Chapter IV

Pirism (or the cult of Pir) in Bengal & Bengali literature

The word Pir as found in the lexicon means senior/old person but its inner meaning is spiritual preceptor or Guru. It is a Farsi word. Like the Farsi word the word ‘thera’ used by the Buddhists also means old/senior. Sanskrit word ‘sthabir’ also means old. The Pirs were the preachers of the religion of Islam. They were originally known as the Sufis. The word Sufi has been originated from the Arabic word ‘Tasauf’ or ‘Suf’. The word ‘tasauf’ means purity/holiness. The word Suf means wool(pasham). So according to one version those who used to wear woolen garments or pasham garments, were known as Sufi. Then in another version at the time of Ahs-ul-Saffa i.e. Prophet Hazrat Mohammad’s time those who used to do ascetic practice at the floors of the mosque, the word Sufi originated out of them. Again according to another opinion those who used to utter namaj in the front row or, the Saif-i-auyial, the word Sufi originated from them. Then according to a great sufi saint Sahal Tasturi, he is sufi who is free from all kinds of dirtiness. Moreover, Maruf-al-Karkhi, a sufi saint of Bagdad said, devotion is the path to salvation. But that cannot be gained by the human being’s asceticism, rather it is a gift of the Allah or the Almighty. If ‘He’ i.e. the Allah looked at someone with compassion, then ‘He’ (the Allah) gift it to him, i.e. the aforesaid someone Tasauf is the realization of the truthful matter. And what is available in the hands of the living beings created by the Almighty, if they sacrifice it, only then there is the dawn of realization or consciousness. In other words, spiritual knowledge or wisdom is based on the apathy or aloofness to earthly possessions.83

While giving definition of Sufism, John A. Subhan said, “Sufism” is that mode of religious life in Islam in which the emphasis is placed not so much on the

83 Das, Girindranath, Bangla Pir Sahityer Katha, Subarnarekha, Calcutta, 1998, p.15

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performances of external ritual as on the activities of the inner self – in other words it signifies Islamic Mysticism. He has further written, “This term has been popularized by western writers, but the one common use among Muslims is ‘Tasawwuf’ while its cognate ‘Sufi’ is used for the mystic. 84

So whatever might be the original connotation for the term Pir, gradually the meaning has been changed to define the spiritual preceptor or Guru and specially it denotes preceptor of the Sufi community. For this reason, the Muslim saints used to be defined as the Pir – Dervish in Sufi doctrine. Incidentally the word Pir many times jointly designated or pronounced with the Farsi word Paigambar i.e. Pir – Paigambar. It means the highly honourable angel and predictionist. The Pir is the master of spiritual knowledge. By doing austere of ascetic practice in the marifat or, the mystic path, he attained divine grace. This kind of austere ascetic practice is generally unbearable and time consuming. Having taken initiation from the Murshid or the religious preceptor, one has to do austere ascetic practice by his direction to gain the love of the Allah/Almighty or the creator. This is called ashuk-mashuk doctrine in Sufi asceticism. Ashuk means who loves and Mashuk means who can be loved. This is again the Jibatma/ paramatma doctrine of the Hindu philosophy. By doing ascetic practice to gain the love of the Allah/Almighty, the Sufi saint is being fused with ‘Him’. This is called fanafillah or being fused with the Allah/Almighty in the Sufi doctrine. An ascetic is eligible to become ‘Kamel Inshan’ or complete man i.e. the Pir, if he is elevated to that level. 85 The Pirism of the sufi spiritualism has resemblances with the guruism or

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preceptorism of the tantric cult and the therabad of the Buddhism in the context of
the doctrine of the Sufi ascetic practice and its rituals. 86

It is the devotee's belief that the Pir's 'doa' (the prayer) can reach the Allah/Almighty. It is because the Pir is capable of superhuman powers. Therefore in the
eyes of the devotee the Pir is not only spiritually a great wise man, but also a holy,
man who is bridging the gulf between the Almighty and the devotee, i.e. (the Pir) a
representative of the Allah. The folk society believes for this reason that the soul
of the Pir is immortal. And the rituals to be followed in this belief are the
following:-

After the physical death of the Pir from the world – to do Jiyarat in the Pir's majar
or tomb, to offer manat or a vow/ promise to offer a particular sacrifice to the
majar on fulfillment of a prayer, to offer Shimi in the majar and a belief in the
'ZindaPir' i.e. the Pir is alive / immortal etc. Due to these beliefs, rituals and
customs and the consequent emotions in the folkways there was the growth of
various types of majars and dargas of the Pirs and Dervishes and surrounding them
places of pilgrimage, holy places and fairs. Some of the such kind of historic Pirs
were Gorachand Pir, Thakursahab, Badar Pir, Barh Khan, Gazi et al.

The Sufism in its original form was totally mystic, there was no place for
'Kayasadhana' or the asceticism with body and mind herein. So there was the
fundamental difference between 'Gurubadi' or preceptorist spiritualism and
Sufism. 87 Having been originated in Arabia, gaining establishment and publicity in
Persia or Iran, when Sufism finally entered into India, since then by the influence
of indigenous tantric yogic cult, the Sufism had been transferred into the formal

86 Ahmad, Dr. Wakil, article entitled 'Pir' in 'Bangla Lokosanskritir Bishakosh' ed. Dulal Chaudhury, Academy of Folk
87 Ahmad, Wakil - Banglar Lokesanskriti, Dhaka, 1974, pp.271-72.
Pirism.\textsuperscript{88} Perhaps from Persia Sufism began to be acculturated under the influence of the yogic cult.\textsuperscript{89} Since in Sufism, direction and supervision of the Murshid (preceptor) has got recognition, therefore similar to ‘Gurubad’ or preceptorism in this path also (i.e. Sufism), Pirism, Jikar (jop or praying silently as enjoined by scripters or by a Guru/preceptor), Murakkibaho (Dhyan or meditation) and relating to the above ideas ‘Kayasadhana’ or asceticism through the body and mind have been integrated with it (i.e. with Sufism).\textsuperscript{90}

In Bengal the use of the word Pir is widespread. Among the Pirs, those who are obeying the Shariyat along with the mystic asceticism, they are known as ‘Shara’ (or, the followers of ‘Shariyat’), on the other hand those who are thinking that the Shariyat to be unnecessary and only practice with Jikar (jop or silent prayer), murakkibaho (Dhyan or meditation), Kayasadhan (or asceticism with body and mind) singing and taking any kind of intoxicating drug or liquor; they are known as be-shara (opposing Shariyat) be-duri (fetter-less/unfettered) or ‘dighal-duri Pir’\textsuperscript{91} centering round both the classes especially the influences of the Pirs of the latter classes, the Pir culture which was being developed in Bengal, that was far distant from the original form of Sufism and more favourable to the indigenous consciousness of religion. That should be termed in general as the Pir-culture or Pirism.\textsuperscript{92}

Non-Islamic influences on Pirism: Yogic and Tantrik Cult

Bengal’s religion originally was not a religion introduced from outside, rather it was a folk based religion. This religion was a gift of the composite life of the clan

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{88} Ibid, p.272
\bibitem{89} Haq, Dr. Muhammad Enamul – Bange Sufi Prabhab, Calcutta 1935, p.74
\bibitem{90} Islam, Dr.Sa’adul, Banglar Hindu-Musulman Sanskritik Oitijhya ‘O’ mishran, Calcutta, end edn, 2010,p.239.
\bibitem{91} Sen, Kshitmohan, Bharatiya Madhyayuge Sadhanaar Dharan, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 42-44
\bibitem{92} Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.cit.p239
\end{thebibliography}
This folk-based religion was being grown up for thousand and thousand of years through the pre-Aryan indigenous people’s problems, crisis, occupations and thinkings, little by little experiences and imaginations of everyday which could not be called religion in literal sense of the term. The religious consciousness of the Austric, Nishad, Mongol, Kirat & Dravid races had been amalgamated there. The mother cult/ mother goddess of the matriarchal society, totem centric indigenous people’s animal and tree worship, beliefs in auspicious/inauspicious souls and transmigration of souls – all these had been originated out of indigenous people’s mind. And behind all these ideas manifold influences of the pre-Aryan Sankhya yogic and tantric cults were effectively working. Among these, yogic doctrines played the most powerful role. This yoga or the yogic cult having been related with Lord Shiva evolved into the various doctrines like tantric Buddhism, Tantrik Brahmanism, Nath order, Buddhist Sahajiya & Vaishnavite Sahajiya (in this phase instead of Shiva-Uma the symbol of Radha Krishna had been accepted.) Likewise the Sufism of Bengal was being developed having been related with the aforesaid doctrines. This Sufism of Bengal defined by Dr. Ahmad Sharif can be termed as the Pirism of Bengal.

