CHAPTER V

MYSTIC IMPACT ON CULTURAL LIFE OF BENGAL

The Muslim mystics of India, particularly those belonging to the early medieval period laid great emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge (ilm) by one entrusted with the duty of enlisting other in the mystic discipline. Ilm (knowledge), ishq (cosmic emotion) and qal (intelligence) were considered essential qualifications for one who looked after the spiritual culture of others. "An illiterate mystic falls prey to the machinations of the devil," Sh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki told Baba Barid Ganj-i-Shakar. The mystics derived inspiration from the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet in their zeal for acquiring knowledge.

2. The Quran (Az-zumar : 9) says:

"Are those who have knowledge equal with those who have no knowledge."

The Prophet stressing oh the need of education is repor
ted to have said:

"To seek knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim man and woman."

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We have little information regarding the educational accomplishments of the saints who came to Bengal before or during the early phase of its conquest by Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji. One of the most important scholars who made a very valuable contribution to the Indo-Muslim religions thought in Bengal was Qazi Ruknuddin Samarqandi. He visited Bengal during the time of Ali Mardan Khalji (1210-1213 A.D.). He was an eminent jurist and a renowned sufi. During his short stay in Bengal he learnt and translated *Amrit Kund*, (a Sanskrit work on Hindu mystic ideology) into Persian and Arabic. The mere fact that *Amrit Kund* attracted the attention of a Muslim jurist-mystic as early as the thirteenth century shows that the desire to find out common meeting-ground for Islam and Hinduism had become manifest almost simultaneously with the settlement of the Musalmans in Bengal.

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"Search for knowledge even if it is available in China."


Another distinguished scholar who contributed in the field of learning in Bengal was Maulana Tajuddin Arabi. He established a madrasah at Mahisun. The madrasah became a famous seat of Muslim learning.

One of the known product of this institution was Shaikh Yahya, father of the celebrated Firdausi saint of Bihar, Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri.

The other academy was founded at Sonargaon by Shaikh Sharafuddin Abu Tawwamah, an eminent saint and scholar of Bhukara. His academy attracted students from Bengal as well as Bihar. He was the author of a book, _Maqamat_, on mysticism. This book seems to be quite popular in the literary circle of India. The next book which has been ascribed to him is _Nam-i-Haq_ on jurisprudence (fikh).

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1 Maktubat-i-Sadi, ff. 338-339
2 For instance Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri came from Bihar and studied tafsir (an interpretation of the Quran), hadith (traditions of the Prophet), and fiqh (jurisprudence) at his feet in Sonargaon. See *Ibid.*, 339 and *Islamic Culture*, 1953, Vol. I, II-12
3 An idea about the popularity and demands of _Maqamat_ could be had from the letter of Ainuddin Ainul Mulk Abdullah bin Mahru which he had written to Nasiruddin, the Muqti of Lahore. The letter records:

> Een bair, tath ma khojan sa sarat sahar, safar, sahar, sarat safar, sahar, sahar, sahar, sahar.

The letter records: 

Zafar Khan Ghazi, a warrior-saint and contemporary of Sharafuddin Abu Tawamah also established a madrasah at Tribeni for the dissemination of education.

The saints of the Chishti silsilah, as noted above, were very particular about education. They took keen interest in the spread of learning. Almost all the khangahs which they established had arrangement of education also. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's khangah, where a large number of disciples were trained and sent to various parts of Hindustan, was not only a centre of spiritual training but an important centre of learning as well. Shaikh Akhi Siraj of Bengal, who was an outstanding khalifa of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and initiator of the Chishti silsilah in Bengal, completed the course of *danishmand* (*alim*) at his khangah.

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4. The authorship of this book is disputed. Dr. Saghir Hasan (*Islamic Culture*, Vol.27, 1963, II) suggested Sharafuddin Abu Tawamah as the author of this book. But a thorough investigation reveals that it was not his work, but was written at his instance by some of his disciples. See *Nam-i-Haq*, Kanpur edition, 5-6.

