CHAPTER 1

EARLY HISTORY OF SUFISM IN BENGAL
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Some Sufis are believed to have come to Bengal before the Turkish Conquest of India. Itinerant Sufis, generally known as darvishes of Bukhara, Samarqand, Iran, Arabia and Syria turned their attention to India to preach the true faith among those who were outside it and to dedicate their lives to the service of humanity. Inspired with those ideals they crossed the western boundaries of India, which were known to them as early as the eighth century A.D. Their attempts at proselytism were probably merely sporadic ones and their advent to this land was really occasional. Names of these Sufis are available in comparatively reliable sources like inscriptions and biographical works. Even then, our sources about them are meagre and knowledge scanty. But as far as can be gathered, they exerted great influence in the spread of Islam; some of them even interfered in the politics of the country. Maulana Obaidul Haq author of Bangladeser Pir Awliyagan has given the following four names of early Sufi Saints of Bengal who propagated Islam in Bengal before the Turkish Conquest:

2. Hazrat Shaikh Ahmad Bin Muhammad (d. A.D. 952).
3. Hazrat Shaykh Ismail Bin Najd Nishapuri (d. AD. 975)
4. Shaykh Ibrahim Turki of Murshidabad (d.A.D. 1169).

We give below brief life-sketches of a few of the other earliest Sufi Saints of Bengal, who seem to have been historical persons:

SHAH SULTAN BALKHI

The dargah of the Saint exists at Mahasthan in Bogra
He was son of a King of Balkh named Asghar. He occupied the throne after the death of his father, and became luxurious. He left home being disgusted of royal life. Within a few days, he renounced the throne and went out in search of divine truth. He reached Damascus, where he became a disciple of Shaykh Tawfiq whom he served for nearly thirtysix years. He was ordered by Shaykh Tawfiq to preach Islam in Bengal. Then he journeyed to Bengal and arrived at Hariram Nagar via Sandvip. There he destroyed a big image of Kali, along with other important images. The King Balarama came to know about the Saint and determined to drive the Saint out of his kingdom. But what happened the King Balarama was killed by the Saint, while the King's minister accepted Islam.

Then the Saint proceeded to visit the kingdom of Parasuram, the then reigning King of Mahasthan in the district of Bogra. Shah Sultan fought against King Parasurama and his sister Sila Devi. The King died in fighting while his magician sister Sila Devi drowned herself in the river Karatoya.


Ratnamani, the daughter of the King was converted to Islam and was married to one Surkhab, general of Parasurama who was herself a convert to Islam. The account of his War with King Parasurama, with minor variations, has come down through tradition, recorded by various authors. "It is thus most probable that the stupendous ruins which are now known as the Mahasthana Gad are the relics of the identical town of Paundravardhana which was visited by the Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang, in the seventh century A.D. Mahasthana is thus one of the most ancient places in this part of Bengal.\(^1\) The Saint generally known as Mahisawar or fish-rider. It is said that he came on a boat shaped like a fish or with the figure-head of a fish. It is difficult to identify him\(^2\) but people of the locality regard him as one of the great Saints. In the year A.H. 1096/A.D. 1685 Emperor Aurangzeb issued a Sanad\(^3\) to Sayyid Abd al-Rahman.

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2. H. Beveridge (J.A.S.B. 1878, Part I, No.I, p.91) writes as follows: "The only genuine inference which we can make, I think, from Muhammad Shah's history is, that he was the hero of a popular rising. He was not a fighting man apparently, and is never called a Ghazi, like the famous Ismail of Rangpur. Parasuram was probably a bigoted tyrant, and was killed by those of his subjects who had turned Muhammadans. This view is supported by the local tradition that Parasuram could not bear the sight of a Musalman. It seems also certain that Muhammad Shah was helped by Parasuram's own subjects; for the tradition is, that one Harpal, the Raja's Sweeper, used to convey information to Muhammad."

and Sayyid Muhammad Rida confirming their right on the Lakhiraj land attached to the dargah of the Saint. The deed bears the seal of Kokaltash Muzaffar Jang and is in the form of an order to the officials, Mutasaddis, Chawdhuri, and Qanungos of Pargana Silbari in Sarkar Bazuha and directs them to respect the Lakhiraj of the Saint Muhammad Mahisawar. This sanad refers to earlier sanads and farmans granted by other earlier Sultans. The dargah was an old one, but its actual dates could not be ascertained, because the earlier sanads referred to by Aurangzeb have not come down to us.¹

SULTAN BAYIZID BISTAMI
(Shah Sultan Bakhsh ?)

