Badī Alam of Chittagong or with a Portuguese, Pas Goal Pearis Botheilo or regarded as coming to Chittagong about the beginning of 18th century floating on a rock<sup>22</sup>

(c) The legends centering round Zindah Ghazi, Ghazi Miyan (Salar Masud of Bahraich) and Sat Pir are similar and identification is difficult The forests and rivers of Sundarbans being infested with tigers and crocodiles, the woodcutters, Hindu or Muslim, worshipped mythical heroes for protection from tigers and crocodiles,—Muhitra (Mabra i.e Mubarak) Ghazi in the 24 Parganas, Zindah Ghazi on the banks of the Lakhya river in the Eastern part of the Delta, Kulu Rai and Dakhin Rai (riding on a tiger) of the Hindus Shrines dedicated

21 *Asiatic Journal*, vol 7 (1832) 142 JASB vol 63 (1894) Pt 3 No 1, 38-9 Ja afar Sharif 272 3 J Wise *Eastern Bengal* 12 20, Hodges *Travels* 35 *Siraj* (Briggs) 11 533 B Bandopadhyay *Sangbad Patre Sekaler Katha* 1 272

22 JASB vol 63 (1894) p 41 vol 42 (1873) Pt 1 No 3 p 802 J D Anderson *People of India* 85

to Muhurra (Mabra) Ghazi existed in every village in the 24 Parganas. Before entering the forest or sailing on the water one must offer worship to the shrines, little earthen mounds raised by Hindus and Muslims. On the banks of the Lakhya river in Eastern Bengal, two mounds represented the Ghazi and his brother Kalu. The manner and the articles of worship among the Hindus and the Muslims were similar.<sup>23</sup>

(d) The followers of Shaikh Madar (Sayyid Badiuddin Madar), the saint of Makwanpur were known as Madaris. There are different stories current about the saint. According to Wilson, the sect originated in Persia and Badiuddin, a Sufi, who brought it to India, came to be (wrongly) regarded as its founder. Some hold that the Prophet uttered the words 'Dam Madar' before reaching the heaven. The festival of Madar Jhanda was celebrated by the lower classes of Muslims and Hindus alike. Buchanan found numerous families of Madari faqirs in Purnea and Rangpur. Many Madaris dressed or were naked like Hindu Sannyasis and passed through fire like the Hindus.<sup>24</sup>

(e) The worship of *Panch Pir* or Five Pirs, invoked to avert danger, was very popular among the Hindus and Indian Muslims especially in Bengal and Bihar. A

23 *Statistical & Geographical Survey of 24 Parganas District* R Smyth in JASB vol 63 (1894) Pt 3 No 1 pp 40, 43, *Asiatic Journal*, vol 4 (1831) 75-6. For Salar Masud see Elliot on *Mirat-i-Masudi*. Haji Ilyas paid a visit to his tomb. For Muhurra (Mabra) Ghazi i.e. Pir Ghazi Mobarak Ali Saheb whose *dargah* is at Ghutiari Sharif on Sealdah-Canning line of Eastern Railway see *Census 1951 West Bengal District Handbook* 24 Parganas XLIV-V, 359. For Pir Gorachand or Gorai Ghazi buried in Haroa, Basirhat Subdivision ibid. ciii. Songs in honour of the ghazi were also sung at Rahtakhan situated within Jaynagar, and a *punthi* of the songs was discovered at Nimpith in the possession of Purna Chandra Gayen by the late Kalidas Dutt zamindar of Majilpur. Article by A. De in *Itihaas (Nava Parjaya)* B S 1375 vol IV, pt 3.

24 *Asiatic Journal* op cit vol 7 (1832) 56-7. Jaafar Sharif, 241 Mrs Ali II, 321, Martin E I II 110 III 147-8, 515.

Muslim boatman would, before sailing, utter the names of Allah, Nabi, Panch Pir, Badi etc. The identity of the five Pirs is uncertain, varying in different parts of India. In Bengal we hear of Manik Pir, Ghora Pir, Kumbhira Pir, Madari Pir but there is no special ceremony or festival. James Wise found a Panch Pir shrine of five unfinished tombs in Sonargaon worshipped by Hindus and Muslims. It has been regarded as an example of fusion of Islam and animism, i.e., 'of Muslim hagiology grafted on animism'. The followers of this sect were called Panch Piriyas. This cult may be traced to the five Pandavas of the Mahabharata or five Dhyanī Buddhas. In some West Bengal districts (Midnapur, Burdwan) the Panch Pir is worshipped even to-day.<sup>25</sup>

The mystics of Bengal in the 19th century were of two kinds, judged by conformity or otherwise to the Shariah. The first type, whose practices conformed to it (*bashara*, also *salik*), was more respected than the second (*beshara*, also *majzub*) whose practices did not.<sup>25a</sup>

#### (iv) Asceticism among Muslims

The Indian Muslims had adopted the practices of Hindu asceticism, with numerous and bewildering groups of *faqirs*. Four major orders of such *faqirs* existed in Bengal by the 19th century,—Arjunshahi, Jalali, Madari and Benawaz with numerous divisions and sub-divisions. Jaafar Sharif refers to a class of Sahajīya *faqirs* who dressed like women and sang and danced before their *mushid*. Some of these *faqirs* used *ganja*, *bhāng*, opium, wine and other liquors against the injunctions of Islam and were moral rakes.<sup>26</sup>

#### (v) Mullaism

The growth of Mullaism or priestly influence is referred

25 JASB vol. 63 (1894), Pt. 3, No. 1, pp. 43-44, vol. 5 (1854), 159, *Imperial Gazetteer*, 1: 433-6, Karim, *Social History*, 167-9 *Ency. Rel. and Ethics*, 1x: 600

25a J. Wise, *Eastern Bengal* 35

26 Martin *Eastern India*, 11: 108-110, Jaafar Sharif, 291-3, 296

to in contemporary Bengali literature. It appears that, as even now, the Mullah, fairly well-versed in religious principles and daily practices of Islam, was consulted by villagers in Muslim society and were paid for their services. An inscription of the time of Nusrat Shah testifies to their importance as a group in society, holding charge of the property of a mosque.<sup>27</sup> Sometimes half-literate, fanatical people in charge of mosques posed to be Imams.

(vi) *Shiah influence*

The religious life of the Sunni Muslims of Bengal was influenced not only by Hindu practices and beliefs but also by the Shiahs. It was about the 16th century that Shiah influence came to be introduced during Mughal rule. Many officials were Shiahs, and some Bengal Nawabs like Shujauddin, son-in-law of Murshid Quli, were all Shiahs. Though the religious doctrines of the Shiahs were not very popular in Bengal, the Muhurram festival exercised an emotional influence on the Muslims, and this is reflected in the *punthi* literature, *zarigan* (or Bengali song) and pompous observances. The *Ta'ziyah* processions held with much pomp and splendour and grief, to celebrate the Muhurram in every Muslim village in Bengal and Bihar (cf. Purnea) came to be regarded by the nineteenth century reformers as idolatrous and sacrilegious as they were similar to the Durga Puja or Ratha Yatra processions. Similarly the mummeries in Imambaras also resembled Hindu practices. Out of 1400 *taziyahs* in Patna and Bihar city 600 were made by Hindus.<sup>28</sup>

(vii) *Popular cults, rites and ceremonies*

As a result of long contact between the two communities, the lower classes of both Hindus and Muslims came to have common objects of worship. Members of one community appealed to the gods and saints of the other, failing their own, during illness or distress. Buchanan

27. Mukunda Ram, *Kavi Kankan Chandī* (end of 16th century). 343-344. *Padma Purāna* ed. by Basanta K. Bhattacharya. p. 54.

28. J. Wise, *Eastern Bengal*, 6, 9.

found such mutual worship among the Brahmans, Mullas and Faqirs and suspected that some qazis and pandits used to do so in Rangpur, while in Gorakhpur even Muslims of foreign origin and of high rank were influenced by Hindu practices through their womenfolk. In Bengal similar was the growth of the cults of Satya Pir (True Saint) and Satya Narayan (True God) among the Muslims and the Hindus respectively, without the use of any image the god being "very good natured" and ever ready to "concede trifles". Excavations at Satya Bhita, the site of Buddhist monastery of Paharpur, revealed Muslim relics.<sup>29</sup>

Among other rites and ceremonies were the birth day celebration of the Prophet (*Milad* or *Mawlad Sharif* or *Milad un Nabi*) during which traditional procedure required standing up and singing in chorus, the death anniversary of *pirs* (*urs*) and rites for remembering dead relatives (*fatila*). These ceremonies, unsanctioned by *hadis* were non-Bengali in origin, being conducted in Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages even now.<sup>30</sup>

#### (viii) *Survival of local customs and superstitions*

The life of an ordinary Muslim, like that of the Hindu from birth to death, was hedged with local customs and superstitions.

