CHAPTER - III

THE SUFIS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
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Before the inception of Islam in Bengal, the original religion of the people was idolatory. There were a number of idols worshiped in different parts of the land. Due to certain religious struggles, the socio-religious condition was worsening. Islam has always become a challenging force to irreligious activities and especially to idolation. When the condition in Bengal was deteriorating, a large number of ulama and sufi saints came to its rescue with preachings of Islam as their ideals.

It will not be out of place to give a brief introduction of these reformers who struggled in Bengal to show the people the right way, which was Islam and only Islam. As sufi teachings are based on Islam and also the sufis have played a major role in spread of Islam, a few of these personalities are to be referred here. Moreover sufi thoughts are part of Islamic Studies hence the study of the following sufis of Bengal is taken up.

Hazrat Shah Abdur Rahim Shahid

Hazrat Shah Abdur Rahim Shahid was born in 1661. He came to Dhaka from Kashmir via Murshidabad in order to
preach Islam and drew people towards Naqshbandi Silsilah.\footnote{Shaikh Muhammad Ekram, *Rood-i-Kausar*, Taj Company, Delhi, 1987, pp. 510-511.} He had a large number of disciples. His spiritual preceptor was sufi Hedayatullah. He died in 1745.

**Shah Sufi Amanatullah**

He was a disciple and successor of Shah Sufi Abdur Rahim, belonged to Naqshbandi Silsila.\footnote{Ibid, p. 511.} His khangah was in Dhaka where he preached Islam. His tomb is at Mohalla Maidan Mia Saheb. He died at the second half of eighteenth century.

**Sayyid Muhammad Dayem**

Sayyid Muhammad Dayem, an inhabitant of Chittagong, a descendant of Hazrat Sayyid Bakhtiya Mahi Sawar of Azimpura, a follower of Naqshbandi Sufi order, was a spiritual disciple of Shah Sufi Amanatullah.\footnote{Ibid.} For further spiritual advancement he went to Hazrat Munayim Pakbaz in Patna. After spending some years there, he came back to Mohalla Azimpura in Dhaka and finally settled there. He had a large number of disciples throughout Bengal and had a very big Khangah where many students were provided with free lodging and fooding for academic pursuits. In course of

\footnote{Ibid.}
time, the Khanqah transformed into a great centre of learning. He was a very strict follower of shariat. He died in A.D. 1799.

**Khwaja Anwar Shah**

No detail about this saint is available. His tomb is in Burdwan and through the inscription on the epitaph it is found that his tomb was built by Farrukh Shah, Emperor of Delhi. He died in a battle in A.H. 1127 /A.D. 1715.²

**Oazi Muwakkil**

He was the chief justice of Delhi during the reign of Aurangzeb (1659-1707), but having been disgusted with the behaviour of the Empress, he not only resigned the post but also renounced the world for the attainment of spiritual perfection (Kamaliyat) and spreading Islam among the people.² He at last came to Chittagong and on finding the place suitable for him, permanently settled there. His tomb is situated on the northern bank of an old tank called Gobaliadighi, situated to the east of thana Mir Sarai of Chittagong.

Shah Umar

The famous saint was one of the twelve Awliya in Chittagong. He preached Islam in the southern part of this district. The shrine of this great missionary is situated, in a small village on the east of thana Chakariya.

Another great Persian saint Umar Shah by name came to Noakhali district. According to local tradition this saint used to live in a boat and show many miracles. A large number of Hindus were converted to Islam by him, which has been supported even by Hindu historians. He gave his name to the Pargana, and it was at his instance that the emperor Muhammad Shah settled it with two brothers of Delhi, Amanullah and Sanaullah Khan at the very low revenue of Rs. 289. The tomb of this saint exists in the parganah Umarabad of Noakhali district.

According to Dr. Enamul Haque, Umar Shah of Noakhali and Shah Umar of Chittagong are the same person. If they are the same person, they were alive during the first half of eighteenth century. But according to local people of

Chittagong Shah Umar came there "some three or four hundred years ago".

**Hazrat Noor Muhammad Nizampuri**

Hazrat Noor Muhammad Nizampuri was a great sufi. He was born in an aristocratic family at Dandira village in Noakhali district of Bangladesh, nearly in the mid half of eighteenth century. His father Shaikh Muhammad Panah was said to be the descendant of the Emperor of Gazni. That he would be a great sufi in latter life, was reflected from his early activities. Having received early education from his father, he left his village for Alia Madrasah in Calcutta for higher education, the then only Institution for higher studies.