There is an old dargah in the village of Nasirabad, five miles north of Chittagong town. An old mosque, used by the pilgrims, is at the fort of the hillock. The management of the "Waqf Estate" of the dargah, is in the hands of "The Chittagong Endowment Committee."² Everyone admits that the Saint Sultan Bayizid did not die here, yet do not hesitate to say that he came to Nasirabad at a time when the place was covered with dense forest a bounded with wild animals, evil spirits and genii, and that he attained the Saintly perfection and enlightenment here after a long time, spent in ascetic practices.³ There is no convincing proof of the fact that there

¹ Abdul Karim, Social History of the Muslims in Bengal, p.89.
² HSB, p.238.
³ Ibid., p.238.
had been any Arab relations with Chittagong before the tenth century A.D. We may identify Sultan Bayizid Bistami of Chittagong with Shah Sultan of Bogra by a passing reference to the Saint's name in one of the Ballada (vide Nurunnehar-o-Kabar Katha) of Eastern Bengal, where the following two lines occur in connection with the Saint:

"I pay respect to Shah Sultan of Nasirabad;
Faithful Musalmans come from different places
(to pay respects to him)"

Dr. Enamul Haq is of the opinion that in reality it is the Dargah of Shah Sultan Balkhi who came from Sandwip to Nasirabad (Tarikh Chellanging p.12)

SHAH MUHAMMAD SULTAN RUMI

The tomb of the Saint is in Madanpur in the Netrokona Subdivision of Mymensing. One old Persian document, executed in the year 1671 A.D. (1082 A.H.) has revealed the name of this Saint. This document records that the Koch King of the locality of Madanpur in Netrakaha Sub-division of Mymensing district (Bengal) tried to poison the Saint who arrived at his dominion with his religious preceptor Sayyad Shah Surkh Khul Antiah in the year A.H. 415/A.D. 1053. It is said that

1. Purba Vanga Gitika, Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, Published by the University of Calcutta, HSB, p.238.
2. A. Rahim: Social History of the Muslims in Bengal, p.38
the King accepted Islam at his hands and dedicated the village to the Saint. In 1829 the Government tried to resume the property attached to the dargah, but the "Mutawali" produced the said Persian document of 1671 A.D. and saved the property.

BABA ADAM SHAHID

The tomb of this Saint is found in the village of Abdullapur in Bikrampur, Dacca. Baba Adam Shahid is generally considered to be the earliest Saint. A mosque was built near the tomb in the time of Sultan Jalal al-Din Fath Shah in the year 888/A.D.1483 by one Kafur. Baba Adam is considered a prominent Sufi-Saint in Eastern Bengal. Baba Adam came to Abdullapur with some of his followers. One day one of his followers slaughtered a cow, a kite swooped down on a piece of its flesh and flew away with it over a Hindu garrison. Unfortunately, the piece of flesh dropped there. The King Ballal Sena of Bikrampur came to know about the matter. This led to his conflict with King Ballal Sena. This is also true that the Saint Baba Adam came to this place for the spread of Islam and hence he was ready to fight against the King. It is said that a battle followed between the "Yavanas" (Muslims) and the Hindus for

fifteenth days. The Saint was ultimately killed by the King, but by a curious stroke of fate the King and his family lost their lives by throwing themselves into agnikunda or a pit of fire. When Baba Adam was killed by Raja Ballal Sena, his body was buried in Abdullapur and his head in Sylhet. Consequently two dargahs were erected by people in these two places situated at a long long distance from each other.

