USE OF THESES

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ABSTRACT

A proselytising religion seeking expansion in an alien soil may adopt different lines of approach. A militant line trying to force itself on a culture group is likely to disrupt the cultural continuum and prove itself unsuccessful. Islam in Bengal did not choose this line. But for the first few centuries of the advent of political Islam in the land it remained indifferent to the mainstream of the local culture. In the meanwhile, the personal influence of the Muslim saints, a consuming belief in their miraculous powers and the ability of many Muslim adventurers to perform a role appropriate to the material and non-material needs of a particular area, had secured the adhesion of a large number of the local masses to Islam. Some elements of force could not have been totally absent in the situation. Whatever the underlying motives and pressures behind the conversion of the masses, that they were not attracted to the religion by its intrinsic merit was amply evident from the writings of the Muslims themselves, which make bitter lamentations about their total ignorance of the adopted faith. On the other hand, a sharp economic, social and cultural polarisation in the Muslim community of Bengal, comprising the immigrants on the one hand and the local converts on the other, reinforced the orthodox and traditional attitudes of isolation from and antipathy to the local culture. The result was obvious. The masses of the Muslims, ignorant of Arabic and Persian, were denied access to the traditions of their own religion and continued to draw religious and cultural sustenance from the pre-existing indigenous sources. The danger inherent in the situation became evident especially to a section of religious leaders, who in their capacity as religious guides (Pir) with considerable following among the masses, had understandable reasons to feel concerned about it. This new attitude was
reflected in the writings of a new group, including those popular religious leaders, who defied the orthodox and conservative opposition in reducing religious matters to the 'vulgar Hindu language'. They did more than this. If the medium of religious and cultural communication was to be intelligible to the people, no less should have been their symbols and idioms. They accordingly exerted themselves in an interesting and difficult venture of presenting Islam to the Bengali people through the symbols known to them from the native religious and cultural traditions. Thus behind a syncretic facade, there lies an overt or covert design on the part of this new group of Muslim intelligentsia to popularise Islamic ideas and traditions among the masses of their co-religionists. What these authors of transformation attempted in their respective fields, outside the ken of orthodoxy and traditionalism, was largely facilitated by a combination of factors in the objective political, social and cultural situations of the country, such as the force of heterodoxy in the religious trend of Bengal, the political expediencies fostering under the Muslim rulers a liberal administration based on the recognition and participation of the indigenous elements, and finally, the impact of local conversion as well as the overwhelmingly rural character of the Muslim masses. (Chapters I-III).

The orthodox and traditional line of avoiding confrontation and seeking no compromise with the environmental forces, and also the liberal attempt to seek a rapport with the indigenous traditions with a view to subserving an ulterior object of popularising Islam, can easily be distinguished from the attitudes reflected in the folk traditions of the Bengali Muslims. Here the presence of the elements of indigenous traditions assumes a form that is as coarse as spontaneous and
unconscious. There is no effort to make one tradition serve the other; both form integral parts of a single tradition, whose spirit is possibly neither Muslim nor Hindu but something that is indigenous and may only be called folkish. (Chapter IV).

Another interesting trend is the direct pursuit of Hindu religious traditions and the direct recourse to Hindu divinities by the Bengali Muslims, which does not come under any of the preceding trends. (Chapter V).

Finally, the religious and social festivals, rites and observances as well as the beliefs and practices of the Bengali Muslims reveal a clear tendency to reduce the polarity between an alien system of symbols and practices and the indigenous ones. The traditional Islamic festivals and practices shed much of their alien character, the common domestic and social observances were permeated by local influences, while practices were innovated, where necessary, to suit the local needs, and often direct recourse was taken to indigenous festivals, rites and beliefs. (Chapter VI).
ISLAM IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF MEDIEVAL BENGAL

(With special reference to the Bengali sources)

Asim Roy

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

March 1970
The thesis is all my own work based on my research.

Canberra, 16 March, 1970.
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The present study grew out of an inquiry into the nature of Islam in medieval Bengal in its historical perspective. This has led us to discern some dissimilar patterns thrown up in the process of interaction between the forces of Islam and the indigenous ones. The impact has left its mark on either side. Our study is, however, confined to the one — the response of Islam to the demands of its environmental forces in Bengal, and the varied ramifications of the response stemming from the social and cultural divergences in the Muslim community of the land.

It possibly needs no mention that Bengal, used for our purpose, comprises what recent history would recognise as West Bengal and East Pakistan. In our reference to the different parts of the land, we have attempted to eliminate the scope of possible confusion by using small initials, such as west Bengal, and east Bengal. No greater need may be felt to emphasize that the inconstant political or administrative connotations of Bengal in our period is rather inconsequential for a study of this nature. No attempt has therefore been made to define its changing political configurations in course of our period. A more important question relates, however, to the regional identity of the land in our period. It is vain to search in ancient or even medieval Bengal for a distinct regional identity of the land in the conceptual framework of material and non-material cultures. The unity and identity of India as a whole and the Indian 'societies' in particular, despite obvious and much too well-known differences and diversities, tends to elude one's vision unless one is able to see that during most of her history this has been 'a cultural rather than a social or political unity'. (Bottomore, T.B.: *Sociology*, 126). We have made
no special effort to establish this unity underlying the Bengal phenomena; but one cannot possibly fail to see the contour of its pervasive image, as reflected in the various facets of our problem under study, and especially in the more meaningful world of thought of the Bengali Muslims.

A few explanatory words may seem necessary for the use of the term 'medieval' in the title of the thesis. We have found it well-nigh impossible to confine our problem to a span of time set by two particular years. This has led us to adopt a conventional term, attributed with not so conventional connotations. The term, understood and accepted in its spirit rather than in its formal chronological sense, acquires greater force and meaning for our purpose. Viewed from this angle, medievalism is more of an outlook and attitude conditioned by a situation, which is contrasted with modernity subjected to a radically different set of circumstances. This explains the persistence of medieval ideas in the chronological framework of modern times—a fact fully brought out from our sources on the folk-beliefs and practices well within the fold of modernism in the context of time. On the other extremity, we have less cogent ground to assign a specific date as the point of departure for our study. Muḥammad Bakhtyar Khaljī's surprise of Nadia as the starting point of the religious, social and cultural history of the Bengali Muslims is far from being a stimulating idea. We know indeed very little of how and when Islam spread its influence in Bengal so as to build up a substantial Muslim community. The most significant development concerning Islam that we are able to trace in its chronological framework involves vitally the masses of its votaries. This is the assertion around the sixteenth century of a new approach and outlook, opposed to the traditional, as represented in the writings of a group of Bengali Muslim writers, many of whom were religious leaders (Pīr) in relation to the masses of the people. Until then the
religious leadership may be taken to have represented an uniform pattern of orthodox traditionalism.

The work is primarily based on the Muslim Bengali literature in manuscripts held by the Dacca University Library. I cannot regret more that I was denied, from the academic point of view, of the direct access to this rich store of literature, and personally, a precious occasion to reinforce my rapport with the unforgettable place of my birth and childhood, consequent upon my application for visa being turned down by the Government of Pakistan. I am grateful to the Dacca University Library as well as the Australian National University and in particular to Professor A.L. Basham for exercising his personal influence in the matter of making a large number of the important manuscripts in microfilm available for the study. But all this resulted in a serious loss of valuable time, set within the limit of three years of scholarship (the microfilms reached my hands after more than two years of my scholarship had elapsed). My thanks are due to the University for its appreciation of my difficulty by giving me an extension of the requisite time without scholarship.

The reading of old manuscripts, a task extremely complex and exacting by itself, is rendered further difficult on the one hand by the technical inadequacies in the process of microfilming and on the other by incredible confusions and illegible handwritings of a number of scribes. The most formidable impediment besetting the task relates, however, to the lack of systematisation of this vast collection made by a solitary figure, dedicated to his mission, Munshi A. Karim. The loose descriptive notes prepared by the collector himself form the basis of the descriptive catalogue in Bengali (Puthi-pariciti), edited by A. Sharif and published by the Bengali Department of the Dacca University (1958).
which was followed by its English version (*A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts*), edited by S.S. Husain and published by the Asiatic Society of Pakistan (1960). On the other hand, E. Haq has attempted a history of Muslim Bengali literature (*Muslim Bānglā Sāhitya*, 1955), also its English version, *Muslim Bengali Literature* (1957), on the basis of these works, but has really added to the list of the descriptive notes on them. This brings us to the heart of the problem. Barring a few works edited and published from time to time, the overwhelmingly large number of these manuscripts still await the kindling touch of a scholar's spade. The entire collection demand at the first instance a thorough examination with a view to eliminating all confusions and lapses that still surround the cataloguing of these works in respect of their dates, places of composition, and even authorship. The next important step should seem to lie in the direction of making careful editions of at least the most important ones of such works. This is an absolute pre-condition for making any scientific use of this rich wealth of historical materials. The present study, despite its serious limitations in time and opportunity in the handling of such complex materials, may be taken as a measure of their importance in the reconstruction of the history of medieval Bengal. We are not permitted by our time to go into these important organizational questions relating to this literature. The rather limited time was consumed in the search of wood in the forest of literature. And yet our task has taken us to the various facets of the problem, that has enabled us to form some notions about their dimensions. In many instances, the folios are widely disarranged, and in microfilms we are left with no choice to arrange them in order and make a meaningful study. Very often the pagination is lacking or faded out of recognition. This is why reference in the thesis is often not to the folio no. of the manuscript, but to its position in the microfilm, indicated by the abbreviated suffix, mc, added to the folio number. But more serious
problems have been confronted in the accepted cataloguing and attributions of some of the manuscripts, arising possibly out of a lack of adequate examination of the ms. concerned. A typical of such instances involves the works of Nūr ud-Dīn. To him are attributed four works - Daqāiq or Daqāiq al-Ḥaqāiq, Mūsār Suwāl, Qiyāmat Nāma or Rahāt ul-Qalāb, and Hitopadesā or Burhān ul-ʾĀrifīn. (MBS, 287). On close examination, several lapses are detected in these attributions. First, the title Daqāiq or Daqāiq al-Ḥaqāiq, and more important still, the contention that the work is a translation of Kanz ud-Daqaįq by Imām Ḥafīz ud-Dīn Abūʾl Barkat ʾAbdullāh (MBS, 288) are unwarranted. The Ms. consulted by us (DMs 387:sl.202) as well as some others cited in DCBM, put Daykāt, which comes closer to Dīqqat than Daqāiq, not to say Daqāiq ul-Ḥaqāiq. In the ms. the title Hitopadesa is also hinted (fol.6). The author has nowhere mentioned Kanz ud-Daqaįq, and instead refers to Burhān ul-ʾĀrifīn as his source (fol.6). This brings us to the second serious confusion of listing Hitopadesa or Burhān ul-ʾĀrifīn as a separate work. We consider it identical with Daykāt, based on Burhān ul-ʾĀrifīn. The extract, quoted by Haq (MBS,289), connecting Hitopadesa with Burhān ul-ʾĀrifīn, and showing the former as a separate work from Daykāt (MBS, 289) is, in fact, a part of Daykāt (fol.6). Again, Haq has accepted Mujammil’s Nīti-śastra-vārtā and Saʾd Nāma as two different works (MBS, 65), despite the contrary opinion expressed by Munshi A. Karim (Puthi-pariciti, 267) and A. Sharif, who has subsequently edited the text (Nīti-śastra vārtā, 1965). The comparison of these two manuscripts (DMs 214:sl.237 and DMs 195:sl.119) in microfilm leaves us in no doubt about the total identity of these two works. ʿAlī Rājāʾ is credited by all with the composition of Agama and Jhāna-sāgara. The latter has been edited by Munshi A. Karim and published by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (DCBM,
surprisingly enough, mentions A. Sharif as the editor of the text, pp. 9, 147). Munshi Karim accepts them, however, as two parts of a single work (Puthi-pariciti, 11). Haq shares the same view (MBS, 279). We do not see any special reason to treat them even in separate parts. Apart from the perfect thematic unity, the name Agama is clearly repeated in the colophon of what is taken for Jnana-sagara. According to Karim, the Dacca Ms. (146:sl.9) comprises both these works, Agama extending upto folio 7, while the rest constitutes the Jnana-sagara. But in fol. 129 we read: 'Agam pāncālī rachi Ali Raj bhañe'. Again the fol. 203 says: 'Hīna Ali Rājā bhañe Agam kathān'. The same possibly applies to Saiyid Sultan’s Nabī-vaṃśa and Shab-i Mi'rāj, which do not seem to be separate works. The latter appears to be the continuation of his work Nabī-vaṃśa. In Nabī-vaṃśa Sultan has dealt with all the Prophets preceding Muḥammad, and continued his study on Muḥammad in what is catalogued as Shab-i Mi'rāj. We do not find the name of Shab-i Mi'rāj in the colophon. Rather, the folio 259a (DMs 433:490) mention the name of Nabī-vaṃśa in the colophon. In folio 374a of Nabī-vaṃśa (DMs 656:sl.222), the scribe mentions to have completed the first half of the work called Nabī-vaṃśa. To Shaikh Cand are ascribed Tālib Nama and Hara-Gaurī Samvāda (DCBM, 193-6, 619; MBS,251). On close examination of our Ms. of Tālib Nama (DMs 694:sl.171) and Hara-Gaurī Samvāda (DMs 559: sl.556) we find them to be a single work in every detail, except that for an Islamic name or term, such as Adam, lauhq, qalam etc. occurring in Tālib Nama, we have Hindu names or terms, such as Mahadeva, Gaurī, aṣṭa-siddhā etc. in Hara-Gaurī Samvāda. There is every reason to consider one of these two works as spurious.

But by far the weakest link in the chain should seem to relate to the precise dating of a number of important manuscripts. No other field connected with this literature
needs greater or more scientific investigation. The task is as complex as exacting and requires considerable time and application. Haq has attempted to break the virgin soil. Although we have often cited him as being the only ready reference, his achievement has, in many instances, remained suspect in our eyes. He has claimed for Shah Muhammad Šaghîr the distinction of being the earliest Bengali Muslim poet, on a very slender basis (MBS, 56). He cites from a manuscript of Šaghîr's Yusuf-Zulaikha in his possession, an extract, which is not found in the Ms. we have consulted (DMs125:sl.12), and points to a reference to a king (narapati) 'Gyach', who has had Šaghîr under his employ. Haq identifies him with Ghyaš ud-Din Āqam Shâh (1389-1410) on the ground that there is suggestion in the said extract about the ruler having dispossessed his father from the throne of 'Baṅgâl' and 'Gauḍîyâ'. Aside from the fact that the reading and interpretation of the key lines in the extract are rather abrupt and vague, there are other things in the work which go against this fixation of time, carrying it to a period nearly a century earlier than Mālādhara-vasu's Śrīkrṣṇa-vijaya, the earliest work in the whole range of Bengali literature that can be assigned to a definite date (HBL, 69). The language of Šaghîr is no more archaic than many other works of the sixteenth century and at least far less archaic than that of Mālādhara. According to D.C. Sen (Bāṅga Sāhitye Musalmaner Abadān, 69), Šaghîr's work bears perceptible influence of the Arakani Bengali literature which flourished only in the seventeenth century. Again, Šaghîr uses Urduised Bengali like 'nikalila' (came out) and Hindu-Urdu words like 'bāṭ' (talk) (fol. 38) - a fashion that was singularly absent even in the Bengali literature of the sixteenth century. Finally, Šaghîr's composition is interspersed with couplets in the pure Vaiṣṇava style with specific reference to the sportive
enjoyments of Zulaikha and her friends in Vṛḍḍāvana - a fact irreconcilable with Haq's position. In any case, if Saiyid Sulṭān's reference (Nabi-vamśa, DMs656:sl.222, fol. 375a) to the already existing 'puthi' applies to Ṣagḥīr, his work cannot be later than early seventeenth century. This is only to impress the enormity of the task lying ahead in the matter of systematisation of this literary collection. The broad fact remains that quite a few Muslim writers appeared since the sixteenth century in the horizon of the Bengali literature, often with a message addressed to the teeming numbers of their co-believers, who found themselves denied of the heritage of their own religion, contained and hermetically sealed in the casket of Arabic and Persian literature.

Besides the Dacca manuscripts we have made valuable use of a few other manuscripts, which I was able to trace among the motley collections of Mr. K.Datta, a local antiquarian of Jaynagar-Majilpur in 24-Parganas, West Bengal. I take this opportunity to acknowledge my gratitude to him. Illustrative of the folk Muslim traditions, these manuscripts have been referred to in our work as JMs (Jaynagar Manuscript).

The work has taken me to various places and people. The idea of the work was mooted at Calcutta, where it started with Professor Sukumar Ray of the Calcutta University. The next stage in the work found me at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, under the joint supervision of Professor A.L. Basham and Professor Riazul Islam of the University of Karachi, on a visiting assignment there at the time. The third and final stage in the work brought me to The Australian National University, Canberra, where the study was continued and completed under the joint supervision of Professor A.L. Basham and Dr. S.A.A. Rizvi of the Department
of Asian Civilizations. I should like to express my indebtedness to all of them, who have been so directly associated with my work. Aside from them, the work has led me to many other people who have rendered me considerable help in some form or another and laid me under obligation. It is my pleasant duty to tender my gratitude to them, one and all: Professor Sukumar Sen and Professor Ashutosh Bhattacharyya of the Calcutta University; Professor T.K. Ray Choudhury of the Delhi School of Economics; Professor T.W. Clark, Professor Führer von Haimendorf, Dr. P. Hardy and Dr. T.P. Mukherji of London University; Mr. Sisir Gupta and my colleagues in the Australian National University, Mr. J.N. Tiwari in particular; Professor Ravinder Kumar of the University of New South Wales; and Mr. Sibnarayan Ray of the University of Melbourne.

My thanks are also due to the officials of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and the National Library, Calcutta; the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, British Museum and the India Office Library, London; the Menzies Library, the School of General Studies Library and the National Library, Canberra.

Finally, I owe a word of thanks to the Australian National University for granting me the scholarship and financing for the microfilms from Dacca.
The bibliography is arranged authorwise mostly. Authors of the secondary works for our purpose are listed with surnames first. Reference to a Dacca Manuscript (DMS) contains the Ms. number first followed by the serial (sl.) number in the Dacca University Library Catalogue. The Mss. are listed by their sl. nos. in DCRM and Puthi-pariciti.

The transliterations in our study have offered a challenge that is only partially confronted by one working with Bengali manuscript materials. It is partially, because, to the peculiar problems connected with the transliteration of Bengali in general, are added in this case the greater complexities in the transliteration of a score of words of Perso-Arabic origin, written in Bengali as those were pronounced by the people. These are often further corrupted by the personal limitations of the scribes. We have not been able to evolve a system, with reference to these Perso-Arabic terms, even to our own satisfaction. We have chosen to transliterate all Perso-Arabic words, including names of persons and books, after Steingass. The exceptions that we have made in this respect are where we have intended to reproduce the original, in which case we have adopted the system of transliteration consistent with the writing of Bengali. In many cases, for the sake of clarity the correct or regular forms are put side by side. Besides, for the names of modern authors, both Perso-Arabic and Bengali, no diacritics are used. Similarly, the names of places and rivers are put in their generally accepted forms, unless otherwise intended.

As regards Bengali words we have tried to be consistent with the largely accepted transliteration system of the Sanskritic languages. Here the peculiarity in Bengali speech as well as pronunciation in respect to the Sanskrit bilabial or labiodental spirant 'v' and the bilabial stop
'b', 'v' occurring intervocally and as the second member of Sanskrit consonant cluster, is quite well-known to a student in the field. We have followed the Sanskrit system excepting where we have intended to reproduce the original. The requirements of rhyme-endings and metres in the versified compositions demand a departure from the general Sanskrit line. Even in this regard certain variations may be noted. 'v' has been preferred to 'b' where it is not stressed in the pronunciation. The difference may be illustrated with two typical words 'sarba' and 'dhvani'. The pronunciation of 'y' and 'j' presents similar difficulties in Bengali in which the distinction made in writing is not followed up in speech. The MSS. have often carried this confusion into writing. These often contain such staggering mistakes in spellings that a phonetic approach is most effective in drawing their contents.

The systems of transliteration used are as follows:

a. For Bengali letters  b. For Perso-Arabic letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ও</td>
<td>a</td>
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<td>ও</td>
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<td>v</td>
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<tr>
<td>ি</td>
<td>w</td>
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<tr>
<td>ি</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ি</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Short vowels: a, i, u

Long vowels: ä, í, ü

Diphthongs: au, ay
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADG</td>
<td>Assam District Gazetteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASB</td>
<td>Asiatic Society of Bengal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av</td>
<td>Ambiyā'-vānī of Hayāt Mahmūd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDG</td>
<td>Bengal District Gazetteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSI</td>
<td>Bāṅgāla Sāhityer Itiḥās, by Sen, Sukumar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCBM</td>
<td>A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in the Dacca University Library, edited, Husain, S.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGEBA</td>
<td>District Gazetteers of Eastern Bengal and Assam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHB I</td>
<td>History of Bengal, vol. I, edited, Majumdar, R.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHB II</td>
<td>-----, vol. II, edited, Sarkar, J.N.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMs</td>
<td>The Bengali Manuscripts in the Dacca University Library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERE</td>
<td>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, edited, Hastings, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Encyclopaedia of Islam, edited, Houtsma, M.T. &amp; others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBL</td>
<td>History of Bengali Literature, by Sen, Sukumar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBLL</td>
<td>History of Bengali Language and Literature, by Sen, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hv</td>
<td>Hitajñāna-vānī of Hayāt Mahmūd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JASB</td>
<td>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JASP</td>
<td>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca.</td>
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<td>JMs</td>
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<td>JPHS</td>
<td>Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi.</td>
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<td>JRASB</td>
<td>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.</td>
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<td>MBS</td>
<td>Muslim Bāṅgāla Sāhitya, by Haq, Enamul.</td>
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<td>MyBB</td>
<td>Madhya-yuger Bāṅgāla o Bāṅgālī, by Sen, Sukumar.</td>
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<td>Nv</td>
<td>Nabā'-vāmśa of Sayid Sultān.</td>
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<td>Pbg</td>
<td>Purba-bāṅga-śītikā, edited, Sen, D.C.</td>
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<td>ShM</td>
<td>Shab-ī Mi'raj of Saiyid Sultān.</td>
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<td>SPP</td>
<td>Sāhitya Pariśad Patrikā, journal of the Bāṅgīya Sāhitya Pariśad, Calcutta.</td>
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<td>VMs</td>
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CHAPTER I

THE BENGAL PHENOMENA

A religion, on close analysis, often appears rather to conceal differences than to offer unity in its community. Even in the body of a well-defined religion, the form and content of the religious consciousness assume striking variations. The nature of response to religious calls tends to vary with the psychic development of the believer, and his social and cultural allegiance. The lines of a religious development are largely conditioned by the nature of the dichotomy in the cultural complex of a community. This is underlined in the difference between what is often inconclusively defined as the 'doctrinal' religion and its 'popular' or 'living' ramifications.1

1'It has been found in countries where there are two distinct classes, the one intellectual and learned, the other illiterate and ignorant that the common religion which they profess has two sides, the one higher and the other lower, the one more or less esoteric and the other popular'. (O'Malley, L.S.S.: Popular Hinduism, 17).

'There have always been two distinct strata of society in India, the one higher and the other lower; the first small in number, but in possession of highly developed religions, social ideas and institutions; the second comprising the great mass of the people who occupy a humbler rung on the cultural ladder. The first provides the intellectual and aristocratic and the second the folk element in India's culture. These two in their interactions have supplied two strands of the pattern....' (Tarachand: Influence of Islam on Indian Culture, Introduction, i).

'As in Europe beneath a superficial layer of Christianity a faith in magic and witchcraft, in ghosts (continued p.2)
Islam is no exception to this. Contrary to the general notion, Islamic society, like any other religious community has never been a monolithic structure, and the idea of world-Islam as a uniform pattern of cultural and societal development is grossly inadequate and superficial. Its simplicity of dogma, unqualified monotheism, egalitarian principles, well-defined scriptures, traditions and decisions of jurists present the outward characteristics of a well-organised system, while there are, in fact, throughout the world, great differences of dogma, ritual and social practices. Regional variations apart, the social and cultural divergences in the Muslim community in a given region are often no less meaningful. It is a common presumption that Islam is the simplest creed. So far as the doctrine is concerned, Islam having reduced it to the existence of no god but Allāh and recognition of Muhammad as the Prophet

1 (continued from p.1) and goblins has always survived and even flourished among the weak and ignorant, so it has been and so it is in the East. Brahmanism, Buddhism, Islam may come and go, but the belief in magic and demons remains unshaken through them all...With the common herd, who compose the great bulk of every people, the new religion is accepted only in outward show, because it is impressed upon them by their natural leaders whom they cannot choose but follow. They yield a dull assent to it with their lips but in their heart they never really abandon their old superstitions; in these they cherish a faith such as they cannot repose in the creed which they nominally profess; and to these, in the trials and emergencies of life, they have recourse as to infallible remedies, when the promises of the higher faith have failed them, as indeed such promises are apt to do'. (Frazer, J.: The Golden Bough, VI, The Scapegoat, 89-90).
of Allāh, has indeed offered a minimum faith. But the very simple proclamation of the absolute and indivisible character of the Godhead demands of the believer what belongs decisively to the most advanced stage in the human quest for the Divine. It is hardly surprising that an absolutely monotheistic religion like Islam should become distinctly modified in response to the popular yearning for something less remote, less abstract and less impersonal than Allāh. Failure to identify the different levels of culture in a religious community tends to breed either a naive complacency about a superficial 'unity', or a misleading notion of 'incomplete conversion' and 'degeneration'.

The believers in 'unity' and the protagonists of 'degeneration' converge, however, on common ground, having

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1 Tisdall, Wellhausen, Goldziher, Robertson-Smith and Westermarck have noted down the 'pagan' elements that persist in the Muslim faith. Zwemer opines, 'Wherever Islam went it introduced old or adopted new superstitions. The result has been that as the background of the whole ritual and even in the creed of popular Islam Animism has conquered'. (Zwemer, S.M.: The Influence of Animism on Islam, vii). With reference to the 'primitive religions', he says that Islam 'stooped to conquer them, but fell in stooping'. Ibid. In the words of Gottfried Simon, 'Among the Animist peoples Islam is more and more entangled in the meshes of Animism. The conqueror is, in reality, the conquered. Islam sees the most precious article of its creed, the belief in God, and the most important of its religious acts, the profession of belief, dragged in the mire of Animistic thought....Instead of Islam raising the people, it is itself degraded'. (The Progress and Arrest of Islam in Sumatra, 157-8).
shown equal unconcern to the social and cultural realities of a given situation and the divergent modes of response from the different cultural strata in the same community to the impact of Islam. For what appears to be a product of 'incomplete conversion' or 'degeneration' viewed through the prism of a particular cultural stratum merely typifies one of the varying patterns of response to the religious call on a different cultural level shaped by its own demand and need. This is what has imparted to 'world' as well as 'regional' Islam, underneath a veneer of 'unity', myriads of shape and colour, each meaningful in the background of its own cultural setting. The questions stemming from the problem of studying religion in the cultural setting are the ones involved in an analysis of the development of Islam in medieval Bengal.

Islam proved itself a significant force in the history of Bengal. By virtue of the sheer numerical strength of its followers Islam constituted a determining factor in the land. By the end of the nineteenth century the Muslim population in Bengal was recorded as about twenty-six million - about one-third of the total population. Distributed regionally, the number was more meaningful. In east Bengal, two-thirds of the inhabitants, and in north Bengal nearly three-fifths, were votaries of the faith. More than the numbers (or what

1 Gait, E.A., Report on Bengal, Census of India (1901), VI, i, 151.
2 Ibid. 156. Of individual districts, Bagura with 82 per cent had the greatest proportion of Muslim population; then followed Rajshahi with 78, Pabna with 75, and Mymensingh and Chittagong with 71 per cent. (Ibid)
may as well be vitally connected with the numerical success) the interesting features of Islam in Bengal were its forms and contents, especially in its medieval setting. Those forms arising out of the confrontation between Islam and the local forces were dictated and sustained by the varying patterns of social and cultural allegiance of the believers. The observers of the Bengal phenomena present a consensus of opinion regarding the peculiarities in the profession and practice of Islam in the land underlining an almost total denial of emphasis on the formal and doctrinal aspects of the faith. Some have also attempted to 'explain' this trend in Bengal with reference to the theory of the 'half-converts' or 'incomplete conversion' and 'degeneration'. The merit of

1 'It would...be impossible for the Arab to connect the corrupt Hinduized rites he witnesses in Bengal with those celebrated at Mecca, or to discern in the veneration of Pirys any relation to the orthodox faith'. (Wise, J.: Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal, 6) 
'Islam in its simple and austere aspect, does not appear to have characterized the life of the people [of Bengal] .....' (Tarafdar, M.R.: Husain Shahi Bengal, 163) Further, 'a careful study of the literature of the time shows that there prevailed a sort of folk Islam having hardly any connexion with the dogmas of religion'. (Ibid. 164).