The Lord Shiva’s influence was extraordinary in the character of the Pir as narrated in the Bengali Pir literature. Almost all of the character of the Pir had been imagined on the model of absent minded, whimsical, stoical yet angry minded Lord Shiva. Just like Lord Shiva, the Pirs were also easily satisfied towards the devotees yet they did not make delay in getting angry. By using the novel power and capability of the Pirs, the balladists of the Pirgatha or the Pir’s ballads have portrayed the character of the Pirs as making impossible tasks for the devotees.

94 Ibid, p.54
95 Ibid, p.55
96 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit p.240
This had been expressed in manifold character of the Pirs and Piranis like Satya Pir, Manik Pir, Gazi Pir, Banbibi et al.

Moreover, the main resort of the unique power of the Pirs were yogic asceticism. The body-centric consciousness was the soul. This soul was part of the earthly cause of everything i.e, the ‘paramatma’ or the Eternal soul/ Almighty. So the eternal soul used to stay within the human body. Therefore availability of the Eternal Entity was possible only through the human body centric asceticism. For this the control of the human body was required. This control was possible only when the respiration, breathing was within the control of a person. For this ascetic practice of human body and mind or ‘Kayasadhan’ through the yogic and tantric cults were indispensable. This asceticism was two fold – first one was ‘bamachari’ or, a tantric religious practice to be performed by a man in collaboration with a woman and second one was ‘Kama charbarjito’ or without the sexual religious practice. The bauls, ‘be-shara’ or ‘dighal-duri’ Pirs were used to embrace ‘bamachari’ religious ascetic practices whereas although the ‘Shara’ (or the followers of the Shariyat) Pirs follow a certain kind of religious asceticism which was without sexual practice, yet they led a family life. In the midst of ‘Jikar’ (jop or silent prayer) and ‘murakkibaho’(dhyan or meditation) they were ‘salik’ or passenger of Spiritual path. The next stage was Fanafillah or getting fused in the Allah/ Almighty. But before the aforesaid two stages, there was the stage of ‘fanafish sheikh’ or, being fused with the Guru or the preceptor. Here the Guruism or preceptorism of the yogic cult had been generated into the Pirism. ‘Fana fish Sheikh’ was ‘Rabita’ or connection with the Guru or the preceptor and ‘Fanafillah’ was ‘Murakkibaho’ or the meditation of the Allah/ Almighty. The concept of ‘Asan’ (Yogasan or yogic practice) in ‘Murakkibaho’ includes meditation (Dhyan) and Samadhi or a self absorbed meditation or trance where nothing but the
‘Chaturanga’ or consisting of four parts of the yogic practice having been absorbed and adopted in Pirism in a different manner.\(^7\)

According to Dr. Ahmad Sharif, whatever the Muslim Sufis had adopted from the Indian Yoga centric tantric asceticism, an attempt has been made to give it a Muslim coating., of course not virtually, but in name. For example Nirban (extinction of individuality and absorption into the supreme spirit) had become ‘fana’, Kundalini Shakti (the female vital force latent in a creature according to scriptures) had become ‘Latifa’... The ‘Sharapadma’ (six lotus) of the Tantra had become ‘Shara Latifa’ (six latifa) or alok Kendra or the centre of light. These six lotuses were ‘Hriday’- ‘Kalab’ (heart), ‘Atma’ –‘Ruha’ (soul), ‘gupta hriday’ – ‘Seer’ (hidden heart), ‘Gupta Atma’ –‘Khagi’ (hidden soul), ‘bibehi atma’ – ‘Kashfi’ (the conscientious soul), ‘dushprabritti’ – ‘nafs’ (evil desire) etc. Moreover, four firishtas (angels) such as Jibrail, Mikail, Israfil and Azrail had been imagined from the Tantrik Buddhism’s four Goddesses - Lochana, Mamaki, Pandura and Tara and from the Hindu tantric cult’s Brahma- Dakini, Mahavishnu-Rakini, Rudra-Lakini, Ish-kakini- who were supposed to guard the chaturduar or four doors.\(^8\)

The Muslims had devotionally accepted through Pirism that kind of asceticism from them by changing the terminology. There the endeavours for syncretism were also noticeable. One can see that in the ‘Balaknama’ of Nayan Chand Fakir such as ‘Dil me baithe Ram Rahim , dil me Malik Sain, dil me brindaban mokam manjil sthan Veshta pai\(^9\)’. According to Dr. Sa’adul Islam, one can see that the Sunyatatwa of the Buddhist doctrine which holds that the world has evolved out of nothing and will pass into nothing had been accepted into the

\(^{97}\) Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, Ibid, p.240
\(^{98}\) Sharif, Dr.Ahmad, Banglar Sufi Sahitya , Dhaka, 1969
\(^{99}\) Karim, Abdul (Sahitya bisharad) Bangla Prachin Pir?? bibaran, Pratham Khanda, Pratham Sanhkkya, p.138
‘Fana’ theory of Sufism. Although the Buddhist ‘Nirban’ or ‘Shunya tatwa’ was negative, yet Fana was an ‘adbay’ condition or an absolute state of affairs (of Monism and Buddhism) which means getting permanency after amalgamating with the ‘Eternal Entity’ which had been called as ‘baka’. Inspite of this it was noteworthy that the medium of gaining ‘fana’ and ‘baka’ were through the yoga and kayasadhan(yogic asceticism through human body and mind). For example one can see-

‘Sunyete paran hangsha, sunye Brahmajnan
jatha te paran Hanrha tatha yoga dhyan’,
or,
‘Sabda sthir hoye jadi sthir hoye mon
mon sthir honte ati sthir hoye ton’
ton sthir honte hoye kayar sadhan’ (Agam Jnan Sagar, Ali Roja). It was through the yogic dhyan or meditation ‘ton sthir’ (fixing of the body) & Kayasadhan or asceticism through human body and mind that the idea of ‘Baka Billah’ had been expressed.