Let us now examine the story we have related above. Exceptional popularity of the story among the common folk of Eastern Bengal and a part of Assam speaks of its antiquity on the one hand and a clear reference of it occurring in an old apocryphal (?) Sanskrit book "Ballala Charitam" by Gopala Bhatta, on one historical name and that is of King Ballala Sena. There is still a controversy about the period of reaching of Baba Adam into Bengal. On his an authority Mr. Jogendra Nath Gupta, the author of the "History of Bikrampur" in Bengali writes that there were two Kings in Bengal of the same name of Ballala Sena, the first one being the son of Vijaya Sena, and the second one, the son of Beda Sena or Viswakatata (?). Both of them had an intimate relation with Bikrampur. The same story has been related by Ananda Bhatta

1. A. Rahim, Social History of the Muslims in Bengal, p. 87
2. MSB, p. 213.
3. History of Bikrampur (in Bengali) p. 34.
in his Ballal Charita.\(^1\) Inspite of Ananda Bhatta's corroboration, the historicity of the event cannot be determined, because Ananda Bhatta's date has been a matter of controversy and many Scholars challenge its authenticity.\(^2\) N.N. Vasu records that there was one Ballal Sena, a Zamindar of note who rose to some prominence in Vikrampur towards the close of the 14th century A.D. He belongs to Vaidya caste and he was different from Ballal Sena of the Sena dynasty and it was at his instance that Ananda Bhatta wrote this book.\(^3\) According to Mr. Jogendra Nath Gupta, Ballala Sena I, reigned from 1118 A.D. to 1168 A.D.\(^4\) and Ballala Sena II was alive in 1378 A.D.\(^5\) and during the reign of this Ballala Sena II, the Saint Baba Adam attacked Bikrampur and was killed in the fight with him. If these two identifications of Mr. Jogendra Nath and M.M. Vasu prove correct, Baba Adam's date may put to the end of the 14th century A.D.

Dr. Enamul Haq, the author of "A History of Sufism in Bengal" says, that the existence of two Ballala Senas is not of doubtful origin only, but seems to be false altogether.

\(^1\) Ballal Charita by Ananda Bhatta, translated by H.P. Sastri, Chapters XXVI & XXVII
\(^2\) History of Bengal, Vol. I, Dacca University, A.D. 1943, pp. 239-41
\(^3\) J.A.S.B. 1896, pp. 36-37
\(^4\) History of Bikrampur (in Bengali)p. 38
\(^5\) History of Bikrampur, foot note p. 52
The only Ballala Sena, of whom the historians know, was the son of Vijay Sena and the father of Laksmana Sena, the last Hindu King of Nadiya. Laksmana Sena had only three sons, Madhava, Viswarupa, and Kesava. After the Turki Conquest the four Hindu Kings reigning in Bengal, viz. Madhu Sena, Nanja, Danujmardandeva, and Mahendradeva. Madhu Sena was alive in 1298 A.D. and he is identified with Madhava Sena, son of Laksmana Sena. Nanja was reigning in Eastern Bengal in 1283 A.D., the year of assassination of the rebellious Mughithu'd-Din Tughral (1278-82). Sufficient numismatic evidences show that Danujmardandeva was the title of Raja Ganes and Mahendradeva was either the name of Jadu alias Jalalu’d-Din. The son of Raja Ganes or he was the brother of Jalalu’d-Din. Besides these names of post-Turki Hindu Kings, we knowno other Ballala Sena reigning in 1378 A.D. in Bikrampur, or in other parts of Eastern Bengal. Therefore, the theory of the existence of a second Ballala Sena is quite untenable. Copperplates and epigraphical evidences show that

5. Ibid.
8. Ibid (i) pp. 17-18
Raja Ballala Sena reigned from the beginning of the twelfth century A.D. upto the year 1119 A.D. If the story be true Baba Adam was alive upto 1119 A.D., the year of Raja Ballala Sena’s death.

