Chapter I

Introduction

'Eastern India' as coming down from the 12th century A.D. comprises South-eastern Bihar, Eastern Orissa, West Bengal, Assam and Bangladesh. This region had been the cradle of Sufis and Samyasis from time immemorial. After having a bird's eye-view of the history of Eastern India one can easily understand that the land of this part of the country had always been a fertile soil for the Sufis and preachers of different religions and its valley have proved to be the appropriate place for their religious devotion, mystic practices and prayer. This is the reason why this holy land did not only give birth to a large number of Samyasis, Sufis and sainats but also drew the attention of a galaxy of religious personalities, devotees, Sufis and preachers of different religions in every period of history. But it is a matter of great regret that no due attention has been paid towards the life and activities of this saints by contemporary historians and biographers. Many works on Indian Sufis and Sufi religious movements
have recently been published but no connected work on
the history of Sufis in Eastern India has ever been
written. The contributions of some of the Sufis and
holy men of Eastern India have been discussed casually
by a number of scholars who have written about political
history of Assam, Bengal and Bihar. No body, however,
has cared to take a comprehensive view of the subject.
The account of Shah Jalal Mu'arrad, Jalalad-din Tabrizi, Ghiahsud-din Aulil and Assan Faquir, etc., are
based on pious legends. However, even this literature
gives the basic framework and structure of Sufis in
Eastern India and reveals the minds of their authors
and their readers.

To write a scientific history of Sufis
either of a particular area or in general a modern
scholar has to work through a vast mass of published
and unpublished works. The most authentic is the
literature written by eminent Sufis themselves about
their doctrines, theories and practices. These works
mostly unpublished, contain sermons and discourses
intended to give moral and ethical evaluation of
the Safis doctrines. It is a matter of astonishment as to why the Safis of Eastern India paid no sufficient attention towards collecting their doctrines, thoughts and practices in black and white. Except a few, none took this trouble. Hence, the paucity of this type of materials and records throws this humble researcher into a pool of trouble and difficulties. Having felt these difficulties Professor A.J. Arberry while delivering the Sir 'Abdullah Suhrawardi Lecture for 1942 at Calcutta University observed, "It would seem that there are few subjects on which so little has been written, in comparison with the wealth of sources available. Hand in hand with the purely literary will go considerable archaeological research into the history of the shrines of the Muslim saints." ¹

However, in spite of difficulties and the paucity of sources some important books on Indian Safis have been written. Among them mention may be made of Professor Nurul Hasan's unpublished thesis, entitled 'The History of Chishtiya and Suhrawardiya Orders',

¹. The History of Sufism, p.66
approved for the degree of doctor of Philosophy in Oxford University in 1946. 2. ‘Makhāikh-e-Chishti’ and ‘The Life and Time of Shaikh Farīd Ganj-e-Shakar’ by Khalīq Ahmad Nisāmī; Professor Muhammad Habīb’s paper on ‘Shaikh Nasiruddīn Chiragh-e-Delhi’ published in the *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, 3 and his critical analysis of the spurious Chishti mystics, *Records of the Sultānate Period*, published in the *Medieval India Quarterly*. Aligarh; Yūsuf Husain Khān’s paper on Sūfīsm in India, published in the *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, 4 and Sabāḥuddīn Abdur Rahman’s *Dawān-e-Sūfīyā*; and Abdul Qaiyum Rafīq’s *Sūfīsm in Kashmir* are useful works in this field.

The second category of authors on Sūfīsm were the immediate disciples of the respective mentor Sūfīs. They took down notes of the discourses and sermons, and later on brought them out in book form. Although this sort of literature supply some materials, it is not free from defects. However, it gives a better idea of the time and the place because the account of

3. *Islamic Culture* Vol. VII 1926
4. *Islamic Culture* July 1956 pp.250–251
the discourses is sometimes set against some historical events. Some biographers, who were only credulous, paraded on the miracle and supernatural powers of the saints, revealed in describing fantastic legends and anecdotes. They were interested only in glorifying the achievements of their masters. Another source of information on the Sufis are the political chronicles. They described some of the leading Sufis, who either wielded influence at the court or clashed with the ruling class on religious issues. Unlike hagiographers of the saints, they were not generally concerned with the glorification of the Sufis, but as their main source of information was unauthentic literature, they also have incorporated legendary materials in their works. Thus the Sufi literature in Eastern India suffers from neglect and defect.