Moreover, Dr. Ahmad Sharif in his book ‘Banglar Sufi Sahitya’ (1959) had given the findings of twenty Sufi scriptural works in which various theories of the yogic and tantric doctrines and their influences on the Pirism had been spelt out. According to him, Hindu Tantra or the tantric doctrine had been originated out of Buddhist Tantra or the tantric doctrine. Again the yogic Kayasadhan or asceticism through human body and mind of the Bengali Sufis had been originated under the

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100 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.241
101 Karim, Abdul (Sahitya Bisharad) ed. ‘Agam Jnan Sagar’, Ali Roja, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata, 1324 B.S.
102 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.241
influences of the Hindu-Buddhist tantrik doctrines. \(^{103}\) And, the Pirism was being grown up through the influence of those who was actually the director and Guru or preceptor of the yogic asceticism of the human body and mind or the Kayasadhan. Therefore the influence of the yogic cult was undeniable in the Pirism.\(^{104}\)

**The impact of Pantheism on Pirism**

The recognition of the divinity and worshipping in everything has not appeared suddenly in one day. This kind of consciousness regarding religion was being grown up gradually from the ancient concepts of animism. The first phase of animism was being completed by the discovery of the concept of the ‘Atma’, or, the soul and second phase has begun in the quest for special power of the soul like beings among all the things of the outer world. In the opinion of Tylor by finishing the quest for God the animism gained the completeness in the last phase.\(^{105}\) In his opinion even the monotheism was the evolved form of this doctrine. Although there was another opinion also. Even before the origin of animism the primitive men imagined about the existence of mystical and mysterious occult power everywhere in the Universe, which has been called as the ‘Mana’. Later on instead of imagining one power or spirit behind the natural phenomenon like the storm, lightening and fire, the existence of different types of spirits/ powers had been imagined – from that there was the origin of the manifold gods – out of which the concept of pantheism has been evolved. Anyway in the later period from these scattered animist and pantheist concepts and ideas a codified scriptural form has been evolved. Therefore the doctrine of ‘Tatwamasi’ – from ‘you are He’ to ‘sohaham’ –‘He is I am’ or the philosophical doctrine that identifies God with the

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\(^{103}\) Sharif, Dr.Ahmad, Bangali ‘O’ Bangla Sahitya, Tritiya Khanda, Dhaka, 1973, p.121.

\(^{104}\) Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit. p241

\(^{105}\) Hafiz, Abdul, Loukik Sanskar ‘O’ Manabsamaj, Muktadhara, Dhaka 1975, p.11-12
individual soul, or ‘Hamha Usht’ / Anal Haq doctrine of the sufis or ‘I am He’ concept had been implemented into the doctrine through the mystic feelings of the ascetic. That means the God, exists among all the things of the Universe – ‘sarbang khalwidang Brahma’ behind the belief there was the influence of pantheism.\footnote{Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit. p 242}

Moreover, the Pir worship (Gazibaba), the grave worship, ‘Asa’ or the stick used by the Pir, ‘Pagri’ or the turban worship, or building the new darga after taking the dust particles of the first Kabar or grave and then the imagined darga worship, keeping ‘Tel Pani’ or, oil and water at the head of the ‘Kabar’ or grave, ‘Dharna’ or the act of lying obstinately at one’s door or at the temple of a deity soliciting or imploring something at the darga or the abode of the shape of the tree, worship of the adjoining tree of the Pir’s abode, tying ‘dhela’ or ‘mudo’ ( a small brickbat or stone/ clay made lump) in the hope of fulfilling a mental desire, and a belief in the infallibility of all these things – all the aforesaid matters are remnants of pantheism and anti-theses of monoethistic Islam.\footnote{Ibid, p.242}

Folk traditions : Practice of vow(brata) and other customs and rituals related to Pirism

To sing Pir-mangal song resembling brata katha (story of undertaking vow or ascetical austerities in order to attain something) to sing the divine grace and power of Banbibi and Gazibaba before entering into the forest, to make noise of ovation or ‘huzza’ (Jayadhawani) in the name of Panch Pir or five Pirs and ‘Badar Badar’ in the dariya (sea/ bay or a large river) while in a boat-journey, in the time of pestilence of the cow(‘go-marak’) to sing the song of manic Pir, Satya Pir and Sona Pir and offering of Shirni (sinni) to them, propitiation of planets (Graha Shanti) in the new year (Naba Barsha) and to sing ‘mangan’ ( song for any desire

\footnote{Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit. p 242} \footnote{Ibid, p.242}
or longing), desiring a year free from dangers and offering Shirni for Satya/ Manik Pir and their worship – all these rituals are widespread in the Bengali Hindu and Muslim society. Besides that offering of Fateha (rice and meat) to Fateha, Barkat’s mother for enhancing wealth and crop production, practice of undertaking a vow of ascetical austerities in order to attain something (Brata Palan) of Lakshmibibi in the resemblance of Lakshmidevi, to offer the blood of swan and duck in the name of Mahalakshmi in the crop room (Mahalakshmi hans rakta deont gola ghore) for doing Hajat in the name of Manai Pir or Nimria Pir in the resemblance of Sasthi or Panch Thakur for protecting an issue, or in order to get protection from the epidemics of cholera and pox undertaking vow (Brata), singing songs offering Shirni and doing ‘Hajrat’ in the name of Olaibibi, Burima & Maibibi and their various forms can be observed. Moreover, the predominance of the Muslim women in the singing party of Vasan songs(Gan) and undertaking the vow of ascetical austerities in order to attain something in the name of Manasa’s Brata (vow) even used to exist 50/60 years ago.  

Now let us see what is the process of the folk Muslim society’s nearness of mentality towards the Hindu customs, rituals, ceremonies and undertaking vows or ascetical austerities in order to attain something. Due to the staying together for a prolonged period of time the lower caste Hindu women used to enter into the Muslim household’s gynaecium (Antarpur or women’s quarter in a house) for selling oil, bangle, fish etc and used to gossip in course of selling;  by which gradually different customs and rituals like the ‘brata’ or women’s vows or ascetical austerities in order to attain something, ‘Vasan’ songs (gan) & ‘Mangal Panchali’ (auspicious class of Bengali poems celebrating the glory of a deity) had

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108 Ibid, p.242
been generated into the Muslim women's fear psychotic tender mind. \textsuperscript{109} In course of time the influence of 'brata' or undertaking vows or ascetical austerities in order to attain something had been spread even among the male members of the Muslim household. Moreover, sometimes simply in pursuits of pleasure or sometimes for the sake of occupations groups of singer of Vasan songs were being grown up among the Muslims.\textsuperscript{110}

**Idolatrous/ Pagan ideas and worship of human beings**

Getting indulgence from the Pirism indigenous folk beliefs and sacraments had been adopted in the Muslim society in a slightly distorted form. Feeble attempts to Islamize the folk beliefs and sacraments could be observed in the various processes like gifting of Hazat, Shirni, Fateha towards the Pirs, clockwise circumambulation round the Pir’s grave, lying prostrate in obeisance for doing Tazimi, Sijda for showing honour to the Majar/ grave of the Pirs etc.

But ultimately the pagan/idolatrous beliefs are being echoed by it. After keeping for some time, bhat-gosht(rice-meat) and Shirni in the banana leaves on a pair of bricks in the 'than' or the holy place beneath the tree while offering 'Hazat', these are being distributed. Here one can notice the similarity of rituals like 'Prasad' or the food-offering to a deity both among the Hindus & the Muslims.

Even ultimately while the Hindus after building the idol of Gazibaba had worshipped it, then the Muslims had shown extreme altitude or limit of human form of worship by the act of lying obstinately soliciting or imploring something or 'Dharna' on it. Thus the human form of worship had got its place in Islam by establishing the connection of the Pirism along with the folk religious ideas.

\textsuperscript{109} Ali, Mrs. Meer Hasan, Observation of the Mussulmans of India, London, 1917, p.206
\textsuperscript{110} Islam, Dr.Sa'adul's book, op.cit, p.243
Dr. Sa’adul Islam had rightly remarked that Dr. Enamul Haq’s comment on the sufi book of Shaikh Jahid named ‘Adya parichay’ can be applicable to the Sufism of Bengal, wherein he has said that in it Muslim Sufi thoughts, the yogic or tantric thinking of the Hindus and the thought process of the primitive people of Bengal had been amalgamated.  

The following remarkable things can be observed in the Pirism of Bengal. Firstly, the ‘Nirakar’ or ‘God without form’ doctrine of the Islami sufism which means asceticism of the Allah / Almighty gradually transformed into the symbol worship of the Pirs (Guru) which implied ‘God with form’, ‘Sakarbad’ of the Hindus.

