CHAPTER VI

SUFI SAINTS OF BENGAL DURING THE SIXTEENTH, SEVENTEENTH & EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
In the later part of the sixteenth century, signs of reformation among the Muslims were visible. The idea that the Muslims of India (including Bengal) were, day by day, degrading themselves by being Hinduised, was entertained by a section of the Muslims who apprehended a great danger for their brethren, of being slowly merged among the Hindu population. This idea was rapidly developing with the march of time; it was enhanced by the liberal movement of Akbar and his learned followers. All these, however, came to be regarded by orthodox Sufi reformers to be abuses or 'innovations in religion and the mode of performing religious duty and worship', which must be shunned by every true Muhammadan because they constituted aberrations from orthodox Islam. Thus, the Naqshbandi Sufi order, closer to orthodoxy than any other Sufi School was sponsored by Khwaja Baqi Billah and reached its culmination in the life and work of his most distinguished disciple, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi who was 'the first to raise the
and they all made him their spiritual successor.¹

This narration which appears to be a statement of reverie, simply means that Shaykh Ahmad not only claimed to be a reformer in the religious and social field, but also in the field of theosophy or Tasawwuf as it was then prevalent in India. He chiefly belonged to the Naqshbandi school of mystic thought, but he reformed all schools including his own. Everyone going through his "Maktubat" or 'Epistles' can easily imagine, how he grappled with the situation. Shaykh Ahmad died in the year 1624 A.D.²

The two other men who carried on the reform of Shaykh Ahmad were Shaykh ‘Abdul-Haq of Delhi (d.1641) and the Sunni Emperor Aurangzib, whose administrative measures forecast the intellectual scheme of reforms advocated by Shah Wali-Allah (1703-62) a generation later. The Reform Movement of Shaykh Ahmad was introduced into Bengal by Shaykh Hamid Danishmand, a disciple and a Khalifah of Mujaddid- i-Aif-Thani.

1. Tadhkireh Awliya i Hind, pt. II: op.cit. P. 95
2. HSB, p. 31...
He was born in Mangalkot in the district of Burdwan in West Bengal. He was also educated there. It is said, the ancestors of this saint and Savant belonged to a Qadi family of Oudh, one of whom came to Bengal and settled in Mangalkot. We came to know from "Maktubat" or Epistles of Shaykh Ahmad that Shaykh Hamid was a disciple and a Khalifah of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, and also there are four letters of Mujaddid-i-Aif-i-Thani, addressed to Shaykh Hamid Bengali. In Delhi, he made friends with prince Khurram (Shah-i-Jahan), who was then placed by his father Jahangir under the instruction of Mujaddid-i-Aif-Thani. After completing his mystic education Shaykh Hamid returned Bengal for preaching the principles of Islam. He wanted a true Islamic reform and to achieve this goal he founded a great Madrasah, the ruins of which are still to be seen beside the dilapidated mausoleum erected after his death over his grave. Enamul Haq says, when the news of his death reached Delhi, Emperor Shah-i-Jahan (1628-1658 A.D.) became very much moved and mortified for the loss of one of his first friends and in order to
perpetuate his memory he ordered for the erection of the present mausoleum (now in a ruinous condition) over his sepulchre and of a mosque near by. This mosque was of magnificent size and is now fallen down, on the foundation and with the materials of which a new small mosque has now been erected by the Muslims of the locality for their use. The Emperor also made proper arrangements for the upkeep of the Madrasah founded by the Saint. He granted a large rent free State to the Successors of the Mawlana (none of whom now live), with an annual income of 80,000 rupees, for the upkeep of the Madrasah. ¹

The epigraph of the old mosque, now attached to the door of the present mosque built on the foundation of the old one, is another proof that testifies that the mosque was originally built by Emperor Shah-i-Jahan. The text of the Arabic Tughra inscription records the following facts:

