SUFI SAINTS OF BENGAL DURING THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY
The actual Sufi Missionary work in India (including Bengal) began from the closing years of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. Hence forward Sufi Saints of outstanding personality began to come to India one after another in quick succession. Hearty responses from all quarters of India came forth and Sufis soon found themselves amidst large number of disciples. Within a few centuries they, their disciples, the disciples of their disciples, were able to capture the imagination of large masses of people and propagated Islam. In this way, through the agency of both Indian and extra-Indian Sufis, Sufism was established in Bengal and other parts of India on a firm footing.

The life-sketches of the 13th century Sufi Saints in Bengal are as follows:

1. AKBARUl SHAYKH JALAL UD DIN TABRIZI

He came to Bengal after the Turkish Conquest of the country.

Abd al-Rahman Chishti, in his Mirat al-Asrar calls him Abul Qasim


2. Abd al-Rahman Chishti, Mirat al Asrar, Dacca University manuscript No. 16 A.R.1435 FOLIO 19.
Makhdum Shaykh Jalal Tabrizi. He settled in Pandua in the district of Maldah, where he died and is also buried there.¹ He was born in Tabriz in Persia. His first preceptor was Abu Said Tabrizi, and then after his death Shaykh Shahab al Din Suhrawardy.² Shaykh Abd al-Haqq Dehlawi has given an example of his extreme devotion to his respected teacher Shahab al Din Suhrawardy. Shahab al Din Suhrawardy often used to make pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah and Shaykh Jalal Tabrizi used to follow him. As Shaykh Shahab al-Din was ill, he could not take cold food, Shaykh Jalal Tabrizi used to put a stove on his head, so that he could provide his teacher with hot food whenever he wanted.³ When Shaykh Jalalud-Din Tabrizi reached Delhi, he was received by Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish (A.D. 1210 - 1236 A.D) and the Shaykh al Islam Nazim al-Din Sughra.⁴ The Ain⁵ informs us that Shaykh bore enmity

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¹ Tadhkirah-i-Awliya-i-Hind, Mirza Muhammad Akhtar Dehlawi pt. I, p.56
against him and brought a few charges against him, one is that of incontinence with a disreputable woman. 1 But he was in good terms with Khwaja Qutb al Din Bakhtyar Kaki and Shaykh Baha al-Din Zakariya. 2 Through the miraculous power of Shaykh Baha al-Din Zakariya, the falsehood of the charge was proved. 3 This story has been related in the Tadhkira. 4 But Shaykh Jalal Tabrizi left for Bengal. 5 According to "Seka Subhodaya" (correctly Shaykh Subhodaya) 6 a later work attributed to Halayudha Misra, a courtier of King Lakshmana Sena (died sometime after A.D. 1205, 7 the last King of the Sena Dynasty, the Saint came to Bengal before Muhammad Bakhtyar's Conquest, and foretold the impending Turkish attack on Lakshmana Sena's Kingdom. 8 It relates that the Saint

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
6. Seka Subhodaya (dog-Sanskrit) - Edited by Dr. Sukumar Sen (Calcutta University) 1927 Hrisikes Series No.11, Chapter VI, p. 31 and vide Editor's Introduction. Regarding the authenticity of the book see, Memoirs, pp. 105-106.
was born in the Kingdom of Attava, his father's name was Kafur, and he was educated with the help of a rich merchant of the locality named Ramadan Khan and left home at the complicity of that merchant. He came to Bengal in Black robe, with a turban on head, a bowl and an asa (stick) in hand. He established a Khangah, where he used to feed thousands of poor, destitutes and travellers. According to Akhbar al-Akhyar, he converted at a look, a Hindi milkman of Badayun. According to Shaykh Subhodaya, a number of miracles are ascribed to him, one night while the Shaykh was living in a forest, three tigers came, saluted him and went away. Seeing his miraculous activities, the King (Lakshmana Sena) built a dargah and a mosque and made liberal grant of land for their maintenance. Important facts of Persian histories have been strung together in Urdu Tadhkirah-i-Awliya-i-Hind, and we quote its account here: "When Jalal-ud-Din Tabrizi reached Bengal, he attracted the attention of all, and a monastery was built for him. He purchased lands to plant gardens thereon and then he dedicated the property by way of "waqf", so that thousands of travellers and permanent residents of the place (muqim) might be maintained. There had been a few ancient temples in that place. He demolished them by his miracles and erected a mosque in that very place and all the worshippers in the temples were converted to Islam." The

2. Shaykh Subhodaya, edited by Sukumar Sen, Calcutta, A.D. 1927, p. 11
above account is supported by the following: "The Saint acquired considerable property in Pandua and elsewhere in Bengal, e.g. Deotla and this estate, which is known as "Bais Hazari (twenty two thousand), is still held by a "Mutawalli" for the benefit of "faqirs" and the poor. When Shah Jalal came to Bengal he began to destroy idols, and the numerous Chilla Khanahs¹ of the Saint probably indicate the actual sites of former Hindu temples.²

