CHAPTER I

MUSLIM SETTLEMENT, GRADUAL EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION OF MUSLIM SOCIETY IN BENGAL

The Arab merchants were fully familiar with and had been visiting the ports of Bengal, known to them as Rahmi or Ruhmi, since the 9th century A.D., if not earlier. The process of Muslim settlement in Bengal had, in fact, started long before its conquest in 1203 A.D. by Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji. On the basis of traditional account of the Arakanese King Radza Weng, it has been claimed that certain ship-wrecked Arabs had settled in Arakan during the reign of Maba-toing Tsan-da-ya (788-810 A.D.). Further


2. An Arab coin dated 172 A.H./788, found at Paharpur (Rajshahi district) and some Arab coins found at Mainamati (near Comilla) indicate that Arab merchants had been visiting these ports since the 9th century. The writings of the Arab geographers of the 9th and the 10th centuries and later, for instance, Sulaiman Tajir, Ibn Khurdadhbih, Masudi and Idrisi, also show that they were well acquainted with this region. See Elliot and Dowson - The History of India, Vol.I, 2,5,13-14,25 and 90; and M.H.Nainar, Arab Geographer's Knowledge of Southern India, Madras University Islamic Series - No.6,1942, 42-43,49 and 89-90. For reference to coins see, K.N.Dikshit, Memoirs of The Archaeological Survey of India, No.55, Delhi - 1938, 87, and F.A.Khan's Recent Archaeological discoveries in East Pakistan, Karachi, ll.

on the basis of circumstantial evidence it has been argued that many Arabs had settled in Chittagong in the 9th century A.D. Here grew up fairly influential Muslim colony, which later on exercised deep influence on the language and literature of Bengal. The Muslim pressure in the East Bengal continued to increase and had become so formidable even before its conquest by the Muslims that many Brahmins, it is said, had to migrate to West Bengal, lest they might be contaminated by the Muslims. Our information regarding the organization and activities of these Muslims is tantalizing in meagreness. It, however, appears that they did not acquire any political power and even their cultural influence remained confined to the area mentioned above.

With the conquest of West Bengal by Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji started a new era in the history of Bengal. This daring general of Qutbuddin Aibak raided Nadia in 1203 A.D., and founded a Muslim Kingdom in Bengal.


2. Aziz, *Early Turkish Empire of Delhi*, III. The silence of the *Tabaqat-i-Nisiri* over the date in Bakhtiyar's career, caused much speculations. Modern historians on the basis of *Taj-ul-Masir* and other accounts have concluded it differently; for example, Sarkar, *History Of Bengali*, Vol. II, 32, puts the date as 1201-1203 A.D., Blochmann, *Contribution to the Geography and History of Bengal*, 3, makes it 1203.

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with his capital at Lakhnauti (Malda Distt.), also known as Gaur. The Muslim principality, thus founded by Bakhtiyar, comprised the south eastern parts of Mithla, Varendra, the northern portions of Radha, the north-western tracts of Bagdi (i.e., portions of the modern districts of Malda, Dinajpur, Murshidabad and Birbhum); and the east and south east bounded by the Tista-Karetoya basin.

Later Malik Ikhtiyaruddin Uzbek (1252-1257), entitled Sultan Mughisuddin, occupied Madaran and Kamrup (Assam) and

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2. Mithla - the country west of Mahananda, Varendra, the region to the north of the Padma between the Karatoya and Mahananda rivers, Radha-the territory west of the Hugli and south of the Ganges and Bagdi - the delta of the Ganges, for details see, Blochmann Contribution, 3.

3. For location of boundaries, see Habibullah - Foundation of Muslim Rule in India, 74.

4. Ibid.
annexed the whole of Radh. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji (1213-1227 A.D.) not only consolidated Muslim power but also advanced his southern boundary from the bank of Ajay river to that of the Damodar and frontiers of Vishnupur. Sultan Mughisuddin Tughril (1268-1281 A.D.) added to Muslim Kingdom the modern districts of Faridpur and Dacca and annexed the territories on both sides of the Padma as far as Loricot (Narkila). Besides these he also extended Muslim Power in the Radha tract.