2 'Incomplete conversion is...another channel through which un-Islamic practices passed into Indian Islam'. (Mallick, A.R.: British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 7) '...long years of association with a non-Muslim people who far out numbered them, cut off from the original home of Islam and living with half-converts from Hinduism, the Muslims had greatly deviated from the original faith and had become Indianized'. (Ibid. 26)

'...it would be preferable to say that these beliefs and usages are part of the original heritage of those people who have assimilated Islam only in an imperfect way'.

(continued p.6)
such explanations apart, the incontrovertible trend marked by a spirit of adjustment with and assimilation into the cultural milieu of the land demands close attention, if only because Islam in its Indian environment has been noted by others for its 'exclusiveness', 'insularity' and 'uncompromising character'. The process and nature of

2 (continued from p.5)
(Crooke, W., Introduction in Ja'far Sharīf: Qānūn-i Islām). 'Most of the Muslim communities who appear to have been only partly converted must have changed their religion because of belief in the miraculous powers of particular saints'. (Mujeeb, M.: The Indian Muslims, 22)

1 Spear considers that 'the principle of repulsion has been more obviously at work than the principle of attraction' in the matter of interaction between Islam and Hinduism in India. (Spear, P.: India, Pakistan and the West, 88).

Basham points out the possibility for different schools of Hinduism 'to hold diametrically opposed doctrines without serious antagonism', and adds, 'Islam, on the other hand, cannot adapt or compromise. The absolute unity of God, the absolute wickedness of iconolatry, are there in black and white in the Qurān, and there is no gainsaying them'. (Basham, A.L.: The Indian Sub-Continent in Historical Perspective, 14).

Referring to the same question, Aziz Ahmad opines: 'The divisive forces have proved much more dynamic than the cohesive ones'. (Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment, 73). 'Islam in India continued to retain throughout the centuries, despite secondary Indian environmental and ethnic influences, its original foreign character'. (Ibid. 74).

Sarkar goes to the extent of saying that the Indian Muslim felt on the whole that 'he was in India, but not of it'. (Sarkar, J.N.: A History of Aurangzeb, V, 487-8).

In the words of Majumdar, 'the Hindus combined catholicity in religious outlook with bigotry in social ethics, while the Muslims displayed an equal bigotry in religious ideas with catholicity in social behaviour'. (Majumdar, R.C.: The Delhi Sultanate, VI, in History and Culture of the Indian People, 616-7).
this transformation of Islam in its Bengali environment make a significant study. The 'why' of this transformation is as complex as the 'how' of it is varied. The actual working out of this process of change is more evident in the pages of the vast mass of medieval Bengali literature, contributed by the Bengali Muslims, than are the forces behind this change. It is commonplace to read in them the impact of the predominantly Hindu environment, but this explanation seems hardly adequate and sounds more descriptive than explanatory. This is so, because the process of mutation on close analysis does not appear to be a simple one of cultural interactions. Adjustments were made at different social and cultural levels of the believers propelled by different motivations. While at the level of the liberal intelligentsia the process of adjustment assumed a conscious, purposive, calculated and rational form, the attempts at the level of unsophisticated masses were characterized by an air of spontaneity, naivety and irrationality. Even the degree of adjustments never appeared to be the same. In certain cases the quest for regional identity could never move beyond a point, while we observe at the same time some forceful trend towards total acceptance of local religious, social and cultural traditions and values.¹

The movement towards adaptation with, and understanding of the local phenomena could not have proceeded unopposed. The task was not accomplished

¹ We propose to trace, analyse and illustrate the different trends in adjustment in the course of the following chapters.
without provocation to the elements of orthodoxy\(^1\) and generating tension and stress in the process. The process of change and adjustment was spearheaded by a new group of Bengali Muslim intelligentsia flourishing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They convinced themselves of the practical and urgent need for a new approach to finding Islam a peaceful, quiet and natural home in the cultural life of medieval Bengal, and decided to break away from the orthodox commitment to unchanging tradition. It is but natural and expected that the tensions arising out of the confrontation between this new group and the old bastion of conservatism and orthodoxy should be reflected in the vast corpus of Bengali literature contributed by the former. It is mainly from their writings as well as other stray incidents in the social and political life of medieval Bengal that we become aware of the presence of tensions in the Muslim society. The existence of orthodox elements and forces in the Muslim society was however quite evident. Literary and epigraphic evidence points to the existence of a pattern of religious outlook and life strictly in conformity with the \(\text{shari'at}\), the code of Muslim life comprehending beliefs, rituals, practices, public and personal law, and stretched even to include dress, personal appearance and rules of behaviour in social intercourse.\(^2\)

\(^1\) 'Orthodoxy' in religious consciousness has been taken here in general terms for the principle and system of maintaining uniformity in belief and practice by discouraging deviation and demanding conformity.

\(^2\) Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, 524-9.
A. The Forces of Orthodoxy and Tradition

The ramifications of the orthodox mind assumed diverse forms. It was reflected in efforts to sustain the contour of the structure of doctrinal Islam. Such activities ranged from building mosques (masjid), constructing educational institutions (madrasa), attitudes of respect and patronage for the learned divine (‘ālim) to systematic inculcation of the virtues, norms and observances of Islam.

Construction of mosques in Bengal goes back as early as the conquest of Bengal by the army of Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī (1202-6). Having entrenched himself at Lakhnauti (Lakṣmaṇavatī), Muḥammad built several mosques.1 Sultān Ḥiyyāṣ ud-Dīn ‘Īwāz Khaljī (1213-27) is credited with building a number of congregational (jāmi‘) and other mosques.2 A large number of inscriptions scattered all over Bengal attest to the erection or reconstruction of mosques throughout the medieval period.3 The inscriptions further reveal that the mosques were built primarily at the instance of the sultāns or high officials, and occasionally by distinguished laymen. The inscriptions generally commence with the enumeration on the basis of

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1 Minhâj us-Sirâj: Tabaqāt-i Naṣīrî, 151.
2 Ibid., 161.
3 For inscriptions regarding mosques, Dani, A.H.: Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal. Inscription nos. 6, 12, 13, 16-19, 21-24, 29-34, 36, 37, 39, 41-48, 50-54, 57-64, 67-70, 73, 74, 76-80, 86, 91-96, 99, 105, 107, 109, 113-115, 117, 121, 124, 126, 128, 130, 133, 134, 141 and 142.
the good authority of the Qur'ān, or tradition of the Prophet (ḥadīṣ) or both, of the divine rewards in the world hereafter, for such meritorious acts. Inscriptional evidence speaks of the construction of a large number of congregational mosques,¹ which were meant to serve very well the purpose of fostering consciousness of the community (ummat).

The other factor in the sustenance of the structure of traditional Islam was the chain of madrasas established through public or private enterprise. A tradition of Islamic learning and education was set up in medieval Bengal. Lakhnauti, Pandua, Nagor, Mahisun, Satgaon, Mandaran, Sonargaon, Rangpur, Bagha and Chittagong contributed the most important Muslim centres of learning in the pre-Mughal period, and some of them maintained their tradition in the Mughul time also.

Gaur, the hub of political and cultural activities in early medieval Bengal contained several madrasas. Muhammad bin Bakhtyār Khaljī and his companions constructed some madrasas in the place.² Sultan Ghiyāš ud-Dīn 'Iwaz Khaljī also founded 'a college' in Gaur.³ In this city, in the vicinity of the village Umarpur, there is a spot popularly known as Darasbādī (the house of instruction or madrasa),⁴ and another, as the site of the

1 Dani, op. cit. Inscription nos. 5, 35, 49, 56, 71, 82, 84, 87, 90, 98, 112, 116, 120, 125, 127, 131, 132, 137, 138, 143, 144, and 146.
2 Minhāj, op. cit., 151.
3 Law, N.N.: Promotion of Learning in India during Muhammadan Rule, 106.
4 Ibid., 108.
Belbari madrasa. 1 Sultan 'Ala'ud-Din Husain Shah (1493-1519) established a big madrasa for advanced learning at Malda, close to Gaur. 2 Pandua was another important Muslim centre of learning associated with the names of two great Şūfis of the Chishti order (silsila), Shaikh 'Ala' ul-Haq (d.1398), 3 and his son Shaikh Nur Qutb 'Ālam. 4 Sonargaon, an important port-city in east Bengal, owed its fame as a centre of Islamic learning to the renowned scholar and theologian Maulānā Sharf ud-Dīn Abū Tawwāma in the last quarter of the thirteenth century A.D., and his celebrated pupil, the Şūfī-scholar Makhdūm ul-Mulk Sharf ud-Dīn Yahyā Manyārī. 5 The Satgaon-Tribeni area was important both as an entrepot of commerce, 6 and a centre of Islamic learning and culture. The religious and intellectual importance of this locality was heightened by the existence of two great madrasas, the one built ln 698 A.H./1298 by Qāzī al-Nāsir Muhammad, who by virtue of his polemical acumen was styled 'Qāzī, the tiger', 7 and the other by Zafar Khān in 713 A.H./1313, the madrasa being

3 'Abd ul-Haq Dehlavī: Akhbar ul-Akhyar, 143.
5 'Abd ul-Haq, ibid. 117 ff.
6 It dwindled in importance with the rise of Hugli in the latter part of the sixteenth century.
7 Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica, 1917-8, 13, plate II.
known as Dār ul-Khairāt (The House of Benevolence). A third madrasa is said to have been built in 907 A.H./1502, at the instance of Sultan 'Alā' ud-Dīn Husain Shāh for the 'teaching of the sciences of religion and for instruction in the principles which lead to certainty....' In the fourteenth century Nagor in Birbhum sprang to importance as a great seat of Muslim religious discipline, thanks to the efforts of the illustrious scholar, Qāzī Hamīd ud-Dīn Kunjnašīn. He maintained a religious seminary and enjoyed the distinction of educating Shaikh Nūr Quṭb 'Ālām and Sultan Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn A'ẓam Shāh in their early age.

The rise of Mangalkot in Burdwan as a seat of learning in the seventeenth century is associated with the name of Shaikh Hamīd Dānishmand, an inhabitant of the village and a direct disciple of the great saint of the Naqshbandī order, Mujaddid-i Alf-i Sānī Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī (1564-1625). A mosque near his dargah is attributed to emperor Shāh Jahān on the basis of an inscription of the year 1655 A.D. Bagha, in Rajshahi district, gained in importance on account of the hospice (khānqah) of Maulānā Shāh Daula, which in the course of time developed into a madrasa of great repute. 'Abd ul-Latīf, who visited the place in 1609 A.D., referred to its great preceptor Hawadhā Mīyān,

1. Ibid. 34; JASB, 1870, 284.
2. JASB, 1874, 303; also Khan, op. cit. 157-8.
and the lands around the village were said to have been granted to him for maintenance. ¹ In the time of Adam this madrasa was noted as a long-standing endowment with 42 villages of the locality. ² Apart from these, Chittagong, Dacca and Murshidabad were also renowned centres of Muslim disciplines. Coming down to the period of Company's rule in Bengal, British administrators' reports mention state-endowed institutions and various private institutions existing at the time in Chittagong. ³ Dacca, alias Jahangīrnagar from the time of Mughul subahdār Islām Khān (1608-13), who made it the capital of Bengal and led to its emergence as a mighty centre of cultural and intellectual activities, contained a number of madrasas. Islām Khān's son himself was educated in a madrasa. ⁴ Murshid Qulī Khān (1700-27), the founder of Murshidabad established a madrasa known as Kātrā madrasa, which included a guest house maintained by the public exchequer. ⁵ Besides these well-organised large madrasas, endowed by rulers and wealthy Muslims with land-grants for maintenance, smaller madrasas were also provided for, in

⁵ Karim, A.: Murshid Qulī Khān and His Times, 242.
the mosques and imāmbāras. The Education Report of 1882 observes: 'There was not a mosque or imāmbāra in which professors of Arabic and Persian were not maintained'.

Different from madrasa was a category of institution - maktab, meant for imparting basic and rudimentary knowledge of the religion, and primary education. Very often a maktab was attached to a mosque. A Bengali poet at the close of the sixteenth century refers to a maktab being 'attended by Muslim children' and 'taught by pious maulabīs'. According to a similar source towards the end of the fifteenth century, prayers (namāz) and ablutions (waṣū') were taught in maktabas.

Higher education in the madrasa consisted of both religious knowledge and secular sciences. A Muslim scholar of religious sciences was generally also conversant with the physical and natural sciences. Maulānā Sharf ud-Dīn Abū Tawwāma used to give lessons in religious, physical and natural sciences in his seminary at Sonargaon. Mīr 'Alā' ul-Mulk, who occupied a very exalted position at the court of Prince Shujā' (1639-60), was respected as an embodiment of the sciences and traditions, excelling others in theology, medicine and

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1 Mallick, op. cit. 149.
2 Mallick, op. cit. 149.
3 Mukundarāma: Candi-kāvya, 344.
4 Vipra-dāsa: Manasa-vijaya, 67.
5 Supra, 11.
Ghulām Husain Tabātabāī names a good number of scholars flourishing in the eighteenth century, who were proficient in Islamic theology, philosophy and law as well as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, chemistry and physics. Adam reported that the Arabic and Persian schools maintained courses of study of a very wide range, which included the study of numerous grammatical works, complete courses of rhetoric, logic, law and studies of the external observances and fundamental doctrines of Islam. The works of Euclid on geometry and Ptolemy on astronomy, in translation, together with treatises on natural philosophy and metaphysics were used in some schools.

It has to be admitted, however, that 'the educational system was primarily religious and there were glaring deficiencies'. Bernier, a pupil of the great French statesman and philosopher Colbert, was critical of the educational methods and arrangements in the Mughul empire, and found 'deficiencies in a system which was becoming stagnant'. The religious education on the science of commentary on the Qur'ān (tafsīr), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and traditions of the Prophet (hadīṣ), had become

1 'Abd ul-Ḥamīd Lahorī: Bādshāh Nāma, II, 755.
3 Adam, op. cit. Third Report (1838), 284.
5 Ibid.
standardised, if not stereotyped. Adam's Third Report furnishes the names of a few standard and conventional books on Islamic religious sciences, followed in the Persian and Arabic schools in Bengal, such as 1 Sharh-i Waqaia, Nurul Iman, Nurul Anwar, Sirajiya, Hidaya, Miscat ul-Misabih, Nam-i Haq, Gauhar-i Murad, Sharafiya and Dair. In most of these works were reflected the ideas and thoughts of the Hanafi school of thought (mazahib) quite consistent with the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Muslims in India as well as Bengal have been Hanafis. 2 Sultan 'Ala'ud-Din Husain Shah patronised one muhaddis (traditionist), Muhammad bin Yazdan Bakhsh, who transcribed the Sahih ul-Bukhari in three volumes in 911 A.H./1503 in the capital city of Ikdala in Bengal. 3 In the words of Mujeeb:

...orthodoxy in Muslim India came to mean taqlid of the Sunni Hanafi fiqh as presented by the central Asian scholars of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, the standard work being the Hidayah of Burhanuddin Abu'l Hasan 'Ali Marghinnani, written in the twelfth century. With rare exceptions, only scholars who had studied the Hanafi fiqh were appointed to the post of qadi or sadr, though they could, at the request of litigants, decide cases in accordance

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2 In Bengal the proportion of Sunnis to Shi'as was nearly eighty to one in 1881. (Bourdillon, J.A., Report, Census of Bengal, 1881, 81).
3 Catalogue of Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore, V, i, nos. 130-2.
with the fiqh of other schools. The Ḥanafī fiqh
was the core of the instruction given in all
educational institutions....The urge to study
the Qurʾān or the whole corpus of hadīq in order
to form an independent judgment was discouraged,
and scholars devoted their attention instead to
writing commentaries upon or preparing
adaptations of the recognized and prescribed
books. Indian Muslim jurists did not permit
themselves the exercise of independent judgment
even in matters of detail....Muslim
jurisprudence, therefore, remained an extraneous
element, envisaging conditions that were
largely, if not entirely, hypothetical or
irrelevant to the actual conditions of life. It
could not but be as rigid as any system which is
purely logical, is sure to become.¹

The orthodox approach towards conformity with the
tradition was also reflected somewhat in the actual
practice of the religion. Literary and epigraphic sources
reveal attempts to conduct life in accordance with the
requirements of the traditional Sunnī Islam. Mukundarāma²
has left a living description of life in a colony of
Muslims, who 'rise early in the morning', and 'spreading
the red mat, say their prayers five times a day....Ten or
twenty of them sit together to decide cases. They always
recite the Korān and the religious books (kitāb)' and
'never give up fasting (rojā) even to the last breath'.
In the matter of their dress and custom, Mukundarāma says:

The Muslims shave their heads, and allow their
beards to grow down to their chest.³ They
always adhere to their own ways. They put on

3 Muslim tradition and belief associate shaven head and
flowing beards with the Prophet.
their head a cap (topī) which has ten sides, and wear trousers (ijār), which is tied tight to their waist. If they would meet anybody [Muslim], who is bareheaded, they pass him by, without uttering a word; but going aside, they throw clods of earth at him.¹

Vipra-dāsa,² who completed his work in 1494 A.D., writes that the Saiyid,³ mullā⁴ and gāzī⁵ always recite the Qur'ān and the kitābs, show their respect to them twice a day, teach ablutions and prayers, and remain devoted to education in the maktab. The poet Vijaya-gupta, who flourished in the sixteenth century, portrays the orthodoxy of the mullā, who 'decides cases invariably with reference to the Korān and the hādis', and also, 'prescribe the verses of the Korān as a remedy against evils'.

Epigraphic sources also bear evidence to the rigid adherence to the Muslim rituals with an undertone of religious satisfaction and pride arising out of such pious actions. An inscription of 911 A.H./1505 found in a mosque in Sonargaon contains the name of the builder of the mosque, 'the great and the respected Malik, the servant of the Prophet, who has made a pilgrimage to the sanctuaries [Mecca and Medina] and has visited the two

³ A Muslim, who traces his descent to the Prophet Muḥammad through Fāṭima and 'Alī.
⁴ A Muslim instructor in religious matters.
⁵ A Muslim jurist and judge.
footprints of the Prophet, Ḥājī Bābā Šāleḥ'. Another early sixteenth century inscription refers to prayer (ṣalāt) and poor-rate (zakāt).

A far more typical pattern of orthodoxy and traditionalism is represented by a type of didactic or instructive religious and moral literature well spread over medieval and even modern Bengal. The key-note of this literature is inculcation of religious rites, observances and knowledge of orthodox Islam in the believer. It is doubtful if the existence of this type of literature in Bengal may be traced as far back as 693 A.H./1293 with the composition of the anonymous work Nām-i Haq dealing with matters like prayers (namāz).

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1 JASB, 1873, 283; Dani, op. cit. Ins. no. 91. There is another inscription dt. 912 A.H./1506 for the tomb of Bābā Šāliḥ which reads, 'The tomb of the pilgrim of Makkah and Madīnah, who has visited both foot-prints of the Prophet, the servant of the Prophet, Ḥājī Bābā Šāleḥ'. (JASB, ibid.; Dani, ibid. Ins. no. 95).

2 Indian Historical Quarterly, 1950, 183.

3 There are two editions of the book, one from Bombay, 1885 A.D., and the other from Kanpur, 1332 A.H. Nothing is there in the book to establish its authorship or the place of its composition. S.H. al-Masumi (Islamic Culture, XXVII, i, 1953, 11) and A. Karim (Social..., 73-4) consider it to have been composed in Bengal. But while the former puts its authorship to Shaikh Sharf ud-Dīn Abū Tawwāma (supra, 14), the latter ascribes it to 'one of his disciples'. Habibullah has hinted at the 'largeness' and 'strained' characters of these 'assumptions'. (Habibullah, A.B.M., JASP, 1960, V, 214).
ablutions (wažū'), ceremonial bath (ghusl), fasting (roza) in the month of Ramaźān, purification by sand (tayammum) etc. But from the sixteenth century onwards we have undisputed evidence of such literature. Afzal 'Alī wrote Naṣīḥat Nāma 'in accordance with the fundamental principles of the holy Kurān and the hadis'.¹ Shaikh Parān's brief composition² deals with the '130 obligatory observances' (ək šata tiriş farj) in Islam.³ He discusses about the four genealogies (kursē), four schools of Muslim jurisprudence (mazahēb) ablutions, prayers, fasting, ceremonial bath, seven cardinal beliefs (İmān), orders (aḥkām) and essentials (arkan), etc. He also refers to his contemporary Hājī Muḥammad, commending the latter's masterly exposition of the essentials of İmān in Şūrat Nāma.⁴ Nasarullah Khan's Musar Suwal (Questions of Musā) was primarily meant for glorification of namāz.⁵ He reminds his co-religionists that they may have an experience similar to the Prophet's ascent to heaven (mi'rāj) five times a day during prayers, and advises them to 'read the Kurān heart and soul for having conversation

¹ Cited, MBS, 73-4.
² The Dacca Ms consulted (Ms. 193:s1.94) does not refer to the name of the work. It is however named Kaidani Kitab in DCBM (p.80), and Naṣīḥat Nāma in MBS, 163-4.
³ Ibid. fols. 6a-14b.
⁴ Fol. 13b. The title Hājī suggests his performance of Hajj i.e. pilgrimage to Mecca.
⁵ DMs 68:s1.338, fol.1 mc.
with God (bākya ālāpīte jadī cāha prabhu saṅge).
Nasarullāh's other work Shāriʿat Nāma\(^1\) is more comprehensive and emphatic in its treatment of the obligations of Islam. He wants 'everyone, who is a true Muslim' to 'abide by' the contents of his work. 'A Muslim not performing Islamic duties', he warns, 'no longer remains a Muslim'. He then proceeds to discuss about 'emr and nāhī, which, as he points out, mean in Arabic, respectively, 'positive orders of God' and 'negative orders or prohibitions'. Shaikh Muẓṭalib, son of Shaikh Paran composed a colossal work based on Muslim fiqh, namely, Kifāyat ul-Muṣallī\(^2\). The work incorporating discussions on innumerable topics like, ablutions, prayers, fasting, divine service ('ibādat) etc., was possibly meant as a manual of religious observances for a Muslim in his daily life. Saiyyid 'Alā'wal's Tuḥfa\(^3\) composed in 1664 is a Bengali rendering of a previous work having for its subject matter the provisions of fiqh. 'Abd ul-Karīm Khwandkār's Hazār Maṣā'il written towards the close of the seventeenth century, is a voluminous

\[1\] Cited, MBS, 175-6. Both MBS and DCBM list four works to his credit, but do not agree on their details. While Haq mentions Shāriʿat Nāma and admits not having seen Hid yat ul-Īslām (MBS, 168-9), DCBM includes Naṣiḥat Nāma in its list to the exclusion of Shāriʿat Nāma (Appendix, ii), and makes brief note of Hid yat ul-Īslām (569-70) with reference to the entry of Naṣiḥat Nāma in the Index (xxvii).

\[2\] DMs 578:61.69; also Karim, A. in Sāhitya, I, ii.

\[3\] Text, ed. Sharif, A., in Sāhitya, I, ii.
compilation of Muslim law. 1 'Abd ul-Hakīm's Naṣīḥat Nāma or Shīhāb ud-Dīn Nāma, 2 Ḥāyāt Maḥmūd's Hitajjāma-va-nil or The Message of the Right Knowledge, 3 Muḥammad 'Alī's Ḵarīrat ul-Fiqh, 4 Muḥammad Jān's Namāz Māḥātmya (The Glorification of Prayers), 5 Saiyid Nūr ud-Dīn's several works - Mūsār Suwāl, 6 Qiyāmat Nāma 7 and his highly popular work Hitopadeśa (The Beneficial Instructions) or Daykāt, 8

1 DMs 109:sl.569.
2 DMs 406:sl.246.
4 DMs 646:sl.558 (written in Arabic script).
5 DMs 189:sl.239.
6 DMs 188:sl.196.
7 DMs 526:sl.81. The whole work is divided into 19 chapters (bāb), such as, on prayer, fasting, ablutions, hell (dozakh), heaven (bihisht), profit (rabāḥ), goodness (neki), envy (hasad), drinking, responsibility of men and women and of husband and wife, rights of parents, custody and trusts (waṣiyat) and so on. This may also be considered an invaluable compendium for all branches of Islamic law and moral. See, also supra, viii, for calling the same work as Rahat ul-Qulub.
8 DMs 387:sl.202. A big work containing 22 chapters, this is, according to its author, based on Burḥān ul-'Ārifīn (Fol. 6). He appears to be the most widely read writers of his type. A large number of manuscript copies of his works both in Bengali and Arabic scripts were found scattered in different places in eastern Bengal. See, supra, viii, for the confusions regarding this particular work as well as others.
and finally, Muḥammad Qasīm's *Sirāj ul-Quṭūb* and *Hitopadeśa* - are all powerful contributaries to the main stream of religious and didactic literature purported to disseminate knowledge of orthodox Islam in medieval Bengal.

Coming down to the nineteenth century, especially in the latter half of it, we have a spate of such literature of far more rigid, uncompromising and intolerant character, printed and published from very cheap presses in Calcutta, Dacca, and Mymensingh, mostly written in a mixed diction - Bengali verses almost unrecognisable not only through uncalled for intrusions of words of Persian and Arabic origin but also through the distinct stamp of that language. This language has been variously called -

1. MBS, 286. The book is divided into 15 chapters relating to such matters as the recital of God's names (*zikr*), the first chapter of the Qur'ān (*Sūra Fāṭiḥa*), the traditions of the Prophet, visitation of angels in the grave, rights of parents, the day of judgment (*qiyāmat*), besides the usual topics of prayers, ablutions, fasting etc.

2. DM 140: sl.559. The work bears such a strong resemblance to its namesake, also called *Daykāt* by Saiyid Nūr ud-Dīn, noted earlier, as to suggest some 'pious forgery' on one side. Both of these works suggest *Hitopadeśa* (Hitopadeśa) as possible title, drawn, admittedly, from the same source - Burhān ul-'Ārifīn, are composed exactly at the same time, that is, between 1197 and 1203 B.S., comprise 22 chapters, often use the expression 'son of 'Azīz' (Ājīj-ṇandana) in the colophon (interestingly enough, while Qasīm's father was Shāh 'Azīz, that of Nūr ud-Dīn was Saiyid 'Abd ul-'Azīz) and above all, certain portions in the work especially concerning the name of the source, the date of composition and the suggestion of the title read all alike. But the suspicion is allayed by a comparison of the rest of their contents.
very incorrectly Musalmānī Bāṅglā, and more precisely, the Dobhāṣī.¹ There is nothing in the life of a Muslim that has not come under the close purview of this literature, and not a single deviation from orthodox Islam that has not been subjected to scathing condemnation. Logically enough, they have to say a good deal about the innovations (bi'dāt), polytheism (shirk), and all other 'accretions' to, and 'deviations' from orthodox Islam. This undertone of aggressive Puritanism as also the language of this set of literature set them apart from the previous stream of didactic literature. This qualitative change in tone and temperament is an integral part of a broader question of Muslim awakening in the nineteenth century in India and outside, and forms by itself an interesting and significant issue for separate investigation.