Jalalu-D-Din Tabrizi treated the poor with great consideration.³ He preached Islam in Bengal more than twenty years and converted hundreds of people to Islam.⁴

There is a set of buildings in Pandua known as Bari Dargah or Shrine of Shah Jalal al-Din Tabrizi.⁵ These buildings are, (a) one jami masjid , (b) two Chilla Khanahs, (c) one Tanur Khana (kitchen), (d) one Bhandar Khana (store house) (f) Haji Ibrahim's tomb and (g) Salami darwazah (entrance gate). The original Shrine was built by Sultan 'Ala, al-Din Ali Shah (A.H. 742-43(1341-42) at the order of the Saint in dream.⁶ The original mosque was also probably built by him, which was repaired by Shah Nimat Allah in

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1. Chilla Khanahs are places where Saints spent successively forty days and nights in fast, prayer and other devotional exercises.
4. HSB, p.166.
6. Riyad, pp.94-95.
The Bhandar Khana was erected by one Chand Khan in 1084/A.D. 1673. The inscription attached to the Lakshman Sena Dalan shows that the astanah of Shaykh Jalal Tabrizi was repaired by one Muhammad Ali of Burji in 1134/A.D. 1722. The inscription in Tamur Khana shows that it was built by one Sa'ad Allah in 1093/A.D. 1682.

In Deotala, there is another chillakhana, which was given the name of Tabrizabad after the name of the Saint. Four inscriptions, referring to Tabrizabad have so far been discovered. (a) Inscription of Sultan Rukn al-Din Barbak-Shah, dated 868/A.D. 1464. It records the erection of a Jami mosque at Tabrizabad by one Ulugh Murabit Khan; (b) a second inscription of the same Sultan. The date is broken. It records the erection of a mosque in the blessed town of Tabrizabad, generally known as Deotala; (c) One inscription of Sultan Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah, dated 934/A.D. 1547. It records the erection of a mosque by one Shir Khan, "in the town of Shaykh Jalal Muhammad Tabrizi,"; (d) an inscription of Sulayman Karrani, dated 978/A.D. 1571. It records the erection of a mosque "in the blessed town of Tabrizabad, known as Deotala."

1. Memoirs, p.100. See also J.A.S.B. 1895, p.201.
2. For inscription see, Memoirs, p.102
3. Ibid, p.103, J.A.S.B. 1895, p.201
4. Memoirs, p.104
6. J.A.S.B. 1874
8. Ibid., p.170.
The above discussion strengthens the idea that Jalalud-Din Tabrizi was born at Tabriz and his name was Shaykh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi. His original name might have been Abu’l Qasim, as found in Mirat al Asrar.

The place and the date of death of the Saint is a matter of controversy. According to Akhbar al-Akhyar he is lying buried in Bengal, but according to Abu’l Fadl, he died in Deo Mahal, identified with Maldivian islands. According to Khazinat al-Asfiya he died in 642/A.D. 1244, while according to Tadhkirat-i-Awliya‘i Hind, an Urdu biography of the Saints, he died in 622/A.D. 1225.

SHAH SAFIU’D-DIN

The tomb of this Saint is situated in Pandua in the district of Hugli. He was the son of Barkhurdar, a noble of the court of Delhi. His mother was the sister of Emperor Piroz Shah. According to the tradition current at Pandua, Shah Safiu’d-Din came to Bengal for the cause of Islam. In the village of Mahanath in Hugli Pandav Raja lived, who was very powerful and antagonistic towards the Islamic faith. A few years

1. Akhbar al-Akhyar, p.46
3. J.A.S.B. 1895, pp.230 ff; 1873, p.260
7. Ibid.
after Saint's settlement there, quarrel broke out between the Saint
and the King over the sacrifice of a cow on the occasion of the
circumcision of a boy. The King ordered the infant child to be
slain as a sacrifice to the goddess Kali in the presence of the poor
Saint. The royal order was carried out accordingly and the
helpless Saint then left the Kingdom of the Raja for Delhi to relate
this harrowing tale to his maternal uncle Emperor Firoz Shah who
sent a large army against the King under the command of Jafar
Khan Ghazi.¹ But before he left Delhi for Bengal, he went to
Panipath, where his spiritual guide Bu Ali Shah Qalandar was
living, to ask of his blessings on the eve of this holy expedition.
Bu Ali Shah Qalandar heartily blessed him and hailed him as the
conqueror of the infidels. In the war that followed, the Hindu
King was defeated. Enamul Haq says, while fighting with the
enemies, Safiu'd-Din received a mortal wound which caused him to
die on the spot.²

The tradition refers the following persons: King Firoz Shah,
Bu Ali Shah Qalandar and Zafar Khan Ghazi. These three persons
are said to have been contemporary with Shah Safiu'd-Din. Let
us now examine whether these three persons were contemporary
with each other.

