ABSTRACT

In the long annals of the history of Bengal the eighteenth century occupies a unique position. In this century Muslim regime came to an end and British dominion was firmly established in Bengal. Many scholars have done commendable research on various aspects and brought out many valuable works on this century. But aspects like Contribution of Bengal to Islamic Studies during eighteenth century have not been properly explored. The purpose of this study is to find out the nature and roots of Islamic learning in Bengal, the institutions and scholars of Bengal.

The thesis has been divided into five chapters and an Introduction and a Conclusion. The chapters are as given below :

Chapter I
Section I - Early Muslim Contact with Bengal.
Section II - Socio-political Contact of Muslims with Bengal.

Chapter II - Religious Institutions of Bengal in the eighteenth century.

Chapter III - The Sufis of the eighteenth century.

Chapter IV - Arabic and Persian Literature in Bengal during eighteenth century.

Chapter V - Contribution of Muslims to Bengali Literature during eighteenth century.
A brief note on the whole thesis is presented here.

This land was known to the Arabs much before the rise of Islam there. Their traders first came here with their commodities, later on, after the emergence of Islam there, preachers came here with the message of Islam. Later on, the land was conquered by a muslim hero, Ikhtiyar ud-Din and since then the land was under Muslim rules for more than one hundred years. This long period can be broadly divided into two - pre-Mughal and Mughal period. The pre-Mughal period was much longer covering about four hundred years. During this period, Bengal was governed mostly by independent sultans. In the Mughal period, which was about a hundred years, Bengal was ruled as a province by viceroys appointed by the Mughal Emperor. Most of the period of the Sultanate witnessed peace and tranquility which resulted in progress in many respects. There was political stability in the early part of the eighteenth century but the middle of the eighteenth century was a period of political instability and transition caused by the gradual fall of Mughal Empire and the rise of the British era. Though it greatly impaired the progress of the Muslim particularly but the later’s contribution towards the cause of Islam was not insignificant.
The Muslim rulers championed the cause of Islam in their policies and activities. They would consider it their pious duty to help Islam in every possible way. So they established many mosques and Madrasahs. They provided liberal grants and donations to these institutions and patronized the Shaikhs and the Ulemas with a view to spreading and promoting Islam. These endeavours started from the very beginning of the Muslim reign and continued even after the end of the Muslim rule in the eighteenth century.

Some of the prominent religious institutions constructed by the rulers are mentioned below.

Kartalab Khan Mosque at Dhaka was founded by Murshid Quli Khan in 1700-4 A.D. He constructed another mosque and Madrasah at Murshidabad known as Katra Madrasa in 1723 A.D. Lalbagh Shahi Mosque situated at Dhaka was constructed by Farrukh Siyar, Deputy viceroy of Bengal in 1703-1706 A.D. Another mosque named Phuti Mosque was built by Sarfaraz Khan at Kumrapur, Murshidabad. Motijhil Madrasah was built by Nawab Nawazish Khan, nephew and son-in-law of Nawab Alivardi Khan at Motijhil area (Murshidabad) in 1751 A.D.

In addition to the Muslim rulers, many rich and benevolent Muslims built Mosques, Madrasahs, Maktabs at various times. Some of these are mentioned below.
Mosque of Inchalabazar was founded by Sayyid Tahir in 1703 A.D. in the district of Burdwan. Khan Muhammad Mirdha mosque was founded near Lalbagh Fort in 1706 A.D. by one Khan Muhammad Mirdha, who was an architect. The wife of Khanjani established one mosque named Armanitala Mosque on Sarat Chandra Chakravarti road in 1735 A.D. Sayyid Qasim established one mosque at Baliaghata, Murshidabad in 1742-43 A.D. Mahinagar Mosque near Murshidabad was founded by Wasil Muhammad in 1759-60. Buhar Madrasah was established by Munshi Sadr ud-Din at Buhar in 1775. Wali Khan built a mosque near Chittagong Medical College in 1790 A.D. Phudan Mosque was founded at English Bagar, Malda by one Phundan in 1794 A.D. In 1797 A.D. one mosque was built by Fakir Talib near Berhampore in Murshidabad. This mosque is known as Mosque Gharbi.

The English also took interest in uplifting educational status of the Muslims of Bengal. With this intention Calcutta Madrasah was founded by Warren Hastings, the then Governor-general of Bengal in 1780 A.D.