Secondly rituals free mystic asceticism of Sufism had been transformed into totally ritualistic asceticism which the people of Bengal irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims had accepted as the Pirism. Thirdly in the sphere of religious culture, in the company of the Bengalis, the particular kind of culmination which happened in the Vedic religion, Brahmanical religion, even in case of idol opposing totally self ascetic revolutionary religion of Buddhism, that too happened in case of Islamic Sufism herein in Bengal. Again by the influence of the ‘Puran’ or the Hindu mythology, Buddhadeva or lord Buddha had got the recognition as one of the avatars(prophets) among the ‘Dashavatars’ (ten prophets) of the Hinduism, thereafter the imagination of the ‘Niratma Devi’ or the soulless Goddess had appeared and the Buddhist Sahajiya doctrine had emerged also. In Pirism we can see the identical sign of admixture of folk mind and Bengali mind. Fourthly just like the folk religion, the Pirism also did not enter into the Bengali society as any one of the doctrines. From the scattered customs, rituals and behavioural patterns of the people as social beings this kind of numerousness of social

\[111\text{Ibid, p.243}\]
behavioural processes emerged in connection with pleasant diversions and inquisitiveness. Gradually that have been culminated into the way of life of the people after the addition of different dimension of beliefs. Ultimately that have been accepted as the theory or the doctrine. Above all, syncretic form as the initiation of life of the Bengalis had been thoroughly manifested into the Pirism.  

Bengali Pir Literature

The Bengali biographical literature which was being grown up centering the Sufi doctrinarian Pirs preaching the religion of Islam, precisely that can be called as the Pir-literature. Bengali Pir literature was a ‘Mangal’ or auspicious kind of literature. The superstition of the devotees of the Pirs irrespective of the people belonging to the faith of Hinduism or Islam being that by reading or listening to the life story of the Pir and his supernatural power, listener or the reader acquires piety, as a result of that auspicious thing and well-beings happen in their lives. That is why it is called auspicious literature.

Again by taking the word ‘Mangal’ or auspicious by denoting ‘Vijay’ or conquest, it can be said that, since the Pir literature was being grown up, centering round victorious expeditions of the Pirs preaching the religion of Islam, that can be called auspicious literature indeed. In this literary process, there were different kinds of Pir literature like Pir-drama (natak), life story of the Pirs written in prose and folk tales of the Pirs etc. What is identified with welfare, if we term it as the literature, then the issue of well being or auspicious things comes in spontaneously.

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112 Ibid, p.243
113 Das, Girindranath, Bangla Pir Sahitya Katha, Subarnarekha, Calcutta, 1998, p.21
Therefore there is no need to mention the Pir literature differently as the Pir ‘Mangal’ or auspicious literature any more. 114

The Historical background of the Pir literature

From the eighth century A.D, preachers of Islamic religion were coming to India. From this time onwards Sufi Pir dervishes used to extend their influences over the minds of the people of this country. Till then distiches of the ‘Charjacharja Binishchay’, which was the first instance / sign of the Bengali literature, were not composed. The medieval period of the Bengali literature was its golden age. In this period, centering around deity or divine like characters wide growth of eulogical poetic verses could be seen and ‘Panchali’ or a kind of Bengali poetic verses celebrating the glory of a deity were being composed taking into account Gods like Dharma Thakur and Thakur Ramchandra, Thakur Krishnachandra and the goddesses like Devi Manasa, Devi Chandi and also the Pir-dervishes.115

Although in the modern period the stream of eulogical poetic verses or Panchali Kavya by taking the gods & goddesses became almost closed, but the stream of poetic verses by taking the Pir-Dervishes were not closed. Its principal reason being that side by side with gods and goddess centric literary style, ascension of the human life oriented literary style of the Pirs and dervishes and their spontaneous growth and widespread influences of the humanism of that period came in to being. In the literary style of the Pir-dervish character based genre wherein the ideal of humanism was pronounced, there was a strong wave of growth of it. So in this period of golden age of the Bengali literature, there was a

114 Ibid, p.21
115 Ibid, p.23
trend to create literature based on ideal persons starting from Sri Chaitanyadev down to the persons of the late period. In this way life stories of the Pir-Piranis were written, first of all in the verses and then in the proses in the modern period and ultimately in the age of the drama those stories were dramatized and going to be staged.\textsuperscript{116}

The social life of the Bengali men and women initiated into the religion of Islam was for the first time began to be published in the written form through the medium of Pir literature, Pir Panchalikavyas or eulogical accounts of poetic verses of the Pirs and Piranis were the only identifiers of culture of the then Bengali Muslim society. In the modern age after the creation of the novels, stories, or the biographical literature the intensity of the waves for publications of the Pir Panchalikavyas or eulogical accounts of poetic verses on Pirs and Piranis were going to be lessened. At present the time of creation of stories of the Pirs and Piranis in poetic verses or Kahini kavyas was over. Similarly the days are over to create or compose the life character of the Pirs and Piranis in poetic verses. Therefore the eulogical poetic verses on the Pirs and Piranis or the ‘Pir Kavya Sahitya’ remained as the only mirror of the Bengali Muslims in the history of Bengali literature in the medieval period and that is why its historical value was extraordinary.\textsuperscript{117}

In the medieval period since the time of the establishment of hegemony by the Turkish Sultans in Bengal, the Hindu culture used to be amalgamated with the Muslim culture – by its ultimate culmination the Bengali culture of the Hindus and the Muslims was being grown up as an undivisible Bengali culture today. By

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p.23
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, p.24
which basis this admixture was based can be described mainly by the following manners:-

Firstly, when the Muslim ruling power had spread its hegemony in Bengal, then the Hindus could not be free from its impact, therefore the policy of co-existence had been followed. Secondly, the sufis of the Chistia and Suhrabardia tarikha (path) were also believers in 'adwaitabad' or monoistic philosophy. They had come to India on the initial period of Islam. Due to the similarities of thoughts of the Sufi saints of the aforesaid two tarikhas with the Hindu adwaitabad, their doctrines were able to establish its permanent place in this country. Again in the 'Kaderia Tarikha' of Hazrat Abdul Kader Jilani and the 'Naksbandia Tarikha' introduced by Hazrat Bahauddin Naksband, the difference between the creator and the creations or 'Dawitabad' or dualism had been acknowledged. Since the Hindu 'Dwaitabad' had gone in favour of them so the 'Kaderia-Naksbandia' doctrines were also easily established in this country. Therefore, a kind of syncretism had developed among the Hindu and the Muslim people being influenced by the Pirs. As a result of that the Pir-culture had been established as a mixed culture of the Hindus and the Muslims. Thirdly the ideology of Sufism sheltered humanism had spread its hegemony on the Bengali Hindu mentalité. Fourthly the converted people from the Hindusim were not able to abandon the Hindu customs and superstitions which they had inherited by birth. Fifthly, with local social environment shrouded in the mentality relating to the preceptors and disciples (Guru-Shishya), it was not easy to abandon for the Muslims of the then period, the weakness of paying reverence to the Pirs as the Divine type of powers.118

It was from the first half of the sixteenth century that the eulogical poetic verses on the Pir-Piranis or ‘Pir-kavya’ began to be composed. The ‘SatyaPir

118 Ibid, p.24
Kavya’ wasa composed as early as on 1545 A.D. The arrival of the Bengali Pir-literature happened with the imaginary ‘Pir-kavya’ (or the eulogical poetic verses on the Pirs and Piranis). Satya Pir was that imaginary Pir. Satya Pir was like a messenger establishing synthesis between the Hindus and the Muslims. Besides that various gods and goddesses had arrived in the literature as the Pir-Piranis of the Hindus and the Muslims. Olai Chandi of the Hindus had become Olaibibi in the Pir literature. Similar transformations took place like from Bandevi to Banbibi, Matsyendranath to Masnad Ali and Machchandali, Bastudevi to Bastubibi et al (Punthir fasal, Ahmad Sharif). The biographical poetic verses (kabya), prose writing and dramas based in the historic Pirs had come gradually. The folk tales used to exist in the past, which are still there. ¹¹⁹