The Indian Muslims' adoption of the Hindu belief in astrology was reflected in the growing importance of the astrologer (*Najum* or *Najoomi*) who came to be consulted by all, high or low, on all things, great or small. The Mughal Emperors followed the advice of the astrologer regarding the auspicious date and hour for starting on expeditions. Farrukhsiyar consulted the astrologers before starting for battle during the struggle for the throne. Mir Qasim had his son's horoscope prepared by astrologers. Marriage negotiations were finalised after the astrologers

29 Martin E I ii 145 445 6 iii 512 D C Sen 796 7

30 M A Khan *Faraizi Movement* Ch 2

verdict Mrs Meer Hassan Ali rightly observes 'Najoomi can make peace or war, in the family he overrules, at his pleasure, and many a house divided amongst themselves by wicked influence of a bad man, thus exercising his crafty wiles over the weaknesses of his credulous master' <sup>31</sup>

Fear of evil spirits pervaded the mind of the Indian Muslims as described in Jaafar Sharif Women were more susceptible to it than men, and like their Hindu sisters often resorted to adoption of superstitious practices during pregnancy or child birth, and even administered drink or drugs etc which proved fatal to their husbands Ignorant Muslims used the ashes of a dead Hindu for achieving certain desires Similarly the moon was believed to possess a decisive influence on human affairs <sup>32</sup>

The goddess *Sitala* or goddess of small-pox was worshipped in the Panjab Bihar, Bengal and other parts of India by the lower classes of the Muslims The goddess of cholera was worshipped alike by Hindus (as *Ola Devi*), and by Muslims (as *Ola Bibi*), as at Raktakhan within the jurisdiction of Jaynagar Besides the fear of *Matni* or *Umm-i Sabyan*, a spirit which was believed both by Hindus and Muslims to cause convulsion to a child up to 18 months, performance of strange rites after the birth of a child in *chhatti ghar* or *asauchi ghar* or room of confinement, and certain ceremonies in connection with circumcision, menstruation and marriage—all indicated the influence of prevailing local customs on the Bengali Muslims Burning or burial of widows on husbands' pyres or graves, female infanticide and intermarriage with Hindus took place in Rajaur in the time of Jahangir Muslims as

31 Irvine *Army of the Indian Mughals* 202, *Sijar* 1 44 11 387  
Jaafar Sharif 84 Mrs Meer Hassan Ali *Observations on the  
Muslims of India* ed by W Crooke 1 70

32 Jaafar Sharif 2 3 6 7 31 51 52 84 338 341-2 Mrs Ali  
1 294-9, JASB XIII (1852) 350

well as Hindus were found to worship in Manohar Nath Shrine in 1836.<sup>33</sup>

The simplicity of Muslim marriage ceremony came to be given up in favour of growing pomp and expensive displays, including music, dancing and drinking. The dowry system, denounced in Islam, invaded the Muslim society. The high amount of dower money agreed to by husbands was disapproved by the 14th century Saint of Bihar. Sipahsalar Usman demanded 40,000 *tankas* for his daughter. There was some difference between Hindu and Muslim systems. The birth of a daughter was regarded as a burden both by Hindus and Muslims. Many Muslims killed their daughters "to save the expenses and trouble of rearing them." Widow remarriage, sanctioned by Islam, was frowned upon by the Indian Muslims under Hindu influence. Mrs. Hasan Ali, on the basis of her twelve years' stay in India, writes that she did not hear 'of a widow marrying again' and that even many Muslim ladies led a single life after the death of the affianced grooms.<sup>34</sup>

(ix) *Casteism in Islam*

Islam teaches brotherhood and social equality. But the Indian Muslims came to imitate the caste distinctions of the Brahmans and the exclusiveness of the Rajputs. The earliest reference to social differentiations among the Muslims is found in *Insha-i Mahru* containing a proclamation in the time of Firuz Tughluq (1353) viz.,

i) The Sadat, Ulama, Mashaikh, and similar others.

33. James Wise, *Eastern Bengal*, 50 ff., ED. VI, 376., Siceman. *Rambles and Recoll*, ii, 238; *Cal. Review* vol. 33 No. 64 (1859), p. 254., JASB I. 1832, 490. JRAS vol. 13 (1852), 350.: For Ola Bibi, see *Ithihas*, op. cit, Fairs are held in honour of *Bana Bibi* (goddess of forests) at Kalkatala in February and of *Sitalamata* at Taldi in June. *Dt. Handbook, 24-Parganas*, op. cit
34. JASB, i. (1832), 492, *Qanun*, 133, 140, 195; Mrs Ali, i. 46f 51, 350., *Calcutta Christian Observer*, Nov. 1835, quoted in *AngloIndia*, ii 65. JASB. i. (1832). 493.

- ii) Khans, Malikhs, Umara, Sadrs, Akabir, Maarif.
- iii) 'Train and suit' of No. (ii)
- iv) Zamindars, Muqaddams, Mafruzman (mafruzian?) madkan (Malkan?) and such like.
- v) Hermits, saints and *gabrs* (probably fire worshippers or any infidel).

Casteism came to have a "complete practical ascendancy" over the Muslims in certain areas and created subdivisions with prohibitions regarding intermarriage and inter-dining. The Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans formed the *Ashraf* (aristocratic) class, but intermarriage was unusual, not only among them, but even within the same order. Thus there was no intermarriage among the four or five *qaums* of the Mughals of Purnea.

Besides social distinctions, there also grew up occupational caste distinctions, as among the Hindus. Each trade formed a separate caste. Buchanan found 38 low professional tribes in Bihar and Patna (e. g., weavers, tailors, lace-makers, etc.) but even these lower orders would not accept proffered intercourse with the higher ranks. Elsewhere in Bihar and Bengal, caste was deeply entrenched and numerous occupations were outside the pale of caste.<sup>35</sup>

### 10. *Influence of Islamic Reform Movements of 18th Century on Islamic Revivalism in Bengal of 19th Century.*

Thus, after a lapse of several centuries and as a result of various forces, political, economic and social, and religious, some of which were natural and logical, Islam in India and especially in Bengal developed certain popular characteristics. All these, however, came to be regarded by orthodox reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries to be abuses or "innovations in religion and the mode of performing religious duty and worship," which must be

35. For *Insha i Mahru*. JASB (1923), 280., Cunningham. *History of the Sikhs*, 31., JASB, i. (1832) 494; Mrs. Ali, i. 7-8; Martin E. L. i. 49, 145-6; ii. 111 112. iii. 150-2, 517.



shunned by every true Muhammadan because they constituted aberrations from orthodox Islam. Thus Maulavi Ismail Haji found the Indian Muslims in early 19th century to be deeply plunged in the vices of 'shirk' or Association with God or at least heresy. The Qur'an and *Hadis* ceased to be their chief guides. The idiom expressed in *Hidayatul Mominun* a Sayyid Ahmadi treatise of the early 19th century, about Islam and Kufr being mixed up like *Khichri* in India was also voiced by Sir Muhammad Iqbal "Surely we have out-Hindued the Hindu himself we are suffering from a double caste system—religious caste system sectarianism and the social caste system which we have learned or inherited from the Hindus. This is one of the quiet ways in which the conquered nation revenged themselves on the conquerors"<sup>36</sup>

To understand this attitude it is necessary to refer to the Islamic revivalist doctrines of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab in Arabia and Shah Waliullah in India, the two great thinkers of the 18th century Islam both of whom drank at the religious seminaries of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina and who emphasised the necessity of reasserting the principle of *ijtihad*. Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703—87) of Najd in Arabia, the founder of the Wahhabiya at first protested against the profligacy and mummeries which defiled the Holy Cities. Later on he in alliance with Ibn Saud struck at the Ottoman Empire. In the field of doctrine Wahhabism was "the first and still the strongest fundamentalist reaction in modern times to the spread of innovations and mystical tendencies among the mass of Muslims". Its followers claimed that they were "followers not innovators". They aimed at reducing Islam to a pure theism. They were Sunnis, following the

36 Mir Shahrmat Ali *Transl. of Takwiyat ul Iman* JRAS XIII (1852) 310 *Strat ul Mustaqim* in JASB 1 (Nov. 1832) 489 *Hindustan Review* quoted in Census of India Report (1911) xiv (Punjab) Pt 1 p 165

School of Hanbal as interpreted by Ahmad Ibn Taimiyya (d. 1328). In positive theological system they were unitarians (*Muwahhidin*) reviving emphasis on *tawhid* or unity of God which has two aspects : uniqueness as master of creation ; uniqueness as entitled to worship. So synthesis, or association of anyone and anything with God constitutes the greatest sin, which even God does not forgive and which justifies war against the sinners, even though Muslims. They had the highest veneration for the Prophet but even he, as a mortal, should not be deified. (They did not spare his tomb at Medina). Their message was simple : a return to primitive, classical Islam and law, as laid down in the *Quran* and *Hadis*. This restoration of Islam to its original purity meant—(i) rejection of all innovations (*bidat*), i. e., all beliefs and practices, outward forms and superstitious observances and ceremonies, introduced since the time of Prophet Muhammad and the early generation of righteous Muslims (*al Selaḥ al Salih*), and encrusting the pure faith, even though these might have been regarded by other Muslims to possess the sanction of *ijma* (or consensus or opinion of the community) : (ii) rejection of intercession, i. e., discarding all intermediaries between God and man, rejecting even the semi-divine mediation of Muhammad, denunciation of the cult and worship of saints, visitation of tombs and offering of prayers and appealing to them in emergencies as tantamount to polytheism (*shirk*) and equated with pre-Islamic paganism. Hence they were called the Puritans of Islam. They admitted the right of private interpretation (*ijtihad*) of the *Quran* and *Hadis* (Traditions) and hence of independent judgement, rejected the four orthodox schools of canon law, and adherence to their prescriptions (*taqlid*). The Wahhabi doctrines were in several respects similar to those of Indian Muslim reformers including those in Bengal.<sup>37</sup>