B. The Dynamics of Change: Social and Cultural Contradictions in the Muslim Community and the New Group of Muslim Intelligentsia:

The emergence of the new group of Muslim intelligentsia, impelled, as we gather from their writings, by a sense of need inherent in the situation confronting them and a call on their faith and morality, leads us to the basic problem of a proselytising religion seeking recognition in a cultural environment outside that of its origin. It revealed the utter inadequacy and

¹ The British Museum and the India Office Library in London, and the National Library of India, Calcutta, hold a large quantity of this literature.
ineffectiveness of the orthodox approach pledged against adjustment with environmental forces, having reduced itself in the process to an alien substance floating on the surface of the stream of local culture. Any attempt to force the way through had to reckon with the possibility of disrupting the cultural continuum at its own peril. The history of Islam in medieval Bengal has no clear evidence to support any orthodox attempt to force a break on the cultural continuum. But the orthodox attitudes, on the negative side, of keeping aloof from the challenges of local forces, and positively, of discouraging, if not resisting, changes and innovations, are clearly evidenced by the writings of the new Muslim intelligentsia. Their writings help us explore a rather dark phase in the development of Islam in the land - a state of urgency, involving the overwhelming majority of the Muslims in Bengal, brought about by the traditional, uncompromising and dogmatic elements in the Muslim religious leadership. A clear understanding of the situation in its entirety presupposes an examination of the social and cultural contradictions in the Muslim community of medieval Bengal with direct bearing on the development of Islam in the land.

A significant feature of the Muslim community in medieval Bengal is the sharp dichotomy in its cultural world. The contradiction was crystallised into a clear distinction between the cultural ethos of the Muslim elite and that of the masses of their co-religionists. The cultural distance derived its pattern from a social polarisation in the community, due largely to the peculiar nature of its composition and the form of conversion in
the country that drew so largely from the local masses.\(^1\)

On the highest rung of the social ladder stood largely the motley collection of immigrant settlers; the lower ones were occupied mostly by the vast multitude of converted masses. The two sections of the community remained almost 'structurally alien' to each other.\(^2\) The consciousness of distinction between these two elements was clearly reflected in a potent observation made by Ihtimām Khān, the Mughul admiral in Bengal under the viceroyalty of Islām Khān (1608-13). Displeased with some unbecoming conduct of the viceroy, Ihtimām remarked to his son Mirzā Nathan:

'...Islām Khān is behaving with us as he would behave with the natives...\(^3\)

History, myth and popular ignorance have contributed to the perpetuation of this social cleavage. It is sociologically interesting that a sense of aristocracy has been attached in Bengal to immigrants from the west. If this is true with the Hindu society,\(^4\) it is all the more so with the Muslims in Bengal. 'Nobility', it has been said, with reference to the Muslim aristocracy - the

\(^1\) Infra, Chapter II, C.


\(^3\) Mirzā Nathan, op. cit. I, 51.

\(^4\) The precedence of the members in a caste is often determined by their association with the alleged five Brahmaṇas and their entourage belonging to other castes brought from the west by Adiśūra, the king of Gaur.
sharīf (pl. ashrāf or shurāfā'),¹ was determined by immigration from the west in direct proportion to the nearness in point of time and distance in point of land of origin from Bengal to Arabia'.²

Although Muhammad did not attack the distribution of property as he found it, he attacked the traditional foundation of Arab hierarchy, deprecating noble ancestry as of no avail in the eyes of the Lord³ and stressing the equality of all believers within the fold of the new

¹ 'The Muhammadans themselves recognise two main social divisions, (1) Ashraf or Shurafa, and (2) Ajlaf, which in Bengali has been corrupted to Atrap. The first which means "noble" or "persons of high extraction", includes all undoubted descendants of foreigners and converts from the higher castes of Hindus.... All other Muhammadans, including the functional groups... and all converts of lower rank, are collectively known by the contemptuous term "Ajlaf", "wretches" or "mean people"'. (Gait, op. cit., 439).


³ "There are no genealogies in Islam", says a traditional saying. The very act of adherence to Islam implied an individual decision into which consideration of kin did not enter.... Truly, the most worthy of honour in the sight of God is he who fears Him most, not the individual who is most famous and most powerful. When Muhammad entered Mecca, he declared, "God has put an end to the pride of noble ancestry, you are all descended from Adam and Adam from dust, most noblest [sic] amongst you is the man who is most pious"'. (Wolf, E.R.: 'The Social Organization of Mecca and the Rise of Islam', South-Western Journal of Anthropology, VII, iv, 1951, 344-5).
faith. But while, on the one hand, Islam promoted egalitarianism, on the other:

...it strengthened the traditional aristocratic proclivities of the Arabs by providing a new and, to the Muslim, unimpeachable basis for social distinction, the closeness to the prophet in blood and in faith. There was added to the pagan nobility of descent the ashrāf, nobles of the prophet's line, of his clan, of his tribe, the offspring of the Meccan companions of his migration, muhajirun, and his Medinese helpers, ansār.²

Beyond the confines of Arabia, Islam brought similar changes in the estimate of what constituted a claim to honour, so that relationship to the Prophet, however remote, and also wealth and political power, have all been counted.³

In Bengal, accordingly, ancestry coming from the west (the west is nearer to Arabia and therefore nearer to the Prophet and his religion), that is, ancestry tracing its origins from Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan or Central Asia, and sometimes even from northern India, was reckoned as šarīf ancestry.⁴ The place of honour occupied by the

1 The Qur'an (49:10): 'All believers are brothers'.
2 Von Gruenbaum, G.E.: Medieval Islam, 199.
4 'Amongst the Bengal Muhammadans the ashrāf or upper class include all undoubted descendants of foreign Moslems (Arabs, Persians, Afghans, Mughals, etc.) and converts from higher castes from Hindus'. (Ibid).

'Now almost entirely indistinguishable from the rest of the population, because of intermarriages and other factors, there exists, scattered throughout the province a sprinkling of Arabs, Persians and Turks. They are the (continued p.29)
Saiyids in medieval Bengal is attested by epigraphic and literary sources. There are quite a number of inscriptions in medieval Bengal, in which the title of Saiyid is used to carry special distinction. Sultan 'Ala' ud-Din Husain Shâh belonged to a Saiyid family, and several inscriptions refer to him as 'Saiyid of Saiyids' (Saiyid us-Sâdât), while one mentions the fact with all its implications that he 'traces his descent from the Prophet of God...'. The builder of a jami' masjid in 1529 A.D.

4 (continued from p.28)
descendants of early Muslim settlers and immigrants... these elements constitute a fair proportion of the old upper-class Muslim families'. (East Pakistan: Land and People, The People of Pakistan Series, 34).

Referring to the aristocratic families covered by the experimental survey conducted by Khan, the Report says, 'all the families claim foreign ancestry and their ancestors were said in most cases to have come into Bengal from Delhi obviously with the ruling class. Instances of direct immigration from the Persian gulf areas are also not wanting'. (Khan, A.M., Report, op. cit., 28).

'I have got report from Barisal that generally six Muslim families are regarded as the most sharif or khandan families in the district of Barisal. Of these six Muslim feudal sharif families of Barisal, two families lay distinct claim to foreign ancestry and people also regard them as such. It is claimed that the ancestors of one of these two families came to Barisal from somewhere outside Bengal (in Bengal if somebody comes from outside Bengal, i.e., from northern India, that is thought to be a sufficient claim to foreign ancestry; and if it is from Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan or Central Asia, it is all the better). It is claimed that the ancestor of the other family came from Medina, Arabia. Because of such a distinct claim to foreign ancestry of the above two feudal families, they are regarded as the most sharif in comparison to the rest'. (Karim, A.K.N.: Changing Society in India and Pakistan, 134).

1 Dani, op. cit., inscription nos. 75, 78, 83, 85, 116 and 121.
2 Ibid., inscription no. 81.
puts his name as the 'worthy Saiyid Jamāl ud-Dīn, ... the glory of the descendants of Tāhā (the Prophet)....'  

Contemporary Bengali literature also bear out the epigraphic evidence. Vipra-dāsa in his Manasā-vijaya refers to the important position of the Saiyids in Satgaon. 

Mukundarāma names the Saiyid first among different groups of Muslims. 'Alā'wāl puts Saiyid as the chief of the people. Hayāt Maḥmūd mentions the practice of colouring the beards among the Saiyids. In Nasarullāh Kān's autobiographical note we read an undertone of pride and distinction as he introduces his father Maṇṣūr Khwandkār as a 'sharīf born in the womb of a Saiyidānī [a Saiyid lady]'. The historical works too illustrate the special position of the Saiyids. The Saiyids used to enjoy stipend from the state in the time of Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn 'Īwāz Khālījī. Firūz Shāh Tughluq (1351-88) on his march against Shams ud-Dīn Ilyās Shāh (1342-57) of Bengal tried to enlist the support of the Saiyids of Bengal with promise of increased stipends for them. When Khān-i A'ẓam, the Mughul governor of Bengal, deputed Farīd ud-Dīn

1 Ibid., inscription nos. 137, 138. 
2 Quoted, BSI, I, i, 202. 
4 Saptā Paikār,(DMs 647:sl.499), fol. 8. 
5 Islam, M., op. cit., 136. 
6 Sharī'at Nāma, quoted, MBS, 170. 
7 Minhāj, op. cit., 161. 
8 JASB, 1923, 280.
Bukhārī to conclude terms with the Afghan chief Qatlu Khān and the two met at a banquet, Qatlu introduced Bahādur Khān, one of his commanders to Farīd ud-Dīn; but the latter, 'who prided himself on being a descendant of the Arabian Prophet, did not receive him with sufficient respect; on which the revengeful Afghan retired in disgust from the company'.

1 Mir Jumla (1659-63), the governor of Bengal in the time of Aurangzeb, is said to have confirmed in his own jāgīrs men 'who were celebrated for devotion to virtue and love of the Prophet's followers....'  

2 Nawāb Murshid Quli Khān (1700-27) offered his grand-daughter, Nafīsa Begum in marriage to Saif Khān, the faujdār of Purnia; but the latter, 'being of an illustrious family, declined the connexion'.

3 Nawāb Murshid Quli himself was highly respectful of the Saiyids.  

4 Nawāb Allāhwardī Khān (1740-56) also had great regards for the company of Saiyids and šālims.

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1 Stewart, C.: History of Bengal, 176.  
3 Stewart, op. cit., 381.  
5 Ghulām Husain Tabatabāi, op. cit., II, 166-85. Borah, the translator of Bahārīstān-i Chaybī refers to an interesting fact about the point. He says that among the various comments made by the annotator in the margin of the Ms. of Bahārīstān kept at Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, the following finds place: 'He cannot tolerate the idea of a Saiyid unit placed under a non-Saiyid. He considers it as an act of sacrilege or showing disrespect to the family of the Prophet'. (Mirzā Nathan, op. cit., Introduction, I, xxiii).
The extravagant importance attached to the Prophet's blood and environment resulted in a natural tendency to claim fictitious foreign ancestry on the part of the aspirants to social position. Foreign ancestry, though a significant element in the making of a shari'a, could not have been the only one. Claim to foreign extraction, to

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...the honour and respect paid to the foreign ruling and privileged classes gave to the foreign and non-Indian extraction of a Muslim the highest claims to social distinction. People began to discover for themselves as far as possible a foreign ancestry'. (Ashraf, K.M.: 'Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan', JASB - Letters, 1, 1935, 192). The extent of the craze for tracing foreign origin may be understood by the vastly disproportionate increase in the number of persons claiming it. In 1872 the total claimants of foreign origin for the whole of Bengal including Purnia and excluding Calcutta was 266,378 (of whom 232,189 were Shaikhs, 23,126 Pathans, 8858 Saiyids and 2205 Mughuls) against a total Muslim population of 17,342,352, while by 1901 those claiming foreign origin in one of the twenty-eight districts excluding Purnia and Calcutta stood over three times the figure of the whole province in the previous census. In Noakhali, there were then 862,290 aliens distributed as 819,290 Shaikhs, 1300 Saiyids and 1000 Pathans in a total Muslim population of 865,709. (Gait, op. cit., 170ff)

One Persian and another Bengali saying is highly illustrative of this social fact. The Persian couplet runs as follows:

The first year we were butchers, the next Shaikhs: this year, if prices fall, we shall become Saiyids.

(Blunt, F.A.H.: The Caste System of Northern India, 184)

The Bengali counterpart goes as this:

What is only ullā or tullā in the beginning, becomes uddīn later on; then, if the tide of fortune turns, māmūd in the end of the name comes at its beginning.

(Gait, op. cit., 172-3) The saying can best be illustrated by the successive changes of the name of a hypothetical Mehrullāh, who becomes first Mehr ud-Dīn, then Mehr ud-Dīn Muḥammad, and finally, Muḥammad Mehr ud-Dīn.
be of any consequence, had also to be associated with land control and feudal status.  

The upper strata of the Muslim society in Bengal had thus been organised into a distinct social entity on the basis of an amalgam of history and fiction welded into the body of material power. The accounts of the contemporary foreign travellers as also medieval Bengali literature have left us with some details of the affluent and extravagant life led by this privileged section of both Muslim and Hindu communities.  

In towns and cities they lived in brick-built houses which had flat roofs and flights of steps.  

According to Abū l Faḥl some of the houses made of bamboos, which were very durable, could each cost 5000 rupees or more.  

They had great bathing tanks attached to their houses.  

They wore very fine white garments reaching to their ankles, with girdles of cloth beneath and silk scarves over them. They put on

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1 Karim, A.K.N.: Changing Society..., op. cit., 132; also his Thesis, op. cit., 199-200. This is amply borne out by what Gait observes in the case of some Muslims in Bengal of foreign extraction without any landholding: 'In some places many of the Mughals and Pathans are regarded as Ajlaḥ (commoner)'. (Gait, op. cit., 439).

2 Barbosa, Duarte: The Book of Duarte Barbosa, Eng. tr., Dames, M.L., II, 147.

3 Visva Bharati Annals, 1945, 1, 121, 124. (Eng. tr. by Bagchi, P.C. of the accounts of the Chinese travellers, who visited Bengal in the beginning of the fifteenth century A.D.).


5 Barbosa, op. cit., 147.
'low sheep-skin shoes with gold thread'.

1 They wore rings studded with jewels and turbans, and publicly carried daggers in their girdles. The women had ear-rings of 'precious stones set in gold' and long pendants around their necks. According to Barbosa, they had sumptuous dishes, and their food included smoked and roasted beef, mutton and fowl. After the meals were over, they took honey and sweetened rose-water. The nobility in Bengal used to take food in golden plates, and for a time it became a custom that whoever could present more golden plates on festive occasions was considered to be higher in status. Drinking wine was common among men and women. The well-to-do Muslims held occasional social gatherings enlivened by music and dance, and the dazzling brilliance of the coloured dresses and ornaments of the dancing girls

1 Visva Bharati Annals, op. cit., 119.
2 Barbosa, op. cit., 147.
3 Visva Bharati Annals, op. cit., 119.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid; also Mukundarāma, op. cit., 86.
7 Visva Bharati Annals, op. cit., 119, 131.
8 Ghulām Ḥusain Salīm, op. cit., 132.
9 Barbosa, op. cit., 148. He has mentioned a kind of wine prepared from the palm which ladies of rank drank.
added splendour to the occasion.  

Humayūn on his march to Gaur (1538 A.D.) is said to have been struck with wonder at the sight of the magnificent palaces with beautiful fountains and gardens containing flower-beds and stone channels of water. Chinese tiles covered the floors and internal walls of the palaces, and the expensive furniture and luxurious curtains which were typical of such buildings commended themselves strongly to the emperor's imagination.  

In sharp contrast with this picture of affluence and prodigality, the life at the other end of the social and economic scale presented a sordid spectacle. Francisco Pelsaert's observation on the life of the common people in the first half of the seventeenth century is quite revealing. According to him they are condemned to a state of 'poverty so great and miserable that the life of the people can be depicted or accurately described only as the home of stark want and the dwelling place of bitter woe'. 

In Bengal they lived in huts 'very little and covered with strawe', the fragile structure being raised on plinths of mud. As regards their clothing, Abū'ī Fazīl observes:

Men and women for the most part go naked wearing only a cloth (lungi) about the loins.¹

The wall of their social exclusiveness was rendered more inaccessible by the massive cultural barrier that they had raised around themselves. The cultural distinction was a natural concomitant of their alien origin. But for an immigrant settled down in the country for generations, there was less of spontaneity and naturalness in the claim to an extra-territorial cultural identity than a calculated and cultivated posture. The upper strata of the Muslim society in Bengal drew their cultural sustenance from the west in the same way as they traced their origin from that direction. Centuries of living in the east failed to mellow the intensity of their emotional and cultural rapport with the west, and the attitudes continued even to a much later time. In the words of Syed Amir Ali of Bengal, a distinguished Muslim leader in the last and the present century:

The Mahomedans of Northern India were descended chiefly from the Mahomedan settlers from the West, who had brought with them to India traditions of civilization and enlightenment, while in Eastern Bengal the Mahomedans were chiefly converts from Hinduism who still observe many Hindu customs and institutions.²

Referring to the 'genuine Ashraf descendants of Arabs (Sadat and Mashaikh), or 'Ajam (Mughals and Pathans or the people of Central Asia), who have not hitherto

¹ A'In-i Akbarī, op. cit., II, 134.
² Moslem Chronicle, January 28, 1905, 293.
contracted marriages...with any other classes', Maulavi Abdul Wali remarks:

If any ancient culture and civilization are to be sought among the Musalmans, they should certainly be sought among the members of this class. The other classes may become very prosperous, but such higher qualities as uprightness, independence, honesty and implicit reliance on God (Islam) can hardly be expected from them, and must be sought among the members of the genuine Arab families.

Wali says further:

As no Brahman concerns himself about the controversies between Baidyas and Kayasthas, so no Ashraf Muhammadan of India cares what the majority of the Muslims are called. To them they are wine-vendors, weavers etc., with all their pretensions. Some of the writers go so far as to say that they are not truly Musalmans, but for political and other reasons it is well that they should be called Muslims. 2

Wali subjects the category of ashrāf to a further distillation, and finds both 'high and low' calling themselves ashrāf on the ground of being 'vilayat-za' (of foreign origin). But according to him, the offsprings of those among the ashrāf who 'contracted marriages contrary to the law of Kufv with Indian converts', were 'looked down upon by the blue blooded Ashraf in the same way as the Europeans of our day look upon the Eurasians and Firingis'. 3 The attitude was more strongly

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
expressed in an anonymous letter in *Moslem Chronicle*:¹

Several heathen customs have crept into the society and bedayets (innovations) and shirks (belief in godlings) are practised with impunity, every day, by thousands of so-called Mussulmans, in their feasts and festivals. There are places where widow marriage is looked upon with hatred, as a practice to be tolerated only by the detested plebs, and abhorred by the high-born patricians. In every district of Bengal there are benighted places where the people profess a corrupt form of Islamism. Not to speak of mild form of shirks and bedayets, they even openly worship the Hindu gods and goddesses. In the last census report it has been stated that more than 50 p.c. of the inhabitants of the Nuddea district are Mussulmans; but are our readers aware what form of Islamism the bulk of the Nuddea people profess: nearly all of them have Hindu names; their manners and customs are those of the Hindus; they celebrate the pujahs; they have a caste distinction too. We are choked with inward shame and mortification by witnessing a scene which we did, the other day, in a street in Taltollah² side of the town. It was the day of Shree Panchami Pujah, when we saw troops of Muhammadan lads, children of lower class people and reading in Hindu pathsalas, carrying small flags and chanting heathen ditties in praise of Ma Saraswati.³

It was largely this exaggerated attitude of the upper stratum of Muslim society that gave birth to the colossal myth that to be a Muslim in Bengal, it was always necessary to be an alien, if not by race and origin,

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¹ Dated, April 25, 1895, 177.
² A suburb of Calcutta.
³ Mother Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning.
certainly in culture and social ideas and affiliations. In the predominantly Hindu part of Bengal to the west of the river Bhagirathi (western branch of the Ganges, i.e. the Hugli), the Hindus regarded the Muslims as aliens, and the Muslims accepted and helped to spread the idea that they were so, at least culturally. As late as 1896 Yaquinuddin Ahmad observed:

In Calcutta Hindus are called Bengalees by every Muhammadan, who has never travelled beyond the Mahratta Ditch (built to protect the city against Maratha incursions in the eighteenth century) as if such Muhammadans are by the fact of their professing the faith of the great Arabian Prophet have a right to be non-Bengalees... 1

If the consciousness of alien lineage, historical or fictional, provided the subjective basis of the social and cultural dichotomy, the linguistic barrier dividing

Moslem Chronicle, April 11, 1896, 165. In west Bengal even to-day a Hindu is a Bengali and a Muslim Bengali is simply a Musalman. Hindu localities are known as Bangali-Pada (Bengali locality), and Muslim localities are known as Musalman-Pada (Muslim locality). It is not as only in towns but also in villages.

It is to be noted that many European writers also shared the notion. As late as 1791, Robertson maintained that the Muslims of India were 'descendants of adventurers, who have been pouring in from Tartary, Persia and Arabia ever since the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni'. (An Historical Disquisition Concerning Ancient India in Robertson's works, II, 346, cited, Wise, J.: 'The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal', JASB, LXIII, pt iii, no. 1, 1894). Orme, referring to the Muslims in India remarks, '...although the reigning nation, they are outnumbered by the Indians ten to one'. (Orme, R.: History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, I, 24).

'The old meaning of the word Hindu comprehended nothing more than an Indian origin. All natives of India were broadly spoken of as Hindus'. (Beverley, H.: Report, Census of Bengal (1872), 96).
the community formed a significant strand in its objective foundation. While the masses of the Muslim society in Bengal belonging to the group of autochthonous converts spoke Bengali and Bengali alone, for the upper strata of the Muslim society Arabic and Persian remained the medium of culture and communication. The fact that Arabic and Persian came to be associated with Islamic religion and culture in India, had apparently moralised this social and cultural cleavage with a religious justification. The notions of the use of Arabic and Persian in medieval Bengal are formed by the numismatic, epigraphic and literary evidences. The coins were all issued in Arabic. The inscriptions generally fixed to mosques and tombs were issued both in Arabic and Persian, the majority being in Arabic. Epigraphic and literary sources again have left us a vast number of official titles and technical terms constantly in use in political and administrative circles. On the other hand, the theological, instructive and didactic literature of the Bengali Muslim writers, as noted earlier, make repeated mention of religious works all written in Arabic and Persian. The position that the Persian language came to occupy in the pre-Mughul period was much strengthened with the introduction of Mughul rule in Bengal (1576

2 Dani, op. cit., passim; Ahmad, S.: Inscriptions of Bengal, IV, passim.
A.D.), which brought Bengal not only in contact with the greater centres of Islamic learning and culture in north India, but also led to the influx of a large number of Persian settlers in Bengal, and added stimulus to the Persian language and culture.¹

The question of language as an important factor in the social and cultural polarisation in the community should be viewed in its true perspective. It could never have been possible that a sizable section of the ashrāf settled in the land for a long time remained ignorant of the Bengali language. Rather, the observation of Ma-huan, who moved closely in the official and ruling circles, that Bengali was in universal use,² and the more important fact of the patronage of the Bengali language and literature by members of the ruling section of the community, point otherwise. But it is not so much the question of their familiarity with the Bengali language as the attitude towards it as a means of their own religious, intellectual or cultural fulfilments that is of consequence. And here, we find, that their attitude was free from any ambiguity whatsoever, and their minds were thoroughly set as much against the regional culture as the local language. If the regional culture was 'Bengali' which in the mind of a sharīf with extra-territorial outlook in cultural

² He writes: 'The language in universal use is Pang-Kie-Li (Bengali); there are also those who speak in Pa-ën1-si (Persian - Persian)'. (Phillip, G., op. cit., JRAS, 1895, 530).
³ Infra, Ch. II, B.
affiliations became identified with 'Hinduism', the
Bengali language smacked no less of 'idolatry' and should
never have been associated with Islamic religion and
learning. But, while adopting this attitude and stand,
they displayed total lack of concern for the vast number
of their co-religionists, who knew nothing of Arabic and
Persian but only Bengali. The stream of medieval Bengali
literature contributed by the Bengali Muslims throw up
ripples of this tension in the contemporary Muslim mind.
Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr has to fight against the feeling of
'sin, fear, and shame' for his literary venture in
Bengali on a semi-religious theme connected with Islamic
tradition.\(^1\) He refers to the element of 'apprehension'
and 'blame' involved in the matter of writing kitābs in
Bengali.\(^2\) Saiyid Sultān, who appears to be a devout
Muslim and sympathetic to the plight of people 'born in
Bengal and unable to follow Arabic', is 'blamed' and
stigmatized as munāfīq (hypocrite) for composing in
Bengali his magnum opus - Nabī-vadmā or The Line of the
Prophets, being a history of the creation and the
Prophets from Ādam down to Muḥammad - a venture which
amounts to his critics to making his book 'Hinduised'.\(^3\)
Shaikh Muṭṭalib writing his work on Muslim fiqh cannot
get over his sense of 'sin' for having rendered 'Islamic
religious matters into Bengali (Bangālā)'.\(^4\) 'Abd un-Nabī

1 Yūsuf-Zulaikha, MBS, 58.
2 Ibid., 59.
3 ShM, fol. 259a; also MBS, 161.
4 Op. cit., DMs 578:s1.69, fol.102b; also, DCBM, 61;
MBS, 198.
speaks about the 'mental anguish of the people unable to follow the story of Āmīr Hāmjā in Persian' and adds, 'all people in Bengal do not follow Persian'. But he entertains 'apprehension in the mind' (maneta darāī) about incurring the wrath of the Lord (Gosāīn) for having written 'Islamic matters in Bengali':¹ Shaikh Parān, father of Shaikh Muṭṭalib and a contemporary of Saiyid Sulṭān, mentions to have written his work on 130 farz in Islam on the basis of a Persian work, 'for the people to follow in Bengali'.² Another contemporary of Saiyid Sulṭān and Shaikh Parān, Hājī Muḥammad in his Nūr Jamāl³ alludes to the contemptuous attitude of the orthodox Muslims towards the Bengali language.

Thus in their thoughts, ideas and even in their language the ashrāf remained or at least posed to remain 'alien' to their other co-religionists in Bengal, and looked down upon the Muslim masses, because they thought themselves nearer to Islam, as they were closer to the Arabic and Persian language, literature and culture, which, according to them, was permeated with Islamic values, while the Bengali language and literature, subjected to the influence of the Hindus, was steeped in idolatry.⁴ The echo of this dilemma in the cultural

¹ Hamza-vijaya, DCBM, 3; MBS, 214-5.
² MBS, 163; supra, 20.
³ DMs 374:s1.260, fol.2 mc.
⁴ 'On the whole the upper class Muslims looked down upon the Bengali Muslims, because their popular beliefs were permeated by local geographical factors'.(Karim, A.K.N., Thesis, op. cit., 254).
attitudes of the upper class Muslims was quite resonant through subsequent stages in the development of the Muslim society in Bengal until comparatively recent times. To quote Amir Ali again: 'In Bengal the upper class Muslims spoke Urdu, though not with the same purity as a native of Lucknow or Delhi'. In the words of Yaquinuddin Ahmad:

...hitherto the Muhammadans of Bengal had leaders who tried their utmost to belong to the North-west. They talked Hindustani, imitated Delhi and Lucknow manners, but in spite of that they were Bengalees.

According to Hunter, writing in 1871:

The British system of Public Instruction... conducts education in the vernacular of Bengal, a language which the educated Muhammadans despise...

A little later Wise wrote:

The Arabic and Persian classics, containing as he [a sharif] thinks all that is worth knowing, are his daily study...while English and Bengali are foreign languages to him.