Most probably the biggest poetic verse on the imaginary Pirs was ‘Baro Satya Pir ‘O’ Sandhyabati Kanyar Punthi’ of the poet Krishna Chandra das. The time of writing of the kavya(poetic verse) was the beginning of the nineteenth century. It seemed to be the most recent Panchali Kavya( or eulogical poetic verse on the divine like character). The biggest and the most recent biographical Panchali kavya on the historic Pirs was ‘Pir Ek dil Shah kavya’. The time of writing of this Kavya (or the eulogical poetic verse on the divine like characters) was the last half of the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century. It was most probably in the first half of the nineteenth century that the biographical life-sketch based prosaic literature on the Pirs begun to be written. The book entitled ‘Hazrat Fatema of Maniruddin Yusuf Saheb’ was published on 1ˢᵗ Baisakh 1373 BS. Before that more books on this genre were published. The Pir dramas (natak) began to be written most probably at the end of the nineteenth century or in the

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p.25
first decade of the twentieth century. The time of writing of the drama entitled ‘Banbibi’ of the dramatist Satish Chandra Chaudhury was 1910.  

The Pir folk tales which had been published in the portions containing supernatural achievements included in the biography of Baro Pir Saheb was not based on the society of Bengal. Most probably the Pir folk tales based on the society of Bengal was published for the first time on 1st Falgun, 1362 B.S in the book entitled ‘Dhanya Jibaner Punya Kahini’ written by Abdul Aziz Al Amin.  

The Pir Panchali Kavya or the eulogical poetic verse on the Pirs are being read in the Bengali household still now. The Satya Pir’s Panchali are being read on the occasion of observing the vow (Brata palan) of the bestowal of Shirmi (Sinni) of the Satya Pir. Each year on the occasion of the fair to be held on the Pir’s dargah, the folk singers sing the Pir’s songs accompanied by the musical instruments like the dholak(tom-tom), Khanjani(tambourine) and harmonium. Still today the common people of rural Bengal read with devotion the biographies of the Pirs written in prosaic literature. Moreover, the Pir-dramas (natak) are being played in many villages of Bengal with much enthusiasm still now. The assembling of the common people on that occasion and the spontaneous outburst of pleasure by seeing that acting are examples of its popularity. Besides that, the Pir folk tales and the Pir-proverbs/adages are especially in vogue in rural areas widely.  

**Pir Mangal Kavya**

In the ‘Pir kavya’ or the poetic verses on the Pirs the word ‘mangal’ (auspicious) had been accepted denoting ‘Kalyan’ or welfare. Since the singing of the Manasa songs were being commenced on a particular Tuesday and being ended

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120 Ibid, p.25
121 Al-Amin, Abdul Aziz – ‘Dhanya jibaner Punya katha’, Calcutta, 1362 B.S
122 Das, Girindranath’s book, op.cit, p.26
on next Tuesday by the singers, so it was termed as ‘Mangal kavya’ by many persons. Pir Mangal Kavya was not Mangal-Kavya in that particular sense. Since by discussing, reading and listening the tales of the greatness and sublimity of the Pirs, auspicious things happen to both the readers and listeners or the piety accumulates to them – this kind of belief generates inspiration in the minds of the common people and in that sense Pir Kavyas are being classified as the Mangal Kavya (auspicious poetic verses). 123

There is no doubt that the Pir mangal literature is religion centric tale. That religion is the Islamic religion of the Sufi or the folk order. Since that (the religion of Islam) was founded on the principles of the equality, fraternity, integrity and universal brotherhood, therefore it is termed as universal religion. Since Islam is universal, so this religion and the literature based on that religious ideology cannot be communal. However for whichever reason culture does not follow the orthodox customs and principles of any religion – rightly for that very reason the synthesis of the Hindu-Muslim-Buddhist religion based culture had been accomplished in the ‘Pir-mangal Kavya’. Moreover, for that particular reason, the ‘Pir Mangal Kavya’ cannot be analysed by any definite epithet like communal. 124

In the Pir-Mangal Kavya, the reflection of the socio-political-economic conditions and social mind of the Bengalis especially the Bengali muslims who are in numerical majority in the whole of Bengal, has been made. However, some persons termed ‘Dharma Mangal Kavya’ as the national ‘Kavya’ or poetic verse of West Bengal. If the ‘Dharma Mangal Kavya’ can be termed as the national poetic verse of West Bengal, then it may be said to be the national poetic verse of the Hindu Bengalis only. The ‘Dharma Mangal Kavya’ do not get the recognition of

123 Ibid, p.27
124 Ibid, p.27
the national poetic verse of the Muslim Bengalis. Rather in that sense it will be better to term Bengali ‘Pir-mangal-Kavya’ as the national poetic verse of Bengal. It is because of the following reasons –

Firstly, the social picture of the Bengali Hindus and the Bengali Muslims have been reflected in the Bengali ‘Pir Kavya’. For example the SatyaPir Kavya, Pir Gorachand Kavya, Pir Ekdil Shah Kavya, etc. Secondly, the Bengali ‘Pir kavyas’ have come to the Bengali people as the literary ingredient originated out of combined endeavours of the Hindu and the Muslim poets. The creations of almost hundred poets like Fayezulah, Arif, Ashad Mohammad et al to Krishnachandra Das, Rameswar Bhattacharya, Ray Gunakar Bharat Chandra et al were its glorious examples. Thirdly, the ‘Pir Kavyas’ can be termed as the crops produced from the amalgamation of the Hindu-Muslim Pir culture centric mental field. For example, the Hindu and Muslim devotees offer hajat, manat, shimi in the Pir’s dargahs. Dr. Girindranath das has commented within context that it can of course be said that the Pirs were historical persons. The biographies of the Pirs had found their places in which poetic verses or Kavyas, especially that can be said to be the national historical poetic verses or ‘kavyas’ of Bengal and that was also the first national historical poetic verses or ‘Kavyas’ of Bengal and that was also the first national historical ‘Mangal Kavya’ or the auspicious poetic verse. However, we have already seen that not all the Pirs narrated in the Pir literature were historical Pirs, there were some imaginary Pirs like the Satya Pir.

The common features of the Pir-dramatic literature / Pir Natya Sahitya

The following features of the dramatic literature on the Pirs (Pir-natya Sahitya) can be noticeable. Firstly, the character of both of the religionists like the Hindus and
the Muslims have found their places in each and every Pir-drama. Secondly, no
endeavor could be seen in the Pir dramas to express the tales of the sublimity of
the Allah. Thirdly, although in the Pir dramas attempts have been made to
captivate the dramatic flavor by narrating the love between man and woman or
the conflict between the two contradictory powers, yet principally the sublimity
and the greatness of the Pir-Piranis have been narrated therein. Fourthly, there
were some musical/lyrical dramas in the dramatic literature on the pirs, which are
very convenient to present on the audience of the musical opera or the Jatragan.126

One of the characteristic features of literature is that it is a mirror of the
society or a picture of the society. The rise and fall, conflict and union, the smile
and tear that occurs, the love and estrangement and the pleasure and agony that
arises, the history that is being created—and all of these happen in the social life of
any place and time—its permanent mirror in the literature of the then period of that
particular place and area. Therefore the only identification of the economic, social,
political, artistic and philosophical conditions of the aforesaid social system is its
literature. So the value of the literary flavor of the Pir-literature whatsoever may be
less or little to anyone, its literary value as a social portrait cannot be socially cast
out.127

The Bengali Pir-balads (Pir-gatha) – The living documents of social thought:
Tales of conflict and synthesis.