Though Islam didn’t encourage asceticism and mysticism, in course of time there came into being a class of mysticism known a Sufi. They were divided into different groups. Each group was named after its founder- the Qaderiyah, the
Chishtiyah, the Naqsbandiyah etc. Their arrival into Bengal occurred much before the advent of Muslim rulers. They played a major role in propagating Islam and in proselytization. Most of the sufis were highly educated and well-versed in Quran and Hadith and would teach people on the light of Sharia. In this connection the name of the following sufis should be mentioned: Hazrat Shah Abdur Rahim Shahid (d. 1745 A.D.) of Dhaka, Shah Sufi Amanatullah of Dhaka, Syed Muhammad Dayem (d. 1799 A.D.) of Chittagong, Khwajah Anwar Shah (d. 1127 A.H.) of Burdwan district, Qudi Muwakkil of Chittagong, Shah Umar of Chittagong, Noor Muhammad Nizampuri (d. 1858 A.D.) of Nizampur, Chittagong, Hazrat Zaker Ali al-Qaderi (d. 1192 A.H.) of Mangal Kote, Burdwan, Tufail Ali Al-Qaderi (d. 1251. A.H.) of Mangal Kote. Maula Ali Shah of Calcutta, Shah Babullah of Mednapur.

Some of the Sufis were renowned poets. They have expressed many complex religious matters, mysteries of Sufism as well as famous historical characters in the form of poetry. In this regard the names of the following can be remembered:

Fakir Garibullah (d. 1770 A.D.) of Hafezpur village, Howrah, wrote in Bengali a number of works namely (1) *Jangnama* (1694 A.D.), (2) *Ameer Hamza* (Part I, 1765-66), (3)

The Faqirs of Bengal of eighteenth century were not only engaged in meditation but also revolted against social injustice and oppression perpetrated by zamindars and other royal families over the poor cultivators. In this connection the following Faqirs should be mentioned. They are Balaki Shah of Barisal, Majnu Shah, Muhammad Reza of Sylhet, Musa Shah, Chirag Ali, Peragol Shah etc.
The influence of Persian over Bengal was more pronounced than that of Arabic because of the fact that majority of the Muslim rulers of Bengal were either Persian or Turkish and naturally they were in favour of this language. From the very beginning they adopted it as official language. The Muslim intelligentsia undertook all sorts of literary activities-narrative, creative, historical, religious, biographical, scientific etc. in Persian to gain favours of the rulers. On the other hand, Arabic was not generally spoken in Bengal. It is a dignified language to the Muslims as it is the language of Quran and Hadith. But its culture was mainly confined to religious circles.

Some of the historical works which are mentioned below are so authentic and resourceful that the historians of the past and present have admitted it unanimously:

Seirul Mutaqherin was written by Ghulam Husain Tabatabai khan in 1783. Its first volume starts from ancient period of India to the end of Aurangjib’s reign. The second volume gives an account of the Nizamat of Murshidabad up to the time of Warren Hastings. The third volume discusses about Muhammad Shah, Hyder Ali, and Maratha war. Another book, Riyazu-s-Salatin of Ghulam Husain Salim gives the history of Bengal from the ancient period up to the time of
the author i.e., 86-88. It is a main source book for the history of Bengal. Tarikh-i-Bangala of Munshi Salimullah was written in 1763 A.D. starting from subahdar Ibrahim Khan (1689-97 A.D.) to the death of Alivardi Khan (1740-1756 A.D.). It is a very authentic book. Muzaffar nama is the history of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from 1722 A.D. to 1772 A.D. which was written by Karam Ali. Another Tarikh-i-Muzaffari written by Muhammad Ali Khan in about 1800 A.D. begins from the Muslim conquest of India to the fall of Asaf-ud Daula, Nawab of Oudh in 1797 A.D. Lubbus Siyar and Lubbut Tawarikh were written by Mirza Abu Talib in 1793 A.D.-1994 A.D. The former is the account of occurrences of the world including the prophets, caliphs, Sultans and celebrated men from the beginning the his time. The later is the history of the Europe written from the works of Jonathan Scott. Tafzihul Ghafilin (1797), of the same author, gives an contemporary political and economical account of Oudh. Tarikh-i-Jahangir Nagar of Nusrat Jang, Naib Nazim of Dhaka is the concise political history of Dhaka, from the reign of Akbar (1556-1605) to Nawab Hasmat Jang (1785-86). Waqai-j-Jang-i-Marhatta is the history of Maratha war, was written by Ali Ibrahim in 1786 A.D. Naubahar-i-Murshid Quli Khan is an historical work written by Azad al-Husaini in medieval period. It is concerned with Murshid Quli Khan. Ahwai-i-Mahabat Jang is an eyewitness
account of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan and his times, written by Yusuf Ali. *Watifat-i-Fateh Bangala*, deals with the history of Alivardi’s reign, was written by Muhammad Wafah.

Some of the biographical works deserve mention here: *Guljar-i-Ibrahim* was written by Ali Ibrahim in 1784 A.D. The biography of about three hundred Urdu poets with a brief account of their literary works has been included in this work. *Suhuf-i-Ibrahim* (1790) and *Khulasat ul Kalam* are two biographical works on the Persian poets written by Ali Ibrahim.

*Basarat-ul Imama* is a poetry by Ghulam Husain Tabatabai in which he has described the biography of his grandfather. *Nasabnama* of Shaikh Itisamuddin described the family history of the author.