In referring to some recent attempts to translate Islamic religious laws into Bengali, Ni'am ud-Dîn said:

The accomplished men of this country [Bengal] do not take themselves to the Bengali books for the poor quality of the language, not worth listening to....They do not like their children

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1 Nineteenth Century, XII, 200.
2 Moslem Chronicle, April 11, 1896, 165.
3 Hunter, W.W.: The Indian Mussalmans, 178; cf. Adam, W., Third Report, 1838, 213-4, also 149.
4 Wise, op. cit., JASB, 62.
to read them; rather, it is forbidden by many.\textsuperscript{1}

In 1880 a spokesman of the \textit{ashrāf} in Bengal felt concern about the total absence of social and cultural communication between the two sections of the community and the fatal consequences arising out of it. He felt that this was responsible for leading the 'lower order' astray and making them prey to the 'revolutionary' ideas and activities of the \textit{Wahhābīs} and the \textit{Paraizīs}. He suggested the way out of the impasse:

Whatever we may feel, think, or do, the Bengali will be our vernacular - this is now a physical certainty. It behoves us then to turn our attention at once to that language and try to introduce into its structure the peculiarities of our diction and the peculiarities of our character.\textsuperscript{2}

The situation, arising out of the linguistic barrier dividing the Muslim community in Bengal, offered striking parallel to that of non-Muslim society. There the Hindu elite had raised a wall of cultural demarcation through the exclusive pursuance and patronage of Sanskrit as the language of religion (\textit{deva-bhāṣā}) and culture.\textsuperscript{3}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{1}{Muḥammad Ni'am ud-Dīn: \textit{Zubdat ul-Masā'il}, I, 1873, Introduction.}
\footnotetext{2}{Saeed: 'The Future of the Muhammadans of Bengal', \textit{Review in Calcutta Review}, 1881, vii.}
\footnotetext{3}{The native language was variously called - \textit{Deśī} (native), \textit{Loukika} (popular), and \textit{Prākṛta} or \textit{Prākṛta bhāṣā} (language). Even in the beginning of the nineteenth century A.D. the pandits used to call it \textit{Gaudīya-bhāṣā} (the language of Gaur). Experts believe that the name \textit{Bāṅgāla} for the language was of much later origin in the (continued p.46)
contempt for the regional languages in general and, for that matter, for the Bengali language as a cultural medium is abundantly clear in Sanskrit works of different periods. By the pandits Bengali was 'despised as a Prakrit dialect fit only for demons and women' though it arose from the 'tomb of the Sanskrit'. Bengali society, however, had already undermined the basis of the linguistic division by the time Islam appeared on the scene. It was the Mahāyāna Buddhist Siddhārtha, who took the lead in the matter, composing religious songs with an undertone of stricture against ritualistic and formalist Brahmical orthodoxy and pedantry. These songs, known as Cāryā-gītī, or Cāryāpada, or Cāryā-koṣa or Cāryā-gītī-koṣa, are generally supposed to be the earliest available specimens of Bengali literature, but there is some controversy as regards their antiquity, as also their undisputed association with the

3 (continued from p. 45) nineteenth century (cf. BSI, I, i, 6-7). But we categorically refuse to subscribe to this view on the ground that several Muslim Bengali poets did use the word Bāṅgalā in the sense of the language. Saiyid Sulṭān in his Wafat-i Rasūl (quoted, MBS, 154), Shaikh Muṭṭalib in his Kifāyat ul-Musallī (quoted, ibid., 198; supra, 21), and 'Ābd al-Ḥakīm in his Nūr Nāma (quoted, ibid., 205) make clear use of the word Bāṅgalā for the language. That the Sanskrit language was not meant for all in the Bengali society is manifest in the Bengali literature of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Mādhava Ācārya in the middle of the sixteenth century writes: 'Bhagabat in Sanskrit is not followed by all. Hence I tell it in lok-bhāṣā (folk language) in the same spirit'. (BSI, I, i, 6). Ramacandra Khan (sixteenth century) wrote in Parākṛta what was there in Śaṃskṛta for the comprehension of the ignorant (murkhā). Kavi-śekhara in the early seventeenth century entreated his learned readers not to laugh his work away for being written in 'Loukik bhāṣā'. (Ibid).

1 Friend of India, IV, 152.
Bengali language. Whatever may be the merits of this controversy, these songs, written in the popular language, shattered the monopoly of the Sanskritic exclusivists and helped in the dissemination of knowledge among the people. They had set in motion the process which was carried to its logical conclusion by the votaries of popular gods and goddesses in Bengal, who produced a gigantic mass of literature known as Maṅgala-kāvyā glorifying their respective deities.

The solution for the Muslim community in Bengal pointed in the same direction. But there was none to take the lead until, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a new group of Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, committed to the interests of the social and religious underdogs among their co-religionists, emerged in Bengal. This newly emerged group need not necessarily be taken as having sprung from the local converts. Immigrant families, after a few generations identifying themselves totally with the country, could very well have sustained its cadre. Tracing foreign descent or not a strong sense

1 The antiquity of this literature is somewhat controversial. While, Shahidullah and his followers trace it back to the seventh and eighth century A.D., S.K. Chatterjee and P.C. Bagchi put it roughly between the tenth and twelfth centuries. In recent years the claim for this literature as being proto-Bengali has also been challenged on behalf of the other neighbouring languages, such as old Hindi, old Maithili, old Oriya and old Assamese.

2 Some of the important names among them indicate their foreign lineage, such as Saiyid Sulṭān, Saiyid Nūr ud-Dīn, Saiyid 'Alā'wāl, Saiyid Murtaţā, Saiyid Ḥamza, Shaikh Faizullah, Shaikh Muţţalib, Shaikh Maņşūr etc.
of regional affiliation and attachment is clearly discernible in the writings of this new group. Saiyid Sulțān writes: 'The mother land is a holy one, and is nice to see. The very thought of it breaks the heart'.

Daulat Wazīr Bahrām Khān 'pines to see the town of Fateyābād renowned in Cātigrām [Chittagong]'. Elsewhere he says, 'Bengal is enchanting and the town Fateyābād embellishes it'. Muqīm compares his place Chittagong to heaven. Nothing in detail is known about their personal life and social standing. But all that can be gleaned from their works about personal matters is conclusive to show that, while most of them followed religious professions of some kind or another, others were in official employ.

Among Muslim Bengali writers of the first category we may mention Afzāl 'Alī, resident of the village of Milua in the Satkania thana in the district of Chittagong, who was both an 'ālim and a Ṣūfī, being a disciple of Shāh Rustam. Son of another Ṣūfī, Bhāngu Faqīr, Afzāl 'Ali appears to be a contemporary of 'Alā' ud-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh (1532-3), son of Sulṭān Nuṣrat Shāh. Saiyid Sulṭān was a great religious preceptor with a large number of

1 Janmabhumi puṇya deś/dekhibāre sudhā beś/smarane hrdāy āṭi yāy/. (ShM, fol. 229b).

2 Nagar Fateyābād/dekhibāre puraye sādh/cātigrāme suṇām prakās/. (Lālī Majnu, ed. Sharif, A., 6).

3 Ibid., text, 9.

4 Svaragaprāy sthal nām cātigān ẓ̱hār. (Gūl-i Bakāwalī, MBS, 139 n).

5 MBS, 72-3.
disciples, the most important of them being Muḥammad Ḵān, who composed Qiyāmat Nāma at the instance of his preceptor. He was a resident of Chakrashala in Chittagong, and belonged to the noted Mīr or Saiyid family of the place. Ḥājī Muḥammad, author of several learned works on mystic principles and a contemporary of Saiyid Sulṭān, was a Pīr (religious guide) as we know from the testimony of one of his important disciples, Muḥammad Shafī', who himself left some good works. Ṣhāh Akbar was a religious preceptor with a considerable following. Saiyid Murtaza, disciple of Saiyid Shāh 'Abd ur-Razzāq, was a noted Ṣūfī in Murshidabad. Even now his 'urs (annual death anniversary) is held in the village Suti for three days in the month of Rajab. Ṣhaikh Muṭṭalib, son of Ṣhaikh Parān, another Bengali poet, was an eminent religious personality. He lost his father quite early in his age and was brought up and trained by a devoted Muslim 'ālim, Maulawī Raḥamatullāh. He had another spiritual guide in Saiyid Ḥasan. Mīr Muḥammad Shafī', son of Shahīd Shāh Jahān, a darwesh, received spiritual instructions from his father and also Ḥājī Muḥammad. Ṣhaikh Cānd, son of Fath Muḥammad and murīd (disciple) of Shāh Daula of Tripura was himself a noted Ṣūfī. ṢAlī

1 Ibid., 143-6.
2 Ibid., 168.
3 Ibid., 178.
4 Ibid., 191.
5 Ibid., 197-8.
6 Ibid., 201.
7 Ibid., 248-9.
Rajā', alias Kānu Faqīr, was an outstanding Muslim mystic in late medieval Bengal. His murshid was Shāh Qiyām ud-Dīn and 'Alī Rajā' himself left a large number of spiritual descendants, the most eminent of them being Muḥammad Muqīm, whose Gūl-i Bakawālī contains a valuable account of the names of Muslim poets, both preceding and contemporary. 1 Muḥammad Muqīm himself was employed in the secretariat of a local zamīndār.

Among those authors who were in the service of the rulers or local chiefs, Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr refers to the king 'Ghīyās', who is rather doubtfully identified by Enamul Haq with Sultān Ghīyās ud-Dīn A'ẓam Shāh (1388-1410). We hold serious doubt about this identification, which others have taken for granted. 2 Ṣaghīr acknowledges himself as 'under his employ'. 3 Zain ud-Dīn appears to be the court-poet of Sultān Yusuf Shāh (1478-81). 4 Cānd Qāẕī served as the qāzī of Nabadvīp in the time of Sultān Ḥusain Shāh (1493-1519). 5 Sābirid (Shāh Barīd?) Khān's family bears an official title - Mahallik, which indicates their association with the revenue administration. 6 The father of Shaikh Manṣūr was a qāzī.

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1 Ibid., 278-9.
2 For identification with Ghīyās ud-Dīn A'ẓam Shāh, see, MBS, 56-7; for the doubts surrounding this identification, see, supra, Preface.
3 Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, op. cit., quoted, MBS, 57.
4 Ibid., 60-2.
5 Ibid., 69-70.
6 Ibid., 75.
named Qāżī 'Īsā.¹ Daulat Qāżī, born in a qāżī family at Sultānpur in Chittagong, was patronised by Aṣḥāf Khān, the military chief of the king of Rosang, Ṣrī Sudharma (1622-38).² 'Alā'wal, one of the greatest poets of medieval Bengal, was the son of the wazīr of Majlis Quṭb, the Mughul governor of Fatehabad. He was wounded in a naval engagement with Portuguese pirates and was taken to Arakan. There he started life as a cavalry member of the royal bodyguard of king Thado Mintar (1645-52). Later, he received patronage from the highest officials in the Arakan government.³

The most distinguishing feature in the writings of this new group of Muslim intelligentsia is a note of keen anxiety to illumine the masses of their co-religionists with the knowledge of their own religion and its traditions. This is where they offer sharp contrast in their outlook and approach with those of the old and existing religious leadership in their community, who played indifferent to the suitability, effectiveness and consequences of pursuing a traditional orthodox role vis-à-vis the simple folk of believers. Unlike the old, the new group realised and concerned itself with the lacunae inherent in the nature of the situation, and with an unerring eye diagnosed the source of the malady. It did not take them long to realise that the language question stood as a stumbling block in the way of the

¹ Shaikh Maḥṣūr: Sirr Nāma, quoted, ibid., 222.
² Ibid., 236-7.
³ Ibid., 242-3.
dissemination of religious knowledge among the Muslim masses. The depth of the situation inseparably associated with this question may be easily gauged from the writings of this new group. They make it evident that knowledge confined to Arabic and Persian books was denied to the vast mass of Bengali Muslims. Saiyid Sulțān mentions the 'inability of the Bengalis to follow Arabic (Ārabī bacan)', and adds:

> There is no dearth of kitābs in the Arabic and Persian languages, which are for the learned alone, and not for the ignorant folk.

He feels sorry for his people who, in the circumstances, are unable to 'grasp a single precept of their religion' and are 'immersed in fictions (parastāb)'. Hājī Muḥammad, as an explanation for writing his Nur Jamāl, mentions the inability of the people to read kitābs and learn about shari'at and injunctions (fārmān). Muhammad Nasarullāh Khān Khwandkār writes:

> The Bengalis (Bāŋgāl) do not follow this Persian book [the Persian version of his work entitled Musār Suwal] and feel sad (pāe manastāb/manastāp) ... This is why I have rendered Farsi into Hinduani5 for the Bengalis to follow the message of that book. If they would come to know about

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2. Ibid., 142.
3. Ibid., 161.
4. DMs 374:s1.260, fol.2 me.
5. The Bengali language was often associated by the Muslims with Hindu religion.
Muhammad Khan mentions the same inability of the people to follow *kitāb* leading them to commit 'great sin' (*maha paap*). The same feelings are also expressed by Mujammil, Shaikh Muttalib, Shāh 'Abd ul-Ḥakīm, Saiyid 'Alā'wal and Ḥayāt Maḥmūd. With reference to his native village Bišilā in the Ghoraghat region, where his forefathers had settled down from the beginning (*ādim hai te tathā / pitṛloke basati karilā*), Ḥayāt Maḥmūd writes:

> It pains me day and night to see that none knows about religious commandments (*din āin*) in my village. They do not grasp the truth of *din* and have no knowledge of the Korān, the ketābs and the provisions for guidance in all situations. With this daily experience, I have set to write the message of *din* in the name of Allā.

A sense of alarm, anxiety and responsibility for the situation is characteristic of the writings of this group. Saiyid Sultān refers to the Bengali recension of the

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4. K. Musāllī, op. cit., fol.7a.
5. Sh. Nāma, op. cit., fol.77b.
Mahābhārata by Kavindra-parameśvara in the second quarter of the sixteenth century and notes with an undertone of concern:

In every house the Hindus and Muslims take to it with avid interest. No body thinks about Khodā and Rasūl.1

Quite a number of these writers are, as we have already noted, religious preceptors, and recognised as their Pīrs by some of the writers themselves. This made it natural for their writings to have a pronounced strain of religious fervour permeated by a pious conviction of individual responsibility. Saiyid Sulṭān, who is one of the most representative and articulate members of this group, and who has clearly combined the role of a Şūfī and Ālim in him, lays the issue bare. He addresses the Muslim folk in Bengal and says:

The Muslims in Bengal, you all listen to me. Let all of you engage yourselves in pious deeds (punya kārya) and make the Lord (Prabhu Nirājan) pleased. . . . The Ālim, who lives in the land (des) but does not explain the truth (tattva) is certain to be thrown into hell (narak). If the people commit sins the Ālim will be taken to task in the presence of Alla. I am born in your midst (tomrā saber mele mor utpan), and so I talk about the scriptural matters (śāstrer bacan). Alla shall accuse, 'you all Ālims being there did not forbid people from committing sin'. . . . When God (Ilāhi) shall call for you—all about your good and bad, you may plead before Lord that you resorted to the teacher (guru), who did not warn you. God will chastise me more than you. I am constantly

1 ShM, MBS, 142.
haunted by this fear (bhay). Driven by this, I wrote Nabi-baṃśa not to let sin touch people.¹

The note of concern and anxiety is clear enough. But how far it stemmed solely from moral and religious inhibitions are not quite evident. The drift of events implied a danger more immediate and tangible than an indictment on the day of judgment. The perpetuation of total absence of rapport and communication between the two broad divisions in the social and cultural structure involved a threat to the religious structure and organization of the community as a whole. Left to itself, the situation could lead to unfordable isolation of the overwhelming majority in the community. Religious leaders like Saiyid Sulṭān, sitting on the fringe of the social frontier in their capacity as Pīrs, could not but take account of such ominous possibilities and try to arrest the process of a development on which hinged the destiny of their community. The argument is further strengthened by evidence to show that the pressure was often built up from the bottom of which the subsequent development was a mere recognition. Shaikh Muṭṭalib's version of the circumstances for his composition of the colossal work on Muslim fiqh reveals that people unable to follow religious injunctions 'in Arabic' approached at the conclusion of a congregational prayer the learned Maulāwī Raḥamatullāh respectfully 'in clasped hands', and sought his intervention in the matter of getting a religious manual done in Bengali, so that they could 'perform duties according to scriptures (śāstra karma)'. Shaikh Muṭṭalib

¹ Ibid., fols. 258a-9a.
was entrusted with the task of 'rendering the injunctions in Bengali' by Maulawi Rahamatullah, who asked him to proceed without having any 'apprehension' (ṣāṅkā) about that.¹

The danger covertly foreshadowed in the concern and responsibility shared by these writers was echoed even at a much later time in the soul-searchings of the ashrāf. Worried about the 'future of the Muhammadans of Bengal', a nineteenth century sharif makes a candid confession:

The refusal or the inability of the higher Musalmans to adopt Bengali has greatly affected the relation between them, and the lower Musalmans. We do not learn the Bengali, whilst our lower orders cannot learn the Persian, cannot learn even the Hindustani. There are thus no means of fellow-feeling or acting together. The knowledge we possess does not reach down to the lower neighbours - our character, ideas and habits of thought do not affect them.²

The task that lay ahead of the new Muslim group was not an easy one. The old order was pledged not to suffer the profanity of reducing religious truth to vulgar language - a profanity which could earn its authors the opprobrium of a munāfiq (hypocrite).³ It required formidable moral courage and will to defy this crushing weight of power and tradition. Only a few could shake it off completely, while most of them were either apologetic for their deviation or tried to rationalise it. Shāh

¹ K. Musallī, op. cit., fols.6b-8b; also, DCBM, 55, 61.
³ ShM, fol.259a; supra, 42.
Muḥammad Ṣaḥḥīr remains apprehensive about being 'blamed', but feels at the same time that it is 'not right' that this should be so, as he assures himself:

I have thought about this subject and have come to realise that such fears are false. If what is written is true, it does not matter what language it is written in.¹

Shaikh Muṭṭalib fails to bring in the same force of conviction:

I am sure that I have committed a great sin in that I have written the Muslim scriptures in Bengali. But this I am sure of in my heart, that the faithful will understand me and bless me. The blessings of the faithful shall involve great virtue, and merciful Allāh will surely forgive my sin.²

'Abd un-Nabi moves a little further:

I am afraid in my heart that God (Gosāīn) may be angry with me for writing Muslim scriptures in Bengali. But I reject the fear and firmly resolve to write in order to do good to the common people.³

Saiyid Sulṭān does not waver in his decision, and takes a firm stance on reason reinforced by theological sanction. He says that the language that God has given to one is his 'precious gem'. He says further:

I know from Allāh that He wills to reveal [the truth] in the particular language of a land. The Paigambar speaks one language and the people in other. How do we follow the dialogue?⁴

² K. Muṣallī, op. cit., fol.102b; also DGBM, 61; MBS, 198.
⁴ ShM, fol.259b.
Sulṭān then goes on to discuss the inability of a 'Khūrāsānī' audience to follow the Prophet speaking in his own language. So, they get 'the message of the Korān in Persian (Fārsī)'. Similarly, the 'Rumīs', the 'Sāmis', the people of 'Emrān', 'Erāk' in their respective language and even the 'Pāthāns' in their 'bad language' (dustabhās) receive religious instructions.¹ Perhaps the most resolute defence of his position comes from 'Abd ul-Ḥakīm:

Whatever language a people speak in a country, God understands that language. God understands all languages, whether the language of the Hindus or the vernacular language of Bengal or any other ....Those who, being born in Bengal, are averse to the Bengali language (Baṅgabānī) cast doubt on their birth. The people, who have no liking for the language and the learning of their country, had better leave it and live abroad (bideśe). For generations our ancestors have lived in Bengal, and instruction in our native language is, therefore, considered good.²

The flood-gates were thrown open by this new Muslim group, through which waves of literary works of religious import burst out to fertilise the mind of Bengali Muslims for the next few centuries. They initiated the move to resolve the language problem, and brought Islam nearer to integration with the local cultural complex. The solution was found on the same lines as the Buddhists and Hindus in Bengal had done in relation to the Sanskrit. Bengali forced its recognition as the local vehicle, while Arabic and Persian retained their sanctity as the traditional media of Islamic religion and culture. This is evident again from 'Abd ul-Ḥakīm:

¹ Ibid., fols.259-60b.
² Nur Nāma, DMs 299:sl.231, DCBM, 234; MBS, 205-6.
Arabic learning is the best of all. If you cannot learn Arabic, learn Persian to know what is good in the end (parinām-hit). If you cannot learn Persian, you should study the scriptures through your vernacular (nīj desi bhāse).¹

It is not, however, language alone that brings the religion closer to the masses. If the medium of cultural communication was to be intelligible to the people, no less should be the idioms and symbols. With the presentation of Islam in its austere doctrinal attire, as a corollary to the orthodox attitudes, the form and meaning of the religion came, in the minds of the people, to consist of a few essential beliefs and observances with little or no emotional content. These could scarcely satisfy the manifold demands of a religion on the part of the people, especially in a land where history and fiction, myth and legend, faith and superstition, supernatural and real, spirit and matter - all are intermingled and interchangeable. Garcin de Tassy in his interesting Mémoire (1831) on Indian Islam makes particular note of the vast mass of innovations and accretions, especially on the popular level, and attributes them to 'the too great simplicity of Islam for a country, where an idolatrous and allegorical religion' prevailed.² The masses of the Bengali Muslims, hindered by the linguistic barrier and unfamiliarity with the new religious and cultural symbols in the framework of the conservative

¹ Shihāb ud-Dīn Nāma, op. cit., DCBM, 250; MBS, 208-9.
type, found access denied to the spiritual and cultural heritage of the new religion as a source of their moral sustenance. The problem was not merely confined to making available to the masses manuals for formal religious observances in their own language. They needed much more from their religion - a religion that could epitomize the whole world of their cultural values and forms. The truth of their religion was to be vindicated not so much through the theological or metaphysical polemics as through the ability of their religious heroes to rise to superhuman and supernatural heights. The dogmas of Islam fell far short of meeting the demands of their consuming passion for traditions in which they could hear about the glorious and miraculous exploits of the champions of the religion. They knew next to nothing about their new idols, who remained prisoners in the 'ivory tower' of Arabic and Persian literatures, whereas the entire cultural atmosphere of Bengal was saturated with the traditions of the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyana, the Nātha-panthis and the Maṅgala-kāvyas, centering around the exploits of Manasā, Caṇḍī, Dharma, Śiva and hosts of minor religious personalities or spirits. The Muslim masses could not live in a cultural void, and they held on to what was already before them - the inexhaustible source of traditional Bengali ballads and folk-lore, and the religious and mythological traditions of diverse kinds. We have already noted that 'the Muslims as well as Hindus in every home' read Kavīndra's version of the Mahābhārata.\(^1\) The popularity of the Rāmāyana stories

\(^1\) ShM, MBS, 142; supra, 53-4.
among the Muslims is attested by Vṛndāvana-dāsa. From him we know that they identified themselves no less than the Hindus with the grief and agony of Rāma on the kidnapping of Sītā. He writes:

The Yabans [Muslims] are in tears to listen to the plight of Śrī Raghunandan [Rāma] after having lost Sītā.¹

Further:

Do worship the feet of Lord Rāghabendra [Rāma], whose activities are respectfully heard even by the Yabans.²

The new group of Bengali Muslim intelligentsia, waking up to a sense of responsibility for the spiritual needs of the masses of the community, had overcome the first impediment of the language. The further task lying ahead of them was to make their religious traditions available to the Muslim masses in terms familiar and intelligible to them. This meant breaking away from the conservative tradition, and bringing Islam into line with the cultural tradition of the people. This was a tremendous feat in itself. It did not involve merely rendering into Bengali what was there in Arabic or Persian. That would have been comparatively easy. The task demanded of them a knowledge and understanding of both traditions. They had to be at once careful and creative enough not to muddle the two together into something strikingly strange and bizarre, and not to make

¹ Caitanya-bhāgavata, quoted, MyBB, 48.
² Ibid.
those suspect in the eye of the people. They used one
tradition to supplement the other, and where either
tradition failed them, they proceeded to the extent of
creating new myths and traditions to serve their purpose.
Religion, history, legend, myth and superstition - all
were made to serve their end. And yet, when the occasion
required it, they knew how not to be shackled by any one
of them. In trying to tread this difficult path some
tended to over-reach their steps occasionally, and lose
the balance either on this or that side - a fact which
might provide enough scope for later academic exercises,
but remained immaterial to the people whom the writers
themselves had in mind.

The attempts of this set of writers indeed deserve
some careful analysis. Their works may be broadly
divided into two categories. In the first, their
contributions are confined to making available to the
people correct guidance for religious observances through
means with far greater accessibility as well as through a
medium of communication which is their own. Here in this
capacity they combine themselves to perform a great duty
of catering to a minimum need for the community, having
provided a formal structure of unity. Aside from
shattering down the linguistic barrier, the contents of
their undertaking in this sphere strike no difference from
those in the orthodox framework. And yet, the very nature
of their attempts in the line, as mentioned above, sets
them apart from the orthodox forces in respect of the
importance of their respective contributions to the
community as a whole. But this is only one aspect of
their attempt. On the other side, their efforts assume
greater dimension in finding Islam a natural local
habitat. Here they break away completely from the orthodox tradition and give full play to their imaginative faculty to achieve their ultimate object, within, of course, their individual limitations. Logically enough, attempts of this nature bear strong syncretic character. One may be very easily tempted to trace ramifications of medieval syncretic ideas in them. But a critical study of these attempts in the larger background of the ulterior objective of their authors should lead to modify a simple notion of syncretism. If the local religious symbols, myths and traditions are found in profusion in their writings, these were intended to subserve an essentially communal interest - to stem a rot in the community itself threatening total isolation of its great majority. We should not overlook that there were people among these writers who were deeply imbued with Islamic religious ideas. Saiyid Sulțān, in whose writings we come across perhaps the most extensive presence of Hindu religious elements, wishes to take himself to Mecca and Medina, 'live there as long as there is life' (jata din thāke prān) and to 'get buried there after death' (mṛttu hai le tāte māti pāi). Their religious convictions often ran counter to the demands imposed by their mission and created tensions in their mind, which they tried to resolve contriving situations and myths leaving traces of strains and affectations to the discerning eyes. A couple of instances should illustrate the point. Saiyid Sulțān recognises the popularity of Kṛṣṇa by accepting him as one of the messengers of Allāh in his colossal work on the prophets of God. A devoted Muslim, he can go to a

1 ShM, fol.248b.
point, and finds it hard either to ignore or reconcile with Kṛṣṇa's amorous sports as well as the iconolatry of his followers. Sultān is left with no other choice than inventing new myths, portraying Kṛṣṇa being sent back from the gate of heaven for his follies, and requiring him to eschew his amorous life, ask his followers not to emulate his love dalliances and forbid worship of his own image. Sultān cannot but remain aware of the realities of the situation with continued worship of Kṛṣṇa and the popularity of his traditions. So, the Muslim Satan, namely Iblīs is this time resorted to, and is held responsible for leading the people of Kṛṣṇa astray, despite Kṛṣṇa's sermons to his followers as required of him by God.\footnote{Nv, fols. 312a-39a.}

Hayāt Maḥmūd tries to draw parallels between the Śūfīstic notion of the supreme reality manifested in 'Āḥd and Ahmad and the Hindu notion of Ādya and Anādya. He carries the analogy further by pointing out the esoteric importance of the Persian letter mīm, which forms the first letter in the name of Muḥammad, and finds a similar position for the Bengali letter na used in the beginning of the name of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu). Hayāt Maḥmūd at this stage shows awareness of the difference between the two communities, and remarks that the practice of religion makes 'virtuous' (śuddhamati) of the Muslims and 'doomed sinners' (naṣṭa pāp jāti) of the Hindus. The latter 'do not know the One, who is the eternal source of sustenance, and worship images and stones instead'. They 'do not utter the name
of Mahāmmad, who stands for emancipation (mukti)', and even a sage (muni) among them 'cannot go to heaven (baikuntha)'.

And yet it may be quite wrong to take the whole gamut of their contributions as the product of a conscious and calculating scheme. We cannot assert with any degree of certainty that none of them wrote without an ulterior motive. It is quite possible that they just naturally imbibed and believed in much of syncretic import they have written. In the enormous volume and variety of literature of this category our attention cannot but be drawn to what emerges very clear of this literary cauldron - a perceptible attempt to make a conscious and motivated use of indigenous elements. We should equally emphasize, however, that all attempts, be it purposive or not in every case, flowed down to a single channel of popularising Islam in the familiar framework of local religious and cultural traditions.

1 Hy, text, 6.
CHAPTER II

THE MATRIX OF CHANGE

If the forces of change and adjustment played a seminal role in determining the course of development of Islam in medieval Bengal, the entire process is to be studied and comprehended by isolating and analysing some basic elements and factors, which went into the making of the problem under study as much as those helped work out the question itself. The process of change and adjustment of Islam in the local environment was set and effected on a ground prepared by a combination of forces, which left an indelible stamp on the patterns of its development.