Although the arrival of the Pir-Dervish –Sufis had occurred in this country at the
time of the foundation of the Turkish rule in Bengali or before that, yet the birth of
the Bengali Pir –ballads (Pi-gatha) did not happen before the sixteenth century.
One can take the period of the birth of Pir-ballads from Shaikh Faezullah’s Gazi

126 Ibid, p.31
127 Ibid, p.23
Vijay (written by taking the character of Dervish general Gazi Ismail of Ruknuddin Barbak shah in 1476 A.D ) and Satya Pir Gatha(1545 – 57)\textsuperscript{128}. Before that news had been ascertained about the ‘Vidyasundar pala’ (‘pala’ means poetic story of a drama) signifying the greatness of SatyaPir(1502), of a certain Brahmin born poet Kanka, imagined to be the contemporary of Sri Chaitaanya and Alauddin Hossain Shah (1493 – 1519)\textsuperscript{129}. There of course Satya Pir became only a helper like Kalika in making the Union of Vidya and Sundar. It was for that reason, Faezullah might be said to be the first poet of the Pir-ballad. However his ‘Gazi Vijay’ and the SatyaPir ballad’s manuscripts could not be obtained, only ‘Gorakkha Vijay’ had been procured. We know that the credit of writing of assumed/ feigned historical ballads belonged to the tradition of the Muslim poets. Faezullah was the pioneer of this line of tradition. While forming the story of the Pir-ballads the sign of an admixed structure of Dharma Mangal, Nath gatha or Nath ballads like ‘Gorakkha Vijay’, assumed / feigned historical, war centric love ballads like ‘Sonavan’ etc and especially that of fairy tale ballads had been particularly noticeable. As the Pir-ballads can be accepted as the living document of the conflict and synthesis of higher castes and the downtrodden lower castes and the Hindus and the Muslims in the Bengali society, likewise it can be said that the similar synthesis had been effectively working in the form and structure of this kind of Kaavya or the ballads.\textsuperscript{130}

The Pir ballads can be divided into two main parts – i) Assumed / feigned historical tales of greatness like SatyaPir, Manik Pir, Gazib, KaluPir, Banbibi et al, ii) Historical – Ismail gazi, Masandali, Shah Sufi sultan, Sultan Balkhi, Shaikh Farid, Mansur Hallaj, Pir Ekdil Shah, Pir Gora Chand – the story of the aforesaid

\textsuperscript{129} Bhattacharya, Ashutosh, Bangla Mangal Kavyer Itihas, Kolkata, 1958, p.663.
\textsuperscript{130} Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.193.
dervishes have been narrated therein. While analyzing the Pir ballads one can see that the achievement of one Pir easily matched with the tale of greatness of another Pir. For example it can be said Pir Gorachand declared war against Akanand Bakanand for their accepting human sacrifices. In the ‘Ray Mangal Kavya’ there were descriptions that Barkhan, Banbibi and Shah–Jangli (Banbibi’s Jahuranama) fought for the cause against the human sacrifices of Dakhin Ray – which had been brought into the tale of SatyaPir in the ‘Malancha pala’ or, the Malancha musical drama. In this way the tales of greatness of the Pirs having been filtered by the folk mind in both the assumed/feigned historical and historical kind of Pir ballads had given birth to a mixed and undivided Pir culture. So in the Pir-ballads the historicity of the private lives of the concerned Gazis or the dervishes was not the principal factor, rather the historicity of social perception born out of consciousness of conflict and synthesis of folk mind was the principal theme herein.  

Satya Pir

The ballads can be divided into the three parts:- Firstly along with the ritualistic tale of vows or Brata Katha there was the related writings. Secondly, folk story centric theme. Thirdly, the Muslim idea and environment centric theme.  

The vow-description centric writings of the first part known as ‘Panchali’ of Satya Natayan(panchali means a class of Bengali poems celebrating the glory of a deity) – were all composed by the Hindu poets. Along with it there were custom oriented tales for offering encouragement to observe the vows. By taking on interpolated source in the ‘Reba’ part of the Skandapuran (Puran – Hindu mythology), Satya Pir had been accepted in the name of Satyanarayan in the Hindu tradition. The fact

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131 Ibid, p.194
that the tale of vows (Brata Katha) of Satyanarayan was not there in the book printed in Bombay, whereas it was there in the books printed in Bengal, which proves that it had been interpolated in the Skandapuran and the reason for this interpolation was different.\textsuperscript{133} From the last half of the sixteenth century at the time of the disaster of the Chaitanya tradition and at the time of the assumed revivalism of the neo-Brahmanism, thinking about the intensity of the devotion to the SatyaPir, this had been interpolated in the Skandapuran. Besides that the reflection of the Hindu -Muslim co-existence and the thinking of synthesis that was found in the chain of ballads of Satya Pir, that did not exist in the vow (Brata) of Satyanarayan. Although both the society participate in the Satya Pir’s shimi, but the vow (Brata) of Satyanarayan belonged only to the Hindus. This kind of Panchali poets were Dwija Giridhar of the 17th century (composed in 1663 – 64), Bhairab Chandra Ghatak of the eighteenth century, (composed in 1700-01), Ghanaram Chakrabarty, Rameswar Bhattacharya, Bikal Chattopadhyay (his time of composition was in 1712), Ayodhya Narayan Roy, Bharat Chandra (his time of composition was in 1737) et al.\textsuperscript{134}

In the folk tales centric second wave, the Hindu poets had imagined the SatyaPir as the Khoda dressed as the fakir, that means as an incarnation (avatar) of the Khoda (for example poet Ballav or SriKabi Ballav’s Madan-Sundar er pala or the musical drama of Madansundar and Satyanarayan’s panchali by the poet Vidyapati. Again they have often imagined Ram dressed as Rahim (for example Rameswar Bhattacharya). And the Muslim poets often imagined Satya Pir as the fakir sent by the Khoda (Almighty) or as the Pir from the Meccaa (for example Lalmon’s punthi – Arif ) Punthi means a kind of Bengali unrefined book of tales containing Islamic traditions and legends. Again in the poetic verses (Kavya) of

\textsuperscript{133} Talib, Abu, Banga Kavye Islami Rennaissance, Islamic Foundation, Dhaka - 1984, p.206

\textsuperscript{134} Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.194
Shankar Acharya, Tahir Mahmud and Krishnahari Das, ‘He’ has been imagined as a human being. According to Shankar Acharya, he (Satya Pir) was a Kanin (virgin mother’s issue) son of the daughter of Ala Badshah, whereas in the ‘Baro Satya Pir O’ Satyabato Kanyar Punthi’ written by Tahir Mahmud and Krishnahari Das, he was the Kanin son (virgin mother’s issue) of Satyabati, daughter of the Barendra Brahmin king Maidanab (Maidulab). From the aforesaid accounts, Nagendranath Basu surmised the arrival of the tale of Satya Pir in the Alauddin Hossain Shah’s time and the synthetic thoughts of this tale was the reflection of his (i.e. Alauddin Hossain Shah’s) liberal mind.\textsuperscript{135} There was even a hearsay or rumour that the Satyapir was the daughter’s son of Alauddin Hossain Shah. We believe that the character of Satya Pir had been created by taking into account of a certain Muslim fakir or Pir possessing supernatural powers.\textsuperscript{136}