¹. H.S.B. -192.
"The Prophet, may God be pleased with him, said whoever builds a mosque (in this world), will have a house in the paradise built for him by God.' This mosque was built in the reign of great Sultan, revered Emperor and the fortunate Shihabu'd-Din Muhammad Shah-i-Jahan, the King and the Ghazi. When you are asked about the date of its foundation say, 'this is the house of the honourable' -1065 A.H. =1654 A.D."\(^1\)

**SHAYKH KHALIL**\(^2\) (alive in 1539 A.D.)

This Saint was one of the descendants of Shaykh Faridu-'d-Din Shakarganj (1176-1269) of India -wide fame.\(^3\)

---

1. *H.S.B.*, p.193
3. *Riyadu-‘s Salatin*, op.cit., p.102
In 1539 A.D. when emperor Humayun was defeated by Sher Shah, and had been fleeing away to Agra, this Saint was instrumental in bringing about a truce between Sher Shah and the Emperor.\(^1\) Though Shaykh Khalil was not a Bengali by birth, he was the spiritual guide of Sher Shah (1539-45).\(^2\) The Saint was alive in 1539.\(^3\)

HAJI BAHRAM SAQQA (d. 1562 A.D.)

According to Bengal District Gazetteer,\(^4\) the tomb of this Saint is situated under the jurisdiction of Burdwan Municipality. He belonged to Turkistan and a Bayet sect of the Muslims. He was a water-carrier in the town of Mecca and Najd, where he used to distribute water gratis to the thirsty travellers and wayfarers. He came to Bengal during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605). When he reached Burdwan, he met a great Hindu Yogi called Jaypal, who was reputed to possess many magical feats and practices of the Tantriks. After

---

1. H.S.B., p.179
3. H.S.B., p.178
4. Bengal District Gazetteer-Burdwan,1910,p.190
the duel between the Saints, Jaypal had to court an ignominious defeat at the hands of Bahram and to change his old religion to the new one, his victor. When Jaypal was regularly initiated to the Islamic faith, he made over all his belongings to Bahram and began to lead the life of a recluse in a thatched cottage built in one of the corners of his garden. Both Bahram Saqqa and Jaypal were buried in their respective residences after their death. When the news of Bahram's death reached Delhi, Emperor Akbar who used to respect the Saint, became very much moved and determined to perpetuate his memory by the grant of the revenue of a few villages in order to meet the expenditure of the tomb of the Saint.

Near the tomb of Haji Bahram Saqqa, is a tablet on a slab of stone which contains the Persian text of Imperial 'Sanad' by which the Emperor Akbar granted the revenue of the village of Faqirpur to the guardian (mutawalli) of the shrine of Bahram for the maintenance of visitors to the grave of the Saint. The Sanad runs thus:
Translation:

"In the name of Allah the Clement and the merciful."

"And give away wealth out of love and
the wayfarer and the beggars and
(for the emancipation of) the captives."

(Quran, Chap. II verse 111).

"By the grace of the auspicious Head of His Majesty,
the King of Kings, the village of Faqirpur has been given
for the subsistence of the poor and the indigent, who
visit the illuminated tomb of Pir Bahram Saqqa, accordingly
to a separate document; and Bakhtiyar be its Mutawalli;
those who (attempt to) alter this, will receive the
curse of God and the abhorence of the Prophet. Written
in 1015 A.H. = 1606 A.D."

The epitaph of Bahram Saqqa's tomb at Burdwan
contains the following lines in Persian verse:

"A fragment of verse from Fathi"

"What a wonderful Saint in the world was Bahram
Because in gnosis, his heart was a sea.
From this world he departed to the next;
Cautious was he of the transient world.
The calculation of the year of the
death of that unique man.

When Fathi desired rightly from us,
An aerial voice came with regard to
the date of his death.
Our darvish was Bahran Saqqa'1
The holy Hijri year 970.1

From this epitaph we come to know that he died in
the year 970 A.H. = 1562 A.D.