We propose to mark out and analyse these elements under four heads.

A. The Religious Traditions and Trends:

In the religious traditions of Bengal new ideas have ever found a fit soil to thrive in. Heterodox tendencies in religious developments have been very pronounced in the country. Nothing is really known about the pre-Aryan life of Bengal, but what stands out beyond all historical disputation is the fact that Bengal, along with Magadha and other adjoining eastern regions, was long considered outside the pale of Vedic Aryandom or the country inhabited by people, who called themselves Aryas and among whom the Vedic civilization originated and developed. Their attitudes towards this outlying
region, which was often contemptuously called the land of the \textit{Vṛāyas} or fallen, were palpably disrespectful and hostile for a long time. The \textit{Aitareya Brāhmaṇa} (about the seventh century B.C.) mentions the Puṇḍra people of north Bengal as \textit{dasyus} or non-Āryans, while the \textit{Aitareya Āranyakā} mentions the Vaṅga (eastern and southern Bengal) and Vagadha (Magadha) as non-Āryan peoples.\footnote{Raychaudhuri, H.C. in \textit{DHB I}, 7-8; Sircar, D.C.: 'Spread of Aryanism in Bengal', \textit{JAS}, \textit{Letters}, 1952, XVIII, ii, 171.} Bodhāyana \textit{Dharmasūtra} (about the sixth-fifth centuries B.C.) regards the people of Puṇḍra, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga (Crissa) as altogether outside the pale of Vedic culture so that it prescribes expiatory rites for the purification of Aryans visiting those countries. The \textit{Mahābhārata} peoples the Bengal sea-coast with \textit{mlecchas} and the \textit{Bhāgavata Purāṇa} (2:4:18) classes the Suhmaś (upper south-west Bengal) as a sinful (pāpa) tribe.\footnote{Lévi, S. and Przyluski, J.: \textit{Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India}, 73-4; \textit{DHB I}, 7-8, 35-6; Sircar, \textit{ibid.}, 172.}

The literary evidence bearing upon the non-Aryan character of the primitive people of Bengal is supported by linguistic considerations. Grierson in his linguistic survey of India finds the existence, on the one hand, of 'a particular Indo-Aryan dialect', which 'developed into the modern language of the Midland' and on the other, of an 'outer band including Bengal over which are scattered different tribes, each with its own dialect'.\footnote{The \textit{Indian Empire}, I, 357-8.} An examination of certain tribal names leads also Lévi and Przyluski to conclude that the primitive peoples of...
Bengal and some neighbouring areas spoke a language that was neither Āryan nor Dravidian, but belonged to a separate family of speech.\footnote{1}{Op. cit., 124-5.}

The deprecating attitudes towards people in this part of the country as reflected in ancient texts appear rather significant in view of the fact that the Vedic culture had penetrated quite early to Mithila (north Bihar) contiguous to north Bengal. This is all the more so, because some Sūtra texts (Vāsiṣṭha Dharmasūtra, 1:13-15) indirectly admit that spiritual culture, even as understood by the Vedic Āryans, was not altogether lacking in Bengal. This might only suggest that the people here 'had a developed culture of their own even though it was non-Vedic and non-Āryan'.\footnote{2}{Bagchi, P.C. in DHB I, 394.} Whatever might have been the cultural and ethnic circumstances of these initial developments, the land was gradually brought over the centuries under Āryan influences. The seminal cultural forces and patterns flowing from the interaction of the indigenous and extraneous elements must have had profound impact on the subsequent cultural developments in the country, but very little is known about all this. Its traces might 'lurk in folk-religious and popular superstitions even now'.\footnote{3}{Ibid., 395.} Whatever might have been the extent of penetration of Āryan culture, orthodox Brāhmaṇism does never seem to have had a firm grip in the land. The Bengal Brāhmaṇa

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{1}{Op. cit., 124-5.}
  \item \footnote{2}{Bagchi, P.C. in DHB I, 394.}
  \item \footnote{3}{Ibid., 395.}
\end{itemize}
remained suspect in the eye of his counterpart in the Midland. The stigma attached to a Bengal Brāhmaṇa was carried to a much later time, as evidenced by the tradition concerning the five Brāhmaṇas brought from Kanauj by Ādiśūra. When those five Brāhmaṇas went back to Kanauj, their 'kinsmen at home treated them as degraded on account of journey to Bengal and asked them to perform penance'.

The four-fold divisions of the society also did not have any relevance to the Bengal situation, where there have been only two orders - the Brāhmaṇa and the Śūdra. Raghunandana, a Bengali Hindu jurist in the sixteenth century, writes in his Suddhārthaṭṭya:

The Kṣatriyas of modern times have been degraded to the status of Śūdras. On account of the abandonment of rites the Vaiśyas and the Ambaṣṭhas also have degenerated (into Śūdras).

To explain away the absence of regular Kṣatriya and Vaiśya orders the apologists for orthodox Brāhmaṇism were compelled to assume the existence of these orders in the remote past, and their subsequent disappearance or 'degeneration'. It is more reasonable to suppose that the four-fold division of society was not indigenous in Bengal, but was imported from the Midland in an imperfect form and the Kṣatriya and the Vaiśya orders failed to make their way there.

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1 Majumdar, R.C. in DHB I, 625.
2 Quoted, Chanda, R.P.: Indo Aryan Races, 44.
It is also significant that two of the greatest challenges to Brahmanical orthodoxy represented by Jainism and Buddhism found considerable favour in Bengal. The wide popularity of these two religions, especially Buddhism in its heterodox Mahāyāna form well spread over different parts of Bengal, is evident from literary, epigraphic, archaeological and other sources which have long received the attention of scholars.¹

Bengal also provided a very fertile soil for the luxuriant growth of esoteric Yogā-Tāntric cults and practices. The extreme popularity of the mother-goddesses as particularly known in medieval times is a striking feature of the religious life in the land. The Tāntric leanings of Bengal have even led scholars to postulate on the Bengal origin of the Tantras. Winternitz opines:

The original home of the tantras seems to have been in Bengal whence they spread throughout Assam and Nepal, and even beyond India to Tibet and China through the agency of Buddhism.²


² History of Indian Literature, I, 592.
Eliot and Payne consider Bengal and Assam as being the original home of Tāntrism. Some of the popular Tāntras like Mahānirvāṇa-tantra and Varadā-tantra are supposed to be of Bengali origin. Leaving aside the question of origin of Tāntrism, which is a highly complex and controversial question, its popularity in Bengal stands beyond all disputations. The influence of the Yogico-Tāntric ideas in the religious traditions of Bengal is also directed towards securing the ground for popular religious movements based on such ideas. It has indeed been a cradle of popular religious movements like Nāṭhism, inspired largely by Yogico-Tāntric ideas. An esoteric cult based on austere self-negation and complete control over the vital, mental and emotional functions, Nāṭhism in its original form was atheistic like early Buddhism, but gradually came under the influence of Śaiva ascetism and Tāntric Yoga. There is good ground to believe that the cult 'originated in Eastern India, probably in Bengal' whence 'the cult and its legends spread out in all directions'. In the traditional verses of the non-Bengali Yogīs there are sufficient

3 Winternitz, op. cit., I, 592n; Eliot, op. cit., 278n.
4 Chanda, op. cit., 153.
6 HBL, 42.
linguistic indications of their Bengali origin. The Nātha Yogīs and their lay followers were considered 'outcastes' as they did not follow the rules of the Brāhmanical orthodox society and their 'songs were not considered elegant enough for the upper classes'.¹ A similarly popular religion in Bengal was the cult of Dharma,² which appears to be an admixture of various strains of religious thought and practice at the popular level. The Dharma worship included rites concerned with all the main occupations of the people, from rice cultivation to tool-making and from chanting of sacred texts to devil dance. There is strong evidence that Dharma was once worshipped as the village deity throughout eastern and northern India.³ The anti-Brāhmanical undertone of the cult is revealed by its tradition in which we read of Dharma's first recruit as Sadā, a Dom. The Doms, significantly enough, monopolised the priesthood of the cult. The initiation ceremony called 'copper initiation' (tāmra-dīkṣā) known among the Dharmists was a clear defiance of its Brāhmanical counterpart (upanayana), confined to the three higher castes of the four-fold Hindu social order. There is reference to tāmra-dīkṣā opening its portals to 'the thirty-six' castes of Bengal.⁴ The tremendous upsurge of

¹ Ibíd., 49.
² Cf. Sastri, H.P. in JASB, 1895, LXIV, Pt. 1, no. 1; Banerjee, K.P. in JASB, 1942, VIII; Sen, S. in B.C. Law Commemoration Volume, I; Chatterjee, S.K. in ibíd.
³ HBL, 54-5.
medieval Bengali literature centering round a host of popular goddesses and gods, besides Dharma and the Natha Siddhās is a significant development along the main lines of cultural progression in the land.

In retrospect the heterodox trend in the religious traditions of Bengal may seem to have stemmed from deeper contradictions in the cultural complex of the country. A significant feature of the distribution of population in the deltaic Bengal as revealed by the census reports was the clustering of some predominant social groups, all occupying lower positions in the social and ritual hierarchy, spread over the southern and eastern parts of the delta. The Mahisyas, the Pods and the Namasūdras constituted the overwhelming majority in the southern region, while Muslim agriculturists (generally called Sekh/Shaikh) and weavers (Jolā) were predominant in eastern Bengal. This demographic pattern might very well have been vitally connected with the known physical developments in the deltaic Bengal. In a deltaic region the premature decline and death of old rivers or sudden rise and violence of new ones are natural features of the landscape. A deltaic river oscillates between its permanent banks, and while, on one side there are extinct or moribund channels, on the other are active land-building ones. Delta-building consequently goes on indefinitely in this manner through the deterioration of old rivers, characteristic of tracts where the anabolism of delta building has been completed and katabolism has set in; and the improvements of old rivers and emergence of new ones in tracts, which have yet to be built up and raised above the level of periodical inundations by the
river system.¹ The entire network of river-system in Bengal have undergone great changes through course of centuries, the most stable and significant feature of which has been a gradual shift of the location of fertile soil from the moribund west of the delta to its mature and active eastern and southern parts.² This must have drawn the aboriginal and pioneer agriculturists and settlers of the old fertile beds of the delta to the new ones. A large number of them were already pushed out of their original settlements by the later colonisers of the higher culture. This appears to have been the case with the whole of the Gangetic Doab, where the higher castes lived in contiguity throughout the Ganges Valley, while the unprivileged Bhars, Pasis, Cāmārs and Dosādhs of the upper plain, just as their Māhisya, Pod, Namaśūdra and Sekh counterparts in the lower delta would live in scattered clumps of houses on the brink of marshes and swamps.³

The development of their material and non-material culture proceeded along the lines determined by their physical environment. The rainfall in these areas is between 60 and 95 inches, while in the rest of the land excluding the northern sub-montane region is between 50

² Ibid., 7-9. 'From all this follows the well-known contrast between the decayed west, scarred with silted or stagnant bhils, the disjecta membra of dead rivers, and the active east....' (Spate, O.H.K. and Learmonth, A.T.A.: India and Pakistan, 574).
³ Mukerjee, R.K., op. cit., 19-23.
and 60 inches. The region along the Padma and the lower Meghna is backed by the Madhupur jungle, a much-dissected older alluvial terrace rising considerably above the general level. This interruption of the slope down to the sea, the ponding back of the local water by the main Ganges-Brahmaputra current, and the high rainfall combine to make the Meghna-Surma embayment perhaps 'the most amphibious part of Bengal' during the rains. The lower tracts are flooded to a depth of 8-15 feet and the homesteads are built on earth platforms 15-20 feet high. As early as the time of the late Sena rulers the Madhyapāṭa Plaṭe of Viśvarūpa-sena mentions a subdivision of Vaṅga as nāyva, which means 'accessible by navigation'. The situation is brought out clearly in the writings of some medieval authorities. Abū'ī Šafī observes:

The rains begin when the sun is midway in Taurus [May] and continue for somewhat more than six months, the plains being under water and the mounds alone visible.

Slightly later 'Abd ū-Lāṭīf notes:

For five or six months most of the land of this province [referring to Alaipur] remains under water, during which period one must use boats

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1 Spate and Learmonth, op. cit., 575.
2 Ibid., 583.
3 Majumdar, N.G.: Inscriptions of Bengal, III, 146, 194.
4 Ā'tin..., op. cit., II, 132.
for the purposes of warfare, travelling or hunting.¹

The areas juxtaposed to the Bay of Bengal, including Bakarganj, Barisal, Noakhali and extending up to Chittagong, were precariously opened to the constant threat of violent cyclonic catastrophes. The resultant 'economic dislocation' and 'indirect suffering' could 'hardly be estimated or exaggerated'.² Men here in this region, especially the agriculturists, wood-cutters, fishermen, boatmen and the like in the most active parts of the delta of the Ganges, the Meghna and the Brahmaputra, which comprised most of eastern and southeastern Bengal were pitted against a Nature that was, on the one hand, so rich and bountiful and so menacing and cruel, on the other. The experiences of material existence in this environment were reflected in the sphere of religious beliefs which were known to have some regional associations. It was no mere accident that the cult of the tiger-god, Dakṣiṇa-rāya,³ emerged and

¹ Op. cit., Bengal: Past and Present, 1928, XXXV, 144. A modern description of the same situation presents a remarkable similarity. 'In the height of the inundation no land is to be seen, and all travelling has to be done by boat.... Half a dozen huts are clustered together on a hillock a few yards square and the inhabitants cannot proceed beyond that hillock, whether to visit their neighbours or their fields... without wading, swimming, or travelling in or on something that can float....' (O'Malley, L.S.S.: Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Sikkim, 8-9).

² Ibid., 575.

³ The name Dakṣiṇa meaning 'south' is itself suggestive.
remained so popular with the folk elements in the population that one of its earliest writers, Kṛṣṇarāma-dāsa, who himself belonged to an upper caste, had to restore the god from his 'vulgar' surroundings at the command of the god himself appearing in a dream. Kṛṣṇarāma's version of the genesis of his composition is quite revealing. According to this, the poet once accepted the hospitality of one of the cowherd caste in a village in southern Bengal. He slept in a corner of the grain shed, and had a dream that a person riding on a tiger and carrying a bow and arrows introduced himself to the poet as the lord of the south. He asked Kṛṣṇarāma to write proclaiming his greatness and assured him that should anyone fail to appreciate the poet's work, the lord will send tigers to eat up his whole family.¹ The goddess Gaṅgā in the folk-literature of this region was represented as the presiding deity of the crocodiles.² In the course of time the fertility and gradual settlement of the mature and active deltaic regions, through the strenuous efforts of the pioneering agriculturists, drew representatives of the higher culture from decadent west. The excavation of Tamluk (ancient Tāmraliptī) in Midnapore district furnishes evidence of a culture of a Neolithic type characterized by the use of polished stone axes being superseded by higher cultures with definite influences in pottery, terracottas etc. from the Gangetic Valley.³ The influx of settlers in

¹ HBL, 141-2.
² Infra, Ch. IV.
³ Subbarao, B.: The Personality of India, 44.
these areas assumed such a proportion that a population survey in the first quarter of the present century reveals 'the world's highest records of rural density in certain areas in the districts of Dacca, Faridpur, Bakarganj, Tippera and Noakhali'. But the shifting of the centres of higher culture did not keep pace with that in the course of the rivers. The western and northern parts of the delta has traditionally remained the seat of hieratic Brahmānical culture. It is not without significance that the first literary records refer to the development of Vardhamāna-bhukti and Kañkagrāma between the Rajmahal hills and the Bhagirathi (Hugli) and along the northern foot-hills or northern parts of Puṇḍravardhana or Varendra with the early inscription at Mahāsthāna on the banks of the Karatoya. As Ray puts it:

The strongest hold of this orthodoxy [Brahmanical] was Bengal west of the Ganges at least up to the southern bank of the Ajay with its citadel presumably at Navadvipa...

The more east and north the country lay from the centre of Brahmanical orthodoxy lesser was, and even to-day is, its grip on the social organisation, which explains the more liberal sociological outlook of the upper grades of the society in Northern and Eastern Bengal and even in Lower or South Bengal.

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2 DHB I, 3.
The old bastion of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, championed by the Sena rulers of Bengal, hailing from Karnāṭa, held its ground in the same region for a long time. The entire drama of Brāhmaṇical revivalism and reorganisation represented by the various attempts at mela-bandhāna as well as the resurgence of Navya-nyāya school, led by Raghunātha-śiromaṇi, and the cultivation of smṛti-literature at the aegis of Raghunandana was enacted almost exclusively in the region of the old moribund delta.

But the process of Sanskritization\(^1\) of the new delta was as inevitable as in other parts of the land. Attempt was made to superimpose an order of ritual hierarchy, which could never correspond to the actual situation. This was revealed in the caste-structure of the land as noted above. Similar problems were to confront the ideational aspects of life in this area as indicated in the case of the tiger-god mentioned earlier. The various popular and heterodox movements in general in Bengal often with pronounced anti-caste tendencies as observed before, may well be viewed as symptomatic of the tensions and stresses generated in the process. The spate of Bengali literature magnifying beyond all proportion's the glory of the serpent-goddess, the tiger-god, the goddess of small-pox, of cholera, the protective deities of children and so on, appears quite intelligible in this context. A critical analysis of this literature shows

\(^1\) In the Srinivasian sense. (Cf. Srinivas, M.N.: Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India, 212–5).
the vigour and tenacity with which these popular divinities fought for their respective recognition from the higher sections of the caste-structure.¹ Through the gradual admittance of popular elements in the religious complex of the land, the ground was slowly laid for the casting of an image of Bengal, rather in an ideational sense, cutting across the horizontal divisions of the society. The pattern of this image is somewhat reflected in the following observation of Chatterjee:²

The people of Bengal had their own pre-Aryan religion, which with a veneer of Hinduism and later of Islam has survived to some extent in the village cults, in the worship of gods and godlings like Dharma, Pāncu Ṭhākur, Manāsā, Sītalā, Dākṣin Rāy, Ghāzī Miyān, Pānc Pīr and others.

It is this legacy that Islam inherited in the cultural environment of Bengal. The advent of Islam in the deltaic Bengal introduced a fresh stream of alien aristocracy and a new set of cultural notions in relation to the Bengali masses. Islam like its fore-runners in the field - Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism - could not but yield

¹ 'Popular Bengali poetry represents these goddesses as desiring worship and feeling that they are slighted: they persecute those who ignore them, but shower blessings on their worshippers, even on the obdurate who are at last compelled to do them homage. The language of mythology could not describe more clearly the endeavours of a Plebeian cult to obtain recognition'. (Eliot, C., op. cit, II, 279).
² Chatterjee, S.K. in Review of 'Hārā Mani (Lost Gem), a Collection of Bengali Folk Songs, Religious and Mystic, mostly by Muslim Poets by Muhammad Mansurruddin', JRASB, 1948, XIV, 149.
recognition to this strong indigenous and popular force in the cultural milieu of the Bengal delta. The Islamic recognition is clearly and boldly written in the masses of medieval Muslim Bengali literature in the same way as the Brahmānical or upper caste recognition is evidenced by the volume of Maṅgala-kāvyā literature showing acceptance of popular divinities\(^1\) in the vernacular language (laukika bhāṣā), which itself developed, often at the initiative of a section of the Brahmānas, in the teeth of opposition and derision by the orthodox members of their community. What is not written however in either Hindu or Muslim literature leaving us curious to explore is the extent to which this recognition was a condition for acceptance and survival of a system, in which the interests of a section of each community, playing active role in bridging the gulf, were at stake. A large number of Brahmānas were associated with the Maṅgala-kāvyā literature, just as there were quite a good number of Muslim religious leaders and preceptors (Pīr) with considerable following among the authors of the Muslim Bengali literature. Both of these sets of writers assigned reasons urging them to action. We have already noted that the Muslim writers were impelled by a sense of communal awareness and responsibility, as expressed in their concern for the religious 'proletariat' in their own community. The poet of the

Maṅgala-kāvyā, on the other hand, wrote, according to his own admission, at the instance of his chosen deity in a 'dream'. We cannot dispel doubt from our mind that none of these groups of writers did possibly reveal the whole truth. The very fact of recognition was a measure of the strength and importance of these popular forces, and the recognition might well be a practical device to maintain their religious role in relation to the vast multitude of members of their respective religious orders.

The absence of the grip of religious orthodoxy in Bengal as a factor in the spread of Islam in the land is a question that invites attention. It is known from the medieval Bengali genealogical (kārīka) and Vaiṣṇava literature that there was no dearth of Brāhmaṇas among people, who aligned themselves eagerly with the ruling class of the Muslims and their way of life. Jayānanda remains apprehensive of the prospect of the Brāhmaṇas 'growing beards', 'wearing socks' and 'reciting masnabis' as he describes the life of Jagāi and Mādhāi, two Brāhmaṇa brothers holding important official positions in Nabadvip, who 'cannot go without wine'. Vṛndāvana-dāsa mentions the Brāhmaṇas 'accepting Islam on their own accord'. He adds:

1 Supra, 77; also, BSI, I, i, 185; Bhattacharya, A.: Bāṅglār Lok-Sāhitya, I, 62.
2 For the Pīrs among these writers, supra, Ch. I, B.
3 Caitanya-maṅgala, quoted, MyBB, 27.
4 Caitanya-bhāgavata, quoted, ibid.
It is his own deed, what can other Hindus do about this? He who courts death himself, what good is there to kill him once more?1

Throughout the medieval period in the history of Bengal, Brāhmaṇas were found occupying responsible positions in the government,2 and consequently remained open to the influences of the ruling class. The increased association of the members of the Brāhmaṇa community with the Muslims did not of course fail to draw some reaction of orthodox nature from their own community. We have already noted the feeling of concern and regret reflected in Jayānanda. Nityānanda-dāsa finds 'all people depraved in the kalikāl' and ascribes it to 'Yabān occupation'.3 One of the leaders of the orthodox Brāhmaṇas, Nulopacānana notes with alarm that Rādhā and Vaṅga of his time were subjected to a great commotion and the noted families in those places were caught in the whirlpool.4 Referring to a few Brāhmaṇa families that were outcasted through 'Muslim contact', the Kula-kārya-kārika holds them responsible for the dissolution of 'kulīnism'.5 The orthodox reaction proceeded along two parallel lines. The immediate reaction was to stigmatize and outcaste those Brāhmaṇa families along with all other people having connexion with them, who 'polluted' themselves by

1 Ibid.
2 See below.
3 Pratima-vilāsa, quoted, MBS, 50.
4 Gosthi-kathā, cited, ibid.
5 Basu, N.N.: Bānger Jātiya Itiḥās, III, 152.
Muslim contact, mostly in the form of taking food with them. Two such important families in west Bengal were known as Pîr-ûlî and Šer-khânî, and there was one in east Bengal called Šrimanta-khânî. ¹ A few other groups (mela) like Bhairava-ghaṭaki, Hari-majumdârî and Dehaṭā were also 'stigmatized' for Yavana-doṣ.² On the other hand, attempts were made to raise a solid bulwark against outside influences by binding the Hindu social order with rigid rules, rites and duties. A renewed emphasis was placed on the smrti sāstras with elaborate and obligatory instructions for conducting life from the womb to the funeral pyre. Vṛhaspati-miśra, Raghunâtha, Raghunandana and Nulo-pañcânana were the leading representatives of this purificatory movement in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The attitudes of orthodox Brâhmaṇism at this period were compared to 'the practice of the tortoise sheltering itself within its own shell (Kurmavṛtti)'.³

The orthodox Brâhmaṇical attitudes were never typical of the reformist movement in general. The liberal force among the Brâhmaṇas responded to the situation by bringing a rather pragmatic and compromising outlook to bear on its policy. An influential Brâhmaṇa of Râdhâ named Datta-khâs, who was an official under Naṣîr ud-Dîn Mahmûd Shâh (1442-59), organised a convention of the Brâhmaṇas of Râdhâ called the Jâtimâlâ Kâchârî which decided in favour of not forfeiting their Brâhmaṇical

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¹ Ibid., 152-60.
² Ibid.
status due to either Muslim contact or receiving titles from the Muslim rulers. Devīvara-ghaṭaka carried the process set in motion by Datta-khās further, and liberalised the Brāhmaṇa community of Rādhā further by regrouping them into thirty six melas (groups). What was attempted by Datta-khās and Devīvara in west Bengal was emulated by Udayanācārya-bhādudī in respect of the Varendra Brāhmaṇas in north Bengal. The Brāhmaṇical liberalism strove to find for the problem confronting their community a solution in line with the religious and cultural traditions of the land.

B. The Political Exigency:

Political exigencies alone, if nothing else, fostered liberal and pragmatic attitudes in the Muslim rulers of pre-Mughal Bengal, which, in their turn, created a congenial atmosphere for seminal cultural activities and developments. Until the whole province was engulfed in the Mughul empire, the Muslim rulers in Bengal exerted themselves in establishing and maintaining their authority in the face of challenges coming on the one hand from the imperialistic designs of the authority centred at Delhi, and on the other from the sustained opposition of the local and neighbouring powers.

Ever since the surprise of Nadiya (1202 A.D.) by the dashing cavalcade under the leadership of Ikhtyār ud-Dīn

1 Basu, N.N., op. cit., I, 184.
2 SPP, 1331 B.S., iii, 109.
3 Ibid.
Muhammad Bakhtyār Khaljī at his sole initiative and design, the relation between the Muslim authority in Delhi and the newly established seat of power at Lakhnauti was left undefined to work itself out through the course of history. The Muslim rulers in pre-Mughul Bengal did work it out by rearing the edifice of an independent sultanate in Bengal. It was achieved neither through a calculated policy shared by all the rulers right from the beginning, nor without opposition from the imperial power at Delhi. Muhammad Bakhtyār himself, on his success in Nadiya, visited the contemporary ruler of Delhi, Qutb ud-Dīn Aibak, bringing valuable presents. The mutual rivalry among his followers led 'Alī Mardān Khaljī, his successor, to seek intervention from Delhi. Sultan Iltutmīs of Delhi took full advantage of the situation to impose his authority in Bengal and placed his son Nāṣir ud-Dīn Māhmūd in authority at Lakhnauti. The name of the ruler of Delhi started being pronounced from the pulpit, and occasionally his coins were issued from the mint of Lakhnauti. From time to time presents of elephants and treasures passed from Bengal to Delhi, and the sultāns of Delhi conferred upon the successive governors titles, privileges of drum-beating, umbrellas and flags. With the weakening of central authority, however, following upon the death of Iltutmīs, there followed a scramble for power in Bengal - a sickening

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1 Minhāj, op. cit., 151.
2 DHB II, 42-3.
period of internal dissensions, usurpations and murders, to which the court of Delhi was a passive and pathetic spectator. But out of this turmoil and the manifest helplessness of the authority in Delhi was emerging the concept and possibility of an independent political personality of Bengal, under some capable hand. Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn Ḥalḥī, who drove Ḥāfīẓ Khān to seek help from Delhi, had already shown the way, which was emulated in a series of unsuccessful attempts that earned for Bengal the appellation of 'the abode of rebellion' (Balghākpūr). Barānī writes:

Lakhnautī is Balghākpūr to the wise and experienced, in as much as its distance from Delhi, the strenuous journey between them and its wide extent, combine to make every wālī appointed by the sultan of Delhi disloyal and rebellious. Should the wālī fail to rise against the sultan of Delhi, there would be others to rise against and kill him and capture the land. With the people of that region, rebellion, for many years, was their very nature (ṭabīʿat) and disposition (khoy).

