CONCLUSION

As commercial and cultural contact of the Muslims in the Western coastal region preceded the Muslim conquest, so also was the case with the Eastern region. The Arab merchants, who had been visiting the ports of Bengal long before its conquests by the Turkish forces, settled in Arakan and Chittagong. Here grew some small colonies of the Muslims which gradually expanded and brought the surrounding regions within its cultural orbit. Some of the Brahmans reportedly apprehended the danger of being contaminated by the growing Muslim community and migrated to the western region of Bengal.

The political activities started with the conquest of Nadia by Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. The small kingdom carved out by Bakhtiyar continued to expand under the governors and the independent rulers of Bengal. By 1350 A.D. almost the whole region of Bengal was brought under Muslim domination.

1. The political history of the Muslim rule in Bengal right from the beginning of its foundation down the arrival of the British, falls into five periods viz. (I) Under the Governors of the Delhi Sultanate (1203-1342 A.D.) (2) Under the independent Sultans of Bengal (1342-1539). (3) Bengal under the Afghans (1539-1576). (4) Bengal Contd. ......
The independent rulers of Lakhnauti depended upon the local support and drew strength from its soil, with the result that some sort of cultural amalgamation between the two communities become inevitable. The Turkish governors and the independent rulers of Bengal maintained the traditions of their ancestors and constructed innumerable mosques, madarsas and khangahs.

Sufi activities in this region, according to the local traditions, started long before the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal. Some of the important saints of the period like Baba Adam Shaheed of Abdullahpur in Dacca, Shah Muhammad Sultan of Madanpur in Mymensingh, and Shah Sultan Mahisawar of Mahastan in Bogra settled before the Muslim conquest of this area. Thus the already established Muslim communities and the activities of the saints provided the necessary cultural and ideological support to the newly established Muslim kingdoms of Bengal. The sultans of Bengal leaned heavily on the local people for consolidation of their power and it was through the help they received from the sufis that they struck roots in the confidence of the people and established their authority.

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under the Mughals (1576-1713) and (5) The independent period of Nizamat introduced by Murshid Quli Khan in 1713 and continued till 1757.
After the Muslim conquest a fresh wave of Muslim saints and scholars reached Bengal. Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrezl, a suhrawardi saint, became very popular among the masses of Bengal and won many converts. Similarly Shaikh Jalaluddin Mujarrad became famous in Sylhet. Maulana Taqiuddin Arabi founded a madrasa at Mahisun where such eminent persons as Shaikh Yahya, the father of Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri, came for education. Maulana Ashrafuddin Tawwama established an academy of Islamic science in Sonargaon. He taught and trained a large number of disciples including the renowned saint of the Firdausi order Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri.

By 1350 A.D. Bengal had become a strong centre of Sufism, a large number of sufis of various silsilahs had entered Bengal and had established Khangahs Zawiyahs and Jama'at Khanaahs in the region. But it was the chishti silsilah which was destined to play the most significant role in the socio-religious life of Bengal.

The Chishti traditions which grew and developed in the North were brought to Bengal by Shaikh Akhi Siraj from the Jama'at Khanah of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya. He established his Khangah at Lakhnauti and started free kitchen (langar). Mir Khurd's remark about Akhi Siraj that he "illumined the whole region of Bengal with his spiritual radiance," is not
exaggerated. His successor, Shaikh Alaul Haq further broadened the scope of the activities of the silsila and made it a powerful factor in the religious life of the people. Like his preceptor, he too maintained a huge langar at Pandua, where thousands of people gathered for spiritual solace and benedictions. Saiyyid Ashraf Jahangir Simmani of Kichaucha (in Faizabad district), came from Simnan and became his disciple. Shaikh Alaul Haq’s popularity excited the suspicion of Sultan Sikandar Shah, who charged him of embezzlement of the state money and banished him to Sonargaon. The langar of the Shaikh, however, continued in Pandua.

Shaikh Alaul Haq’s son Nur Qutb Alam played a conspicuous role in the spiritual as well as political life of Bengal. His knowledge of religious sciences combined with deep piety and great concern for the welfare of the people considerably enhanced his prestige. It was he, who invited Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi to overthrow Raja Kans. The success of the coup d’etat further increased his hold on the rulers and the bureaucracy.

Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam had several disciples in and outside Bengal, but the man who carried successfully his mission further was Shaikh Husamuddin Manikpuri. After Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam, the Chishti silsila flourished in Bengal
under his descendants. But no significant change took place in the ideology and institutions of the chishti saints in Bengal. Like their predecessors of North India, they continued to emphasize the development of cosmic emotion as a sine qua non for spiritual progress. Great emphasis was laid on the building up of a morally autonomous personality. In one respect, however, the Chishti saints of Bengal departed from the well-established tradition of the early Chishti saints. Government service and contact with the rulers which was looked down upon as something below the dignity of a saint came to be cherished by them and they began to meddle in political affairs of the realms.