37. For Wahhabism, D. S. Margoliouth in *Ency. Islam* iv. 1086 ff : the Wahhabis differ from the orthodox on ten heads:

Sharply contrasted with the Wahhabis of Arabia stood Shah Waliullah (1703-62), one of the greatest Sufi philosophers of Islam in India, an encyclopaedic scholar of tradition, theology and jurisprudence and a moderate reformer, who taught devotion to the Sunna of the Prophet and the value of tolerance and compromise in interpreting the Holy Law. Waliullah's Islam was richer, more comprehensive, and more flexible than Wahhabism. In that age of political disintegration, moral collapse, sectarian conflict and socio-economic decay, Waliullah was responsible for the religious revival of Indian Islam. He tried to restore the unity of the Muslim community and create sound leadership. Ascribing the moral decline of the Muslims to their ignorance of Islam, he tried to popularize the Quran and translated it into Persian. He tried to effect a reconciliation among the conflicting standpoints—"the Shia and the Sunni, the Sufi and the Mullah, the Hanafi and the Wahhabi, the Mujaddidi and the Wahdat ul Wajudi and the Mutazali and the Ashaari". As a protest against orthodoxy, tightened by Aurangzeb's *Fatawa e Alamgiri*, he emphasized that the door of interpretation (*ijtihad*) was not closed, though he did not support licence in religious thought. He also endeavoured

Margoliouth in *Enc of Rel and Ethics*, vol 12, G S Rentz in *Twentieth Century Ency Religious Knowledge* 'Wahhabis', Hunter IM 49-52 T W Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, Qeamuddin Ahmad, *Wahabi Movement*, T P Huges, *Notes on Muhammadanism* (1877), passim, Titus *Islam in India and Pakistan*, J L Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, II 253-470 W G Palgrave, *Personal Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia*, 2 vols, E Rehatsck *History of Wahhabis in Arabia and India* JRAS Bo XIV (1880) 274-401, C M Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* 2 vols, Dr B Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, H St, J B Philby, *Arabia*, H A R Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, W C, Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (1957), 48-51, *Calcutta Review* vol 51 (1870), M Husain, *Origins of Indian Wahhabism* Pr I H C 1939, S B, Chaudhuri, *Civil Disturbances during the British rule in India* (1955), R C Majumdar, *History and Culture of Indian People*, vol IX pt 1 (1963)

to reconcile the differences between the Sufis over the question of monism coming down from the time of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindī (*Majaddīd ʿAlf ʿSanā*) He also tried to bridge the gulf between the Shias and the Sunnis by refuting the latter's view that the former were not Muslims Again, the *sine qua non* of spiritual progress of a society was economic equilibrium and social morality, which in turn, presupposes individual morals Strict application of Islamic ordinances would check the moral decay of the Muslims Knowledge of theology must be combined with mysticism But Muslim theology had been burdened with an Islamic matter, thereby compromising the universal nature of the Quran and encouraging the growth of unhistorical traditions While counselling avoidance of rigidity in interpretation of religious injunctions, Waliullah endeavoured to establish pure monotheism and purge the Muslim society of all polytheistic and un-Islamic social practices beliefs, customs, etc, which had grown up in Hindu environment, because the purity of Islam, its doctrines and values, must be maintained Thus did Shah Waliullah seek to effect the moral and political regeneration of the 'decadent, demoralized, bewildered and disorganised Muslim society in India His son, Shah 'Abdul 'Aziz (1746-1823) and grandson, Ismail (1781-1831) preached the Shah's ideals He ruled that India was no longer *dar ul Islam* but *dar ul harb* and that Muslims had a duty to restore Muslim political authority Suitable action, based on popular support, was also needed.<sup>38</sup>

As regards the extent of influence exerted by Wahha-

38 For Shah Waliullah I H Qureshi *The Muslim Community of the Indo Pakistan Subcontinent* (610 1947) ch 9 S M Ikram op cit 350-353 Irfan Habib *Proc Ind Hist Congress 1960* Pt 1 Section II W C Smith *Islam in Modern History* 51-54 K A Nizami *Shah Waliullah Dihlavi & Indian Politics in the 18th Century Islamic Culture* 1951 M D Rahbar *Shah Waliullah & Ijtihad The Muslim World* 1955 Peter Hardy in Wm Theodore de Bary et al *Sources of Indian Tradition* 450 M Mujeeb *The Indian Muslims* 277-82

bism and by Shah Waliullahism on the revivalist movements of 19th century Bengal, there is considerable difference of opinion. European writers hold that the movements of Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly and of Shariat Allah, Dudu Miyan, Titu Mir and Karamat Ali were nothing but Wahhabi off-shoots in India and that Sayyid Ahmad was the Wahhabi apostle in India. Thus W W Hunter speaks of "the chronic conspiracy within our territory" and the "standing rebel camp on our frontier". Some modern scholars like Dr. I. H. Qureshi and Ikram have objected to this view and tried to show that the Indian Muslim revivalists were not Wahhabis. Others hold that the Indian movements were influenced more by Shah Waliullah than by Wahhabism. On the other hand, Dr. A. R. Mullick has used the term 'Indian Wahhabis' while Dr. Q. Ahmad has written on 'the Wahhabi Movements in India.' While it is true that there are some differences between the Arabian and the so-called Indian Wahhabis the fact remains that some of the ideas like rejection of the innovations and un-Islamic beliefs and practices, advocated by the Wahhabis and Shah Waliullah, were also emphasized in the 19th century purificationist religious reformation movements among the Muslims in India and Bengal.<sup>39</sup>

The Wahhabi movement in India had two wings, the left wing (against external threat or domination) being led by Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly with his band of warriors and call to a holy war (*ghad*), while the right wing (against internal decay) was led in Bengal by reformers Shariat Allah and Karmat Ali whose programme was to effect peaceful purification in Islam and remove all undesirable practices of earlier faiths.

39 Hunter, *Indian Muslims* 1-78, Ency. Islam, op. Cit. M. A. Khan *Faraizi Movement*, Ch. 2 Sec. A 'Aziz Ahmad, *Studia*

## 11. *Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah of Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi in Bengal.*

Of all the reform movements in Indian Islam during the early 19th century that of Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi (1786-1831) and Shah Ismail Shahid (1782-1831) was unequalled in vigour, in the extent of the area affected and in the influence exerted.<sup>40</sup> Its fortunes as a political force have not been dealt with here. But as a religious force it stirred the entire Indian Muslim society to its foundations. It was Bengal which supplied men, money and resources for the movement in the north-west, while Patna in Bihar formed its organisational centre.

Born in a family of Hasani Sayyids of Rai Berelli and related to Shah Waliullah, Sayyid Ahmad became a disciple of the latter's sons, learnt the Quran and the *hadis* and had some mystic training. After learning the art of war and European technique including the use of artillery in the service of Amir Khan (1810-16), he became the disciple of the Shah 'Abdul 'Aziz, then reputed as the 'Sun of India', the greatest Muslim theologian of the age. Then, emerging as a preacher, he inaugurated his movement about the same time (c. 1818) as Haji Shariat Allah in Bengal. He tried to reform the faith and practice of the

40. For Sayyid Ahmad, Notices of the peculiar tenets held by the followers of Syed Ahmad, taken chiefly from the *Sirat UI Mustqini*, a principal treatise of the sect, written by Moulavi Mahommed Ismail. By J. R. C. in JASB vol. i, (Nov. 1832), pp. 479-98. Translation of the *Takwiyat ul Iman*, preceded by a Notice of the author, Maulavi Ismail Haji. By Mir Shahamat Ali. J. R. A. S. xiii (1852), pp. 310-372; JBRAS, 382; SRBG vol. 42 (Trial of Ahmadulla), 128, 129; Mrs. Ali, *Observations* I. 211; Latif. *History of the Punjab*, 441; *Calcutta Review*, vol. C. 80-83. 95-104; vol. cii (1870), 383; *Asiatic Journal*, vol. 6, 58; Hunter. J. M. Chs 1 & 2; A. R. Mullick, *British Policy and the Musalmans of Bengal*, Pt. 1 Ch. 4, 92-114; Margoliouth in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. iv : Q. Ahmad, *Wahabi movement* : Titus. 189-193; Qureshi, 196-209; Ikram, 281 ff; W. C. Smith *Islam in Modern History*, 48-51; 'Aziz Ahmad, *Studies*.

Indian Muslims by purging them of 'un-Islamic practices'. His reformation was intensely practical. The fact that two near relations, the nephew (Shah Muhammad Ismail) and son-in-law (Muhammad Abdul Hai) of Shah Abdul 'Aziz and peerless learned men (*Umm Bana'ii*) who became the disciples of their illiterate (Ummi) co-disciple Sayyid greatly advanced the movement. Patna became a permanent headquarters of the movement with four Khalifas (Wilayat Ali Inayat Ali, Muham Ali Farhat Hussain) and one Imam (Shah Muhammad Hussain) while his agents collected taxes and supplies from all big towns through which the Sayyid passed, e.g. Monghyr, Bhagalpur, Murshidabad, Hughli, etc., on the Ganges on his way to Calcutta. Here in 1821, the volume of converts was so great that the usual practice of enoiment by laying hands on them, had to be replaced by their touching his unrolled turban. Even many Hindus were converted by him.

From Calcutta he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina (1822). The extent of the influence of Wahhabism on him will remain a controversial matter. But the fact remains that, inspired by his experiences in Arabia and Syria, he now began to preach, with redoubled zeal against what he considered to be the abuses and degradations in Islam, so as to purge Islam of all traces of Hindu corruption. India, being under a non-Muslim power, was a *dar ul-harb* and hence a holy war or *ghar* was necessary.