The most serious attempt at independence was made in the last quarter of the thirteenth century by Mughīṣ ud-Dīn Tughral. The rebellion was brutally suppressed by Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn Balbān, who put his own son Bughrā Khān at the helm of affairs in Bengal. But the process that was already set in motion could not be halted, and soon after Balbān's death Bughrā Khān himself severed his links with Delhi. The independence of Bengal may be said to have

1 Ziyā' ud-Dīn Barānī: Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī, 82.
2 Ibid.
begun from the time of Bughrā Khān. While the Khaljīs were ruling at Delhi, the house of Balban maintained their independent status in Bengal and Bihar. Taking advantage of the fraternal squabbles among the sons of Shams ud-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh (1301-22), Tughluq intervention succeeded in restoring the imperial control for some time, but it did not take Shams ud-Dīn Ilyās Shāh (1342-57) long to mark the formal inauguration of the independent sultanate of Bengal, which, despite two abortive attempts by Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq at imperial domination in the time of Shams ud-Dīn, also known as Ḥājī Ilyās, continued to exist until it passed under the hegemony of the Mughul power (1575 A.D.). The success of Ḥājī Ilyās and his dynasty is largely explained by their policy of siding with the local interests - the Muslim nobility as well as the Hindu chiefs. A full knowledge of the basis of Ḥājī Ilyās' power constrained Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq to promise rewards to different sections of the Bengali population to win them over to his cause. It is

1 Baranī, op. cit., 148; DHB II, op. cit., 71.
2 DHB II, ibid., 68 ff.
3 Shams ud-Dīn Ilyās united in 1353 A.D. the three political divisions that Muḥammad bin Tughluq effected in Bengal. But Fakhr ud-Dīn Mubārak Shāh had already in 1338 A.D. made himself independent at Sonargaon after the death of Bahram Khān, the deputy of Muḥammad bin Tughluq at Sonargaon.
4 Shams-i-Sirāj 'Afīf: Tarīkh-i Fīrūzshāhī, 114-8.
only in this context that a precise appreciation of Hājī Ilyās' titles - Shāh-i Bangālah and Shāh-i Bangāliyān is possible. He was the first independent Muslim ruler to exercise authority over the united kingdom of Bengal, which thenceforward came to be covered by the term Bangālah.

The position of the Muslim ruler of Bengal was threatened not by the expanding power in Delhi alone. The Bengal sultāns, even when they felt secure against the imperial designs of Delhi after the Ilyās Shāhī rebuff to the Tughluqs, remained for a long time apprehensive about the systematic aggressions of their ambitious neighbours. The fabric of the sultanate of Bengal was reared up slowly in piecemeal fashion. What Muḥammad Bakhtyār acquired in 1204 A.D. was but a small tract in the north-western part of Bengal, while the vast territory towards the north-east, south and south-west lay beyond his reach. The process unleashed by him was only brought to its logical conclusion after another two and a half centuries of dogged persistence. By the end of the fifteenth century, during the reign of the later Ilyās Shāhīs, the sultanate seems to have been extended over the whole of Bengal. All through these centuries, and in subsequent years, the nascent Muslim principality in Bengal maintained an uneasy existence surrounded by a ring of ambitious and hostile neighbours - Orissa, Tirhut, Kamrup, Tripura, Arakan and at a certain period the Muslim kingdom of Jaunpur.

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1 'Afīf, op. cit., 114-8.
2 DHB II, op. cit., ii-vi.
The greatest and most direct menace to the Muslim power was the mighty eastern Gaṅga kingdom of Orissa. A feudatory of the Gaṅgas who had his seat at Jajpur on the bank of the Baitarani river proved more than a match for the Mamlûk rulers of Lakhnauti. In 1245 A.D. the Orissan king Narasimhadeva I advanced as far as Lakhnor, or Nagar in Birbhum, captured it, and put the local Muslim fiefholder to the sword along with a large number of Muslims. Emboldened by this success, the Orissan army arrived before the Muslim capital of Lakhnauti, and drove the governor Tughral Tughan Khān to seek shelter within its gates. The beleaguering army was, however, forced to withdraw as reinforcements were sent by the imperial authority. In spite of his failure to capture Lakhnauti, king Narasimhadeva I could not be dislodged from his conquests for the next ten years, when Malik Ikhtyar ud-Dīn Yūzbak, who subsequently assumed the independent title of Sultān Mughīṣ ud-Dīn, forced the Orissans to retrace their steps.

Tirhut, under the rule of the Karnataka dynasty, was a source of concern for the Muslim rulers in Bengal from the beginning. 'Alī Mardān Khaljī and Tughral Tughan raided the territory. Chiyāṣ ud-Dīn Tughluq's eastward march resulted in the ousting of the Karnataka dynasty. It was finally annexed to the Bengal sultanate by Husain Shāh.

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1 Ibid., 43.
2 Ibid., 48-51.
3 Ibid., 20, 46.
4 Ibid., 153.
The ancient Hindu principalities in Kamrup (Kamta-Hajo) were supplanted by a powerful confederacy of Bāra-bhuiñās of immigrant Mongoloid tribes. Under the impulse of a neo-Hinduism, the Koch, Mech, Tharu and other Mongoloid tribes assumed the role of Kṣatriyas, and proved an effective barrier to the progress of Muslim arms in the tract between the Karatoya and Subarnashri rivers for about a century; and further east, the Shan invaders from upper Burma under their kings Sukhaphā (1228-68 A.D.) and his son Sutepha (1268-81 A.D.) laid the foundations of the Ahom kingdom of Gauhati, which posed a great challenge to the Muslim rulers in Bengal. 1 Sultan Mughīṣ ud-Dīn undertook a fatal expedition for the conquest of Kamrup (1257 A.D.) which cost him his life. 2 For a century after Yūzbek's invasion Kamrup was left to itself; but about 1357 A.D. it was again invaded by a Muslim army, possibly in the time of Ḥājī Ilyās. Taking advantage of the Abyssinian anarchy (1487-93 A.D.) Nīlāmbara, the third Khen king of Kamtapur, recovered his position considerably. This led to Ḥusain Shāh's expedition to Kamrup (1498 A.D.). After a protracted siege the Khen capital was captured by treachery. The city was eventually destroyed, and the whole kingdom as far as Hajo was permanently annexed. After the colonisation and garrisoning of the territory, the victorious army on their way back were cut down to the last man by the Ahom forces. 3

1 Ibid., 43.
2 Ibid., 52-4.
3 Ibid., 146-7.
The relations between the Muslim rulers of Lakhnauti and Tripura were also very strained. Tughral is credited with a raid in Tripura. But the most serious attempts at annexation of Tripura were made during the reign of Husain Shāh. In the Tripura chronicle, the Rājamālā, we read of as many as four successive expeditions sent by the ruler of Bengal, some of which proved disastrous for the invading army. The campaigns proved only partially successful. Tripura was finally annexed only in the Mughul period under the viceroyalty of Ibrāhīm Khān.

About the same time a new menace appeared on the far southern end of Bengal. According to the Rājamālā, the Arakanese king took advantage of Husain's preoccupations with Tripura and occupied Chittagong. It was evidently to deal with this Arakanese aggression that the military operations mentioned by Parameśvara and Śrīkara-nandī were started, possibly under the command of the crown prince Nuṣrat, to whom local tradition of Chittagong ascribes the first Muslim conquest of the district. He was assisted by Parāgal Khān, later posted in the newly conquered territory. Operations were probably continued for some years, and from his headquarters on the Feni river, Parāgal, and after him his son Chuṭi Khān, steadily pushed the Arakanese southwards and also maintained a vigilant watch on the Tripura king.

1 Ibid., 59.
2 Ibid., 149.
3 Ibid., 292-302.
4 Ibid., 149-50.
It is not difficult to see that the Muslim rulers of medieval Bengal had no choice in the politically expedient policy of keeping the question of territorial, dynastic and personal security above any other consideration. They were logically drawn towards building up a polity that could ignore the local forces only at its own peril. They had to rely largely upon the local foot-soldiers (paik), and bowmen (dhānuks), which constituted the mainstay of their army. Baranī calls the former 'the well-known foot-soldiers' (paikān-i m'arūf), who claimed to be 'heroic men', used to pride themselves as being the 'fathers of Bengal' (abū Bangāl) and 'took promise before Ilyās' to 'sacrifice their lives' for him.1 The paiks stood in good stead to the Ilyās Shāhī rulers, and, led by Sahadeo or Sahadeva, they rendered invaluable services to Ėjī Ilyās in establishing his authority and a long succession of his dynasty.2 According to Joao de Barros, the paiks in the time of Ḥusain Shāh used bows, arrows and guns.3 Bābūr, who faced the Bengal paiks in the army of Nuṣrat Shāh, noted some of the peculiarities in their battle array.4 In the beginning Muslim arms penetrated only towards the south and north of Lakhnauti, where the cavalry could be profitably utilised. Soon they realised that the cavalry was of little use in the vast riverine tract of eastern

1 Baranī, op. cit., 593.
2 Yahyā b. Ahmad Sirhindī: Tārīkh-i Mubārak Shāhī, 125.
3 Campos, J.J.A.: History of the Portuguese in Bengal, 34.
and southern parts of Bengal. The need for a fleet was strongly emphasised as early as the time of Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn 'Iwāz Khālji, who is credited with building up a flotilla of warboats. The role of the local elements in this venture cannot be exaggerated. But it was in the sphere of administration that the presence of local elements was more evident. After the dust raised by the hordes of the conquering army had settled down, the Muslim rulers confronted the harder task of consolidating their military victories. Bakhtyār built up a Khālji oligarchy, dividing the conquered lands into several muqta's among his important followers entrusted with the overall charges of administration, military as well as revenue. In course of the century, however, they evolved a system of administration which was almost a replica of the Delhi sultānate. But the system could not have been worked out without reference to the pre-existing indigenous set-up. The system of revenue administration, in particular, depended largely upon the native system and apparatus. With the beginning of rapprochement between the conquerors and the upper strata of the indigenous society the exodus of the latter from the Muslim territory gradually stopped. The Muslim rulers, with their inadequate knowledge and understanding of the life and traditions of the people of the country, were naturally inclined to

1 Minhāj, op. cit., 163.
2 DHB II, 43. The Muslim conquest of Bengal was followed by an exodus of a section of Hindu and Buddhist scholars of the country to Nepal, Tibet, Mithila, Orissa, Kamrup and Burma. (Ray, Niharranjan, Visva Bharati Quarterly, op. cit., 48; MyBB, 3).
draw them towards participation in the government. From the beginning of the Ilyās Shāhī rule we have clear evidence of Hindus, mostly belonging to the Kāyastha and Brāhmaṇa castes, being employed in exalted positions in the government. The Muslim rule in Bengal marked a significant rise of the Kāyasthas, who ingratiated themselves with the ruling Muslims, through their knowledge of the Persian language, in particular, and their avidity for learning, in general. Their intellectual accomplishments are attested by the self-consciousness of the caste, whose members declared that the goddess of learning Sarasvatī was 'benignant' towards them all, that they were all 'learned', 'cultured' and 'adornments' of a place. 1 According to another poet 'the Kāyastha kārkūns are all engaged in learning'. 2 On the authority of Kṛṣṇa-dāsa-kavirāja, the Kāyasthas took up all matters concerning royal administration when Sanātana, a high official in Husain Shāh's government, resigned his position. 3 Significantly enough, quite a good number of poets flourishing in medieval Bengal belong to the Kāyastha caste such as Māladhara-vasu, Srīkara-nandī, Kavindra-parameśvara, Kāśirāma-dāsa, Rāmacandra-khan, Locana-dāsa, Kṛṣṇa-dāsa-kavirāja and Govinda-dāsa (Ghoṣ). The Muslim rulers found in them some of the ablest administrators of medieval Bengal. Māladhara-vasu of

1 Mukundarāma, op. cit., 354.
2 Rūparāma: Dhrāma-maṅgala, quoted MyBB, 15.
3 Kṛṣṇa-dāsa-kavirāja: Caitanya-caritāmṛta, quoted, ibid.
Kulingram in Burdwan and his son Lakshminatha-vasu distinguished themselves in the service of the Bengal sultans at the close of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth centuries. The Muslim rulers reciprocated by conferring the titles of Gunaraja-khan and Satyaraja-khan on them respectively. Another distinguished Kayastha family of Mahinagar in West Bengal rose to eminence in the service of the sultanate about the same time. The family owed the beginning of its ascendency to Isana-khan who occupied a high position in the revenue department. It was, however, with his son, Gopinatha-vasu, who was subsequently honoured with the exalted title of Purandara-khan and became the wazir, that their fame reached its greatest height. Purandara-khan's elder brother Govinda-vasu was an officer-in-charge of the treasury, being honoured with the title of Gandharva-khan. His younger brother Sundarbara-khan was also in government employ. Of the five sons of Purandara-khan - Kesava-khan, Nilambara-khan, Srinivasa-khan, Narahari-khan and Harihara-khan - the former became most distinguished by occupying the position of Chatranaigir, the superintendent of the royal parasol-holders or the chief of the royal body-guard. His son Cakrapani-khan succeeded him in his position under Husain Shah. Srikrshna-vasu, another son of Kesava-khan, held the confidential position of Bisvasa-khas. There were other

1 Maladhara-vasu: Srikrshna-vijaya, 11, also Introduction.
3 Hence he is called in Vaishnava literature as Keśava-chatri.
Kāyastha families who rose to position in the sultanate. Three brothers, Rāmabhadra, Rāmanātha and Vānīkānta-rāya held positions in the revenue department in the reign of Ḥusain Shāh. Vānīkānta later on came to occupy the high position of Rāya-rayāna. The process continued in the time of the Afghān sultāns also. Rāmānanda-guha and his sons Bhavānanda, Guṇānanda and Śivānanda held responsible offices in the government of Sulaimān Karrānī (1565-72). Bhavānanda and Guṇānanda rose to the position of ministers and Śivānanda attained the office of the chief of the revenue department. Śrīhari, son of Bhavānanda, was elevated to the position of wāzīr and was honoured with the enviable title of Vikramāditya by Sulṭān Dawud Karrānī (1572-5). His brother, Jānakiballābha was promoted to the headship of the revenue department with the title of Basanta-rāya. Abū'l Fażī notes in his account of the subah of Bengal that 'the zamīndārs are mostly Kāyaths'. There was a large number of Kāyastha revenue officials, who bore the titles of Caudhurī, Majumār, Adhikārī, Neogī and others. Rāmacandra-khān, a Kāyastha of the Ghōs family and son-in-law of Purandara-khān, was appointed adhikārī of the village, Chatrabhog, by the ruler of Gaur.

1 Jadunandana: Kārika, quoted, Basu, ibid., ii, 118-21.
2 Rāmarāma-vasu: Pratāpāditya-caritra, 32-8.
3 Ā'in..., op. cit., II, 141.
4 Even now among the Bengali Kāyasthas, a large number of families are found with these titles.
5 Vṛndāvana-dāsa, op. cit., 333, 508.
The Muslim sultāns also engaged the talents of several outstanding administrators belonging to the Brāhmaṇa caste. Ḥājī Ilyās is known to have rewarded many local Hindu chiefs including Brāhmaṇas for having rendered military co-operation to him against Fīrūz Tughluq. ¹ Duryodhana, a Brāhmaṇa officer, received the title of Vaṅgabhūṣaṇa (the ornament of Bengal). Another kulin Brāhmaṇa, Cakrapāṇi, was honoured with the title of Rāja-jayī (the victor of the kings). According to the family accounts of the Sānnyālas and Bhādudīs of Rajshahi district, they owed their prosperity to their association with the Ilyās Shāhīs. ² Ḥājī Ilyās is said to have patronised four Brāhmaṇa brothers belonging to these families. Jayānanda-bhāduḍi was appointed dīwān, and Subuddhi-khān, Keśava and Śikhāi-sānnyāla were given ranks in the army. In the beginning of the fifteenth century the Ilyās Shāhī rule provided an unparalleled example of the steady rise of a Brāhmaṇa chief of north Bengal, named Gaṇeṣa ³ or 'Kāṁs' as the Persian chronicles put it wrongly, to the position of a regent and king-maker, if not king himself. ⁴ His son, variously named as Yadu, Jītmaḷ, Yaduesaṇa, adopted Islam and proved himself a capable ruler with the name of Jalāl ud-Dīn Muḥammad

¹ Uḥruvaṅganda: Mahāvaṃsāvalī, quoted, Basu, N.N., op. cit., Brāhmaṇa Kāṇḍa, iii, 61.
³ DHB II, 120-8.
⁴ The long established view in favour of the assumption of royal authority by Gaṇeṣa has been questioned by Dani. (Cf. JASB, 1952, N.S., XVIII, ii, 121-70).
Shāh (1415-32 A.D.). Jalāl ud-Dīn was served by a brilliant Brāhmaṇa scholar, poet, administrator and commander, Vṛhaspati-miśra, on whom he conferred the grandiose title of Rāya-mukūta and Pāṇḍita-sārvabhauma. His sons Rāma and Bīrāma or Bīswāsa also occupied important ministerial positions. Jalāl ud-Dīn conferred the title of Rāya-rājyadhara on another of his Hindu commanders. In the reign of 'Alā' ud-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh, two Brāhmaṇa brothers, Rūpa and Sanātana enjoyed positions of great responsibility and confidence at the court. Rūpa held the important office of dabīr-i khaṣ (personal secretary) of Sultān Ḥusain Shāh. His elder brother Sanātana occupied the post of sakar-mālik (sakar-i mulk) or minister of state. They enjoyed great influence and prestige in contemporaneous Bengal. According to Jayānanda:

'Thousands of horsemen run before and after them'.

Besides the Kāyasthas and Brāhmaṇas, Hindus of other social denominations were also in the service of the state. In the early Ilyās Shāhī period, Kuladhara, a Bāṇik by caste, served in the government and received two successive titles - Satya-khān and Subharāja-khān. A

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1 MyBB, 10-2.
2 The name of the person is not available. But it is known that his father was Jaga-datta and it is only on his request that Vṛhaspati-miśra wrote his famous Smṛti-ratna-hāra, ibid.
4 MyBB, 16.
Vaidya named Dāmodara, who served in the Husain Shāhī government, received the title of Yaśorāja-khān. We have references to quite a few other Hindu names in the service of the sultanate. The name Sahadeo as the leader of the paiks in the time of Ḥājī Ilyās has already been mentioned. The sultanate period of Bengal indeed evolved the structure of a polity which was based on recognition and utilisation of the local elements.

Quite consistent with the pragmatic policy of liberal adjustments in administrative affairs, stemming from a political situation fraught with dangers, the Muslim rulers often fostered the cause of the Bengali language and even literature embodying Hindu religious traditions. The royal patronage was a significant factor in the development of the Bengali language and culture, as the royal court had hitherto been the hub of the Sanskrit language with all its cultural implications. It appears, however, that the extent of royal patronage was rather limited and sporadic. Very few of a long line of sultāns could claim this distinction. The Sanskrit scholars continued to be in the court and honoured. But the enduring contribution of the sultāns in this respect lay in their attitude towards Bengali, in sharp contrast with that of their predecessors on the throne, and in the example that they had set about it—an example which was emulated by other officials, local chiefs and the

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
neighbouring courts of Tripura, Kamta and Rosang. The cumulative effect of all this was to create a great ferment in the mind of the Bengali people outside the small circle of the Sanskritists, which did not take long to lead to a vigorous outburst of Bengali literary works, religious and secular.

Mālādhara-vasu, who rendered the Bhāgavata into Bengali, was patronised by both Sultān Rukn ud-Dīn Barbak Shāh (1459-74 A.D.) and Shams ud-Dīn Yūsuf Shāh (1474-81 A.D.). Mālādhara-vasu, as we have already noted, was honoured with the title of Guṇarāja-khān. Yaśorāja-khān, who composed Śrīkrṣṇa-māngala, was an officer in the court of 'Alā' ud-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh. But far more momentous development took place in the south-east corner of Bengal in the time of Ḥusain Shāh. Since at least the days of the last Pāla kings the recital of the Mahābhārata had been a custom at the courts of kings and feudal chiefs. After the darkness of centuries, a glimpse of the continuation of this practice was found in the shadow court of a provincial chief under Ḥusain Shāh. There, at the request of his patron Parāgal Khān, a commander

1 Supra, 95-6.
2 Scholars mostly agree that Mālādhara-vasu received his title from Sultān Shams ud-Dīn. (MBS, 35; Rahim, op. cit., I, 217). But Sen points out that the composition of Mālādhara's Śrīkrṣṇa-vijaya began in 1473 A.D. and there he uses his title Guṇarāja-khān in the colophon. Sen strengthens his argument by referring to another poet, Kuladhara, who received the title of Rāja-jay from Barbak Shāh. (BSI, I, i, 128; MyBB, 16-7).
3 MBS, 36; Tarafdar, op. cit., 249.
(laskar) in Chittagong, who was never tired of listening to the Purānas, Parameśvara-dāsa entitled Karīndra, the court poet of the former, made the earliest rendering of the Mahābhārata in Bengali. The enormous popularity of the work is attested by Saiyid Sulțān, and is also evident from the fact that its manuscripts have been recovered from all parts of the country. Parāgal's son Nuṣrat Khan, better known as Chuṭi Khan, who succeeded his father to his official position, shared his father's liking for the Mahābhārata stories. He was very much impressed with the Aśvamedha-parva (the Horse-sacrifice section) of the Mahābhārata as narrated by Jaimini and desired its Bengali recension. Poet Śrīkara-nandi, who was very much attached to him, took up the task. Śrīkara's introduction to his work deserves careful

1 BSI, 253-6.
2 Supra, ch. II, B.
3 HBL, 80.
4 It has long been accepted that Śrīkara wrote this at the instruction of Chuṭi Khan. (HBL, 12; Dasgupta, T., op. cit., 99; MBS, 37; HBL, 81). But S. Sen, who had earlier attributed the work to Chuṭi Khan's instructions, amended his position later on to find that 'there is no mention of Chuṭi Khan being the instructor', and he prefers to accept that 'Parāgal and not his son - got it done by Śrīkara-nandi'. (BSI, 1, i, 256). Sen has not adduced any better reason than a bare statement that Chuṭi Khan is never mentioned as such. The extract he has quoted to nullify his former stand and to transfer the authorship of the suggestion from son to the father is taken without its context. From the context of the passage, we have quoted, the 'Khan' who suggested the Bengali rendering can be no other than Chuṭi Khan. (See, for the whole relevant extract, Sen, D.C.: Banga Bhasa o Sāhitya, 152-4.)
attention, for it not only reveals that Parāgal and Chuṭi Khān carried on the tradition, and could follow the recital of the Sanskrit text of the Mahābhārata, but also throws valuable light on the attitudes of a section of the Muslim ruling class to the indigenous cultural heritage in course of a process of cultural coalescence. So says the poet:

In the court attended largely by pundits the high-souled Khān was one day seated surrounded by his friends. He was listening to the tale of Mahābhārata, the stories of the Purāṇa text compiled by the great sage Jaimini. The episode of the Horse Sacrifice pleased him; and the Khān addressed the assembly: 'We have heard the Mahābhārata of Vyāsa as told better by the sage Jaimini. The Sanskrit text of the epic is not understood by all. So, listen, you poets, to my request. By being narrated in the local speech let the story proclaim my name throughout the land'. Placing on head his request as a chaplet Śrikara-nandi speaks in this Pāṇcālī composition.²

While he was a young prince, Ḥusain Shāh's son and successor, Nāṣir ud-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh, is credited on the authority of a passing reference by Kavīndra-paramēśvara with 'getting a Pāṇcālī [versified work] written'.³ In

1 That Chuṭi Khān used to enjoy the Mahābhārata is evident from Śrikara who writes: 'The son of Lāskar Parāgal Khān is pleased to listen to the narrative about the Yajña (sacrifice, possibly the horse sacrifice)'. Quoted, ESI, I, i, 257n).

2 Aśvamedha-parva, quoted, ibid., 257.

3 Kavīndra-paramēśvara: Mahābhārata, quoted, Sen, D.C.: Banga Bhāṣā..., 138. Rahim cites D.C. Sen as his authority on this point and writes: '...Nuṣrat Shāh had the Mahābhārata translated into Bengali by Kavīndra (continued p.104)
the absence of any specific reference to this work and its poet, the name of Vidyāpati, also known as Kaviśekhara, is suggested to our mind. In the colophon of a song, Vidyāpati pays his tribute to 'Nāsirā Sāhā'. A song composed by Shaikh Kabīr and containing the name of 'Nāsirā Sāhā' has come down to us. Shaikh Kabīr is supposed to be closely connected with Nuṣrat Shāh.

Nuṣrat Shāh's son Fīrūz as a crown-prince patronised Śrīdhara, who composed Vidya-sundara, a romantic narrative.

The material and moral forces stemming from this combination of cultural traditions and political exigencies of the country confronted the development of Islam and of Muslim society in medieval Bengal. This brought the community face to face with the question of helping out the evolution of a system that tended to emerge from the interaction of the pre-existing and the new forces as an integral part of the structural unity

3 (continued from p.103)
Parameśvvardas, a poet other than the one at the court of Paragal Khan. ... The introduction of the translated Mahābhārata supplies this evidence'. (Op. cit., I, 218). Our reading of D.C. Sen makes this observation absolutely unwarranted. Sen does not have anything more to cite about the poet and even the name of his work than the cryptic information left by Kavīndra, which yields neither the name of the poet nor that of the work. Rahim's observation appears most intriguing in view of the fact that Sen prefers to identify the unknown poet with Sāhjāya, who is also known to have composed a Mahābhārata in Bengali.

1 BSI, I, i, 103.
2 MBS, 38; Tarafdar, op. cit., 250-1.
3 MBS, 38.
of the country. Political Islam, as we have already noted, responded to the challenge readily, and laid the basis of a stable polity. The sultans did not concern themselves seriously, if at all, with the dar ul-Islam. ¹ The expressions of their concern consisted of making formal use of the title Nāṣir-i Amīr ul-Mu'mīnīn or al-Nāṣir Amīr ul-Mu'mīnīn (Helper of the Commander of the Faithful) or Ghaus ul-Islām wa'l-Muslimīn (Helper of Islam and the Muslims) on some of their coins. ² The name of the Khalīfā also appears on the coin, even after the Baghdad Khilāfat came to an end. There is only one positive instance of a Bengal sultan seeking recognition from the Khalīfā. Sultan Jalāl ud-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh sought for, and actually received investiture from Ashrīf Saif ud-Dīn Barstāy (1422-38 A.D.), the ninth ruler of the Burjī line of the Mamluk rulers of Egypt. ³ 'Alā' ud-Dīn Ḥusain Shāh in his Malda inscription of 1495 A.D. appears with the title of Khalīfatulāh. ⁴ Even these formal gestures should not be divorced from their political implications. All this tend to become

¹ In Muslim jurisprudence the world is divided into dar ul-Islām and dar ui-barb - the abode of Islam and the abode of war respectively. The distinction implies a unity of the Muslim world. (Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, 68-9).


⁴ JASB, 1874, 302; Dani, op. cit., 45.
more meaningful in the context of the perennial tension, rivalry and hostility between Delhi and Gaur - Pandua. As regards activities like construction of madrasas in the city of Mecca and Medina, as known about Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn Aʿẓam Shāh¹ and Jalāl ud-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh,² and building of a sarāi at Mecca and excavation of a water channel at 'Araffat, as also known about Sulṭān Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn,³ we need not look beyond the explanation of the acts of piety of an individual believer. It is possible, however, to read secular motives behind such religious activities, but none of such explanations had any extraterritorial implications. A secular explanation of this type may account at least in part for such religious activities of Jalāl ud-Dīn, who suffered the unusual fate of having to pass through the successive stages of conversion to Islam, reconversion to Hinduism, repulsion at the uncompromising attitude of the Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy against his reconverted status, and final return to the fold of Islam on the eve of his assumption of royal dignity.⁴ A similar explanation can be adduced for Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn, who waged a fatal war for the throne against his father, Sikandar, in which the latter was killed.⁵ But in the light of other information about

² Ḥājī Dabīr, op. cit., III, 979, cited Karim, ibid., 50.
³ G.A.A. Bilgrāmī, ibid.; Karim, ibid., 49-50.
⁴ DHB II, 127-8.
⁵ Ibid., 114.
him, Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn does not appear to have been actuated solely by a secular motive of this nature. His orthodox religious education in early life and orthodox associations in the later part of it seem to represent him as of a different mould than the general run of the Bengal sultanāns, as we shall note below.