As the tradition refers to Firoz Shah, Blochmann identifies
him with Jalalal-Din Firoz Shah Khalji of Delhi, who reigned for

². HSB, p.195.
five years from 1290 A.D. to 1295 A.D., and also according to the
tradition Bu-'Ali Shah Qalandar died in 724/A.D. 1324. 1 Jafar
Khan Ghazi has been described in the present tradition as the
commander of Jalalu-'d-Din Khilji and the conquerer of Pandua.
There is a historical person named 'Ulugh-i-Azam Humayun Jafar
Khan Bahram Itagin, who conquered Saptagrama, the capital of the
Southern Part of Bengal during the Ruknu-'d-Din Kaykayus Shah
(1291-1302 A.D.) the Sultan of Gaur. 2 At Saptagrama, he built
a mosque in the year 698 A.H. =1298 A.D. The inscription inlaid
with wall of the mosque records that when he conquered the place,
he erected this mosque and celebrated his victory over the
Hindus by giving away wealth in charity to the Muslims. 3 On the
confluence of the Ganges and the Saraswati at Tribeni was a
temple built of stone, in which Jafar Khan was buried. 4 In the
year 713 A.H. =1313 A.D., Jafar Khan founded a college in the
city of Saptagrama near Tribeni 5 and in the same year, his tomb
was erected within the old Hindu Temple Triveni. 6

2. Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, New Series,
Vol. V., p. 246; Banglar Itihas, Rakhaldas Banerji, Vol. II,
p.87.
3. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol.XXXIX, 1870
5. Ibid. p.89; Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Old
6. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1870, Old series,
Vol. XXXIX, 1870, pt. 1 p.289.
From this, it will be clearly seen that all three persons, viz. Bu'Ali Shah Qalandar, Jalalu'd-Din Firoz Shah and Jafar Khan Ghazi were contemporary with each other. The above evidences, therefore, made Shah Safiu'd-Din contemporaneous with Bu'Ali Shah Qalandar, Jalalu'd-Din Firoz Shah and Jafar Khan Ghazi and it is also very likely that he first conquered Pandua sometime between the year 1290 and 1295 A.D., and then he conquered Saptagrama in 1298 A.D.

SHAH ABDULLAH KIRMANI

The tomb of this great Saint is situated at Khustigiri in the district of Birbhum. According to Tadhkira,1 Shah 'Abdullah Kirmani was a Bengali by birth and was a disciple of Khwajah Mu'inu'd-Din Chishti. He formed a new group or a sub-order of the main Chishti order called the Kirmanis. This sub-order became very popular in Western Bengal and other parts of India.

The date, anecdote and account recorded elsewhere2 and the local tradition is this that he was born in Kirman, a city in Persia, in his very early life, he came to India and became a disciple of Shah Arjani(d.1630 A.D.) in Patna. Shah Arjani ordered him to go to Bengal. Shah Arjani also gave him a tooth-pick of Chambeli wood telling him to remain at that place where he found the tooth-pick to be fresh and green. Shah

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   (ii) Bengal District Gazetteers -Birbhum, 1910, p.120.
Abdullah reached Bengal and stayed at Bargaon, near Bhadiga, where he performed several miracles. But as the tooth-pick remained dry, he then left the place for Khustigiri. One night he put the tooth-pick into his pillow and slept, when he awoke, he found his tooth-pick was fresh and green. He planted the tooth-pick and it soon became a large tree, which is still seen. According to Tadhkirah, he was alive in the year 1236 A.D. and he was one of the early Saint's of India. He also converted a large number of people to Islam. Shah Abdullah is especially renowned for the powers which he had over serpents, and now-a-day, in Birbhum, Bankura, and Burdwan his name is repeated in formulas of enchantment.

BABA FARIDU-‘D-DIN SHAKRAGANJ

Baba Farid is known in Bengal for a fountain, besides the hillock at Solak-Bahar, situated within a mile north of Chittagong. This fountain is widely known as "Shaykh Farider Chashamah" or the Fountain of Shaykh Farid. Owing to its traditional association with Shaykh Farid, people visit this sacred fountain and take its water home to serve the purpose of holy water and of medicine for various ailments.

1. Bengal District Gazetteer-Birbhum, 1910, p.120.
2. Ibid. p.120.
3. HSB. p.239.
4. Ibid., p.240.
According to the local tradition,¹ this Shaikh Farid was the spiritual guide of Nizamu-'d-Din Awliya (1236-1325 A.D.). There is a tradition still current in some parts of the district of Faridpur that the name of the district and town of Faridpur was given after the name of Shaikh Farid, who once visited the district and converted the people to Islam. A small tomb, which was probably made to commemorate the name and activities of the Saint, is still seen in the town of Faridpur. Both Hindus and Muslims give offerings to it in fulfilment of their vows.²

¹ HSB, pp.240-241.
² Haq, Enamul, HSB, p.243.