An idea of the principal reforming tenets of Sayyid Ahmad may be had from the *Sirat-ul Mustaqim* (or True Path), and the *Iaqrwatul Iman* (Support of the Faith), both written by Maulavi Muhammad Islam, and the *Hidayat-ul mominin*, another Sayyid Ahmadi work. Most important were (1) emphasis on the unity of God (*Tauhid*) and restoration of the simplicity of classical Islam and (ii) rejection of *shirk* (idolatry), which presupposes rejection of all innovations, superstitions and abuses pervading

Indian Islam whatever their source. The *Sirat* bewailed the darkness overspreading the land: "Compare the State of Hindustan with that of Rum and Turan! Compare it even with its own condition two or three hundred years ago. Alas! where are now the Aulia and Ulama of those times?" The innovations were classified into three classes: (a) first, those arising from association with sceptics or heretics—sinners against the unity of God. The excessive respect to *murshid* (spiritual preceptors), and saint worship, constituted the whole religion of the common Muslims in India. The appeal to the saints in every case of difficulty, circuits (*tawwaf* meant for the Kaaba) round their tombs, and burning of lamps thereon (prohibited in tradition), long arduous and expensive pilgrimages to their shrines (rather than to Mecca), endless vows and offerings made to propitiate them so as to fulfil every conceivable blessing or object of human desire (*e. g.*, children, honour, health, fortune, etc.) the custom of naming children after the saint, allowing hair to grow untouched,—all these popular, heretical and superstitious practices, due to Hindu and not Sufi influence, became a sin against God's unity. Belief in the power of saints was open blasphemy. The saint was worshipped but God was neglected or forgotten. Of little benefit to the devotee, it exposed him to God's wrath and injured the Muslims in general and hence must be avoided. "If the Hindus have their Gyah, their Mathura and their Kashi the Mahomedans have their Makwanpur, their Bahraich, and their Ajmer. The one set builds maths over their idols; the other, not to be behindhand raise domes over their saints' tombs. In the maths you will find mahants and Goswains; at Mahomedan shrines, Khadims, Mujawirs and Pirzadas." Hence the *Taqwiatul Iman* exhorts: "Follow no one, be he mujtahid, Imam, Ghaus, Kutb, Moulavi, Mashaikh, King, Minister, Padri or Pandit, against the authority of the Quran and the Traditions."

(b) The second class of innovations were those arising



from association with Shiāhs. Ali was given a dignity and honour higher than the earlier Calīphs. Muharram ceremonies were also frowned upon. To a true believer the breaking of *tazīahs* should be as virtuous an action as a breaking of idols. If this was not possible, these should be detested and abhorred.

(c) The third class of innovations originated from imitation of bad and corrupt customs. Hence pompous or expensive ceremonies on occasions of festivals, mourning, marriage or death must be avoided. "Follow the example of Mohamamad of Arabia and relinquish all the usages of Hind and Sind, of Fars or of Rum." The prohibition of widow remarriage among the Indian Muslims, due to intercourse with the Hindus, must be given up. Similarly astrology or soothsaying, the practice of worshipping, like the Hindus, the goddess of small-pox, or of keeping pictures of the Prophet and the *Prophets*, must also be discarded.

Sayyid Ahmad termed his doctrine *Tariqah-i Muhammadīyah* (The Way of Muhammad). The movement helped to create a spirit of reform, better understanding of unity of God and the Sunnas by the average Muslim than before and expose several religious irregularities. Though not abolished, the customs of revering the tombs of saints and of making *tazīahs* were considerably checked. The influence of his tenets was extensive, as they were intended to "awaken the sincerity of religious zeal and gratify the pride of Muhammedan feeling." On the other hand they also roused much opposition as they struck at the root of long established customs, beliefs and practices. So henceforth the Muhammedans of India came to be divided into two parties. Those who did not accept the Sayyid's creed were called *Mushriks* (Polytheists). His opponents consisting of orthodox *maulanas* and *khadims* and others, derided his followers as Wahhabis.

## 12. The Faraizi Movement

### (a) Haji Shariat Allah

Nineteenth century Bengal witnessed a new Islamic religious movement in the hands of a few devoted local reformers and scholars in Eastern Bengal, collectively called the *Faraizi* sect, for their insistence on the performance of *Faraiz*, i.e. obligatory duties enjoined in the Quran, especially the five fundamental institutions (*ibadat*), viz, (i) profession of faith (*Kalimah*), (ii) 5 daily prayers (*namaz*), (iii) fasting during Ramzan, (iv) paying poor tax (*zalat*), (v) pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Four kinds of duties are recognised by the Holy Law, viz, (i) *Faraizah* or obligatory duty, (ii) *Hajib* or near obligatory duty, whose performance is necessary, (iii) *Sunnah* or Prophetic usage which ought to be performed and (iv) *mustahab* or desirable practices. The *Faraizis* emphasized the performance of all religious duties. They availed of steamship journeys to Arabia and tried to introduce some Wahhabi ideas into India early in the nineteenth century, without calling themselves Wahhabis. This complex socio-religious movement which was started about 1818, when the Muslim society of Bengal had become corrupt and un-Islamic, rapidly spread over Eastern Bengal and Assam, especially the rural areas. Subsequently it came to have a strong politico-economic colour. At present the sect survives mainly as a religious group.

The founder of the sect, Haji Shariat Allah<sup>41</sup> (1781-1840) was a Bengali Muslim belonging to a petty taluqdar family of Shamail village in Madaripur subdivision. He had his early education at Calcutta and Hughli. He visited Mecca

41 For FARAIZI movement, M. A. Khan, *History of the Faraizi Movement in Bengal (1818-1906)*, A Bibliographical Introduction to modern Islamic Development in India and Pakistan, 1700-1955, Titus 186-187, Q. Ahmad, Ch 3, J. Wise, *Eastern Bengal*, 21-23, Beveridge *District of Bakerganj*, 225, Hidayat Husain in *Encyc. Islam* II 57, Ikram 248, Qureshi 209, A. R. Mullick, 71, R. C. Majumdar (ed.) *Bharatiya Vidya-Bhawan Series* vol IX ch 4 sec 8

twice during 1799-1818 and 1820-21. He belonged to the Qadiriya sect of Sufism studied at Al Azhar, and became a skilful disputer and a fine Arabic scholar.

The Faraizi movement was the earliest and foremost of all other religious reform movements in Bengal. The Faraizis aimed at 'self-collection', enforcing the original teachings of Islam and purging the Muslim society of superstitious rites and ceremonies. To realise these objectives the Haji formulated certain main principles.

(a) *Initiation (ba'iyat)* The prevalent Sufi initiation procedure of joining hands was discarded. The term *Pi-r-i-muniri* implied a complete submission of the disciple to the priest or religious preceptor. So this sinful innovation was replaced by the relationship between *ustad* (spiritual guide or teacher) and *shagird* (pupil).

(b) *Repentance (Taubah)* A would-be disciple had to express repentance (*taubah* or *tauba*) for past sins and take a vow to lead a more righteous and godly life in future. Hence the members of this creed were also known as *Taubas* Muslims. The formula of repentance was couched in Bengali language for the convenience of the ignorant masses and administered by the *ustad* to the *shagird* without touching. The process was known as *istighfar* or *iqra'i ba'iyat*.

(c) *Unity of God (Tawhid)* This is to be firmly practised. A Faraizi must refrain from ascribing God's partnership to any other. Hence any belief or action, having the slightest resemblance with infidelity (*Kufr*), polytheism (*shirk*), or sinful innovation (*bidah*), e.g., paying money to or joining Hindu rites and ceremonies, *pu*-worship, traditional *fatihahs* and other practices were repugnant and must be discarded.

(d) *Prayers* The Faraizis differed from other Muslims on the question of holding congregational prayers of *Juma'* and *'Id*. According to Hanafi law these are not permitted except in *masi-al-jami* (i.e. in such a township where the administrator and the judge, appointed by a lawful Muslim

Sultan, are present). India, being under British (i. e. non-Muslim) rule, was *Dar-ul-harb* not *Dar-ul-Islam*. Such townships did not exist in Bengal and hence observance of Friday congregational prayers on the two important festivals of 'Id-ul-fitr and 'Id-uz-zoha was not lawful. This implied a protest against the administrative changes of the British to the detriment of the Muslim community.

(e) The Faraizis denounced and abolished all popular un-Islamic rites and ceremonies—the worship of saints, servile devotion to the Prophet or to the *Pirs*—the holding of *urs* or death anniversary of *pirs* (as it was a *fatihah*), and held that participation in Muhurram was a sinful innovation. With his puritanical attitude Haji Shariat Allah ruled that the socio—religious celebrations of the Muslims must be in strict conformity with Islam. The Faraizis were very strict in adhering to the commands of God and were 'stricter in morals' than other Muslims.

On the social plane, the Faraizis denounced caste prejudices as a deadly sin, being contrary to the spirit of the Quran. So they emphasized the equality of all members of the reformed creed. This attracted the lower orders of the society,—cultivators, weavers, oil-grinders, etc., chiefly in the villages. But their appeal was ineffective in towns and cities, like Dacca, Comilla and Chittagong, where the upper classes were influential.

The Faraizis were in some respects influenced by Wahhabism, viz., in the emphasis on unity of God and the denunciation of all polytheistic and un-Islamic rites and ceremonies, but there were differences, too, between them. They did not share the dangerous political views of the Wahhabis.