On the whole, the Muslim sultanāns of Bengal did not search for any political and religious values outside the geographical limits of contemporaneous Bengal. The focus of their attention was to safeguard their own interests by raising a bulwark of power around them, which could not exclude, far less alienate, the local Hindu aristocracy. The policy, as we have already noted, led to the growth of a powerful Hindu element in the ranks of the official aristocracy, exercising significant influence in the affairs of the government. In the Ilyās Shāhī period this nobility, composite but totally committed to individual and local interests, proved itself a determining factor. The policy of the first two Ilyās Shāhīs - Ḥājī Shams ud-Dīn and Sikandar - welded the nobility into a solid force so that during the second invasion of Bengal by Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq 'there appeared no split in the ranks of the Bengalis'. They played a crucial role in the struggle for power between Sikandar and his son, Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn. It is quite reasonable to think that Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn did not share the political outlook of his predecessors, which might have led to his escape to Sonargaon and to the subsequent war against his father ended by his father's death in action. On his

1 BHB II, 112.
accession to the throne he seems to have brought a new outlook to bear on his state-policy, particularly with reference to the participation of the non-Hindu elements in the higher branches of administration. He is known to have been a close friend of Nur Qutb 'Alam, a Chishti Sufi, who at a later period played the pivotal role in the suppression of a Hindu aspirant to political authority in Bengal with the help of military intervention of the Muslim ruler of Jaunpur. Ghiyas ud-Din was taught together with Nur Qutb 'Alam by a Chishti Sufi Hamid ud-Din Kunjnasheen of Nagawr in Birbhum. He seems also to have been on close terms with another orthodox Sufi of Bihar, Shaikh Muzaaffer Shams Balkhi, whom he presented with rich attire, when the latter came to Bengal on his way to Mecca and Medina in connexion with the performance of Hajj. On that occasion, the sultan made all necessary arrangements for ships for the journey of the Sufi and his entourage between Bengal and Arabia. It was again Muzaaffer Shams who wrote him a lengthy letter warning him strongly against any irreligious and imprudent placing of non-Muslim elements at the helm of

1 See below.
3 Askari, H.: 'The Correspondence of two 14th Century Sufi Saints of Bihar with the Contemporary Sovereigns of Delhi and Bengal,' Journal of the Bihar Research Society, 1956, XLII, ii, 16.
affairs. A stickler for justice, Chiyāṣ ud-Dīn remitted, as already noted, vast sums of money for the construction of a madrasā and a sarāi in Mecca and Medina, the excavation of a water channel at 'Arafāt, and so much for distribution among the learned and destitute of Arabia that 'everyone of the two holy places got his own share thereof'. He is also associated with a tradition of being in correspondence with the celebrated Persian poet Jalāl ud-Dīn Ḥāfīẓ. Nothing more of importance is known about this significant ruler. But the local elements in the administrative set-up seem to have remained subdued until his death, which is said in a very late tradition to have been brought about by the machination of the Hindu chief, Rājā Gaṇēśa. His murder was followed by the accession of his son, Saʿīf ud-Dīn Ḥamza Shāh, 'who was raised by the army chiefs to the throne'. But his accession was followed by a civil war involving other members of his family, Nāṣir ud-Dīn Maḥmūd I and Shams ud-Dīn Muẓaffar Shāh. Hardly anything is known about this struggle except the fact that a Hindu chief took part in it and removed Shams ud-Dīn from the throne to assume direct control of the government. He was Rājā Gaṇēśa, the most powerful of the

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1 Infra, 110-11.
2 For the anecdote showing his keen sense of justice, DHB II, 117.
3 G.A.A. Bilgrāmī, op. cit., 183-4; supra, 106-7.
4 DHB II, 117.
5 Ibid., 119.
nobles at the close of the Ghīyāṣ ud-Dīn Aʿẓām's reign. A chief of Dinajpur, who had an independent and hereditary source of power in his large ancestral estate and personal contingents of troops recruited from the sturdy Mongoloid tribes of the sub-montane country not in the sultān's pay, coupled with his ability and experience, made him the foremost among the nobles.

It was at this crucial stage in the history of the country that the Muslim religious orthodoxy made a daring intervention. The rapid rise of Hindu elements in the administration was viewed by the orthodox leaders of the Muslim community with extreme concern and repugnance. They could at least put up with the sordid spectacle of 'the vanquished unbelievers with heads hanging downwards' and exercising their 'power and authority' and administering 'the lands which belong to them'. But the facts that 'they have also been appointed officers over the Muslims in the lands of Islam' and that 'they impose their orders on them [the Muslims]' were irreconcilable, being opposed to the 'severe warnings in the Qur'ān, [and] the Ḥadīṣ'. The orthodoxy disposed of the logic of 'expediency' as untenable, for the policy would prove the 'cause of trouble and sedition'. Such were their attitudes, brought to full light in the following extract from the letter of Maulānā Muẓaffar Shāms Balkhī, a contemporary Sūfī of Bihār, addressed to Ghīyāṣ ud-Dīn Aʿẓām Shāh:

The Exalted God has said, 'Ye who believe take not into your intimacy those outside the ranks'. The long and short of the matter is that in commentaries and lexicons they have said that the faithful should not make the unbelievers and strangers their confidants and
ministers. If they say that they do not make them their favourites and friends but for the sake of expediency, the reply is that God says that it is not expediency but the cause of trouble and sedition. He says, 'Lā Yālunakum Khabālān' (they will not fail to corrupt you) i.e. 'Lā Yaqsērūnā Ifsād-i Amrēkum' (they will not hesitate or spare themselves in creating troubles for you). Therefore, it is incumbent on us that we should listen to the divine command and cast aside our weak judgement. God says 'Waddūna Mā Anittum' (may only desire your ruin) i.e. when you make them intimate with yourself they will love to involve you in evil deeds. An infidel may be entrusted with some work, but he should not be made Wālī (Chief supervisor or Governor) so that he may have control over and impose his authority on the Muslims. God says, 'Let not the believers take for friends or helpers unbelievers and neglect God; if any do that, in nothing will there be help from God except by way of precaution, that ye may guard yourselves from them'. There are severe warnings in the Qur'ān, the Hadīs and historical works against those who have given authority to the unbelievers over the believers. God grants opulence and provisions from unexpected sources, and He gives deliverance from them. There is an authoritative promise of provisions, victory and prosperity. The vanquished unbelievers with heads hanging downward exercise their power and authority and administer the lands which belong to them. But they have also been appointed [executive] officers over the Muslims, in the lands of Islam, and they impose their orders on them. Such things should not happen.¹

It is only in this background that the bitterness and hostility between another leading early contemporary Sufi in Bengal, Shaikh 'Ala' ul-Ḥaq, and Sikandar, who carried on his father Ḥājjī Ilyās' policy of secularism in administration with even greater success, assume significance. The rupture was completed by Sikandar turning 'Ala' ul-Ḥaq out of Pandua to Sonargaon in east Bengal. Shaikh 'Abd ul-Ḥaq Dehlawī attributes the estrangement between Sikandar and 'Ala' ul-Ḥaq to personal jealousy on account of the latter's fabulous wealth outshining the royal treasury. It is said that the Muslim monastic orders of Pandua and Sonargaon of the time had amassed vast treasures by 'beguiling Sultan Ghiyāṣ ud-dīn Azām in his old age and taking leases of the administration of districts (like Sātganw)'. This is further corroborated by the testimony of Ghulām Ḥusain Salīm that Rājā Gaṅesa on his assumption of political power sent Shaikh Anwār, son of Nūr Quṭb 'Ālam, and Shaikh Zāhid, grandson of Nūr Quṭb, to Sonargaon 'to make them disclose the buried treasure of their father and grandfather'.

The phenomenal success of Gaṅesa outraged the orthodox Muslim leadership, and Nūr Quṭb 'Ālam sought for the intervention of Sultān Ibrāhīm Sharqī of Jaunpur to liberate dār ul-Īslām from the clutch of the 'black infidel'. He also wrote to Mīr Saiyid Ashraf Jahāngīr

1 A.H. Dehlawī, op. cit., 143.
2 DHB II, 127.
Simnānī, a fellow Sūfī of Jaunpur to impress upon the Sharqī sultān the solemn religious duty to retrieve the co-believers in distress. The letter that Ashraf Simnānī wrote to Sultān Ibrahim, who sought his opinion on his intended march to Bengal at the instance of Nūr Qūb 'Ālam throws further light on the orthodox attitudes. He wrote:

God be praised. What a good land is that of Bengal where numerous saints and ascetics came from many directions and made it their habitation and home...in the country of Bengal what to speak of the cities there is no town and village where holy saints did not come and settle down....If the sons and descendants of these holy personages, and particularly the son and family members of Hazrat Qutub Alam, are rescued from the clutches of the black infidels with your aid and assistance and the courage and bravery of your troops it would be an excellent thing....I, the afflicted Darwesh of the Alai order, congratulate you on the firm resolve that you have made and I offer my prayer for the deliverance of Bengal from the hands of the infidels. I have already recited the Fathiha prayer to God to render justice. As your object and that of your nobles is to free the land of Bengal and to champion the cause of Islam, if God wills you will achieve your aims in the best manner possible....As the firm resolve and the sound judgement of the King are directed towards helping the cause and satisfying the heart's desire of the son of Hazrat Makhdum ['Ālā' ul-Haq, who was the religious preceptor of Ashraf Simnānī] you should not neglect showing favour to that dear holy personage and you should never refrain from meeting him and fighting for his cause.1

What exactly followed since the arrival of the Jaunpur army at Firuzabad is still buried in the confusions and contradictions of the historical sources. The presence of the Jaunpur army seems to have tipped the scale against Gaṇeśa, who yielded to the pressure of the situation by consenting to the conversion of his son Yadu to Islam. The Jaunpur army returned back reluctantly at the insistence of Nūr Quṭb ʿĀlam, obviously frustrated in their political ambition. The absence of military pressure enabled Gaṇeśa again to recover his position, pushing his converted son to the background, as appears from the coins issued in the name of Danūja-mardana-deva, identified with Gaṇeśa. He also attempted to reconvert his son to Hinduism through a purificatory ceremony, which left Yadu disgruntled at the uncompromising attitude of the Hindu orthodoxy to his status of a reconverted Hindu. Gaṇeśa did not survive long, and the period immediately following his death coincides with the issue of coins in the name of Mahendra-deva, identified by Stapleton with Gaṇeśa's second son, 'a boy puppet, who was raised to the throne' after his father's death by the Hindu party', and who reigned for a few months only, being 'crushed by the partisans of the restored Jalāl ud-Dīn (the title assumed by Yadu on his second conversion to Islam and accession to the throne)'.

Jalāl ud-Dīn's appeal to the nobility, expressing his determination to embrace Islam on his own accord and to forfeit his claim to the throne in favour of his younger Hindu brother in the event of the nobility refusing him allegiance, shows on the one hand

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1 DHB II, 121.
the persistence of strong Hindu elements in the nobility and on the other the secular orientation of the official nobility. He assembled the nobles (a'yan) and other props (arkan) of the realm and declared:

The truth of Islam is evident (zahir) to me, and there is no escape (gurezi) from what is thus imperative (amr) on me. If you accept me and do not turn against my royal authority, then only shall I step into this august throne, otherwise, you may raise my younger brother to the throne and excuse me.1

The assembled people, who could 'bind ('aqd) and dissolve (haq) the realm, said in one voice:

We are followers of the monarch in temporal affairs and have no concern with theological and spiritual matters (mazhab wa din).2

The open confrontation between orthodoxy on the one hand and expediency and liberalism on the other appears to have led to an even battle, with neither side gaining

1 Firishta, op. cit., II, 297.
2 Ibid. Karim (JASP, op. cit., 1958, III, 77-8) has read this significant account of Firishta with reference to the 'Muslim nobility' to show that Jalal ud-Din's accession 'was approved' by them. This is to overlook its deeper implications. Jalal ud-Din's address, carefully analysed, presupposes at least strong secular element in the nobility, if not an outright Hindu one. The logic of his rejection by the Muslim nobility on the ground of his realisation of the truth in Islam does not make a sensible reading. More important still, his offer to relinquish the crown in favour of his younger brother, who was a Hindu, could by no means be treated as a concession to the Muslim section of the nobility.
a complete victory: the orthodoxy gained in their object of not having an unbeliever as wālī, while the secular force in the nobility retained their position in the government. The restored Ilyās Shāhī rulers were cautious against the repetition of the 'Gaṇeśa episode', and tried to clip the wings of the local nobility by introducing a large number of Abyssinian slaves. The experiment ended in a disastrous Hābšī interregnum (1487-93). It was left to the Ḥusain Shāhī dynasty to restore the political equilibrium by striking a remarkable balance between central regal authority and the tradition of local commitments, which could not be ignored, owing to the exigencies of the political situation.

C. The Local Conversion:

By far the most seminal factor in the adaptation of Islam in medieval Bengal was the fact of local conversion. The Muslim society of Bengal, as with varying degrees of importance in other parts of India, was composed of both immigrants and indigenous converts. The question of local conversion presents a historical complexity that has given scope for some intellectual wrangling. The controversy centres round whether or not the bulk of the Muslim people in Bengal are autochthons, and if so, what social and economic strata they were mostly derived from.

When the British administrators first came in contact with the people of Bengal, they arrived at the conclusion that the Muslims constituted an insignificant
number in the population.\(^1\) Their estimates, formed on very insufficient grounds, were generally assumed to be approximately correct. Adam in his Education Report notes about the district of Rajshahi:

Before visiting Rajshahi, I had been led to suppose that it was peculiarly Hindu district. Hamilton on official authority [the estimates of 1801] states the proportion to be that of two Hindus to one Musalman; and in a work published by the Calcutta School Book Society for the use of schools (1827), the proportion is said to be that of ten Hindus to six Musalmans.\(^2\)

Adam's own investigations led him to reverse this to 'seven to three, or the proportion of 1,000 Musalmans to 450 Hindus'.\(^3\) The first census of Bengal found it 1,000 Muslims to 288 Hindus.\(^4\) In 1830 the first census of the city of Dacca was taken by H. Watters, who estimated the native population at 66,667, of whom 35,238 were Muslims and 31,429 Hindus.\(^5\) In 1839 Taylor observed that the population of the district of Dacca consisted of Hindus and Muslims in nearly equal proportions.\(^6\) Even as late as 1860, the Revenue Survey arrived at the conclusion

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3 Ibid., 136.
4 Beverley, op. cit., 131.
5 Asiatic Researches, XVII, 536.
that the population of the Dacca district consisted of 455,182 Hindus and 449,223 Muslims.¹

These estimates indicate the general conviction of earlier administrators until the first census of the whole of Bengal in 1872 revealed that, in Lower Bengal alone, there were 17,608,730 Muslims, of whom 7,948,152 or 45 per cent resided in the nine eastern districts, while the total number of Hindus in the same province was 18,100,458. Throughout the central and eastern districts, with the exception of 24-Parganas, the Muslims constituted at least one-half of the population. Within these districts is a central tract running from Rangpur and Mymensingh on the north to the Bay of Bengal, in every part of which the Muslims were in a decided majority.

The discovery was too revealing to pass without an attempt to comprehend the phenomenon. The British administrators and observers strongly believed that this Muslim preponderance in the Bengal population resulted largely from the fact of local conversion. Early observers like Hodgson² and Buchanan-Hamilton³ had already paved the way for Beverley,⁴ Wise,⁵ Risley⁶ and

¹ Principal Heads of the History and Statistics of the Dacca Division, Calcutta, 1868; Wise, Notes..., op. cit., 4.
³ Statistical Account of Rangpur, 221.
⁴ Op. cit., 130ff; see below.
⁵ Notes..., op. cit., 5.
⁶ Risley, H.: The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, I, i, passim.
Gait,\textsuperscript{1} who argued strongly in favour of the theory of local conversion. But it is not so much the local conversion as such, as their opinionated view about the conversion from the lower rungs of the Hindu social ladder that drew stiff opposition from some quarters and led to sharp diatribes from either side. Khan Bahadur Dewan Fazle Rubbie of Murshidabad wrote a book - \textit{Haqīqat-i Musalman-i Bangla}, which was translated into English as \textit{The Origin of the Musulmans of Bengal} (1895)\textsuperscript{-} to focus attention on the Muslim immigrants in Bengal at different periods of history. Fazle Rubbie's stand was strongly upheld as late as our own decade by Rahim, who along with Fazle Rubbie smells at the back of this 'low class theory' a 'definite intention of lowering the prestige of the Muslims of Bengal'.\textsuperscript{2} The rejoinder from the other side is no less sharp:

\begin{quote}
The dislike which educated Muhammadans have for the theory that most of the local converts in eastern and northern Bengal are of Chandal and Koch origin seems to be due to the influence of Hindu ideas regarding social status, according to which these tribes occupy a very degraded position.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

The root of the controversy lies in the fact that the history of the spread and dissemination of Islam in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, is largely shrouded in obscurity. Historical allusions are sporadic and inadequate for framing an incontrovertible picture.

\textsuperscript{1} Op. cit.; see below.  
\textsuperscript{2} Op. cit., I, 57.  
\textsuperscript{3} Gait, op. cit., 171.
Understandably enough, inference and imagination have taken the place of factual analysis. Despite this, the fact of local conversion seems fairly well established.

There are quite a few references in historical works to local conversion. The earliest is about the conversion of a Mec chief, 'Alī, at the hands of Muhammad bin Bakhtyār Khaljī during his march through north Bengal against Tibet.¹ We are also told about the conversion of a Yogi of Kamrup named Bhojar Brahman,² who arrived at Lakhnauti in the reign of 'Alī Mardān Khaljī (1210-3 A.D.) in search of a Muslim scholar for the purpose of holding a polemical discussion. He was thoroughly impressed by Qāżī Rukn ud-Dīn Samarqandi and accepted Islam.³ From the same source we come to know about the conversion of another religious personality of Kamrup, Ambabha-nātha.⁴ The conversion of Sultan Jalāl ud-Dīn Muḥammad, son of Raja Gaṇeṣa, has already been discussed in some detail. Kālāpāhād, alias Rāju, the famous military commander in the Karrāni regime is known

¹ Minhāj, op. cit., 152.
² The name, which sounds rather strange, can very well be an Arabic or Persian corruption of Vajra Brahman, a name quite appropriate for a Hindu Yogi or a Buddhist Tāntrist (Tarafdar, op. cit., 16). Rahim takes him to be a 'Vedantist Brāhmin' for reasons not clear to his readers. (Op. cit., I, 66).
⁴ Ibid.
to be a Brāhmaṇa convert. ¹ Kālidāsa Cagadāṇi, a Bāis Rājput immigrant in Bengal during the reign of Islām Shāh Sūr (1545-53 A.D.), who had been converted to Islam, ² left a long line of illustrious successors including his son, 'Īsā Khān and grandson Mūsā Khān, Masnad-i 'Alā, two of the leading Bārabhūiṇas of Bengal, who identified themselves strongly with the local interests and culture. ³ During the governorship of Islām Khān (1608-13 A.D.) Raghū-rāya, the Hindu chief of Shahzadpur in the Pabna district embraced Islam. ⁴ A number of medieval family histories record Brāhmaṇa and Kāyastha antecedents of some converted Muslim families. The Pīrālī, the Šer-khānī and the Šrīmanta-khānī Brāhmaṇas were thrown out of the pale of orthodoxy for having family antecedents who had been converted to Islam. ⁵ Kamāl ud-Dīn Caudhurī and Jamāl ud-Dīn Caudhurī, the zamīndārs of Singhatia were known to be Brāhmaṇa converts to Islam. The Rājās of Kharagpur were originally Khetaurīs, and became Muslims. ⁶ The Dewān family of Pargana Sarail in Tripura was of known Hindu origin. ⁷ The family of As'ad

¹ DHB II, 183-4.
² Ibid., 177.
³ Mūsā Khān had a great Sanskrit scholar, Mathuresa, as his court poet. (MyBB, 20-1).
⁴ Mirzā Nathan, op. cit., I, 32.
⁵ Basu, N.N., op. cit., III, 152-8; supra, Ch.II, A.
⁶ Statistical Account of Monghyr, 179; Gait, op. cit., 170.
⁷ Gait, ibid.
'Ali Khan of Baranathan in Chittagong is by origin a branch of the Srijukta family of Naupara. Their ancestor Syama-raya-caudhuri was converted to Islam. The ancestors of Asadullah, the zamindar of Birbhum in the time of Murshid Quil Khan, were known to be Hindus. The genealogical table of the Miyan family of Sirampur, in the sub-division of Patua-Khali, Bakla, shows their Brahmana ancestry. Sivananda-majumdar was converted to Islam and came to be known as Sibun Khan. The same is known about the Rajas of Rupsi in the thana of Jhalkathi and the Khan family of Sirjug in Bakla. The Muslim Caudhuri family of Shahbazpur in Sylhet traces its origin to the Hindu Jangdar family of Panchakhandi. Svaruparama, son of Syama-raja Jangdar of this Hindu family was converted to Islam and became known as Shabhaz Khan. The Muslim Caudhuri family of Daulatpur in Sylhet is also known to be a branch of the family of Ananda-raya, the noted founder of Anandapur.

Medieval Bengali literature also alludes to the fact of local conversion. Seka-subhodaya, one of the earliest literary works of medieval Bengal, doubtfully ascribed to Halayudha, who was one of the court-poets of king Lakshmana-sena, shows the possibility of conversion at the

1 Ibid.
2 Stewart, C., op. cit., 371.
3 Sen, R.K.: Bakla, 121.
4 Ibid.
5 Chaudhuri, A.C., op. cit., II, 216.
6 Ibid., 466.
hands of Muslim divines. ¹ Vṛndāvana-dāsa mentions the Brāhmaṇas accepting Islam 'on their own accord'.²

Contemporary foreign travellers did not fail to observe the phenomenon of local conversion. Barbosa, who visited Bengal in 1518, noticed that of the 'Gentiles' (Hindus) 'every day many turn Moors [Muslims] to obtain the favour of the kings and the governors'.³

All this tends to show the trend of local conversion. This conclusion is further strengthened as tests of other disciplines such as anthropometry and serology are applied to the case. There has always been a general impression of common physical appearance between the bulk of Hindus and Muslims. Charles Grant was attracted by the fact that 'a great number of the poorest or the rural classes of Muslims are so mixed up with their Hindu fellow-labourers as, in social habits and appearances, to be half-amalgamated'.⁴ Wise observes:

...if we examine a crowd of Bengali villagers at the present day, one and only one type of features, of complexion, and of physique pervades them all, and it is impossible for the most practised observer, setting aside the different styles of dress, the beards, and the hair, to distinguish between a Muhammadan and a Hindu peasant.⁵

¹ Ed. Sen, S., Chs. III-IV.
² Op. cit. [1:16]; supra, Ch. II, A.
⁴ Grant, C.: Rural Life in Bengal, 177.
⁵ Wise, JASB, op. cit., 33.
Referring to the 'Nasyā' and 'Sheikh' groups of Muslims in the Jalpaiguri district of northern Bengal, who together comprised, according to the census of 1901, 226,379 of the 228,487 Muslims in the district, J.F. Gruning remarks:

'In appearance, dress and customs, they differ little from the Rajbansis (Hindu)').

The same view is reiterated by J.N. Gupta:

'In North Bengal, the Muslims resemble the Rajbansis'.

With reference to the Indo-Mongoloids of north and east Bengal, Chatterji notes:

The masses, who are the descendants of the Bodos, pure or mixed, in North Bengal and East Bengal - in Rangpur, in Bogra, in Maimansingh, in Comilla, and in Sylhet - are now largely Mohammedan in religion.

Beverley writes:

If further proof were wanted of the position that the Musalmans of the Bengal delta owe their origin to conversion rather than to the introduction of foreign blood, it seems to be afforded in the close resemblance between them and their fellow-countrymen. That both were originally of the same race seems sufficiently clear...from their possessing identically the same physique....

1 Jalpaiguri, DGEBA, 35-6.
2 Bogra, DGEBA, 33.
3 Chatterji, Suniti Kumar: 'Kirāta - Jana Kṛti (A Study on Indo-Mongoloid Contribution to Indian Culture)', JRASB, 1950, XVI, i, 214.
4 Beverley, op. cit., 134.
The general impression of physical resemblance and affinities is reinforced by the findings of modern anthropometric and blood-group studies relating to the people of Bengal.

To Risley goes the credit of first making anthropometric studies that strengthened the hands of sociologists, anthropologists and historians concerned with Indian phenomena. Risley took special interest in the Bengal situation. Among other things he contended, on the basis of anthropometric data on a limited scale, that the Muslims of Bengal were primarily local converts from the lower rungs of the Hindu caste ladder. It is understandable, if undeniable, that Risley's pioneering venture is not above criticism. But there is little sense in treating his work as a mere scrap of paper, as both Fazle Rubbie and Rahim would have us do. It would be a mistake to think that Risley made a generalisation about the whole Muslim community in Bengal. All that he intended to do was to show that the lower strata of both the Muslim and the Hindu society of Bengal sprang from the same ethnic stock. This is why he relied on the anthropometric data regarding Muslims collected from some one hundred and eighty-five jailed convicts belonging to lower echelons of the social structure. This again is

1 Risley's Tribes and Castes of Bengal (op. cit.) is a monumental work in two volumes, each volume being further sub-divided into two parts. Vol. I contains the Ethnographic Glossary and the second one contains detailed tables of Anthropometric Measurements.

2 Ibid., I, 91.
the reason for the corresponding measurements of the Hindus being taken castewise to establish the identity of the former group not with the upper section of the Hindu society but the lower one, which is quite evident from his figures.¹ This resolves the doubt raised by Rahim as he points out:

Risley took the measurement of the nose of very lower [sic] class Muslims, while, on the other hand, he had the nasal examination of the persons of all classes of the Hindus.²

The real point of weakness in Risley's work lies in the extreme meagreness of his data and the lack of adequate scientific method and equipment necessary for such investigations. Risley, however, had set the stage for a process of inquiry which was carried on and applied to the Bengal situation by P.C. Mahalanobis, B.S. Guha and others. The most systematic and adequate study has, however, been made through the collaboration of an anthropologist, D.N. Majumdar, and a statistician, C.R. Rao, under the auspices of the Indian Statistical Institute. The result of their work has been computed, analysed and incorporated into a quantitative study entitled Race Elements in Bengal. The most important feature of this investigation is that they proceeded independently on the basis of common data and arrived at similar conclusions. Among other problems, which they set themselves, one was whether Muslim and non-Muslim groups can be said to belong to two different populations

¹ Beverley, op. cit., 132.
and if not, what was the relative place of Muslim groups, vis-a-vis the Hindu castes and tribes. It is not our purpose to go into the main lines of their investigations. We content ourselves with certain broad conclusions with closest bearing on our problem, which vindicate the position of Risley. To quote from the Report:

As regards the relative position of Muslim groups, we notice that nine groups out of a total of fifteen fall within a narrow range of mean nasal height (21.80 to 22.20). All these nine groups have almost identical mean values as the two Namasudral groups, five have lower mean values and stand very close to tribal cluster and only one, i.e. Muslim of Dacca [the name applied to a group under study] occupies a position close to the caste groups.

The Report proceeds:

If we agree as to the competence of nasal height in defining group divergences, I feel that we should look among the tribal and scheduled caste non-Muslim groups of Bengal for a possible origin of Muslim population of Bengal, and not in the high caste groups, a fact which differentiates the Muslims of U.P., who cluster with the higher castes in nasal height from those of their co-religionists in Bengal. 2

The serological data collected by Majumdar from practically all the districts of Bengal lead to the same

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1 The Candaás have changed their caste name to Namaśūdra since the census of 1901.
2 D.N. Majumdar's Report, Race Elements in Bengal, 96. It may be noted that Majumdar and Mahalanobis made a collaborated anthropometric survey of U.P. in 1941.
conclusion. The three blood groups A, B and O are found in nearly all known populations, though they vary in their relative frequency. The frequency variation of the A, B, O groups has a regional complexion for 'each continent or major sub-division of a continent has its own general character'. It has been found that the Muslims of India as a general rule differ significantly from their co-religionists outside, both with regard to anthropometric and serological type. While the Muslims in the Middle and Near East have high A value and low B and AB value, the Muslims in India have low A and high B + AB value. The serological data obtained from the Muslim population in Bengal tends to the same view, viz., the dissociation of the Bengal Muslims from those outside India and even from those of Uttar Pradesh. This indicates, to quote the Report, 'the local origin of the Muslims, if blood groups evidence has any meaning at all'.