MAKHDUM SHAH DAWLAH SHAHID

The dargah of this Saint is in Shahzadpur in the district of Pabna. According to tradition he came from Yemen in Arabia with the permission of his father Muaz-bin Jabal, the King of Yemen and accompanied by a large number of followers, some of whom were his close relatives, viz. (i) Khwajah Kalan Danishmand (ii) Khwajah Nur, and (iii) Khwajah Anwar. On way he met Jalal al-Din Bulkhari (1196-1291) who gave him two pigeons as a token of good wishes to the party. Their ship continued eastward so till it struck near Shahzadpur. The locality was under a Hindu Raja Bihar who came to know about the settlement of the Muslims in his jurisdiction and he tried to expel them; the Saint including some of his followers lost their lives in the battle that followed save his nephew Khwajah Nur, had to sacrifice his life. His surviving nephew Khwajah Nur is said

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2. HSB, p.215
4. SKSB, p.90
5. HSB, p.216
to have been married to one of princes of Sonargaon afterwards. ¹

The grey pigeons of the locality are said to be the young ones of that pair of pigeons which Jalalu-d-Din Bukhari given to Shah Dawlah as present and hence are now called "Jalali Kabutar" or the pigeons of Jalalu-d-Din.² Among the followers of Makhdum Shah Dawlah, the following names are now known:

1. Shamsu'd-Din Tabrizi: His tomb is enclosed by a separate wall. This Saint never came to Bengal.³ He died on the 17th December, 1273 A.D.⁴

2. Shah Yusuf: The tomb of this Saint is within the enclosure of the walls round the tomb of Shah Dawlah. The Yusuf Shahi Pargana, now under the jurisdiction of Shahzadpur was named after this Saint.⁵

3. Shah Khinger (Steed Maker)
4. Shah Ajmal
5. Hasila Pir
6. Shah Bodla (Indian?)
7. Shah Ahmad
8. Shah Mahmud

1. HSB, p.216
2. As to the genesis of "Jalali Kabutar" or the pigeon of Jalal, there is another story current in Eastern Bengal and Assam. According to this story the grey wild pigeons are called "Jalali Kabutar" because of the fact that they were pet pigeons of Shah Jalal of Sylhet. This is the most popular version of the genesis of the wild pigeons.
3. HSB, p.217
5. HSB, p.217.
A month fair is held in the shrine during the end of the Bengali month of Chaitra (April) and is attended by both Hindus and Muslims.

Makhdum Shah Dawlah Shahid was probably alive in the latter part of the thirteenth century. As we have said that he met Shah Jalalu'd-Din Bukhari who covers the period between 1196 A.D. and 1291 A.D. and Shamsu-'d-Din Tabrizi, the teacher of Mawlana Jalalu'd-Din Rumi, died on the 17th December 1273. If there is any truth in the statement, it may be supposed that the great Saint Makhdum Shah Dawlah Shahid came to Bengal in the 13th century A.D. The Shahzadpur mosque attached to the Dargah, is endowed with 722 bighas of rent free lands, held direct from Government by trustees or mutawallis.

Makhdum Shah Mahmud Ghazawi alias Raha Pir

The tomb of this Saint exists in Mangalkot in Burdwan district. He is commonly known as Raha Pir. He was the disciple of Baha'ud-Din Shah. One day his spiritual guide ordered him to go to the east into a Hindu Kingdom where he will preach Islam. Then with his followers proceeded to the east from Delhi.

1. Ain, Vol.III p.369; Tadhkirah Part 14, pp.139-141 and 147-150
and at last entered the Kingdom of Bikramakesari (Bikramaditya) at the time of Asar, i.e. afternoon prayer, when the darvish reached a place now called Bangtela, situated in the middle of the city. The king tried his best to arrest him but failed. With the permission of the King the Saint settled there, to the opposite bank of the river. The king raised a high wall along with the bank of the river, so that he might not see the face of the Saint. The village, situated on the other bank of the Kanur river, is now called "Adal" meaning "concealment" or "cover!"

After a period of ten years the Muhammadan Emperor of Delhi sent a letter to the court of Raja Bikramkesari. The letter was written in Persian. Rahi Pir was called to explain and to write an appropriate response to the Emperor of Delhi of the said letter by the Raja. He drafted a letter in Persian in contradiction with the purport of the King, invited the Emperor to attack the Raja. The Emperor sent a large number of army under the royal command of Ghora Shahid, a great warrior-Saint, after receiving the letter from Rahi Pir. There were some other Sufi Saints who accompanied Ghora Shahid to Mangalkot. The following seven names are now known:

1. HSB, p.185
2. Ibid, p.186
Rahi Pir and Ghora Shahid with their army fought with the King Vikram Kesari and with in a few days, the Hindus were defeated. In the battle the horse of the darvish was killed and hence forward he became known as the darvish Ghora Shahid. Rahi Pir became successful and preached Islam in Mangalkot. The tombs of the said Saints are still existing and identified by local people. The conquest of Mangalkot by Rahi Pir may have been taken place during the early years of Turkish conquest.