Under Bughra Khan, entitled Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah (1282-1291 A.D.), and his successors the regions of Satgaon (arsa-i-Bangala), Sonargaon (iqlim-i-Bangala) and other areas of eastern Bengal including the modern district of Mymensingh and Sylhet (Assam) were reduced and added to the Muslim dominion with three well defined divisions, Lakhnauti, Sarkar, Vol.11, 61-64.

2. Ibid., 22.
4. Ibid., 60.
5. He was the second son of Sultan Balban. Before coming to Bengal he held the fief of Sunam and Samanah. After suppressing the rebellion of Tughril, Sultan Balban assigned the principality of Lakhnauti to Bughra Khan sometime in 1382 A.D. Barani, Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, 128, 141-143 and 160.
Satgaon and Sonargaon. Finally Chittagong was conquered and annexed by Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah (1338-1349).

Thus by the middle of the 14th century almost the whole of Bengal had passed under Muslim control.

Simultaneously with the expansion of political power there, Muslim cultural institutions also flourished. The Muslim rulers, whether governors or independent Sultans, evinced keen interest in the growth of cultural institutions in Bengal. Bakhtiyar Khalji and his officers constructed mosques, madrasahs, and Khanqahs in various parts of the area under their control. Sultan Husamuddin Iwaz Khalji (1213-1227 A.D.) a benevolent ruler showered his favours upon his subjects and granted stipends to Ulama, Shaikhs and Saiyyids. He built several big and small mosques and madrasahs. Malik Jalaluddin Masud Jani (1247-1251 A.D.)

1. Sarkar, Vol.II, 99. He was silahdar of Bahram Khan (or Tatar Khan governor of Sonargaon under Sultan Muhammad Tughluq. Fakhruddin is alleged to have killed him in 1338 A.D. and occupied Sonargaon. He ruled as an independent Sultan from 1338-1349. When his son Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi (1349-1352) succeeded him. See Ibid., for details, 99-105.

2. See - Minhaj, Vol. I,428, where besides erection of mosques, he refers to the Khutba also.

built a mosque at Gangarampur (near Devkot). An inscription found at Devkot (dated 697/1297 A.D.) commemorates the construction of a mosque during the reign of Sultan Ruknuddin Kaikaus (1291-1301 A.D.). Another inscription discovered at Tribeni, Satgaon, dated 698 shows that a madrasah was constructed there. During the time of Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz (1301-1322 A.D.) a madrasah, called Dar-ul-Khairat was built by one of his feudatory, Shihabuddin Zafar Khan.

No less important was the contribution of the Muslim saints who came to Bengal during the period from the 9th century to the 1st half of the 14th century A.D. They came from different centres of Islamic culture and settled here. We have little authentic details about the arrival and missionary activities of the early saints. Certain traditions have, however, preserved the accounts of some of the early saints, which may not be wholly reliable.

Some of these traditions would have us believe that Baba Adam Shaheed came from Mecca, settled at Abdullahpur (Dacca Division). He is said to have come into conflict with the local raja, Ballalsena, and was killed in an engagement.

1. Sarkar, 51.
2. Ibid., 75-76.
3. Ibid., 77.
Another tradition says that Shah Muhammad Sultan of Rum, came to Bengal in 445/1053 A.D., and settled at Madanpur in the Netrakona sub-division of Mymensingh distt. He was known for his spiritual power and is said to have converted a Koch King to Islam. Shah Sultan Mahisawar came to Bengal via Sandvip and finally settled at Mahastan in Bogra distt. There he fought against another Hindu raja Persuram who oppressed the Muslims. In the engagement the saint himself was killed.

Makhdum Shah Daulah also belongs to the same category, and is said to have come to Bengal with a large number of his followers and relatives. He settled at Shahzadpur in Pabna distt., started missionary activities and built a mosque there. The local Hindu raja got alarmed at his popularity and tried to check his activities. In a fight with the raja the saint suffered martyrdom and his sister drowned herself in a river to save her chastity. It is said that the head of the saint was taken to Bihar and buried there and the body was buried at Shahzadpur where stands his present mausoleum. People frequently visit Shahzadpur to pay their homage to the venerated saint.