The second and third parts of the ballads were basically the same. In these two parts there were the predominance of the different musical dramas (Pala) or tales testifying the greatness of Satya Pir. Here Satya Pir played the role of a saviour. There the Satya Pir had been seen in playing various roles such as in the Garibullah’s Madan Kamdev’s Pala or the musical drama, against the homicide of the bewitching beauties in the state of Kaur or Kamrup (murder of the husband’s younger brother or devar Sundar by Sumati, wife of Madan and by Kumati, wife of Kamdev), in the Madan Sundar Pala of Ballav against the black magic and oppression of the deceptive witches, in the Shishu Pal Raja pala of Krishnahari Das against the king who was the devotee of the goddess Kali for saving the life of a boy, etc. Then there was the arrival of Satya Pir as a savior in the ‘Lalmon’s punthi of Arif, or, in the ‘Fansarar pala’ and ‘Sakhi Sonar punthi’ of Fakir Ram


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against the oppression of the ‘fansiara’ or the hangman and against the murder of Lalmon’s husband. In the Tahir Mahmud’s ‘Malanchar pala’ Satya Pir came forward as a mark of protest against his maternal grandfather Mahidanab who was inimical / yavanic religion, wicked and symbol of demonic power, for the abandonment of his daughter Sandhyabati, the mother of Satya Pir. Again in the ‘Kashikanta Rajar pala’ by rendering punishment against the misapplication of ‘Barnashram Pratha’ or the caste system, and in the ‘Sashi beshyar pala’ by bringing back an unchaste woman to good path, Satya Pir not only made arrangement for his own worship by her, but also arranged for her place of immortal asceticism as a worshipper in the society.137

According to Dr. Sa’adul Islam, considering all these aspects, Satya Pir had been meant to be a hero of the story of prevention of untruth and establishment of truth like any ‘Kamel Pir’ (‘Pir Barhaq’, Haq on truth) or the truthful Pir. It was not impossible to have been contained in the ‘Satya Pir pala’ the life sketches of any real life Pir or a number of such Pirs. Therefore, it would be reasonable to accept the story of Satya Pir as a metaphorical symbol of beautiful and ungraceful, truth and untruth. As in the stories of Satya Pir there was the identification of this kind of conflict between the higher classes and the lower classes, likewise this story in the ultimate analysis upheld the examples of victory of oppressed truth and above all one undivided consciousness of synthesis. The picture of conflict and synthesis can be obtained in the life of poet Kanka, in the evidence of ‘Purba Banger Gitika’, again when the foster father Garga wanted Kanka to be upgraded in the caste hierarchy the violent reaction of the orthodox Brahmanical society could be seen in the following -

137 Das, Girindranath, Bangla Pir Sahityer Katha, Subarna Rekha, Calcutta, 1998, the chapter on ‘Satya Pir’.
"Kanka is not only the son of a Chandal, but he has been imitated by a Muslim Pir, therefore the Hindus mostly address Kanka as a Muslim, if someone tears, then another burns ‘Satyer Panchali’, they have lost and degraded from their caste by taking home the ‘Punthi’ (or the unrefined book of Islamic traditions and legends) of the Muslims, then unitedly all together do the penance”.  

However, Garga and his countrymen were amazed by the poetic fame of Kanka which can be seen by the following verse—

"Kanka is no more the shepherd (that he was before), all call him as the poet Kanka, listening to that Garga admits that an amazing thing has happened. Hindus and Muslims all know the Satya Pir, appreciation has been acknowledged for the Panchali (by everyone) – he who worships Satya Pir, he reads Kanka’s Panchali, and sings the quality of Kanka everywhere in the country”. In the personal life story of the poet Kanka and in the story of Satya Pir by Tahir Mahmud, one can see that owing to their fascination for the Muslim dervishes, there was the incidence of ostracizing Sandhyabati, the mother of Satya Pir and Kanka respectively. Ultimately by the firm endeavour of Satya Pir that ostracism had been withdrawn and then on the basis of compromise there was the reacceptance of the aforesaid two untouchable persons (in the Hindu Society) having been touched by the Muslims. All these simultaneously placed the living documents of conflict and synthesis in the social history of Bengal. Now one can see the endeavour of synthesis from the following verse—

"Barring one Brahma, the existence of the two Brahmas are not true,
the master of all is one Niranjan Gossain,
the name of Niranjan is Bismillah

138 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit.p.196
Bishnu and Bismillah are not different persons”.
(Malanchar pala – Tahir Mahmud & Krishnahari Das).  

**Manik Pir**

Manik was the saint and greatman of pre-Islamic Iran (Manik < ‘Manichee’, Greek ‘Manikhaios’). He was acknowledged Pir of the Sufis, and a compassionate and ailment preventing greatman like Jesus.  

He had come down from the ‘batun’ or the secret other world to bring under control the ailments. He had arrived in this world as a Kanin son (virgin mother’s issue) of Dudhbibi. He had come from Mecca along with the companion Hafiz Ali to assert himself. His place of work was the Ghosh ‘palli’ or locality of the Ghosh’s belonging to the degraded classes. He was an ailment preventor especially the protector of the cows and in wide terms protector of the animals.

Gradually he had developed familiarity with the folk Shiva or the folk God Shiva. He used to get ‘payesh’ or sweet rice porridge/ pudding of ‘Nabanna’ or rice-harvesting festival during the winter and offerings from the new cow’s milk from the whole of Bengal. In the Manik Pir’s git (ballad) of Fakir Mohammed (18th century) he had been portrayed as a person who had helped to establish ‘Dukhya’ or Dukhia, son of the widow milk-women. He had removed the obstacles of giving Dukhya in marriage with a princess. Ultimately Dukhya had gained the kingdom of ‘baish lakkha’ (twenty two lakhs) parganas. In the Manik Pir’s Jahuranama composed by Jaidi or Jayraddi he had been seen as a kanin son( virgin mother’s son) of Dudhbibi. Whereas in the ‘Manik Pirer Kechcha’ written by Munshi Pijiraddin he had been seen as the Lalmanik and Ranjana Bibi’s son, Habib Shah’s

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139 Ibid, p.196
140 Sen, Sukumar, Bangla Sahiyer Itihas, Pratham Aprardha(1st part), Kolkata, 2nd edition, 1965
father’s foster son. Everywhere he had arrived as the patron of the species of the cows and the milkmen class. 141

**Gazi Pir**

In the tales containing ‘Gazi Punthi’ or ‘Kalu Gazi Champabati’ , there was an attempt to create historic environment. But there was a doubt regarding the proper identification of Gazi. In somebody’s opinion, he was the son of Shah Sikandar, the king of Birat Nagar, and the husband of Champabati, the daughter of Mukut Roy, the king of Dakshin Kingdom. He had been assisted by Khawaj Khijir & Gangadevi and he was of course the Allah’s Fakir. 142 Again in somebody’s opinion he was Gazi Ismail of Garh Mandaran or he was Barh Khan Gazi, son of Jafar Khan Gazi of Tribeni. Of course in the opinion of Abdul Gafur Siddiqui and Girindranath Das, he was Gorachand Pir Abbasuddin’s (14th – 15th century) disciple Hazrat Abdullah alias Sondal’s eldest son Barh Khan Gazi (15th – 16th century) whereas in the Ray Mongal ballad of Krishnahari Das, there was the tale of a fight of Barh Khan Gazi with Dakshin Ray, conjectured as a commander of Mukut Roy (1574 – 1660). Kamdev, son of Mukut Roy and the brother of Champabati, came to be known as Thakurbarh Saheb after embracing Islam.143 The tale of these historical personalities could be obtained from the ballads of Ray Mangal or Gazi Kalu Champatati. That the fight between Dakshin Ray and Gazi had occurred over the possession of the Bhati region or the region of downward direction( of the Sundarban area) of South Bengal, this hypotheses is not unreasonable. Gazi’s fight was that of a human conquest over the tiger God greedy of human flesh or the oppressor Dakshin Ray masked as a tiger. There was the tale

141 Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.197
142 Gafur, Abdul, Gazi Kalu Champabati, Macina Book depot, Calcutta, undated.