The Muslim saints of Bengal, as elsewhere in the country, laid great stress on learning. Wherever they went they established madrasas and encouraged the study of Islamic science. The contribution of Bengal to mystic literature includes works like Nam-i-Haq, Magamat, Munis-ul-Fugara, Anis-ul-Guraba, Maktubat-i-Nur 'Alam and the translation into Arabic and Persian of the famous Sanskrit work Amritkund. They encouraged vernaculars also and the literary output of the period in the local dialects was largely due to their efforts. Works like Yusuf-Zulekha of Shah Muhammad Saghir, Rasool-Vilay of Zainuddin, Saiat Namah of Muzammil, Nabi-Bangsba of Saiyyid Sultan and Nasihatnamah of Afzal Ali
greatly enriched the Bengali language and literature.

Besides the Chishti saints, a number of other saints who belonged to various silsilahs, rose in Bengal, but our early records throw very little light on their lives and activities. Later generations have mixed facts with fictions and these stories have been floating down the stream of time for centuries.

The Shattari silsilah was introduced in Bengal by its founder Shah Abdullah Shattari. His famous disciple in Bengal was Shaikh Muhammad Ala Qazin Shaṭṭari. He worked for a very long time in Bengal but this silsilah could not strike roots in the soil of Bengal. Some important saints of this silsilah, like Shaikh Ali Sher, Shah Manjhan and Shaikh Yusuf, were Bengalis but they worked outside their homeland.

The religious climate of Bengal on the arrival of the Muslims was not much different from that of northern India at the advent of the Turks. The Brahmins were the custodians of religion, and the people of the lower castes were not allowed any introduction to religious sciences. Socially also their position was far from satisfactory. The Muslim concept of an egalitarian society as demonstrated by the sufis in their Khanqahs attracted people of lower castes to their fold.
Alarmed at the progress of the Islamic faith and culture in Bengal, the Hindu teachers concentrated their efforts on reconditioning their religious ideology to suit the changed situation. Foremost among such reformers was Chaitanya. His main emphasis was on the revival of Vaishnavism in order to preserve the Hindu religion and faith. He advocated extreme devotion to Krishna as a supreme being and introduced the system of Kirtana (mass worship) and removed caste restrictions from admitting people to his faith.

The emergence of some syncretic cults like Nath, Panchpir and Satyapir, which bear Muslim and Hindu elements, seem to be the outcome of the impact of Islam on Hinduism and vice versa. Some newly converted Muslims, due to lack of proper knowledge of Islam, continued to retain some of their long inherited customs and practices which in course of time resulted in the evolution of such cults.

Politically Bengal was never subdued by the Delhi Sultans. The governors appointed by the Sultans of Delhi remained virtually independent and those who were powerful enough to declare their independence, did not acknowledge the authority of the Delhi rulers. There were several reasons for this isolation. First, because the Delhi Sultans could not effectively control the far off region as the means of
communication could not annihilate time and distance. Secondly, Bengal was rich in economic resources and could support its govt. and people. Consequently the rulers of Bengal never depended on central support. Thirdly, the Sultans of Delhi were involved in many other pressing problems, like the Mongol invasions etc. and could not afford to get entangled in the complicated political situation of the Eastern region. Lastly the kingdom of Jaunpur intervened between Bengal and the Sultanate of Delhi. The Jaunpur kingdom was not powerful enough to absorb Bengal or Delhi, but it played a significant role as a buffer state between Delhi and Bengal. Its geopolitical role was also of great importance. Further Bengal remained culturally isolated from Delhi. It could not draw cultural strength from Delhi. The pattern of culture which developed here was to a great extent different from that of Delhi. The main reason was that Delhi was constantly acting and reacting to developments in the outside world of Islam. It was Delhi which gave shelter to refugees from Central Asia and Persia. Amongst these refugees were scholars, sufis, poets, statismen and artisans. All of them were absorbed by Delhi, and when it fell and split up into provincial kingdoms, Ahmadabad, Mandu and the Deccan inherited the rich cultural
traditions of Delhi and absorbed the scholars, the sufis, the statesman and etc. who had come to India in the earlier centuries.

The mystic stream that trickled down into Bengal during the middle of the fourteenth century was never so strong as the Muslim mystic movement in other parts of the countries. After Shaikh Akhi Siraj no important saint entered and worked in Bengal. The saints of the Subhawardi, the Qadiri, the Firdausi, the Shattari and the Naqshbandi orders who played a conspicuous role in spiritual, political and cultural life in various parts of India did not touch the soil of Bengal. Only the Chishti silsila flourished there and exercised its influence on the social and political life of Bengal. The influence of Shaikh Alaul Haq and Shaikh Nur Qutb Alam crossed the frontiers of Bengal and inspired Saiyyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani and Shaikh Husamuddin Manikpuri, whose silsila continued and flourished for a long time.