It was also similar in some respects to the school of Waliullah and the *Ghair muqallids* especially as regards denunciation and rejection of all superstitious, corrupt beliefs and practices, developed by long contact with the non-Muslims. But unlike the Wahhabis and the *Tariqah-i-*

Muhammadi sect, which emphasized observance of Traditions the Faraizis followed the Hanafi school of law

Haji Shariat Allah rejected superstitious practices like the rites of *Puttee*, *Chatti* or 6th day ceremony and *Chilla* (between the first and fortieth day after the birth of a baby) and followed only the *aqiqah* or naming ceremony in conformity with Islam. He also made various purges and sweeping reforms without much opposition or hindrances.

But opposition came from two quarters. In the first place he was opposed by the traditional or *sabiqi* Muslims for his crusade against certain time-honoured institutions—patriarchy, caste prejudices and employment of the *dar* (midwife). They clung to their old beliefs and practices. His promulgation that the father or an elderly lady of the family should cut the navel cord of a new-born baby instead of a mid-wife (as it was a deadly sin borrowed from the Hindus), roused vehement opposition and many defected away from the sect. Shariat Allah prescribed *pagama* and *lungi* for his followers, but if *dhoti*, which was generally used by the Muslims, was worn, it should be worn *kachha bhula* for covering the thighs.

In the second place, the spread of the new creed with its emphasis on social equality of all members, and common Islamic brotherhood which “bound the Muhammadan peasantry together as one man” naturally alarmed the zamindars, who persecuted the Haji. This two-fold clash came to a head in 1831. Driven away from Nayabari (mod. Charigram in Dacca district) where he had settled, he returned to his birth place. However, with prudence and caution he continued his reformist movement till his death. “A vast majority of the uneducated and most excitable classes” of Muslims joined his fold. His orders were implicitly obeyed and his influence was unbounded. His work resulted in stricter observance of Islam. The poor Faraizis were honest and dependable and developed a new spirit of self respect. By his life long mission

Shariat Allah revived Islam in Bengal from its stupor. According to *Durr-i-Muhammad*, the Haji found Islam in a dying state for lack of water of faith (*imaneer pani*) but he revitalised the tree of faith (*darakt i iman*). Herein lay his contribution. A contemporary writer estimated that one-sixth of the total Muslim population of Faridpur, Bakarganj, Dacca and Mymensingh districts were converted to his fold. It also spread to Tipperah. The success of his mission paved the way for Sayyid Ahmad.

*Influence of Shariat Allah* : Muhammad Hidayat Husain thus assesses the degree of the influence of Shariat's work :

"That he came of obscure parentage amidst the swamps of eastern Bengal, and should be the first preacher to denounce the superstitions and corrupt beliefs, which long contact with Hindu polytheism had developed, is remarkable enough ; but that the apathetic and careless Bengali peasant should be roused into enthusiasm is still more so. To effect this required a sincere and sympathetic preacher : and no one ever appealed more strongly to the sympathies of a people than Shariat Allah, whose blameless and exemplary life was admired by his countrymen, who venerated him as a father able to advise them in times of adversity, and give consolation in cases of affliction."

(b) *Dudu Miyan (1819-62)*

The original Faraizi movement, lacking all political colour, did not attract much attention during the life-time of its founder. But under his son, Haji Muhammad Muhsin (or Muhsin ud din Ahmad), popularly known as Dudu (Dudhu) Miyan (1819-62) the sect came to be further consolidated and developed and assumed a deeper economic and political tinge. Though lacking his father's scholarship and extra-ordinary abilities, Dudu Miyan exercised an influence over the Muslims far exceeding his father's. His appearance perhaps largely contributed to this. He was tall and handsome with a dark flowing beard and a large turban. His organising skill was another factor in his success. By adding a new feature to the movement, viz.,

socio-economic bias, he transformed the sect from a predominantly religious to a religio socio, politico-economic body

Dudu Miyan<sup>10</sup> was born at Mulfatganj in Madaripur subdivision of Bakarganj district in 1819. Like his father, he also went on pilgrimage to Mecca quite early in his career (1831-6). On return he organised affray parties for his father's growing conflicts with the zamindars. On his father's death in 1840, he came to be elected leader (*ustad*) of the movement. He assumed certain mystic traits of seeing visions and receiving revelations and added some new doctrines to his father's. He asked his followers to eat the detested common grasshopper (*phanga*) just as the locust (*ludda*) was taken as food in Arabia, as there was not much difference between a native goat and one of the bank of the Jamuna.

Those who profess his doctrines were enjoined to say the *Zuhr* (mid-day) *Farz* (compulsory) prayer on Fridays instead of the *Juma* or Friday prayer usual with majority of Muhammadans.

The most remarkable advance made by Dudu Miyan was the organisation of a society, the formation of a well-knit fraternity with agents to look after its activities at different places. This was a logical outcome of his father's work. According to tradition in the Faraizi settlement of Rekabi bazar (in Munshiganj subdivision, Dacca district) it was Shamlat who organised the local *panchayat* there. But perhaps it was Dudu Miyan who realised the necessity of organising the sect. "He asserted the equality of mankind, and taught that the welfare of the lowly and poor was as much an object of interest as that of the high and rich." In the absence of a legitimately recognised Muslim government in Bengal he tried to set up a

42 *Ency Islam* 11 58-59 Hunter *Ind Mus* 28-78 M. A. Khan *op cit* Ch 4 Ch 8 Beveridge *Bakerganj*, J. Wise *Eastern Bengal* J. E. Gastrell *Jessore, Furreedpoore & Backergunje*, Ikram 284-5 Qureshi 210-, A. R. Mullick 71-76, Q. Ahmad 88

community capable of discharging some of the essential functions of a communal life. He had a two-fold aim. To protect the Faraizi peasantry from Hindu zamindars and European indigo-planters, he raised a volunteer body of *lathials* for affray parties. To secure social justice for the Muslims, he revived the traditional *panchayat* system. These two branches (*siyasi* and *dini*) were co-ordinated by an hierarchical Khilafat system under the direct control of the *Ustad*. Finally the political branch came to be absorbed in the religious. He divided Eastern Bengal into circles (*thalqas*), consisting of 300-500 families, either by following the example of the Vaisnavas or of the Sufis. Over each he appointed a *siyasi* Khalifa (agent or deputy or spiritual leader) whose duties were to keep the sect together, to make proselytes, to realise contributions from members and finally to promote the aims of the central association. Its headquarters were fixed at Bahadurpur, where every Muslim stranger was fed. At the head of the entire organisation stood the Miyan himself, usually styled the *Pir* or simply *Maulavi*, who protected the interests of the whole neighbourhood. Emphasizing the ideal of brotherhood, he insisted upon every member's obligation to render mutual assistance in times of distress for which no action will be criminal or unjustifiable. He took upon himself the task of settling disputes, administering justice in a summary way and punished members of all communities, Hindu, Muslim or Christian, who ignored him and carried their suits (like debt recovery) to the normal law courts, without first referring these to him. With an organised espionage system, working over Eastern Bengal, he kept himself acquainted with everything. His orders were taken to far-off villages by his secret agents. To remove suspicion "his letters signed *Ahmad nam namalun* (Ahmad of unknown name) often had the ordinary Hindu superscription." Terror tactics was effectively used. As Hidayat Husain says: "He taught that there was no sin in persecuting those who refused to embrace his doctrines



or who appealed to government courts against the orders of the society and its acknowledged leaders.”

Under Dudu Miyan and his followers “the movement became the spearhead of the resistance of the Muslim peasantry of Eastern Bengal’ against the newly created class of Hindu landlords and European indigo-planters who stood in mortal dread of them. He made the “most determined stand” against the long-standing practice of the landlords in levying illegal cesses (23 in number) on Muslim ryots for Durga Puja and other Hindu rites, which, though sanctioned by antiquity or adaptation to feelings were denounced as “intolerable acts of oppression. Proceeding further, he declared that as the earth belonged to God, none could claim it as inheritance or levy taxes on it. Hence he regarded exploitation of the peasantry by the zamindars as injustice (*zulm*) and persuaded the peasants to settle on government-managed *khushmahals* in order to escape from all taxes except the land revenue. Steps were taken to protect the Faraizis from the landlords, whenever information was brought by his agents. Funds of the association were supplied to Faraizi victims of any zamindar asserting his legal rights for filing suits in law courts. Sometimes such a zamindar had his property plundered or his servants beaten by *lathials*. While Dudu Miyan tried to compel all Muslim peasants to join his fold on pain of beating, excommunication or destruction of their crops, the zamindars tried to prevent such recruitment through punishment or painful torture (e.g., by tying the beards of peasants and giving them snuffs of red chili powder). But coercion failed to halt the movement. The doctrine of social equality of men and the denunciation of the exactions proved to be strong incentives and powerful appeals to the simple and oppressed peasantry.

The Faraizi sect, which under Shairat Allah never opposed or clashed with the law of the land came into active politics under Dudu Miyan. His rapid successes so

alarmed the landlords that they brought many law suits against him during 1838-46. Though he was frequently jailed on charges like abetment of plunder of houses, murder, trespass, unlawful assembly, abduction etc., he was acquitted every time, because witnesses (alleged to have been paid by funds of the association) would not give evidence against him or any Faraizi prisoner. The riot of 1838 was so serious as to necessitate the despatch of a sepoy force from Dacca. In 1840 nearly one third of the Muslims of Dacca were considered (by Taylor) to be Faraizis. In the later stages of the movement, it got merged in the wider Wahhabi movement. With his death at Dacca in September, 1862, ended the vigour of the movement. Dudu Miyan's name became 'a household word' throughout the districts of Faridpur, Pabna, Bakarganj, Dacca, Noakhali, Baraset, Jessore and Malda,—almost in the whole of East Bengal and also in some areas of West Bengal. The thoroughness of the methods of the father and the son was testified to by the number of the Faraizis in 1927. Dudu Miyan's social reform would remain his most solid achievement and lasting contribution to the movement.