MAKHDOM SHAH ZAHIRU-'D-DIN

Makhdum Shah Zahiru-'d-Din "is credited with having
had the miraculous power of curing all sorts of diseases,
and his tomb is frequented by votaries who came for
relief from their ailments." 2 His tomb is at Makhdum-
nagar in Birbhum. He is reputed to have converted all
the inhabitants of the village into Islam and hence the
ancient name of the village, now not known, was changed

1. H.S.B., p.200
2. Bengal District Gazetteers -Birbhum, p.120.
to the new one, (i.e. Makhdumnagar) after the title prefixed to his name. It is said that he in matrimonially connected with a certain Sultan of Gaur.\(^1\) Dr. Enamul Haq thinks that the Saint flourished in Birbhum before the close of the sixteenth century A.D. because no Sultan ascended on the throne of the Gaur after that period.\(^2\)

**MAULANA SHAH DAWLAH**

The Saint is lying buried at Bagha in the Sadar Sub-Division of Rajshahi district.\(^3\) His original name was Mawlana Shah Mu'azzam Danishmand\(^4\) but he is known by his more familiar name Shah Dawlah. Tradition\(^5\) records that he was a descendant of Harun al Rashid, the Abbaside Khalifah of Baghdad. He ran away from Baghdad, reached Bagha in the reign of Sultan Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah (A.D. 1519 -32), and married the daughter of a

\(^1\) H.S.B, p.198  
\(^2\) Ibid, p.199  
\(^3\) J.A.S.B., 1904, No.2, pp.108 ff.  
\(^4\) Ibid, p.111  
\(^5\) Ibid, p.113
certain influential noble 'Ala Bakhsh Barkhurdar Lashkari of Makhdumpur not far from Bagha. Since then the Mawlana settled at Bagha and his descendants are living there even to this day. An inscription discovered from the place records that one mosque was built by Sultan Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah (in 930/A.D. 1523-24). ¹

There is a big "waqf" estate in the village, the origin of which is as follows: "In 925 A.H., i.e. in 1519 A.D., a devotee named Hadrat Mawlana Shah Dawla came and settled in Bagha. His tomb may be seen in a small cemetary in the mosque compound with those of five of his relatives. In 1615 A.D., his grandson Mawlana Hadrat Shah Abdul Wahab received by a farman (letters patent) of Mughal emperor, a free grant of 42 villages yielding Rs.8,000/- a year, for the support of his family." ² Abd al-Latif, ³ who travelled in North Bengal in A.D. 1609

¹ Abd al-Latif, who travelled in North Bengal in A.D. 1609
² J.A.S.B. 1904, No.2 p.111
In the reign of Emperor Jahangir met one Hawadha Mian at Bagha, an old Saint aged about one hundred years. The old man maintained a college, built of grass-thatched roofs and mud-plastered walls where many of his descendants and other students engaged themselves in study. The entire country-side around the village was granted to Hawadha Mian for his subsistence (madad-i-ma'ash). Dr. Abdul Karim thinks, "Hawadha Mian of 'Abd al-Latif's account may be identified either with Mawlana Hamid Danishmand or with his son 'Abd al- Wahhab."

**SHAH SULTAN ANSARI** (alive in 1540 A.D.)

Dr. Enamul Haq says, "The genealogy (which we examined during our stay at Mangalkot) of the descendants of Shah Sultan Ansari proves, that his father belonged to the Ansar (those who helped the Prophet in Medina after flight) family of Medina, and he came to Mangalkot with his family about the year 900 A.H. = 1498 A.D. Shah Sultan, one of his three sons was born in Mangalkot, just after a few years of his settlement. He was a great learned man, a famous dervish, and a successful

---

missionary". Mawlawi Mufaddalu-r-Rahman Ansari, one of the descendants of this Saint, who is 52 years old in 1931, is the 17th man in descent from the Saint.² According to Enamul Haq, Shah Sultan was alive in 1540 A.D.³

**SHAH PIR (d. 1632 A.D. ?)**

The tomb of this Saint is situated under the jurisdiction of thana Satkania. There is a great market called "Darbesher Hat," within a distance of two or three miles from the tomb of the darwish, said to have been founded by the Saint. According to the local tradition, his real name was Muhammad Yusuf and he was a prince of Delhi. After he passed his youth, he became indifferent to the world and renounced it. In course of time, he became a darwish and came to Satkania some three or four hundred years ago⁴ and settled there. He preached Islam there for a long time.