In Bengal Shaikh Akhi Siraj founded his khangah on the pattern of his preceptor and took keen interest in the spread of learning. He took with him some books from the library of the great Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya after his death and established what may be called the first library of Islamic mysticism in Bengal. Shaikh Alaul Haq his khalifah was also a great scholar of his age. His khangah at Pandua was a great seat of religious and intellectual life. People from far and wide attracted to his khangah to acquire knowledge in spiritual and Islamic sciences. Some of the best products of his khangah were Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam and Saiyyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani.

Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam, son and successor of Shaikh Alaul Haq, was very fond of and had impressed upon his disciples the importance of learning. He was a versatile

1. For a reference to the establishment of library see A. Rashid, Proceedings of the Pakistan History Conference, 1952, 209.

   Shaikh Siraj lived about 30 years in Bengal and worked a great deal to promote the cause of the Chishti movement, but not a single instance is so far available to show his contribution in the field of education.

2. Akhbar-ul-Akhyar, 149.

3. Shaikh Husamuddin Manikpuri is one such example. He was so much attracted by the mystic discipline that against the wishes of his father, he gave up his study and joined the khangah of Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam. But when the Shaikh learnt about this, he advised him to continue his study as well as the spiritual training. Mir'at-ul Asrar, f.360.
scholar of Persian and Arabic and took deep interest in literature and poetry. Besides he had a good taste of and composed Hindi duhas also. The important contributions of Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam were his maktubat (letters) and two works, Munis-ul-Fugar and Anis-ul-Ghuraba, on the science of mysticism. They provide valuable informations to understand the political, religious and cultural activities of the Musalmans. Nur Qutb Alam is also credited to have maintained a madrasah and a hospital at Pandua.

1. For a reference to his duhas, see, Maktubat-i-Nur Qutb Alam, ff. 28 and 61.

2. Maktubat-i-Nur Qutb Alam, is a collection of 13 letters, addressed to different persons. They serve as an index to understand the mind and the mood of the Shaikh on various subjects, love of Allah, attitude towards the world, importance of Shariat, observance of rituals and practices. One of these letters contains important political information about the rise of Raja Kans. (rotograph of this Maktubat available in the Department of History, A.M.U.Aligarh).

3. Munis-ul-Fugar is an excellent treatise on mysticism. It was prepared by the Shaikh to serve as a hand book to his disciples, especially for Shaikh Husamuddin Manikpuri. It contains interesting information on the science and the method of mysticism. (MS. of this work is available in a private library, Kutubkhana, Shah Damiababa, at Khalifa Bagh, Bhagalpur).

4. Anis-ul-Ghuraba is another important work on mystic learning. It is, as appears from its contents, prepared on the pattern of Munis-ul-Fugar. It has valuable instructions for a lover of mystic science. (This MS. is Contd.....
Saiyyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani was a learned Sufi and had deep knowledge of theology and Islamic mysticism. Like the earlier sufis he also laid great emphasis on the acquisition of learning. Highlighting the importance of education, he remarked that "the primary condition for a Sufi is to have been an 'alim (learned), if ignorant he would not be aware of the evil." He had left behind a good number of letters (maktubat) and a valuable work on mysticism, *Lataif-i-Ashrafí*. He is also said to have

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available in the library of A.S.B., Calcutta).


2. *Maktubat Ashraf Jahangir Simnani*, as it is known was collected and arranged by Abdul Haizzaq. It consisted of 75 letters, addressed to different persons. Some of these letters, No. 45, 46 and 47 are very valuable. They contain references to the political and religious condition of the Muslims as well as the influence of the sufis on their contemporary rulers. (MS. of this *Maktubat* is available in the Department of History, A.M.U.).

3. It is a collection of his *Malfuzat* and was compiled by Haji Gharib Yamani. It contains important information about the Islamic mysticism and theology and deals with the mystic history of various orders, which are known in India. This book was published in 1298 A.H./1880 A.D. by Nusrat-ul-Matabe in Delhi. It is divided in two volumes each has 412 and 432 pages respectively.
compiled a book on the lives of the pious caliphs. The former two are very important, they throw light on the social, political and religious life of the Muslims during that period; and present a true picture of the sufi movement in India.