Dudu Miyan achieved his success mainly among the cultivators and village workmen (largest number of converts), on whose behalf he took up the cudgels.

### 13. *Influence of Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah on Bengal*

#### (a) *Titu Mir*<sup>43</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad had established a definite organisation in Bihar with Wilayat Ali as his chief Khalifah (1820). We do not know of any such policy with regard to Bengal on the part of the Sayyid. About 1827, however, a disciple of his, Titu Mir, led a mass movement of reformers,

43 For Titu Mir *Calcutta Review*, No. CI 177 ff., JBRAS xiv (1878-80), 358. Hunter I M 44-7, S R B G XLII, A R Mullick 76 ff. Q Ahmad 89-95. M. A Khan LXI-LXVII, S B Chaudhury *Civil Disturbances in India (1765-1857)* 95-97.

peasants and artisans in the villages in West Bengal. This was similar to, and practically synchronised with, the Faraizī movement in East Bengal and was a compound of religious reform, agrarian insurrection and defiance of government. Nasir Ali, alias Titu Mir or Titu Miyan, an obscure villager of desperate character, belonged to Chandpur, south-west of Narkulbaria in Baraset district. He became a professional wrestler in Calcutta and was employed as a *lathial* by Hindu zamindars of Nadia. While accompanying some members of the royal family of Delhi during pilgrimage to Mecca he met Sayyid Ahmad and became his disciple (1822). Encouraged by the Sayyid's striking success, Titu Mir, on return in 1827, became a religious reformer preaching his doctrines at Haidarpur (near Narkulbaria) where he settled.

His ideas of religious reform were similar to those of Shariat Allah and of Sayyid Ahmad, viz, emphasis on the unity of God and restoration of the original purity of Islam. The first implied that the attributes of God must not be applied to a human beings and that the worship of angels, spirits, demons, pirs, teachers, saints or prophets constituted polytheism and was to be disallowed. The second necessitated the purging of Islam of all those superstitious, un-Islamic and idolatrous practices, ceremonies and rites growing out of contact with Hinduism. The similarity led Revenshaw, Wahhabi prosecutor (c 1863-70) to identify the Faraizī movement with those of Titu Mir and Sayyid Ahmad. Dr. A. R. Mullick also calls Titu Mir's movement as Faraizī. True both Titu Mir and Shariat Allah came from lower strata of the Muslims in Bengal, and both were supported by the rural masses. Both the movements spread in areas where the Muslim peasants were oppressed by the Hindu zamindars. Like the Faraizis, Titu asked his followers to grow beards and wear *dhutis* in *kachhalkhula* fashion. But there were certain doctrinal and basic differences between Titu Mir and the Faraizis, as pointed out by Dr. M. A. Khan. While Shariat Allah held that

the Friday and Id prayers were not obligatory in India. Titu and his followers (and also Karamat Ali) said these prayers. Moreover, though Dudu Miyan met Titu, the latter had no contact with Shariat Allah. The latter got his inspiration from Arabia, whereas Titu's reform programme was an extension of Shah Waliullah and Sayyid Ahmad's programme for West Bengal. The conformity of both Shariat Allah and Titu to the Hanafi School proved nothing. Even Sayyid Ahmad had some leanings towards it and his disciples like Karamat Ali were Hanafis. Though avoiding Hindu custom, Titu's followers imitated it by forming an exclusive caste, interdining only among themselves, perhaps out of attachment to lawful food and earnings (*halal ruzi*).

Titu Mir was not merely a religious reformer. He soon became the leader of 'an infuriated peasant rising'. His followers, recruited from poor and illiterate Muslims during his tours in districts east and north of Calcutta, gradually grew in numbers. They differed from the bulk of Muslim population in dress, appearance and social attitudes and in upholding stricter doctrines. The area between the Jamuna and the Ichamati became the recruiting ground of this movement. Three districts of 24 Parganahs, Nadia and Faridpur came under his influence.

The progress of the sect, however, roused the opposition of some Muslim peasants (especially the Hanafis) and Hindu zamindars. The former were shocked at the denunciation of their rites and customs. The latter (e. g., Ram Narayan of Taragonia, Gaur Prasad Chowdhury of Nagarpur, agent of the Zamindar of Koorgatchy and Kishen Deb Roy of Purwa or Poorna on Ichamati river) were alarmed at the potential threat to their interests and on getting complaints, used their extensive powers and influence to interfere and discourage the sect by imposing fines (e. g., illegal beard tax) or petty kinds of maltreatment on peasants and weavers of the new sect. Eventually a mosque was burnt. Failing

to get justice from the normal judicial machinery of the locality the exasperated Muslims, led by their lieutenant, Ghulam Masum carried the case of the peasants to Calcutta. But the spirit of revenge led them to commit acts of open violence in a series of agrarian outrages, not only against the Hindu zamindars but the Hindu community in general. They were equally bitter against the non-conformist Muslims. Proclaiming the extinction of British rule, they defied the civil authorities of Baraset and Nadia. They indulged in cow-killing, desecration of temples and plunder of villages at Purwa (November 1831). The affray at Lawghatta village in Nadia assumed a serious character, in which the Joint Magistrate of Baraset had to retreat and the Magistrate of Krishnanagar also failed. Finally Titu Mir was killed (1831) during military intervention, and five trials were held in which his lieutenant, Ghulam Masum, was sentenced to death and several others were convicted. The movement was considered to be "local" and engineered by "unimportant" men by the enquiring officer, J. R. Colvin. But O'Kinealy sharply commented on the inexplicable apathy of the Government. The contemporary press held a different opinion. "Such sects as the Faraizis and Wahabis even if impotent themselves for a great Movement may gather all the discontents, hatreds, ambitions which under the present not very wise, however beneficent and brilliant, rule must be numerous enough. The Faraizis, though a Bengal sect, are heard of outside in the Native states. There are scores of villages in Bengal but the Government and the public alike are quite in the dark as to them or their organisation, their politics or their religions. This bespeaks of great neglect." Whether this open violence of Titu Mir's group was inspired by the success of the movement of Sayyid Ahmad in the frontier against the Sikhs is a controversial point. But their simultaneity as also the insurgents' open proclamation of the end of British rule and of the rightful claim of the

Muhammadans to the empire are highly significant. Starting as a religious movement it developed into a socio-economic struggle of the Muslim peasantry against the Hindu zamindars. Propagating passive non-co-operation among the masses by refusing to take service under the English and refusing to go to the English courts, it became a religious economic, political and communal movement.

(b) *The Patna School of Wilayat Ali and Enayat Ali*<sup>44</sup>

The central feature of the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah* of Sayyid Ahmad was the emphasis on the Prophetic tradition (*ittiba-i-sunnah*) and the rejection of the prescriptions of the schools of Law (*ittiba-i-fiqh*). After his death (1831) differences of opinion arose among his three principal disciples over the relative emphasis on these two principles. Maulavi Wilayat Ali of Patna re-affirmed the principle of the *Tariqah*, i. e., Prophetic tradition (in his book *Amal bil Hadis*, probably written before 1837). Maulana Karamat Ali of Jaunpur refuted Wilayat Ali (in his book *Qunwat al Im an*, 1837), remained firm on *taqlid* and followed the Hanafi School of Law. Maulavi 'Abd ul Jabbar of Calcutta, though a Hanafite, reasserted emphasis on Prophetic tradition, refuting Karamat Ali and supporting Wilayat Ali (in his book *Taqwiyat ul Muslim n fittiba i-Sunnat-Sayyid al Nusrain*, 1840). Hence 'Abd ul Jabbar may be regarded as belonging to the Patna School. Thus arose a split in Sayyid Ahmad's sect between the Patna School of Wilayat Ali and his brother Enayat Ali and the *Taariqat* School of Karamat Ali. In course of time a third group arose by leaving the Patna School the *Al-i-Hadis*.