1. H.S.B., p.191
2. Ibid., p.192
3. Ibid., p.191
4. H.S.B., p.255
Dr. Enamul Haq says, "we know of a great Indian Saint named Shah Pir, whose shrine is in Meerut in the United Provinces. His magnificent shrine was built by Nur-Jahan, the beloved wife of the Emperor Jahangir. He died in the year 1632 A.D. and belonged to the Shattari order of Indian darvishes. 1 Again, Enamul Haq thinks, that, this Saint of Meerut visited Satkaria once in his life time who died in 1632 A.D. in Meerut and not in Chittagong, which contains his memorial tomb. 2

SAYYID SHAH NI'MATULLAH (d.1664 A.D.)

According to the account recorded in the Khurshid-i-Jahan Numa, this Saint was born in Karnaul in the province of Delhi. 3 He was a great traveller and in course of his itinerary, he came to Rajmahal and lived there for some time. Sultan Shah Shiyia (1639-1660) was then governor of Bengal who showed much honour to the Saint. 4 The Saint afterwards repaired

1. H.S.E., p.256
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.179
4. Ibid.
from Rajmahal to Firuzpur quarter of Gaur, where he died in the year 1664 A.D. the chronogram of his death is "Nimatullah bahar-i-’ulum mudam", i.e. "Nimatullah is an everlasting ocean of learning," the numerical value of which bring forth the year 1075= 1664 A.D. 1

SHAH MIR DHAKIR 'ALI

According to Enamul Haq, Shah Mir Dhakir 'Ali, came to Mangalkot only a few years after the death of Maulana Hamid Danishmand. 2 He was a great Sufi Saint, who worked many miracles in his Lifetime. 3 He died in A.D. 1778.

HAZRAT SHAH ABDUR RAHIM SHAHID 4

He was a great Sufi Saint of Bengal who preached Islam there. He came to Murshidabad, West Bengal, from thon he Kashmir and then came to Dhaka from Murshidabad. He belonged to the Naqshbandi Silsila. His spiritual preceptor was

1. H.S.B., p.179
2. Ibid., p.194
3. Ibid.
Sufi Hedayatullah who was a Khalifah of Sufi Abdullah.
Sufi Abdullah was the spiritual desciple and a Khalifah of Khwajah Muhammad Masum of Naqshbandi Silsilah. Hazrat Shah Sufi Abdur Rahim was born in A.H. 1661 and died in A.D. 1745.

**SHAH SUFI AMANATULLAH**

He was the spiritual disciple and a Khalifah of Shah Sufi Abdur Rahim. The Khanqah of this Saint is in Dhaka. He was a great preacher of Islam in Dhaka. He belonged to the order of Naqshbandi Silsilah. He was successful to propagate Islam there. He died during the second half of the 18th century. He is lying buried in Mohalla Maidan Mia Sahib.

**SAYYID MUHAMMAD DAYEM**

He was a resident of Chittagong and a descendant of Hazrat Sayyid Bakhtiyar Mahi Sawar of Daira Azimpura. Sayyid Muhammad Dayem was also belonged to the Naqshbandi Sufi Silsilah and was a spiritual disciple of Shah Sufi Amanatullah. Due to his further spiritual training he had met Hazrat Shah Sufi Abdur Rahim, who ordered him to go to Patna and meet Hazrat Munayem Pakbaz. Then

---

1. Rood-i-Kausar, p. 511
2. Ibid., p. 512.
he came to Patna and met Hazrat Munayem. After sometime he returned to Dhaka and had settled at Kohalla Azimpura. He became renowned Sufi Saint of Bangladesh during the second half of the eighteenth century. He had many disciples in Chittagong, Noakhali and Kumilla. He was a very strict follower of Shariat. He established a very big Khanqah. There were many students who used to stay in that Khanqah and they were also given free fooding and lodging for their academic pursue. This Khanqah became a great centre of learning. Shah Sufi Dayon died in A.D. 1799.