Shaikh Husamuddin, a distinguished Khalifah of Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam was a good scholar of Arabic and Persian. His command over Arabic may be gauged from the fact that he could have explained Hidayat in the terms of Sufistic theosophy. He wrote Anis-ul-Ashiqain, a good work on mysticism in Persian. This book is divided into four sections and deals with love, lover and the beloved in a spiritual sense. His Malfuzat, Rafiq-ul-Arifin, was another important contribution in the field of mystic literature. This book was compiled by one of his disciples, Farid bin Salar Muhammad bin Mahmud Iraqi. It brings to light the social life and religious approaches of the sufis and had

references to Sultan Sikandar (1357-1392 A.D.) and Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah of Bengal (1389-1409 A.D.), and to some sufis of Bengal, Bihar, Awadh and Dehli. The sons and grandson of Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam who continued the Chishti silsilah in Bengal were all educated, but we have no information about their literary activities.

Inspired by the spiritual activities and literary taste of the Muslim saints, some local Muslim scholars of the fifteenth and the sixteenth century of Bengal wrote religious books on various branches of Islamic learning in Bengali to educate the people and to regularize their lives in accordance with the principles and traditions of Islam. Since the converted Bengali Muslims could neither read nor understand the religious books then available in the Arabic and Persian languages; and were satisfied with the religious tales of their ancestors. They composed books on purely religious, religio-historical, religio-romantic and such other subjects relating to Islam and Muslim heroes. For instances, Shah Muhammad Saghir, a contemporary of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1389-1409 A.D.) composed the Yusuf-Zulekha, reflecting the love story of Hazrat Yusuf and Bibi


Zulekha as revealed in the Holy Quran. Zainuddin, who flourished in the reign of Sultan Yusuf Shah (1474-1481 A.D.) compiled *Rasul-ViJaya* highlighting the war achievements of the Prophet. Although it has been written in a fanciful way and has little historical value, but it is a very fine piece of Bengali literature. Muzammil, who is said to be a disciple of Badruddin Badr Alam of Bihar, (ob. 1440 A.D.), was a renowned sufi poet of the middle of the fifteenth century. He wrote *Sat£ Namah* on the science of mysticism to democratize mystic discipline among the people. Afzal Ali was another scholar and sufi poet of the middle ages. He was a son of a Muslim saint, Bangu Faqir and a disciple of Shah Rustam. He composed *Nasi£at namah* on Islamic theory in order to acquaint the people with the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. Saiyyid

1. The Quran, Chapters XII, XIII, Surah-I, Yusuf.
2. *Muslim Bangla Sahitya* (Urdu Translation), 75-79
3. Ibid., 76.
4. Ibid., 80-83.
5. Ibid., 83.
6. Ibid., 122.
7. Ibid., 87.
Sultan (1550-1648 A.D.) is also one of the known Muslim scholars of Bengal who has written several books on the Islamic subjects. His most outstanding work is the Nabi-Bangsha. The author begins this work with the creation of the world and concludes it with the birth of the Prophet. The main motive in preparing this work was to propagate the conception of one God and to popularize the image of the Prophet among the non-Muslims. Shaikh Faizullah, another noted scholar and poet who flourished in the sixteenth century, composed Ghazi-Vijaya to glorify the account of the warrior saint Shah Ismail Ghazi (ob. 1474 A.D.), a general of Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474 A.D.). His other work is Zainab-Chautisha. It is an elegy of thirty four verses, based on the tragedy of Karbala with special reference to the sorrows of Hazrat Zainab, sister of the martyred Imam Husain. Lastly the name of Daulat Wazir Bahram may be mentioned here. He was a good scholar and a respectable courtier of Sultan & Husain Shah (1493-1619 A.D.) of Gaur. His known work is the love epic of

1. Ibid., 160-163, 165-168.
2. Ibid., p 167.
3. Ibid., 101-102.
4. Ibid.
Laila-Majmun. This is a fine piece of Bengali literature and is greatly enjoyed by the Muslims of Bengal.

These contributions by the Muslim scholars not only enriched the Bengali literature and substantially widened the horizon of its linguistic traditions by introducing new words, phrases and idioms of the advanced Arabic and Persian languages, but they also played a significant role in the development of Muslim religion and culture in Bengal. Their works popularized the subjects on Muslim learnings on the one hand and checked the incoming of Unislamic ideas in the Muslim society on the other.

1. Ibid., 105.
2. Ibid., 119.