He was endowed with all the properties that make a man great. He was always conscious of his duties and responsibilities, kept himself busy with social service. He used to perform every religious duty perfectly and recite from Quran every night regularly. He led a very simple life. One night Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) appeared in


his dream and instructed him to become murid of Syed Ahmed Barelvi (1786-1831). Next morning he immediately carried out the instruction of the prophet. At that time Barelvi was engaged in a movement to bring back self confidence and spirit of freedom in the Muslims and Hazrat Nizampuri took active part in this movement and even participated in the battle of Balacot.

He performed Haj with his Sheikh (master) and spent a long time in Medina. Sheikh Nizampuri kept himself so much busy in the service of Islam that he preferred to be bachelor to spare more and more time for the spread and service of Islam.

At the fag end of his life he was settled at a remote village in Chittagong named Nizampur in Mirsarai. According to Anowarun Nayyarin, after spending a long eventful life, he passed away in the year 1858.¹

**Hazrat Zaker Ali Al-Qaderi**

Syedana Hazrat Shaikh Zaker Ali is said to be the descendant of Syedana Hazrat Ghaus-ul-Azam Shaikh Abdul

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1. Ibid. p.82; According to Ghulam Saklayen, Noor Muhammad Nizampuri died at the battle of Balacot in 1861 (Bangladesher Sufi Sadhak, Islamic Foundation, Dhaka, 3rd edition in 1982, p. 119.)
Qader Jilani. He was born in A.H. 1111/A.D. 1699 at Baghdad. Having been directed by his great ancestor, Abdur Qader Jilani in spiritual plane he came to Bengal in 1180 Hejri/1766 A.D. accompanied by his father and other family members to propound and propagate the Qaderia order. His father Syedana Hazrat Abdul Qader Abdullah al-Jili was a great sufi and attained the rank of a Qutub (one of the highest ranks in sufism).

On their way to Mangalkote from Baghdad they halted at Pataspur village where lived Maulana Danishmand (1560-1654), a great oriental scholar, well versed in religious subject as well as in science. Mangal Kote was formerly a great Muhammedan settlement and there were many mosques. When Zaker Ali settled in Mangalkote, his father went back to Baghdad. Syedana Hazrat Rowshan Ali, brother of Zaker Ali also proceeded to Shahidgong in the district of Purnea to invite the people to the Qaderia order, leaving behind his son, Syedana Hazrat Tufail Ali, under the care of Hazrat Zaker Ali. Hazrat Zaker Ali’s pious and saintly life,

1. He was born in Jilan in A.H. 470/A.D. 1077-1078. He was the founder of Qaderia Sufi order and was the head of every Sufi of various order. He died in A.H. 561/A.D. 1166.

profound erudition, persuasive eloquence, sublime sermon attracted all sorts of people - the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate, from far and near. So long the people was practising a formal, dry and moribund religion. After having received proper guidance from Hazrat Zaker Ali their faith became enlivened and meaningful. Zaker Ali was endowed with supernatural power through which he relieved sufferings of humanity. He built a Khangah of mud wall in Mangal Kote. Zaker Ali, popularly known as Hazrat Ghous-i-Sani, left for his eternal abode at the age of eighty one in the year 1192 Hejri/A.D. 1778 leaving behind a large number of murids. Even today people used to go to his tomb for blessings.

Syedana Hazrat Shah Tufail Ali al Qaderi

Zaker Ali has been succeeded by a galaxy of sufi saints. His immediate successor was his nephew and son-in-law, Tufail Ali who came with the family of Syedana Hazrat Shaikh Abdul Qader Abdullah-al-Jili in A.H. 1180. He had studied the commentaries of the Holy Quran, the tradition of the Holy Prophet, Islamic laws and various other subjects

1. Gulistan-e-Qaderi, op. cit., p. 25
under his uncle and Pir Zaker Ali. Great sufis are said to transmit their spiritual power to their successors before their death. Hazrat Zaker Ali could not transmit this knowledge to his favourite successor. On the second day after his death, when Hazrat Tufail Ali prayed with tearful eyes for his inheritance, all of a sudden two brilliant hands came out of the tomb and Hazrat Tufail Ali grasped them firmly and he at once became possessed of divine knowledge and spiritual illumination.¹ Hazrat Shah Tufail Ali spent most of his time in Mednapore but after death, according to his wish, he was buried by the side of his pir Shaikh Zaker Ali in Mangal Kote. He was popularly known as Qutb-E-Rubbani. He died in 1251 A.H. His place was filled by his son Syedana Hazrat Shah Meher Ali al Qaderi by his second wife, who later became great sufi and a true successor of his father Hazrat Shah Tufail.

Moula Ali Shah

Moula Ali Shah’s real name was Haider Ali Shah, but this name is unknown to the common people. He is known as Moula Ali Shah. This name was given to him by his disciples, followers and admirers. The main cause behind calling him Moula Ali Shah is this that the saint would very often utter

'Ya Ali, Ya Moula' (Oh Ali, Oh Moula). 1.