A somewhat similar story is related about Makhdum Shah Mahmud Ghaznavi, popularly known as Rahapir, who came to Bengal in the early part of the 13th century and settled at
Mangalkot in Burdawan distt. He is said to have sought help from the Sultan of Delhi against the persecution of Muslims by the local Hindu ruler. Consequently the region was occupied by a Muslim force.

The account of these saints is mainly based on traditions, nevertheless it establishes the fact that some saints before the Muslim conquest had come to this region and might have indulged in missionary activities and hence invited the wrath of the local Hindu rulers.

The first important saint who came to Bengal after its conquest and whose reliable account is available was Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi. Born at Tabriz in Persia, Shaikh Jalaluddin received education in Bukhara. He first became the disciple of Shaikh Abu Said of Tabriz and later joined the circle of Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrwardi's disciples in Baghdad. After an extensive tour of Arabia, Iraq, Bukhara and Nishapur he came to Hindustan. First he visited Multan where he met


2. Ibn Battuta who visited Bengal in the middle of the 14th century (probably in 1346 A.D.) met Shaikh Jalal of Sylhet and confounded him with Jalaluddin Tabrizi.
some of the eminent saints of the time and then arrived in Delhi during the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish (1210-1336 A.D.), the latter received him with great respect, but he could not remain in Delhi for long due to the evil machinations of the Shaikhul Islam.

Shaikh Najmuddin Sughra, the Shaikhul Islam of Delhi, became jealous of his influence and brought false charges of adultery against him. Although the saint was acquitted after investigation, he got disgusted with the political circles of Delhi and proceeded to Lakhnauti via Badaun and settled there.

Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi was very much venerated by the people in Bengal. He built a Khanqah and started langar (free kitchen). He purchased and endowed a piece of land and some gardens for the maintenance of the langar khana. Later he appears to have moved from Lakhnauti to Deotala and

1. For instance Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya (1169-1266 A.D.) who was his fellow disciple. The other contemporaries were Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti, Shaikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and Shaikh Fariduddin Gang-i-Shakr. See Amir Khurd, Sivar-ul-Auliya, 50-53 and 62-63, Amir Hasan Sijzi, Fawaid ul Fuad (edited by Muhammad Latif Malik) 185.
2. Fawa'id-ul Fu'ad, 228; Hamid-bin-Fazullah alias Jamali, Sivar-ul-Arifen, (rotograph); f.130b. Gulzar-i-Abrar (rotograph), Vol.1.
3. This place is also mentioned as Deo Mahal in Sivar-ul-Arifen, f.131a and Win-i Akbari, Vol.III, 406. I have followed Maktubat-i-Ashrafi (MS.) Letter No.46, f.98, which mentions the place as Deotala. Cunningham, Archaeological Survey of India, Vol.XV, 94 and A.A.Khan, Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua, 170-171, also identify the place as Deotala. For a detail discussion on the identity of the place. See M.A. Rahim, Social and Cultural History of Bengal, 96-97.
became very popular among the people. Here he built his takiya (resting place) on the site of a temple. The piety of the saint made him extremely popular and his missionary zeal won him many converts to Islam from the spiritually hungry masses of this region. He died probably in the middle of the 13th century A.D.

Shaikh Jalaluddin Mujarrad, a Khalifah of Sultan Saiyyid Ahmad Yasvi, came to Bengal from Qumia (in Turkey), most probably towards the close of the 13th century A.D.

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2. The Shaikh is reported to have said:

"He ardently believed that one who has attachment with woman, wealth and property never attains happiness." Fawāid-ul-Fuṣūd, 172, see also Maʿārif-ul-Wilayāt (MS.) f. 225.


4. The exact date and place of his death is not known to us. A marginal note in Sīyar-ul-ʿArifīn, f. 131a records that he died in 666 A.H./1266 A.D. at Dev-Mahal. See also Gulzar-i-Abrar, ff. 37b, 38a.


Mr. Ikram contradicts this view and says that he belongs to the Silsilah-i-Khwajgan of Turkey, which later came to be known as Naqshbandi silsilah, see JASP, 1957, Vol. II, 68.
After completing his spiritual training, he sought the permission of his preceptor, to carry the mystic mission to new regions. Thus with seven hundred fellow disciples he set out for India. He had to fight several successful battles on his way to India. Finally when he reached Bengal, he had only 313 followers with him. It appears that at this time the Sultan of Bengal had sent an expedition under Sikandar Khan to conquer Sylhet. The Shaikh also joined this army and Sylhet was conquered in 1303 A.D.