There are some interesting narrative works which are mentioned below:

*Ma’asir-i Talibi* (1804) of Mirza Abu Talib narrates the experience of the author acquired during his tour in Europe. *Shigurfnama* of Shaikh Itisamuddin is the description of his journey in England.

The following religious works are noteworthy:

*Resala-i-Najatiya dar ‘Aqa’id-i-Hadithiya* is an important work on hadith written from the viewpoint of
Apostolic traditions by Faqir Allahabadi in 1748 A.D. Hidayah, an Arabic work on Muslim Law, was translated into Persian by Ghulam Yahya Khan in 1776. Sirajia, an Arabic work on Muslim law of inheritance written by Siraj al-Din, was translated by Muhammad Kasim under the title of Al-Paraijush Sharafia in 1776. Persian Tafsir on Quran was written by Ghulam Husain Tabatabai. An Arabic commentary on Mafatih of Mulla Muhsin Kashi and a Persian commentary entitled Sharh-i-Nukhba were composed by Mir Muhammad Ali.

Statistical account of Bengal and other states during Mughal reign are given in Khulasat-ul-Tawarikh by Kalyan Singh. Chahar Gulshan, another statistical work, was written by one Chatar Man Kayath in 1759 A.D. Hadigat al-Iqlim written by Murtaza Husain gives an account of geographical facts.

There is no satisfactory evidences of the literary activities of Muslims in Bengali before the sixteenth century. Muslim rulers patronized the language of the people and in course of time adopted it as their own. Initially the
Muslim writers did not venture to write religious themes in Bengali for the fear of sin and peoples blame. The Muslim writers adopted the same verse form as their Hindu counterparts but the literary efforts of two communities followed quite two different paths. The Hindus were mainly concerned with themes related to Gods and Goddesses and their incarnations whereas the Muslim used to derive their inspirations and themes from Persian and Arabic sources and their subjects were related to human activities and historical traditions. Their writings were primarily aimed at propagating the knowledge of Islam and Islamic tradition and at the same time counteracting the impact of Hindu literature on the Muslim population.

The following literary efforts were aimed at instructing the Muslims in the principles and teachings of Islam.

Siraj Kulub of Ali Raza is a book on sharia written on the basis of a Persian work. Another Siraj Kulub written by Muhammad Kasim in 1790 A.D. narrates various religious matters like namaz, yoza, and other duties and responsibilities towards parents. Faidul Muqtadi, a religious work written by Muhammad Muqim in 1773, also suggest duties and responsibilities of a muslim. Another Faidul Muqtadi, written by Balak Fakir deals with the
religious matter suggesting the duties of a true Muslim throughout his life. *Dagaegul Heqaig* is a work on Fiqh written by Sayyid Nuruddin in 1790 A.D. It is based on an Arabic work *Koni-ud-Dagaiq* by Imam Hafizuddin Nasfee. Another work on Fiqh entitled *Hazratul Fiqh* of Muhammad Ali and *Hazar Masail* of Abdul Karim Khandekar are very famous. *Qiyamatnama* or *Rahatul Oulub* of Sayyid Nuruddin was written on matters selected from Quran and Hadith, describing at length on qiyamat, Namaz, Roza, Heaven and Hell etc. Another *Qiyamatnama* was written by Shaikh Chand in 1734, narrating the Day of Judgement hereafter. *Nasiatnama* written by Afzal Ali is based on moral themes, instructing the Muslims not to indulge in matters which is forbidden in Hadith.

A number of works entitled *Rasul Vijaya, Nabinama, Ambia Bani* were written on the life and teachings of last Prophet (PBUH) of Allah by Ghulam Rosul, Burhanullah, and Hayat Mahmud respectively. *Dulla Mailish* composed by Abdul Karim Khandekar in 1705, deals with the lives of many Prophets, Sahabis, Sufis, Namaz, Roza etc. *Nurnama* of the same author describes how the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was created from ‘Nur’.

The following works were written on Sufism:

*Agam, Ynan Sagar* was written by Ali Reza on Sufi
philosophy, Baishnab philosophy and Yoga. *Satchakraved* was written by the same author in which the author wanted to show the co-relation between Muslim sufism and Hindu yoga. *Hitopodesh* or *Burhanul Arefin* of Sayyid Nuruddin and *Hitopodesh* of Muhammad Kasim were written on *Tasawwuf*. *Sirnama* was written by Kazi Shaikh Mansur in which he discussed various religious matter including secrets of mysticism. *Mainamatir Gan* of Sukur Mahmud deals with the renouncement of luxurious life and adoption of the perilous path of a saint by king Gopi Chandra.

There are several Jangnamas written by different authors like Muhammad Yakub, Fakir Garibullah, and Hayat Mahmud. Some other works based on war themes are *Amir Hamza* and *Jaiguner puthi* by Sayyid Hamza, *Kesemer Larai* by Sherbaz, *Sonavan* and Amir Hamza (Part I) of Garibulla.

Some works based on religio-romantic theme are as follows:


This is a brief description of the thesis which is being presented for the award of Ph.D. Degree.