The area became known with the name of the saint as Maula Ali. This in a way overtook the shrine in fame. Rightly says the Statesman in its issue dated 6th April, 1981, "On the one hand there is blind admiration, on the other equally bleak ignorance. Devotees swear by the shrine, there are also people who ask, "where is Maulali Mazar"? When told that it lies at the crossing of Lower Circular Road and S.N. Banerjee Road, they say, "You mean in Maulali?"... Every time the bus or tram conductor shouts "Maulali, Maulali", little does he or his passengers think of the history of the shrine, and how it came to achieve the popularity it enjoys". 2

Very little is known about the life of Hazrat Moula Ali Shah. From the scanty information given by the present Mutawalli or manager of the shrine, it is known that the saint, at the age of about forty came to Calcutta, and settled at the place where the present shrine exists. He came from Uttar Pradesh, probably, from Badayun, which was his birth place.

Actual date and the year of his birth is not known. But it is said that the saint breathed his last at the age of about ninety years in 1760 A.D. He might have born in the year 1670 A.D. About his early life nothing is known. From the very early years of his life he passed his day in deep meditation. It is also said that he had studied the Islamic Literature thoroughly. Rightly says the Telegraph in its issue dated 14th January, 1985, "Torn by the struggle between flesh and spirit Hazrat Maula Ali left home at an early age. He was so stirred by the sight of human suffering that he renounced the material world and sought divine instruction to attain an existence free from evils. Deeply religious by nature, the 18th century Calcutta saint would often retire to a room and spend days in prayer and meditation".¹

At the age of about forty, i.e., about 1710 A.D. Hazrat Moula Ali Shah came to Calcutta. Here in the vicinity of the present shrine he settled. He made thatched hut there and began to pass his days. It was like a Khanqah. Many people came to him to get his blessings. It is said that at that time the saint made a sort of Madrasah where he would teach the lofty tenets of Islam. This tradition is still

maintained by the management of the shrine.

Very little is known about his family life. He was unmarried and when he came to Calcutta he had with him his sister who was married here and the descendants of his sister are the Mutawallis or managers of the shrine.

The Mazar Sharif is opened to the public, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Iranians, Saudi Arabians, Afghans living in Calcutta, even hippies use to come to the shrine. Among the historical visitors were Nawab Sirajud-duala and Mirza Ghalib.

Syed Ruhullah al-Hussaini

Syed Ruhullah, better known as Mohajeed Saheb, was born at Baghdad in 1137 A.H. He with his wife and one son Syed Badiuddin al-Hussaini and one daughter Syeda Amatuzzainab came to India and settled at Mouza Kumarpur near Mahisadal, in the district of Mednapur in the year 1765 A.D. He was at the same time a great sufi and eminent scholar as well. His most famous writing was Raudatul-azhar fi Manaqib-e-ahlil bait al Athhar. It is written on the basis of

1. The daily Statesman, op. cit.
2. The Telegraph, op. cit.
theological ideas. He died in the month of Rabius Sani 1212 A.H. and was buried in Kumarpur. Even today people go to his Mazar sharif for blessings. In Kumarpur he built a grand Khangah and a mosque which are still there and maintained by the descendants of this saint.

His son Syed Badiuddin was also a great sufi saint of his time. He was born at Baghdad on 26th Muharram, 1163 A.H. He was the successor of his father Syed Ruhullah. After the demise of his father, Syed Badiuddin shifted to village Amragohal under the police station of Panskura in the district of Mednapur. He died there on 4th Rajab 1248 A.H. and his Mazar is at Amragohal.

Hazrat Ghulam Ali

Hazrat Ghulam Ali's genealogy is traced to Hazrat Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet of Islam through Hazrat Syed Shah Sadruddin Abul Fugra Zafarabadi. Syed Ghulam Ali's

2. Our Times, op. cit.

During twelfth century A.H. Syed Ghulam Ali came to Mednapur and married the daughter of one of the contemporary sufis named Hazrat Syed Shah Babullah, great grandson of Razi al Bukhari, better known as Chandan Shahid Baba whose Mazur is in the heart of Mednapur town. Later on Syed Ghulam Ali along with his new bride went to a village under the subdivision of Arambagh in the district of Hugli and settled there. As Syed Ghulam Ali was a great pir, i.e. spiritual guide, the village later on was called Pir Nagar.

After his settlement at Pir Nagar he married a lady of that area which was his second marriage.

Syed Ghulam Ali was a prolific writer too. Amongst his literary works Irshadut Talebin is most famous. It is in

Persian and written on the art of writing and reciting of different forms of religious formulas for therapy in different diseases generally used as 'Tawiz' (amulet). The language of this book is very simple, lucid and vivid. This book is divided into four chapters. It is in manuscript form and kept in the library of Khangah-i-Husainiya, Khejutty, in the district of Howrah.