After the conquest of Sylhet he settled there and established a Khanqah. He is said to have converted many inhabitants of the place to Islam. The Shaikh led a very simple and pious life. It made him extremely popular in that region and people held him in high esteem. Certain miracles attributed to him by Ibn Battuta and a number of traditions current among the people about him reflect the extent of his impact on the people of the region. The Shaikh lived and died at

1. **Gulzar-i-Abrar, Vol. I, f. 75b.**

2. The **Gulzar-i-Abrar, Vol. I, f. 75b**, attributes the conquest of Sylhet to the Shaikh; but according to **Suhail-i-Yaman**, the Shaikh was assisted by the armies of the Sultan of Bengal (Sarkar - History of Bengal, Vol. II, 79), while the **Tazkirah-Auliya-i-Bangal, Vol. I, 117** says that Sikandar Ghazi had requested the Shaikh to join his army. An inscription found at the Dargah of the Shaikh in Sylhet, however, records the conquest of Sylhet by Sikandar Khan in 703 A.H./1303 A.D., and also contains reference to the Shaikh See **A.H. Dani, The Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal, appendix to JASP, Vol. II, 1957, 7.**

3. He observed fast for about 40 years, during which period he broke it after every 10 days with the milk of a cow, he Contd....
Sylhet, where his grave is still visited by a large number of people of different faiths.

Maulana Ashrafuddin Tawwama, a renowned scholar and sufi of Bukhara, is another very distinguished saint, who settled in Bengal during this period. He came to Delhi in or about 1260 A.D.

He was so well versed in the traditions of the Prophet and other branches of Islamic learning, that within a short period, he became very popular in literary circles of Delhi. His growing influence and popularity alarmed the Sultan of Delhi who directed him to go to Sonargaon.

Maulana Ashrafuddin obeyed the royal order and proceeded to Sonargaon. On the way he stayed for sometime at Maner, where

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had with him, and used to pray throughout the night. See 'The Rehla', Ibn Battuta, (English tr.) Mahdi Husain, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1953, 239.

1. According to Ibn Battuta, who visited Bengal probably in 1346-1347; and had a meeting with the Shaikh, the latter died the same year (i.e., in 1347 A.D.) at the age of 150 years. An age of 150 years is an unusually long life, but if this statement is accepted, then the Shaikh would have born in 1197 A.D. See The Rehla, 238-240. Gulzar-i-Abrar, an authentic source about his biography, so far available does not mention his death.

2. See Nam-i-Haq, A.H.1332, 5-6 (cited by Karim, Social History of the Muslims in Bengal, ASP, Dacca, 73-74.

Shaikh Sharafuddin Ahmad, the famous saint of the Firdausi silsilah and his father Yahya Maneri welcomed him. From Maner Sharafuddin Ahmad also proceeded to Sonargaon with him, probably after 1282 A.D.

Maulana Ashrafuddin established a madrasah at Sonargaon which became an important centre of Islamic learning, and people thronged there in large numbers. He established a Khanqah also in Sonargaon. Thus he initiated a programme of brisk intellectual and spiritual activity there.

Maulana Ashrafuddin is said to have written a book, named Maaamat, on mysticism which became very popular in mystic circle. He is lying buried at Sonargaon.

Shaikh Sharafuddin Ahmad Maneri (1262 - 1380 A.D.), a leading disciple of Maulana Ashrafuddin Tawwama and a distinguished saint of Firdausia silsilah of Bihar, was the son of

1. There is some difference of opinion regarding the time of his arrival in Sonargaon. Dr. Ishaq, on the authority of Nuzhat-ul-Arwah, holds that he went to Sonargaon in the time of Iltutmish, see 'Indias contribution to the Study of Hadith Literature', Dacca University, 1955, 53-54. Dr. Saghir says that he came to Sonargaon in Circle 668/1270 A.H. Islamic Culture, Vol.27 No.1,11.