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of a fight against this man-eater tiger God and the consequent saving of life of the wretched son of a ‘maule’ or honey collector named ‘Dukhe’, which were the essence of the tale of Banbibi, found in the ‘Banbibibi’s Jahuranama’ as told in the epilogue of ‘Ray Mangal’ or ‘Gazir Gan’.\textsuperscript{144}

One can see again in the ballad of Ray Mangal that there was the tale of accepting human sacrifices in the self-identity of Dakshin Ray. In his remark to the woodcutter Ratai, his popularity can be seen in the following verse:

“I am Dakshin Ray, everybody sings about my virtue, all worship me in the ‘atharo bhatti’ or the region of eighteenth downward direction (of the Sundarban area) by sacrificing the son, worship me with precaution, then I shall keep alive the six brothers” (Krishnaram Das, 1684-85).

Dakshin Ray had fought with the Gazi at Khania. When the arbitration became impossible, then the Almighty had arrived by the act of assuring the form of idol of half SriKrishna half Paigambar and had prescribed mediation which can be observed in the following verse.

“Here Dakshin Ray took possession of all Bhati (or all the region of downward direction) (whereas) in Hijli there was the thana of kalu Ray(however) everywhere there was the existence of Saheb Pir, one should lower down his head in obeisance to him, nobody should prohibit/ forbid him”.

Here it can be observed that in this tale there was the reflection of the conflict of representative classes of both the societies of the Hindus and the Muslims and after the end of the conflict, the realistic ideal of co-existence had been kept. Here one can remember the tale of providing assistance of Barh Khan Gazi in Ghutiary Sharif, in keeping intact the zamindari or the feudal estate of

\textsuperscript{144} Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book – op.cit, p.197
Madan Ray, the zamindar or feudal landlord of Medan Malla Pargana. The closer picture of this conflict and co-existence can be observed in the ‘Gazir punthi’ (‘punthi’ means a kind of unrefined book combining Islamic traditions and legends). There one can see that from the very beginning the assistance of Ganga devi was in favour of someone called Gazi, Ganga Devi had sent the army of crocodiles against the tiger army of Gazi, but of course at the aggrieved entreaty of Dakshin Ray. Again if we look at the part of the story of Champabati’s tale, then one can see that the human interest had been roused here. Poets like Syed Halu Miaa, Abdul Gufur in the eighteenth century and Azehar Ali and Abdul Rahim et al in the nineteenth century composed the ballads of Gazi Khan and Champabati.

**Banbibi**

In the Banbibi’s tale more forward looking outlook can be found. Here Dakshin Ray in exchange of human sacrifice has said about gifting seven boats full of wax and honey to Dhana maule or honey collector. When Dharna decided about sacrificing his nephew Banbibi and his brother Sajangli (Shah-jangli= emperor/king of jungle/ forest) by listening to the prayer of Dokhe, had declared war against Dakshin Ray. First of all, there was the fight between Ray’s mother Narayani and Banbibi. Having seen defeated by Banbibi, Narayani entered into a friendship with Banbibi by addressing her as ‘Soi’ (women mate or companion). However, when Dakshin Ray again began war –march, then fight between Ray and Bibi broke out. When Gazi came to mediate at the imminent defeat of Ray, then Sajangli and Banbibi rebuked him. Now this time Banbibi made the impossible task possible. Dukhe, Ray and Gazi – eatable eats, eater and mediator – she has transformed all the above three into brothers embraced with

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145 Ibid, p. 198
each other. Ultimately, Gazi had given the newly discovered brother Dukhe the wealth of ‘Sat jari dhan’ and to Dakshin Ray the possession of wax and honey of the region known as ‘atharo ḍhati’. At the time of departure of Dukhe by giving order to marry the daughter of the uncle Dhana, Banbibi has given farewell to Dukhe with a very realistic ideal of peaceful co-existence. Therefore instead of conflict, the ideals of understanding, co-existence and fraternal feelings had been kept here too. The poets like Mohammad Khater, Mohammad Munshi, Boynuddin et al had composed the ballads like ‘Banbibir Jahuranama’. Generally the ballads and poetic verses like the ‘Gazi Mangal Kavyas’ had been mentioned as the social picture of conflict – identifications. But in practical purposes not the picture of conflicts, but the realistic ideal of understanding and co-existence had been portrayed here. 146

Bengali Pir ballads and the lessons of history

Certain salient features were remarkably noticeable in the Pir ballads which were as follows –

Firstly, in all the Pir-ballads and poetic verses the jehad or the crusade had been declared against the social and official or state sponsored injustices such as the human sacrifices, casteism, religious bigotry etc.

Secondly, always the untouchable/subaltern or the oppressed classes supported the aforesaid declaration of jehad of the Pirs.

Thirdly, while in the Mangal Kavyas or the auspicious poetic verses, for obtaining the worship of the high society the poets had taken recourse to the support of the persons belonging to the higher classes like the saintly merchants like Dhanapati or Chand Saudagar or, the princes like Lausen by inciting the fear psychosis among

them regarding the cruelty of the Gods & Godesses and establishing their greatness. But the subaltern or the oppressed classes were the medium for expression and establishment of greatness of the Pirs. As the symbol of the oppressed we get Dukhia of the Manik Pir Gatha(ballad) and Dukhe of the Banbibi’s tale(Kahini). By gaining the mind of the all sorrowful persons, the Pirs had done their Jahura(or the expression of the secret spiritual power). From this perspective the Pir ballads are much more expressive of mass consciousness.

Fourthly, above all the ideal of understanding and syntheses between the different kind of society and culture of the Hindus and the Muslims had been portrayed in powerful sketches in all the Pir ballads. Where there was meeting or union only for the sake of meeting or union, there that would have been pre-conceived and artificial. But the quest for union as a result of the conflict would have been natural and pleasant. Therefore the value of the fate of the Pir-ballads is not much less from the aesthetic point of view.147

The syncretistic tradition formulated by the Bengali Muslim Cultural mediators presented a significant contrast with the other tradition obtained at the folk level of the Bengali Muslim Society. The former undoubtedly catered for the folk, as this literature was primarily aimed at them, while it originated not with the folk but with the cultural mediators of the higher social strata. The latter, on the other hand, emerged clearly from the folk level itself. In addition to authorship, there were two more vital differences between these literary traditions. A mere casual glance reveals a qualitative difference in literary refinement, style, diction, and cognitive level. The literary sophistication of the mediators stands out in high relief against the simple, coarse, and rustic character of the folk literature. The other significant point of difference relates to the contents of these literatures. The

147 Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, pp.199-200
object of both was the ultimate vindication, refurbishing and diffusion of Islam as they interpreted it. But the folk writers, unlike the mediators, had very little concern with Islamic theology, liturgy, mysticism, ontology, cosmology, and even with the historical – mythical characters of great Islamic tradition. The Muslim folk literature was almost exclusively focused on the most popular object of their veneration and supplication during the trials and tribulations of their everyday life, namely Pir. The Pirism or the cult and the pantheon of Pir, as evolved at the Bengali folk level, extended beyond the usual theoretical notions of veneration or even worship of mystic guides, saints or holy men. It embraced, on one hand, disparate Muslims who received popular canonization as Pir in recognition of their secular and religious roles in diffusing Islam in the hand and, on the other, a vast motley of Pirified old popular religious objects of worship, veneration, and supplication. The massive dispersion, ubiquity, popularity and heterogeneity of Pirs in Bengal point to the seminal importance of the Pir phenomenon in the study of Islamization in Bengal as providing a meaningful frame of reference for and a point of interaction between exogeneous Islam and indigenous converts.

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148 See the 3rd para of the 1st chapter for the mediators of the great tradition – such as teachers, reciters, ritual leaders of one kind or another which are concerned with the cultivation and inculcation of the great tradition form the social structure of this tradition. There is however a constant interaction between the great traditions and little traditions.