He built a large Khanqah at Pir Nagar and also built a mosque. He had a great number of disciples in almost all the districts of Bengal particularly from the surrounding districts, namely Mednapur, Howrah, Murshidabad and Burdwan. Large number of common people irrespective of caste and religion come to him for blessings.

He travelled extensively throughout India. He also performed Haj for at least seven times. He died in 1219 A.H. and his Mazar is at Pir Nagar. His descendants are still living at Khejutty and there is also a rich library full of rare books and MSS. on Sufism and religious subject.

Shah Babullah

Another contemporary sufi saint was Syed Shah Babullah, father in law of Syed Shah Ghulam Ali, whose genealogy

reached Hazrat Ali in this way. Syed Shah Babullah, son of
Syed Shah Muhammad Yusuf, son of Syed Shah Ahmad, son of
Syed Shah Chandan Shahid, son of Syed Shah Mukarram, son of
Syed Shah Mina, son of Syed Shah Muhammad Sayeed, son of
Syed Shah Iqrar, son of Syed Shah Munir, son of Syed Shah
Nuh-i-Hindi, son of Syed Shah Sayeed Bukhari, son of Syed
Shah Ismail, son of Syed Shah Kamal, son of Syed Shah
Ibrahim, son of Syed Shah Jamal, son of Syed Shah Ahil, son
of Syed Shah Muhammad Shaghil, son of Syed Shah Imam Musa,
son of Syed Shah Imam Musa Kazim, son of Syed Shah Imam
Zafar-us-Sadiq, son of Syed Shah Imam Muhammad Baqir, son of
Syed Shah Imam Zainul Abidin, son of Syed Shah Imam Hussain,
son of Syed Shah Ali, son of Abu Talib. His mazar is in
the vicinity of the Mazar sharif of his great grand father
Chandan Shahid at Mednapur town. There is a grand mosque and
a khanqah attached to Mazar sharif. Even today a large
number of people gather there every day and particularly on
the Thursdays and Fridays.

**Hazrat Maulana Syed Khwaja Miskin Ali Shah Chishti**

He is popularly known as Chiragh-i-Bangala. He was a
great saint of Chishtiya order of eighteenth century. He was
born at Delhi and afterwards came to Calcutta and settled

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1. Ibid, pp. 182-183.
there. His Mazar Sharif is in the vicinity of Nuna Pukur Tram Depo, i.e., 24 Benia Pukur Lane, Calcutta-14.

He was a great writer of Urdu language. His Diwan which is written in Urdu language is kept at his Mazar sharif under the custody of the Mutawalli of the Mazar. It is full of high thoughts and spiritual ideas. The couplet of each and every poem tells about the unity of God, the Almighty and also about Tasawwuf. The language of the Diwan is very simple and lucid. From this it can be said with great confidence that Hazrat Miskin Ali Shah was a great saint, a great poet and also a great scholar at the same time. He died on ninth September 1846 A.D. Even today a large number of people come to the Mazar for blessings.

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. Some Sufis wrote books on Tasawwuf, Hadith and Tafsir. In the connection the name of Faqir Garibullah, Ali Raza (Kanu Faqir), Shah Noori, Faqir Ilahabadi can be mentioned. According to their achievements they have discussed in subsequent chapters.

1. I personally went to Mazar sharif and saw it.
2. It is known from inscription of the Mazar that he died on ninth September, 1846 A.D.
Faqirs of Bengal were not only engaged in meditation but also revolted against social injustice and oppression perpetrated by Zaminders and other royal families over the poor cultivators.

Most of the Fakirs were educated and had great influence over the common people. They made use of their influence and waged a battle against the tyrant rulers which is known in the history as Faqir Bidrahah or movement of the Faqirs. The following Fakirs are noteworthy in this respect.

**Balaki Shah of Barisal**

He took up arms in 1791 against the Zamindar for taking revenues at a higher rate.

Again, Muhammad Reza of Sylhet with his five thousand troops revolted against the East India Company and declared independence but later on he was defeated and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Majnu Shah

He rose his arms against the East India Company for their raising revenues forcibly from the people. Under his able guidance the Faqirs started plundering at Rajshahi, Pabna, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Dhaka every year. They also plundered government treasuries. They converted their khanqas into the centre of conspiracy. In 1776 they made a fort at Mahasthan. Majnu Shah died in 1787 A.D. His brother Musha Shah became leader and follow the foot step of his brother. Apart from him his followers Chirag Ali Shah, Paragol Shah, Rauson Shah, Karim Shah also took active part in the struggle.