The death of Sayyid Ahmad in 1831, (which also coincided with the failure of Titu Mir) did not break his movement. It was rescued by the Patna Khalifas of the Sayyid, Wilayat Ali and Enayat Ali of Sadiquepur family,

<sup>44</sup> Hunter 28-78, Q Ahmad Ch 4. M A Khan, A R Mullick 81-92, 115-139, *Calcutta Review* No C 95-104, Ikram 406, 405

with their 'missionary zeal' and 'immense pecuniary resource'. About them Hunter has recorded "Indefatigable as missionaries careless of themselves, blameless in their lives, supremely devoted to the overthrow of the English infidels admirably skilful in organising a permanent system of supplying money and recruits, the Patna Caliphs stand forth as the types and exemplars of the Sect. Much of their teaching was faultless and it had been given to them to stir up thousands of their countrymen to a purer life and truer conception of the Almighty." They revived the religious zeal of the Wahhabis for *jihad*. Returning to Patna from the Deccan, Wilayat was elected leader. The two brothers moved from the east to the north-west whenever necessary. From the headquarters station of Patna radiated out numerous agents to preach *jihad* and collect funds, recruits and provisions. But it was Bengal which became "the chief field of propaganda and recruitment". Of course it took some time and intensive propaganda to stir the Muslims of Bengal and Bihar, long enjoying peace under British rule. But once stirred, their intellectual superiority prevailed and the movement became to a great extent a Bengali Muhammadan revival. Though far distant from the north-west frontier Bengal and Bihar played a very important part in the Sayyid's movement. Touring throughout Bengal and Bihar the two brothers roused the zeal of their adherents to fever heat, and collected men and money for the front. In Bengal the Sayyid's Khalifahs and their agents were commissioned to work in jurisdictions of their own. The districts of Chittagong, Noakhali, Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur and Barisal in Eastern Bengal were the fields of activity and touring of Maulavi Karamat Ali of Jaunpur. Central Bengal and especially the districts of Faridpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Maldah, Bogra, Nadia and even Baraset became the chief ground of Enayat Ali of Patna for more than ten years. During 1840-44 he made Hakimpur village in Jessore district his headquarters. He built mosques

and appointed teachers (and 'Muhammadan Mullahs') to spread the creed and preached  *Jihad* . For a time he was assisted in Bengal by his brother Wilayat Ali, but the latter mainly worked among the people of Central India, Hyderabad and Bombay. The  *Jihad*  fund at Patna was replenished by proceeds of sale of the Deccani women's jewels.

Zainul Abedin a Hyderabadí convert was commissioned to preach in the eastern districts of Bengal (particularly Dacca and Sylhet) and he converted the peasantry of Tipperah and Sylhet. The efforts of Enayat Ali and his agents (1830-70) succeeded in rousing a strong religio-political consciousness among the Bengal Muslims, and encouraging the growth of a civic and corporate spirit, a policy of civil disobedience to government and boycott of government organs, especially the courts. The village mosque under its Imam became the centre of this corporate spirit. Those who were not in a position to abandon this country and join in Jihad were recommended to resist passively and refrain from all intercourse with their Kafir rulers, to form, as it were, a power within the then Government but totally opposed to it. Assistance should not be demanded from the infidels, their courts, which decreed interest should 'be avoided' (O'Keefe). Thus the masses came to be united in a well-knit organization. The remotest villages in Bengal came to be electrified by the  *Jariqah-i Muhammadíyah* . In 1850 Enayat Ali was found preaching  *Jihad*  in Rajshahi in North Bengal with the assistance of the headmen of many villages especially one Muniruddin. In the controversy between the two brothers, Enayat Ali's programme for immediate action against the British was supported by the 'ignorant and desperate' Bengalis but when it was not accepted by Wilayat Ali, supported by the Hindusthanis, Enayat Ali deserted him. After his death in 1852 Enayat Ali became the leader till his own death in 1857. The ignorant and poor Muslims of Bengal and



Bihar—rural masses of Bengal—the tailors, the water-carriers and the like of Bihar—supplied the chief recruits to the ranks of the Wahhābīs.

The influence of the Patna School extended mainly in northern and western districts of Bengal—Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Nadia, Burdwan, West Jessore and Twentyfour Parganas. The School was strongest in those areas traversed by the Ganges and the Bhagirathi. Nevertheless the school did not make appreciable headway and its progress was retarded in Eastern Bengal. There was a conflict between the masses (with their belief in the Sayyid being *maḥdī*) and the elite (counter-acting this belief). The Patna School maintained good relations with the Faraizīs who were influential in the districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Dacca, East Jessore, Faridpur, Kulna and Barisal, and was unwilling to come to conflict with the *Ta'āyūnī* School of Karamat Ali concentrating in East Bengal. Another religious revivalist, a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad, whose influence in East Bengal was very great, was Maulavi Imamuddin. Born in Hajipur in Bengal and educated at Delhi under Shah Abdul Aziz, he became a disciple of the Sayyid at Lucknow in 1824. He was instrumental in the initiation of a large number of his native villagers by the Sayyid at Calcutta and accompanied the latter to Arabia. Participating in the *jihād* on the frontier till 1831, he returned to his native district of Noakhali and won over many people to the creed of his master. Chittagong was the field of activity of another disciple of the Sayyid.

### (c) *Karamat Ali* (1800-1873), (*Ta'āyūnī Movement—Opposition to the Faraizī Movement*)

Sayyid Ahmad's reform movement was further developed by Maulavi Karamat Ali<sup>45</sup> who largely prepared

45 For Karamat Ali JASB Vol. 63 (Pt III 54-6) Ency. Islam II 752-3 (by Yusuf Hussain) Census of India (1901) vol. 6 pt

the ground for the recent organisation, the *Ahl-i Hadis*. He belonged to a Shaikh family which held the office of *Khatib* during Muhammadan rule. His father was a *varishtadar* in Jaunpur collectorate. Born at Jaunpur (c. 1800) he studied theology and other Muslim sciences under various celebrated teachers, especially Shah Abdul Aziz, *muhaddis* of Delhi, the teacher and afterwards follower of Sayyid Ahmad Brelvi. Karamat Ali became an ardent disciple of Sayyid Ahmad (then touring in Bengal and Northern India, 1820-24). But, according to Yusuf Ali, he did not join the Sayyid's *jihad* against the Sikhs or go to the Afghan border. After the Sayyid's death (1831), his old master Shah Abdul Aziz became the Khalifah of Karamat Ali. About 1835 the Muslims of Eastern India became so much plunged in superstitious beliefs and practices that he apprehended divine retribution. Choosing Bengal as the field of his mission, he came there in 1835. An active propaganda for revival of Islam now originated in Bihar and Bengal. Karamat became its "most successful apostle" and "most brilliant exponent."

Never an extremist and always moderate in his ideas, Karamat was nothing but an orthodox reformer. He worked whole-heartedly for revival of Islam on orthodox lines, and peaceful reform of Islam in Bihar and Bengal,

I (Bengal), p. 174; Hunter, I. M. 97; Titus, 194; M. A. Khan : Ikram 406-7; I. H. Qureshi; Q. Ahmad 103; *Nineteenth Century*, May, 1905, 780-2; Buckland, *Dict. of Indian Biography*, 229; 'Aziz Ahmad, *op-cit*.

Karamat Ali wrote chiefly in Urdu. Rahman Ali's list of 46 of his works is not exhaustive. One of his works is regarded in India as a correct statement of Islamic Principles. His writings may be divided into four classes: (1) general works, (2) works on the reading and verbal interpretation of the Quran and formal prayers and ablutions, (3) works on the doctrine of spiritual preceptorship (*Pir i Muridi*), the corner stone of orthodox Islam in India: in accepting this doctrine, Karamat Ali stands in sharp opposition to the Wahhabi sect and merges insensibly in the *Tasawwuf* schools he brings into relation with the traditional religious orders. (4) polemics against Shariat Allah, Dudu Miyan, the Wahhabis etc.

especially in Eastern Bengal. In the field of doctrine, his principal ideas were as follows :

(i) *Taqlid* : He insisted on the principle of *taqlid* or imitation of the school of law (*mazhab*), also accepted by the Faraizis but not by the Patna school or Wilayat Ali's group. He identified himself with a particular school of law (or *mazhab*) viz., the orthodox Sunni Hanafi School. Hence his group was called *Ta'aisyuni* (Arabic *ta'ayyun*, to identify). It was also called Rahi or follower of the Path, like the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah*. He laid great stress on authority, successively handed down by living teachers. He accepted the six orthodox books of tradition, the commentaries (*tafsir*), the principles of ceremonial law as interpreted by the masters (*usul i fiqh*). Karamat denounced both the Patna School and the Faraizis as the Wahhabis of Arabia. He denounced the Patna School as *la-mazhabi* for rejecting *taqlid* and for not identifying with any of the four schools of law. Differing from the Faraizis on the question of prayers and food, he criticized them as the Kharijis of Bengal.

(ii) *Prayers* : Karamat held that the congregational prayers (Juma' and 'Id) were not only lawful but obligatory. In this he differed from the Faraizis who held that as India had become *dar ul harb* because of British conquest, these prayers could not be held. Karamat, who introduced an era of religious debate in Bengal, counter-argued that India had not become *dar ul harb* and even in that case, the Muslims could follow all observances practised in *dar ul Islam*. The Patna School agreed with Karamat in this respect.

(iii) *Pir-i-Muridi* : Karamat also accepted the doctrines of *Tasawwuf* and *Pir-i-Muridi*. Unlike Sayyid Ahmad who vehemently opposed the principle of 'spiritual preceptorship' (*pir-i-muridi*), Karamat Ali was bold enough to cling to it.

(iv) *Mujaddid* : He accepted the tradition of the emergence of a *Mujaddid* (renewer of faith) in every century

and regarded Sayyid Ahmad to be a *Mujaddid* of 13th century A. H. to be followed till the 14th.

(v) Karamat differentiated "between *shirk* (negation of Islam) and *bid'at* (an error in doctrine) and between a *fasiq* (sinner) and a *kafir* (infidel). His life constituted a "double struggle" against un-Islamic practices and heterodoxy, both of which he attacked in his books.

His programme of action was thus twofold: (i) Abhorring all un-Islamic practices like the Faraizis of East Bengal, he waged a war to abolish the Hindu customs, rites, ceremonies and superstitions which had crept into Islamic practices through ignorance and condemning which he wrote a book. He denounced music, dance, *tazias*, and *us.* But he approved in a modified form some of the traditional ceremonies like *tatiah* (rite for the dead) and *Qiyam* or standing during birthday celebration of the Prophet. He criticised those who "denied funeral prayers to those who did not pray but repeated the *Kalima*." (ii) He also endeavoured (successfully) to bring back to orthodoxy the new heterodox schools growing out of the work of Shariat Allah and Dudu Miyan.