The Maktubat-i>Sadi, 339-340, records that at the time of his departure, Sonargaon was under the Imperial Control of Delhi; and this region is said to have been conquered after 1282 A.D. See, Sarkar, History of Bengal, Vol.II, p 71. Thus he must have reached Sonargaon after 1282 A.D.

Shaikh Yahya Maneri. He came to Sonargaon with his Shaikh at the prime of his youth. Sharafuddin spent many years and acquired knowledge in all the branches of Muslim learning. He completed his education and spiritual training with great devotion. He was so much occupied in his studies that he could not spare time to read letters. Once it is said, he received the letter containing the news of his father's death which he could read after several days. During his stay at Sonargaon he fell ill, and was advised by the physicians to marry. He married his slave girl, who gave birth to a son. He then returned to Maner with his son and there committing him to the care of his mother, himself proceeded to Delhi to meet Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya whose fame as a spiritual teacher had reached far and wide. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya did not admit him in the Chishti Silsilah perhaps because he thought that by aptitude and inclination he was more fitted for the discipline of the Firdausi. So he advised him to join the order of Shaikh Najibuddin Firdausi (also known as Najmuddin Sughra),

1. Maktubat-i-Sadi, 339 See also Khawan-i-Pur Ni’amat, 15; Islamic Culture, Vol.27, No.1, 10 and 11, Hasan Askari, Sufism in Medieval Bihar, 4.

2. Sirat-us-Sharf, 46, 52.


1. The silsilah is said to be established by Najbuddin Kubra Firdausi, one of the prominent Khalifas of Shaikh Ziauddin Abu Najib Suhrwardi. Shaikh Safiuddin Bakharzi of Bukhara, a distinguished saint of the silsilah, was the khalifa of Shaikh Najbuddin Kubra, (Akhbar-ul-Akhyar, 124; Gulzar-i-Abrar, ff. 56b and 57a). Another version is that, Shaikh Safiuddin Bakharzi was the founder of the silsilah (Prof. Nizami - Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the 13th century A.D., 59).

a celebrated saint of the Firdausi silsilah.

Shaikh Sharafuddin appears to have lived in Bengal for about a decade but no contemporary or semi-contemporary authority gives any detail of his work in Bengal. In fact his work as a mystic, properly speaking belongs to Bihar where he concentrated his energies to the spiritual and moral regeneration of the people.

It is evident from the foregoing account that by the middle of the 14th century Bengal had become a powerful centre of Muslim mysticism, and sufis of various orders had settled there and had established their silsilah. Shaikh Ashraf Jahangir Simnani (1285-1405 A.D.), an eminent disciple of Shaikh Alaul Haq of Pandua, was amazed at the growth and popularity of the sufi orders in Bengal. In a letter addressed to Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi (1401-1440 A.D.), he states that no less than eighty saints of the suharawardi order flourished in
Devgaon alone, besides several others in Mahisun. Many saints of the Jalalia order lived and died at Deotala, a number of companions of Shaikh Ahmad Damishqi lived at Narkot. There were saints like Shaikh Sharafuddin Abu


2. Ibid.

3. The Jalalia silsilah appears to have been named after Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrezi, who flourished at Deotala in the middle of the 13th century A.D. We could not find any detail about the silsilah.


5. Ibid.
Tawwama, one of the twelve of the Qadir Khani Order, who lies buried at Sonargaon. There was another distinguished saint Badr Alam known as Badr Alam Zahidi, who lived and worked in Bengal. A number of other silsilahs; such as, 'Alai, Khalidia, Nuri, and Husaini, which were the off-shoots of the latter developed silsilah, is said to have been popular in Bengal.

1. The origin of the silsilah could not be traced.

2. These silsilahs seem to have started after the names of Shaikh Alaul Haq and his father Asad Khalidi. For the verification of Alai and Khalidia, see Abid Ali, Memoirs, 108-109.

3. Ibid.

4. This silsilah might have originated after the name of Shaikh Kur Qulb Alam.

5. Husaini silsila is probably known after the name of Shaikh Husain Dhukkarposh. He is claimed to be a Khalifah of Shaikh Alaul Haq. He lived and worked at Purnea in Bihar. See Professor Hasan Askari's articles in Bengal: Past and Present, 1948, 34-37.