Among the later works that supply valuable information about the Sufis of Eastern India is Dr. Enamul Haq's, paper published in *Indo-Iranica* of Calcutta, and his published thesis approved for Ph.D. degree by Calcutta University. And Dr. Matiur Rahman

in his Ains-e-Waisī, a doctoral thesis approved by Patna University deals with the life and times of Sūfī Syed Fatheh Ali Waisī. There are two important works done in Assam—one is Pavitra Assam by renowned and great scholar of Assam, Dr. Mahoswar Neog, for basic information of Sūfīs of Assam and the other is Assam Muslim Religion and Its Culture Significance by Dr. Mohini Kumar Saikia approved for Ph.D. degree by Gauhati University.

Keeping all these in view, the present researcher has selected the topic of Sūfīs in Eastern India, which till this time is untouched. In collecting the materials regarding lives and activities of the Sūfīs of the region under review much care has been taken and original sources have been utilised.

In order to do full justice to the subject, we have to survey a vast field of literature covering a number of Sūfīs and mystics who flourished in the course of a long span of seven centuries. Therefore, efforts have been made to trace the origin and development of Sūfism in brief and the life and works of Sūfīs in a general way.

The Sūfīs had to travel a long way before coming over to Eastern India. The number of Sūfīs in this
region is not meagre. The whole of Eastern India hummed
with Sufistic activities during the thirteenth and
fourteenth centuries A.D. It should be noted that the Sufi
monasteries which developed as an institution, were purely
private. They were patronised by the Sultans, as doubt, as
they were highly educated and religious-minded people.
But they exercised no control over the institutions of
the Sufis.

The Sufis took upon themselves the sacred
duty of the propagation of Islam, deriving their strength
from the sayings of the holy Prophet: 

\[ \text{بَلْغُهُ بَلْغَيْتُ} \]

\[ \text{أَنَّيْ وَلَا أَيَّاهُ} \] (Preach whatever you heard from me even
if it is only a verse), and it is due to this pioneer mission
that Eastern India, which was included in the 'Suba Bangla'
in those days enjoyed the light of Islam more than other
parts of India.

For our convenience we have divided our study
into six chapters. A synopsis of these chapters is given
below:

The first chapter under the title 'Introduction'
provides a brief survey of previous scholarship in the
field of Sufism and Sufis of Islam. A general history and development of Sufism is also been supplied.

The second chapter under the caption of History of Sufism deals with a brief history of the origin and development of Sufism. In this chapter different stages of Sufism have also been traced. To give a clear picture of the past and glorious history of the Sufis, the activities of the early Sufis have also been given in a nutshell.

The spread and propagation of religion depends more or less on the political, social and religious conditions of the country. With this view in mind a brief survey of the political, social and religious conditions of India at the time of the advent of the Sufis are being described in the third chapter.

The fourth chapter deals with the influx of Sufis in India and important Sufis' orders of India and abroad. Names of the founders of the famous orders and their chief characteristics have been brought to light. Besides, a list of forty-five different orders of India
and elsewhere with their founders, places of their shrines and
dates of their deaths is also furnished.

The fifth chapter under the caption, "Sufis of
of Eastern India - life - time and activities", forms the
main chapter of this work. The peculiar geography of what
we call Eastern India is being explained. A brief history
of the arrival of the Muslims in this region has also been
added to it. The chapter has been divided into four sub-
chapters, that is, (a) Sufis of Bihar, (b) Sufis of West
Bengal, (c) Sufis of Assam and (d) Sufis of Bangladesh.
In preparation of this chapter much care has been taken
and original source books, manuscripts and documents have
been consulted. Effort has been made so that no Sufi making
the slightest impact on the society of this region may be
overlooked.

The last chapter deals with the religious life
and practices of the Sufis and their impact on thought and
culture of the people of this region. A brief discussion
of the Islamic festivals celebrated in India and their
influence on the festivals of Hindus have also been added
to it.