A skilful organiser, Karamat Ali showed great power throughout his life for regenerating Islam and revitalizing Islamic life in East Bengal. Sailing on the rivers for a period of nearly forty years on his flotilla constituting a travelling (residential) college, he conveyed the message of Islamic reform and regeneration to the Nagas of Assam and the people of the Bay of Bengal islands. Thus did he keep himself in touch with the Muslims in Bengal and distributed the presents he received to the poor from Faridpur to Dacca, Mymensingh, Noakhali and Barisal. By 1872 he witnessed much more "pauperism, lethargy and negligence among Muslims of South Bengal than in any other Muslim land." His following was so large that when he died (30th May, 1873), "there was scarcely a village in Bengal that did not contain some of his disciples." He was buried in Rangpur.

(d) *The Ahl-i-Hadis*<sup>46</sup>

The moderation and wisdom of Wilayat Ali (d 1852) sufficed to maintain unity among the conflicting principles of *ittiba-i-Sunnat* and *ittiba-i-fiqh*. Without identifying himself with any school of law, he recognized the validity of the schools. On the other hand, Maulavi Abdul Jabbar, though belonging to the Hanafi school, was firmly attached to the Prophetic tradition. After Wilayat's death these two trends came to collide. One group definitely clung to Hanafi school, and the other repudiated *taqlid* or prescription of the schools of law. A split became inevitable. About 1864 Sayyid Nazir Husain (b 1805) of Balthawa in Monghyr district wrote a treatise *Thabut i Haqq al Haqiq* (establishment of the truth) which marked the complete breach. A new vigorous school thus came out of the Patna school. Known as the *Ahl-i-Hadis* (People of Tradition or Partisans of the Prophetic Tradition) it came to absorb most of the reformist tendencies of the nineteenth century Islamic revivalism. The creed of the sect is 'whatever the Prophet Muhammad taught in the Quran and authoritative Traditions (*Ahadis Sahihah*) that alone is the basis of the religion known as the *Ahl-i-Hadis*. It aims at going back to the first principles,—restoration of the simplicity and sincerity of classical Islam. Emphasis is therefore put on (i) reassertion of *Tauhid* (unity of God) denial of occultism (*ilm-ul-ghaib*), rejection of *pirism*,

(ii) rejection of *taqlid* i.e., blind acceptance of the four schools of law, and of the *iqma* (agreement) of the Islamic community,

(iii) individual interpretation (*ijtihad*) of the Quran and Traditions which implies that the person must be sufficiently learned. This is a principle of far reaching importance,

(iv) eradication of all polytheistic innovations or un-Islamic customs, as a natural corollary to this doctrine

<sup>46</sup> For *Ahl-i-Hadis*, Titus 1957, M. A. Khan *op cit*

so that the 'inner truth and meaning' of Islam may be understood. They are sometimes called *Rafi Yadayn* as they frequently raise hands to their ears during prayer. Their opponents called them *lamazhabi* (not belonging to any recognised Sunni Schools of law. They called themselves 'Muhammadi' indicating their succession to the Sayyid Ahmadi community.

The *Ahl-i-hadis* never became a mass movement in the villages of Bengal, perhaps because of its intellectual character. Traces of the influence of this sect were found in the Faraizi districts of Faridpur and Bakarganj during the second half of the 19th century. The Hanafite Faraizis did not oppose this sect. This relatively small sect, however, finds regular mention in the Census of India. There is an all-India body, All India Ahl-i-Hadis Conference, which holds annual sessions and there are district organisations in Bengal, Bihar, the Punjab and other parts of Northern India. The sect maintains schools, mosques and also publishes books and journals.

#### 14. *State of Islamic Religion during the second half of the Nineteenth century.*

By the beginning of the 20th century the Bengal Muslims could be broadly classified, after James Wise, into five religious groups, the *Sabiqa* (or the Traditional), the Faraizi, the Patna School, the *Ta'aiyuni* and *Ahl-i-Hadis*.

The *Sabiqa*, the followers of the old customs of the ancestors, consisted of a majority of landlords and generally the descendants of old Sunni families, representing "the debased Hinduised religion peculiar to Muhammadan India." They represented a composite culture in which the various strains of local and foreign traditions were fused. The vestiges of the old society survived only in the practices of these conservatives. The social order of the *Sabiqa*s was the oldest and most corrupt which so long represented the dominant state religion.

The other four represented the reformist groups, aiming

at reforming the old religious and social order, purging it of un-Islamic elements, and also at winning over the *Sabiqis*.

(a) *The Faraizis : the successors of Dudu Miyan (1862-1906)*

The Faraizi movement, after effecting some permanent changes in the religious life of Bengal for nearly half a century, gradually began to decline in importance. It had roused the opposition not only of the landlords and the planters, but of the *Sabiqi* or traditional Muslims as well, partly for violence used and partly for banning the ceremonial prayers which were considered highly important by the ordinary Muslims, who were branded as *Kafirs* or infidels by them.

The death of Dudu Miyan in 1862 created a crisis in the history of the Faraizis. His three sons succeeded him one after another. His eldest son, Ghiyasuddin Haider, succeeded him but died soon after in 1864. The second son, Abdul Ghafur alias Naya Miyan, then only 12 years of age, was elected leader (1864-1883 or 84). The organisation was kept up by the central hierarchy of the triumvirate (the attorney, *mutawalli* and *mufli*), established by Dudu Miyan. In 1879, he formally assumed leadership and established, according to Navin Sen, "a state of his own within the British regime." He followed a policy of co-operation with the Government. *Saiuddin* Ahmad (1884-1906) became leader and continued his brother's policy of co-operation with the government which conferred the title of Khan Bahadur on him. A section of the Faraizis, suspecting him, left the movement. He supported the partition of Bengal.

(b) *The Patna School*

The death of Wilayat Ali in 1852 and of Enayat Ali in 1858 caused a general setback to the Wahhabi movement.

(c) *Ta'aisyuni movement (1873-1898) :*

The movement of Karamat Ali exercised a "living influence" in certain districts of Bengal. Not only did he criticise the superstitious beliefs and practices of the

*Sabiqis*, he also denounced the radicalism of the Faraizis, the Patna School and *Ahl-i-Hadis*. He at first criticized the Faraizis as Kharijis and later on in 1878 as Wahhabis 'in reality.' He approved in a modified form some of the traditional ceremonies like *Fat'ha* (rite for the dead), *Qiyam* (standing) during the birthday celebration of the Prophet, rejected by the above three groups. So Karamat Ali was considered by the *Sabiqis* to be their champion. His work was continued by his son (Maulavi Hafiz Ahmad, d. 1898) and nephew (Muhammad Muhsin.)

Thus there ensued a triangular struggle in Islamic revivalism in Bengal between the Patna School, the Faraizis and the School of Karamat Ali, some of the main points of the dispute being the emphasis on Prophetic tradition, *taqlid* and authority, and prescription of schools of law. *Itahad* (or private interpretation), prayers and food. Karamat Ali remained at times at Calcutta from 1835-53. He met Haji Shariat Allah there in 1836-37. Some progress towards a compromise between the schools was made by 1855. Karamat met Dudu Miyan about 1860. At the Barisal debate (*Bahas*) in 1867 the Faraizi representative, Maulavi Abdul Jabbar, did not yield on the question of prayers though Karamat agreed on certain points with him and pointed out that the Maulavi "mistook grasshoppers (which were unlawful food) for locusts (which were lawful)". In 1879 another debate was held at Madaripur over the question of Juma' prayer between the Faraizis under Naya Miyan and Hafiz Ahmad, son of Karamat Ali, the Ta'aiyuni leader, which was called *Juman Yuddha* (or battle of the Juma') by Navin Sen. In 1903 there was another debate at Daud Kandi between the Faraizis and the *Sabiqis* over the question of Juma' prayer, leading to a split between the *juma'wallah* and *bejuma' wallah*. In spite of this prolonged debate over the question of Juma', prayers continued to be held by majority of the Muslims. The Faraizis, however, revived their congregational prayers only after 1947.



Thus it is to be noted that Islamic reformation movements did not result in the establishment of religious peace or unity in the land. On the one hand, even the vigour of the revivalist movements did not succeed in wiping out the vestiges of un-Islamic practices and beliefs which had become traditional among a large number of Muslims. Heresies and superstitions survived. On the other hand internal differences between the religious reformers caused splits in the monolithic uniformity of some movements or ranged the different sects in hostile opposition on account of doctrinal conflicts.

Notwithstanding this internal conflict within the bosom of Islam in Bengal, it must be admitted that the Islamic religious revivalist and reformation movements of the first half of the 19th century outlined above, introduced a new life among the Muslims in Bengal. During a period of political and economic decline of the Muslims, the reformers not only tried to revitalise Indian Islam in Bengal through stricter religious observances, prohibiting un-Islamic practices and emphasizing austerity in life but also to rouse the political consciousness of the Muslims by their call to *jihad* and to resist the zamindars and indigo planters. In many cases it was a protest against the British administration and economic exploitation of the masses of the Muslims. Thus religious reform became a many-sided affair,—social, economic, political and communal. The growing process of assimilation between the Hindus and the Muslims during nearly 650 years received a setback. All this encouraged the growth of a spirit of socio-religious exclusiveness among the Muslims, which assumed a political colour in the next half century.

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