The inhabitants of Bikrampur in the district of Dacca trace its origin from the name of Raja Bikram or Bikramaditya. They say, Raja Bikramaditya, being defeated in a fratricidal war, fled to Samatala where he reigned for years together and he was the person who changed the old name of the place to Bikrampur.

MAKHDOM SHAH OR SHAH MAKHDOM

The tomb of this great saint is at Dargahpara, a locality named after the saint's Shrine in the district of Rajshahi...

The dargah of this Saint is a place of pilgrimage to the Muslims and Hindus alike. The inscription in laid above the door of the

1. HSB, p.187
2. HSB, p.190
3. (i) Statistical Accounts of Bengal- Hunter, p.116
   (ii) Bikrampurer Itihas -Jogendranath Gupta, pp.4-6
The saint died on the 27th Rajab leaving behind him a large number of followers. He remained a bachelor. He is popularly known as Makhdum Shah, except a Persian inscription mentioned above. The English translation of this inscription are quoted below:

"(Ali Quli Baig) has been provided with the privilege of erecting to tomb of the reputed Sayyid, received in the mercy and forgiveness (of Allah), who approached the neighbourhood of Allah, ShahDarwish, in the year one thousand and forty five of Hijra, the possessor of happiness, recipient of the Divine grace, the cream of the equals and-equals, 'Ali Quti Baig, the slave of his eminence and exalted dignity the favourite of his high and sublime majesty's sovereignty, Yusuf like master of the servant, a noble example of Kings and canen for emperors, a progeny of the lord of apostles, the kingson of King, son of king, the emperor son of emperor, son of emperor, the commander of Iran, the propagator of the faith of the twelve Imams (sectarian of the twelve), the (watch ) dog at the threshold of the best man after His Holiness, the Prophet, the blessings of Allah be on him and family the lord of the faithful and leader of the

2. HSB, p.229
Pious, 'Ali son of Abu Talib, blessings and peace be on him, (he is) Shah Abbas the Safavi, a descendant of Husain, mercy and audience of Allah be granted to him, with all freshness and happiness."

From the inscriptions, we understand that a mausoleum was erected over the grave of "Saiyyid-i-Sanad Shah Darwish" by 'Ali Quli Begh who was a servant of Shah 'Abbas, the Safawi (1587-1629 A.D.) of Iran, and who belonged to the "Ithna Ashariyah" (Twelve Imamites) Sect of the Shi'ahs, in the year 1045 A.H. - 1634 A.D.¹

The date of Shah Makhduum's death, viz; "1592 A.D. at the age of 117 years," as recorded in a recent publication.²

Ghulam Akbar, one of the important descendents of the 'Khadims' of Shah Makhduum's dargah, deposed in 1904 in the court of the District Judge, Rajshahi about the 'Tawliyat' (trusteeship) of the dargah property. His deposition is as follows:

"The name of Makhduum Saheb is Hazrat Shah Ruposh. I do not know what other name he had. .... I do not remember the date of his death. The estate does not date from before 1044 Hijri (1634 A.D.). In the papers that I have filed, it is mentioned that Shah Ruposh was living 450 years before that time. The writing on the stone and the papers filed by me do not tally.

1. HSB, p. 231
I am the ninth generation from Shah Nur (the first Mutawalli of the dargah)¹

From the Mutawallis statement, according to which Shah Makhdum was alive 450 years earlier than 1044 A.D./1634 A.D. it is presumed that he was alive in 1634-450 = 1184 A.D.

¹ Vide Index of papers of Appeal from original Decree No. 550 of 1904, at the Court of the District Judge, Rajshahi.