Besides physical resemblance, 'similarity of manners and customs' has also been cited as a proof of local conversion. An early nineteenth century European traveller, Mrs S.C. Belnos, who in her own words was 'a curious and interested spectator of every object... characteristic of native opinions and manners in Bengal', and 'an attentive observer' of 'the festivals and processions, the ceremonials of religion and the practices of ordinary life' notes:

All Musselman born and bred in the country villages in Bengal, assume the manners, language, and dress of the Bengallies....

1 Twenty four Plates Illustrative of Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal, Plate 5.
Referring to the Koc women of north Bengal with special reference to Rangpur, Glazier observes:

...the women of the common people wear the old Kamrup dress, which offers a marked contrast to the common Saree of Bengal. It consists of a square piece of coloured cloth, indigo-striped, passing under the arms and round the back, so as to cross in front where the upper corners are tucked in, leaving the head and shoulders bare, and reaching to the knees below. All women, Hindus and Muhammadans alike, dress in this fashion; and they also attend the markets and transact the buying and selling, to the almost total exclusion of men.1

Shihāb ud-Dīn Tālish writes:

The Muslims whom we met in Assam are Assamese in their habits, and Muhammadans but in their name. In fact they liked the Assamese better than us.2

Beverley raises and tries to answer a pertinent question in this connexion. He writes:

All this, it may be urged, can be sufficiently explained by long residence of Hindus and Muhammadans side by side and their frequent intercourse with each other. It was thus, it will be said, that the original tribes became so Hinduised, that in the present day it is difficult to know where to draw the line between them and Hindus. This no doubt is true enough, but the case is very different in regard to the Bengali Musalmans. In the first place the introduction of the Muhammadan faith into Bengal is an event which has occurred within historical times; whereas no one has yet succeeded in determining the date of the Aryan

immigration. Moreover, even after the lapse of ages, the aboriginal element has not yet been so thoroughly effaced from the low-caste Bengali as to conceal his origin from the most superficial observer. But place a Chandal or a Rujbunsee and a Bengali Musalman together, and were it not for some peculiarity of dress or the mode of cutting the hair, it would be difficult to distinguish the one from the other. The probability is, they are one and the same race, and only within the last few centuries have they ceased to profess the same religion.1

On the same point Gait argues:

It is sometimes denied that the prevalence of Hindu superstitions is a proof of the Hindu origin of the people who believe in them, and it is urged that this may equally well be due to the religious torpor amongst the Muhammadans which prevailed at the beginning of British rule. This might possibly explain the facts in places where Muhammadans are in the minority but it could never do so where they form the bulk of the population. The two religions would doubtless affect each other to some extent, but a strong monotheistic religion like that of Islam would never give way before a tolerant, amorphous and polytheistic creed like that of the Hindus.2

As still another proof of the local origin of the Muslims, in some parts of Bengal especially in the north-eastern areas peopled chiefly by Koces, Meches, Bodos and Dhimals, in the early years of this century the great mass of the Muslims had no designations or surnames of Arabic or Persian origin. In these parts there were few Shaikhs and Khāns, whilst the great majority were

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2 Gait, op. cit., 167n.
called by a common but unexplained name of Nasyā.
Besides this, Hindu names and titles were very common.
Names such as Kālī Shaikh, Kālācānd Shaikh, Vraja Shaikh or Gopāla Maṇḍala were regularly met with. The prevalence of Hindu names among Muslims was also observed in Nadiya. In Noakhali 'Muhammadans with surnames of Chanda, Pal and Patta are to be found...to this day'.

The foregoing discussion has made it abundantly clear that local conversion was a significant strand in the process of expansion of Islam in Bengal, which, in its turn, shaped the mould in which their religion was cast. It is evident that a considerable number of Muslims of various racial affiliations settled down in Bengal at different times. But our knowledge is next to nothing about their numbers and proportion to the other elements in the population. It may not be reasonable to think that the Muslims, who flocked into this country from the triumph of Muḥammad Bakhtyar Khaljī onwards, all settled

1 Bogra, DGEBA, 34; ibid., 172.
2 Mallik, K.N.: Nadiyā-Kāhinī, 225.
3 Noakhali, DGEBA, 39.

'Noakhali is known throughout East Pakistan for the pervading influence of the priestly class called the Mullahs and "pure" Islam'. (Karim, A.K.N., Changing Society..., op. cit., 133). Webster, writing in 1911 about Noakhali, remarks: 'Formerly, it is said, the Mohammedans kept too many of their old Hindu customs, but about the middle of last century they came under the influence of a reforming priest, Maulavi Imamuddin, and are now, almost to a man, Faraizis. They abhor all innovations...and the worship of saints....' (Noakhali, ibid., 39).
down in the land. We have absolutely no knowledge about the movement and mobility of population in medieval Bengal. We do not know how far the 'proverbial bad climate' of Bengal had discouraged the prospective settlers of the upper strata of the Muslim society. The settled Mughul administration in Bengal caused on the one hand an undoubted inflow of Muslims of rank, but on the other 'the viceroys and nobles governing Bengal amassed wealth rapidly and returned to spend it in the luxurious palaces of Delhi and Agra'. In the circumstances, any attempt to break their proportion into figures, as Rahim has chosen to do, appears bizarre and confounding. For reasons not at all clear to his readers, he takes the 'total Bengali Muslim population' in 1770 for 10.6 millions of which '3.27 millions belonged to the stock of the immigrant Muslims and 7.33 millions were from the converted Muslims'. He moves further:

Calculating on the basis of 100 per cent increase on account of birth-rate, we find that the stock of the immigrant Muslims and the converted Muslims numbered about 8 lakhs and 9 lakhs, respectively, two centuries before.

1 DHB II, 186.
2 Wise, Notes..., op. cit., 2.
3 Op. cit., I, 64. With a view to giving 'an idea about the increase of the immigrant Muslims', he draws on purely conjectural basis a chart of the 'Original Settlers', breaking them down racially, with actual numbers on their arrival and showing their respective positions in 1770 A.D. after centuries of growth, which, according to his calculations, comes cumulatively to 3,271,500. (Ibid.)
Thus in 1570 the Bengali Muslim population was 27 lakhs and the Hindus were 41 lakhs, in a total population of 68 lakhs, say 70 lakhs with the Buddhists and others, in Bengal. The Muslims represented 39.5 per cent of the total population of the province. In the growth of this Bengali Muslim people, the foreign element contributed 29.6 per cent and the local converts 70.4 per cent.1

It is needless to point out that no reasonable attempt to deduce demographic conclusions for medieval Bengal is warranted by the extant historical materials. All that can be done about this is to make an attempt, with all its limitations, at comprehending the phenomenon in the light of actual positions revealed by much later census enquiries. There we may have a better 'idea' of the Muslim immigrants categorised under the title of Saiyid, Mughul, Pathan and partially Shaikh - partially because we have already noted the tendency of Bengali Muslim aspirants to social promotion towards assuming the title of Shaikh.2 Gait's Report sums up the position very well, although he sounds a note of caution that 'no exact estimate is possible'. He writes:

...it may be said generally that almost the whole of the functional groups, such as Jolaha

1 Ibid.
2 Supra, Ch. I.B. A large number of the Muslim agriculturists also bear the designation of Shaikh as noted earlier. Similar tendency was noticed among the Hindu aspirants to social position in Bengal, who assumed mostly the caste designation of Kayastha. For this reason, Kayastha is sometimes called the 'national caste' of Bengal. On the same analogy Shaikh may be viewed as the national social group of the Bengali Muslims.
and Dhunia, throughout the province, the great majority, probably nine-tenths, of the Shekhs in Bengal proper...are of Indian origin. The foreign element must be looked for chiefly in the ranks of the Saids, Pathans and Mughals. Even here there are many who are descended from Hindus, and...high caste converts are often allowed to assume these titles, and, in some cases, to intermarry with those who are really of foreign descent, their number, however, is possibly only a small proportion of the total, and may be neglected. If the above estimates be taken as a basis, it would appear that the strength of the foreign element amongst the Muhammadans of Bengal cannot, at the most, exceed four millions, or say, one-sixth of the total number of persons who profess the faith of Islam.¹

Besides local conversion, the other aspect of the question, concerning the social and cultural background of the majority of the indigenous converts, is also a very complex one. History does not help dispel the mist surrounding the actual process of conversion of such a vast number of people in the country, beyond a few recorded sporadic cases. These are quite inadequate for making generalizations on their basis. Besides, those cases have exclusive reference to the upper sections of the Hindu society.² Not much can be made out of this. Common knowledge and impressions, backed up by ethnological facts, point strongly to a conclusion about which history maintains an unfortunate silence. This need not take us by surprise nor drive us to wrong premisses. If the conversion of the masses does not

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¹ Gait, op. cit., 169.
² Supra, 120-3.
find place in history, the history of the masses is of recent development. The affinities of the Muslim masses of east Bengal have been observed with the Candālas and the Pods, and those of north Bengal with the Rājbaṃśīs and Koces.¹ The conclusion is based not only on their striking physical resemblance, but also on the fact that the proportion of Hindus of other castes in these parts of the country has always been very small. The Koces are generally supposed to have spread in any numbers only as far westward as the Mahananda, which runs through the Purnia district. East of that river, where the bulk of the population was Koc, no less than two-thirds were Muslims, while to the west of it, where the Koc element was weak, less than one-third of the population was returned under the religion.² The main castes were the Rājbaṃśīs (including the Koces) in north Bengal, and the Candālas, Pods and others in east Bengal. It may also be recalled that the Report of Majumdar and Rao points out that nine out of the fifteen Muslim groups spread over the different districts of Bengal studied by them have almost identical mean values in the matter of nasal height as the two Namaśūdra groups, and five have lower mean values and stand very close to the tribal cluster.³ The Muslims belonging to this social and economic level constituted, at the census of 1901, about five-sixths of the total Muslim population of Bengal. Here again Rahim

¹ Gait, op. cit., 169; Beverley, op. cit., 132-3.
² Gait, ibid.
³ Supra, 127.
has his own statistical figures and conclusions. We quote him without comment:

...of the 70 per cent converted Muslims, at least half of them came from the upper strata of the Hindu and the Buddhist communities and the rest was recruited from the lower class. Thus the Bengali Muslim population was formed of about 30 per cent converts from the upper class non-Muslims and 35 per cent converts from the lower strata of the Hindu society. Thisexplodes the theory that the Bengali Muslims were converts mostly from the low caste people of the Hindus. No society of the sub-continent could claim to represent a larger percentage of the immigrant Muslims and converts from the upper class Hindus as well as the Buddhists.1

D. The Rural Character of the Muslim Masses:

If the indigenous element was a significant constituent in the forces of change and adjustment, the fact that the character of the Muslim masses in Bengal was predominantly rural was not less consequential for the development of Islam in the land. Islam may be characterized as 'a religion of the townspeople', and to the Muslim, 'a town was a settlement in which his religious duties and his social ideals could be completely fulfilled'.2 The Prophet Muhammad himself was born into the most highly developed urban community of contemporary Arabia, and the appeal of his message was in large measure due to its 'appropriateness to the urban

situation'. 1 Indeed, the emergence of the religion itself may be largely explained by a set of contradictions in the social and economic life centred at Mecca arising out of the conflicting interests in a nascent merchant community. 2 The stamp of that urban mission was never lost in Islam. While discussing the question of Indian Muslims from this standpoint, Mujeeb notes:

Islam has, in all countries, promoted urban life, and Muslim civilization has everywhere been essentially urban in character...the standards of life and culture have been urban: the ideally good life has been life 'among men', in habitations where the variety of habits, tastes and conditions has provided sufficient opportunity for cultural and spiritual experience. Educated Indian Muslims have, therefore, thought of their community as consisting primarily of city-dwellers, and judged themselves as a people setting up and conforming to standards of city-life; the uneducated, uninformed population of the countryside has not been given the consideration to which it is entitled by the very fact of its existence. This is understandable, because, almost the whole contribution of the Muslims in manners, in literature, in art, is seen in the cities. 3

Bengal marks a significant departure from this pattern of Islamic culture. In Bengal the Muslims 'appear to take less readily to a town life than the

1 Ibid.
2 Wolf, E.R., op. cit., passim; Watt, W.M.: Muhammad at Mecca, passim; also, his Islam and the Integration of Society, passim.
3 Mujeeb, op. cit., 10.
Hindus; but elsewhere the reverse is the case and in the United and Central provinces, in Madras, and in many of the adjoining states the proportion of Muhammadans in towns is double that of Muhammadans in the population at large. In his analysis of the Muslim population of Bengal, Gait remarks:

The first point to be noticed is the very large proportion of Musalmans who subsist by agriculture, and the small number engaged in intellectual pursuits.... No less than 7,316 in every 10,000 Muhammadans are cultivators, compared with 5,555 amongst the same number of Hindus... it may be said generally, that the occupations, other than those connected with agriculture, in which Muhammadans preponderate are very few. The chief are those of tailors, dyers, ... silk-worm rearers, operatives in silk-filatures, cotton cleaners and pressers, butchers, ... hukka-stem farriers, makers and sellers of glass bangles, and book-binders. Although they do not outnumber the Hindus, the proportion of Muhammadans is also high amongst vegetable and fruit-sellers, thatchers, silk-spinners and weavers, and cotton weavers.

East Bengal, where, according to the Census Report of 1901, two-thirds, and in north Bengal, three-fifths of the inhabitants are Muslims, has a characteristically rural landscape. Even in the words of a very recent monograph published under the auspices of the Government of Pakistan:

A very striking feature of East Pakistan [comprising east Bengal and part of northern and southern Bengal] is a certain absence of towns. Even Dacca, the capital city, retains many an interesting rural feature of East

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1 The Imperial Gazetteer of India. I, 455.
2 Gait, op. cit., 484.
Pakistan. Chittagong, East Pakistan's principal port is growing rapidly, but has a long way to go in taking on a completely urban complexion: and when you go to Sylhet, you are almost amidst rural surroundings. The whole province could with truth be described as a huge sprawling village.¹

It is again extremely significant that the Muslim preponderance was not met with in the vicinity of the centres and seats of Muslim power. In some districts like Rajshahi, Pabna, Noakhali and Mymensingh they formed three-fourths of the population, and in Bagura as much as four-fifths.² None of these districts contained any of the places famous as the headquarters of Muslim rulers. In Dacca, which for a long time contained the seat of government, Muslims were very slightly in excess of Hindus. In Maldaha and Murshidabad, which contained the centre of Muslim rule for quite a few centuries, the Muslims formed a smaller proportion of the population than they did in the adjacent districts of Dinajpur, Rajshahi, and Nadia. In Bakharganj, Tripura, Rangpur, they constituted two-thirds of the population, and in Jessore and Faridpur more than half.³

This characteristic pattern of distribution of Muslim population in Bengal was a surprising revelation for the British administrators and observers. For them 'it is easy to understand, why Muhammadans should be found in large numbers in the Panjab and Sind, which lie

1 East Pakistan: Land and People, op. cit., 23.
2 Beverley, op. cit., 132; Gait, op. cit., 156.
3 Ibid.
on or near the route by which successive hordes of Afghan and Mughal invaders entered India; but it is not at first sight apparent why they should be even more numerous in Bengal proper. What was more surprising for them was that the Muslim preponderance, even in Bengal, did not, as we have already noted, thrive under the shadow of the seats of political and military power of the Muslim rulers. Underlying this line of thinking is an implied belief that Islamic expansion is better understood in the framework of force and militancy. The Bengal phenomenon proved shattering for the believers in brute force and persecution as significant factors in the expansion of Islam. This characteristic distribution of Muslim population in Bengal is indeed significant in the context of the broader question of the methods of conversion. If there is any question concerning Islam in India which has drawn universal attention and elicited a motley variety of individual opinions, but has remained as dark as ever, it is that of how Islam secured the adherence of its indigenous followers. Far greater than the fact of local conversion, the motive forces behind it remain a vast open field for historical speculation. For a long time the success of Islam was generally associated with the 'fire and sword' carried by the Muslim conquerors as we have just alluded to. The extension of political authority of the Muslim conquerors in the territories which their armies overran, occasional plunders, pillages and destructions following upon military

1 The Imperial Gazetteer of India, I, 475.
victories, and stray and isolated references to cases of oppression and persecution by the Muslim members of the ruling class have often been resorted to in accounting for the expansion of the religion. Beverley believes:

The Mohammadans were ever ready to make conquests with the Koran as with the sword. Under Sultan Jalaluddin (Jadu), for instance, it is said that the Hindus were persecuted almost to extermination.1

Gladwin mentions a law enforced by 'tyrannical' Murshid Quilî Khān that any āmil or zamīndār, failing to pay the revenue that was due or being unable to make good the loss, should with his wife and children be compelled to become Muslims.2 If it is a matter of listing similar instances, we need not depend on such doubtful historical evidence. Sporadic occurrences of this nature whose historical veracity is less open to question may easily be gleaned for medieval Bengal through other sources. The cases of conversion recorded in the family histories are mostly results of compulsion or accident, rather than of a voluntary adherence to the faith. Some ancestors of the Pīrālîs, the Šer-khanîs and the Šrimanta-khanîs, for example, became Muslims because they were outcasted on account of having been forced to taste or smell forbidden food cooked by the Muslim.4 Šyāma-rāya-caudhurī, to whom

3 Supra, 121-2.
4 Supra, 121.
the family of As'ad 'Ali Khan of Baranthan in Chittagong traces its descent, was deprived of his caste by being forced to smell beef. Sivānanda-majumdar (Sivān-khan), the ancestor of the Miyan family of Srirampur in Chittagong, was forcibly converted.\(^1\) The same is known to be the case with the 'Rajas' of Runsi in Jhalkathi, as also the Khāns of Sirjug in Bakla.\(^2\) The forcible conversion of the Brāhmaṇas is indirectly evidenced by the provisions contained in the Rāmāyana of Adbhutacārya for restoring the caste status of a Brāhmaṇa forced to take food by the Muslim. He says:

> In the event of the caste being forcibly undermined by the Yaban, it may be restored after necessary penances, provided not more than six mouthfuls of [Muslim] food have been taken...for the divine force of a Brāhmaṇa is not destroyed up to six generations...but it is no longer retained after taking beef.\(^3\)

Medieval Bengali literature contains references to persecution and oppression, mostly of the Brāhmaṇas, by certain tyrannical Muslim officials or religious fanatics. Mukundarāma mentions a Muslim official, 'Māmud Sarīp' (Maḥmūd Sharīf), who is represented not only as a corrupt and tyrannical administrator, but as 'an enemy of the Brāhmaṇas and the Baiḍabas'.\(^4\) Kṛṣṇadāsa-kavirāja mentions Gopīnātha-paṭānāyaka being

\(^{1}\) Sen, R.K., op. cit., 121.
\(^{2}\) Ibid.
\(^{3}\) Quoted, Chakrabarti, R.K.: Gauḍer Itihās, I, 248.
tortured for having failed to clear his dues to the amount of two hundred thousands of 'kāhan'.

He also mentions another 'Muslim tyrant', exercising authority in the territory next to that of Pratāparudra-deva of Orissa, 'for whom the people are scared to travel along the roads in his territory or cross the river'.

Jayānanda would have us believe that Caitanya's appearance was preceded by a feeling of alarm on the part of the Muslim rulers. He says:

Nabadvip is suddenly seized with a royal terror. The king deprives the Brāhmaṇ of caste and life. One in whose house a conch shell is blown is liable to lose everything - his caste, property and life. Any one with a sandal-wood mark on the forehead and sacred thread on the shoulder is pillaged and locked up. Temples are destroyed, Tulsi plants uprooted. The people of Nabadvip are, indeed, terribly concerned for their lives.

Īśāna-nagara writes:

Haridās once reported to the Lord [i.e. Caitanya] that the wicked mlecchas were undermining nitya-dharma, breaking icons into fragments and putting everything about deha pujā into confusion. They put forcibly all scriptures like Śrimat Bhagavad Gītā into the fire, took away from the Brāhmaṇs their conch shells and bells, licked up the sandal-wood marks [tilak mudrā] on the body, urinated on


2 Ibid., 138.

the Tulsi plants like dogs, violated the sanctity of the temple with human excreta, spat water from the mouth on people in meditation and teased the sadhus by calling them lunatics. In hundreds of ways of this nature, they put an end to all spiritual and religious undertakings.1

The Manasā-maṅgala-kāvyas also contains similar references. The following is an extract from Vijaya-gupta:2

In the south, near the village of Husenhati, there lived two Mahomedan brothers, named Hasan and Husen. They were both of notorious character, great bullies and sworn enemies of the Hindus. There was another rogue also, named Dula Haldar, a brother-in-law of Husen, who always preceded the latter when he went out; Dula surpassed Husen in his oppressions which were mainly directed to the Hindus, who used to flee away if they happened to meet him. Dula used to arrest the Hindus and take them to his brother-in-law, the Kazi, to be tried for offences such as the carrying of a Tulasi leaf on their head [a practice still prevalent amongst the Vaishnavas]. Punishment would now follow as a matter of course. The unfortunate accused used to be assaulted, in accordance with the Kazi's orders, by Dula himself. They were led to a spot under the shade of a tree. Blows and slaps fell on them as hail in a storm. Dula's Paiks were particularly hostile to the Brahmins and used, in great delight and enthusiasm, to drag them by their necks, tear off their sacred threads and spit into their mouths. Brahmins of a comparatively milder temperament could not use cow-dung for purificatory purposes in their houses, any custom savouring of Hinduism being sufficient to invite punishment.

1 Advaita-prakāśa, quoted (text), ibid.
Vamśī-ḍāsa carried the description a little further:

When the Kāzī learnt that some Hindu milkmen had been engaged in worshipping the goddess Manasā Devī at a certain place, he called out his men to accompany him to the scene. Within a moment a large number of Khojas [eunuchs] and Mahomedans came out and followed him, not one remaining in the town. All of them now arrived at the place where the ceremony was being performed. The Kāzī's presence filled the hearts of the worshippers with terror and they took to their heels and fled in all directions. But some of them were caught hold of by the Kāzī's followers and beaten mercilessly. The sacred jar - an emblem of the deity - was broken to pieces and the requisites of the ceremony were scattered and trampled under foot. This done, the iconoclasts said their prayer at that very place and caused the Hindus - specially the Brahmans who came there as mere onlookers - to be circumcised with a view to breaking their caste. To crown all they desecrated the place by killing cows before they left it.¹

Forcible marriages of Hindu girls are known from popular traditions as well as medieval Bengali literature. Shams ud-Dīn Ilyās is known to have forcibly married a Brāhmaṇa widow, Phulamati of Bajrayogini in Bikrampur.² 'Īsā Khān is said to have abducted and married Sonāmani, sister of Kedāra-raīya of Jessore. In Shamsher Ghāzīr Gan, we are told:

The Gāzī once went to a forest for hunting near Jaypur Mandia, a village where lived one Manū Sarkār, who had a very beautiful daughter whom

¹ Manasā-maṅgala, quoted, ibid., 94-5, with slight stylistic emendations.
her father gave in marriage to a Kulɪn Brahmin of Mireswari. Once she went to a neighbouring tank for a bath, accompanied by her girl friends, when she was noticed by the Gazi, who was at once charmed by her rare beauty. The Gazi seized her from amongst her companions just as a serpent catches a frog.¹

The abduction of a Hindu girl by an oppressive Ḍāzi is narrated in the story of Maluyā in Maimansimha Gītikā.²

A large amount of epigraphic evidence may be interpreted as indicative of the use of force and militancy. Several important mosques, minarets and other constructions of Islamic religious import reveal unmistakable relics of non-Muslim origin. In Pandua a Sūrya-mandir (Sun-temple) was converted into a mosque and a Viṣṇu-mandir into a minaret. At the back of the massive icon of Sūrya, an Arabic inscription dates the construction in the reign of Shams ud-Dīn Yūsuf Shāh (1474-81 A.D.).³ The ruins of the mosque, known to-day as Bāiš-darwāza, contain many traces of the Hindu temple. A few decades back some broken limbs of an icon of Viṣṇu were recovered from a tank in front of the masjid.⁴ The ruins at Tribeni consist of an astañah with two enclosures containing tombs said to be those of Ḷafar Khan and his family, his brother Burhān Qāzī and his

¹ Quoted, Das Gupta, T.C., op. cit., 89.
² Cited, ibid., 90.
³ JASB, 1873, XLII, i, 275.
⁵ He is often identified with Bāda-khān Gāzī (Ghāzī) of popular traditions. (Infra, Ch.IV).
family, and also a mosque to the west of it built by 
Zafar Khan in 1298 A.D. Both appear to have been built
from materials obtained from old Hindu temples. The low
basalt pillars supporting its arches are unusually thick,
and the domes have horizontal arches common in Hindu
constructions in Bengal. On the reverse of the basalt
inscriptions in the second enclosure are carved several
serpents and dragons showing Hindu origin.¹ There is
also an inscription in Sanskrit found in Zafar Khan's
mosque.² In some parts of the masjid the figure of
Buddha performing 'bhumi-sparsa-mudrā' is said to be
engraved.³ At the back of an Arabic inscription found
beside the door on the right side of Burhān's tomb, a
specimen of Jaina architecture has been discovered.⁴ At
Debtala or Deotala in Dinajpur district the jami' masjid,
built of black stone in the reign of Bārbak Shāh (1459-
74 A.D.), appears to have been erected on the site of a
Hindu temple.⁵ To the south of Khān Jahān 'Alī's
mausoleum in Bagerhat, Khulna, there is a large tank
called, significantly enough, Thākur-dīghi. A mutilated
image of Śiva has been recovered from the tank, one of
whose arms 'bears the mark of a cut from a kodāli

¹ Banerji, R.D.: 'Saptagrāma or Sātgān', JASB, July,
1909, N.S., V, vii, 247.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 20-1.
⁵ Chakrabarti, R.K., op. cit., II, 246.
(shovel). The dargāh of Nūr Quṭb 'Ālam or Chota-dargāh is also popular as Bhāleśvarī. One explanation for this is that the dargāh is possibly situated on the site of the abode of goddess Bhāleśvarī. The dargāh was built in 863 A.H. in the reign of Nāṣîr ud-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh by Laṭīf Khān, twelve years after the death of Nūr Quṭb 'Ālam. The ruins of the dargāh contain a spout in the form of a sea monster (Makara) for draining rainwater from the roof. This appears clearly to be a vestige of an old Hindu or Buddhist religious shrine.

The Eklākhi-masjid situated in the east of Sonā-masjid in Gaur is built with materials belonging to Hindu temples. Even the Ādinā-masjid, the biggest mosque in Bengal, is supposed to be built on a huge Buddhist shrine out of materials collected from Hindu and Buddhist structures. On the top of the building's facade, an engraved Buddha figure is detected, which bears the mark of attempts to destroy it. The steps of the mosque contain a stone depicting Hindu divinities like Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, KārtiKa, Ganeśa etc. The jāmi' masjid in Maldā, also called by some the Sonā-masjid built in 1566 A.D. by a merchant named Ma'ṣūm, is also built of materials from Hindu

1 Khulna, BDG, 166-7.
3 Ibid., 26.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 29.
temples. The most prominent position in the whole of the extensive ruins of Mahasthan in Bagura is occupied by a mound, which is topped by a half-buried granite stone, locally known as Khodār-pāhād (God's Hill). Excavations revealed a whole mass of buried stones which are the remains of a great Buddhist stupa. Westmacott is of the opinion that the shrine of Nimāl Shāh in Patharghata on the banks of the Tulsi-ganga in the thana of Bagura is also erected on the remains of a Buddhist shrine. In Burdwan the masjid of Barabazar or Nutan-hat of Mangalkot contains inscriptions on its inner walls in the name of Rājā Candrasena. On the other side of the tank in front of the said masjid, there is a dargāh in the steps of which is found a piece of stone inscribed in Bengali. At Dainhat near Katwa is a masjid which was built out of the materials of a Śiva-temple in the same area built by Rājā Indresvara of Indraṇī. At Dewanganj in the north of Dainhat the tomb of Badar Shāh contains traces of materials from Hindu temples.

All this is clear enough. But what is not so evident is the bearing of these facts on the extension

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1 Ibid., 32.
2 Bogra, DGEBA, 24-5.
3 Ibid., 25.
5 Ibid., 36.
6 Ibid., 42-3.
7 Ibid., 43.
and consolidation of the religion in the country. They would never seem adequate explanations for the existence in Bengal alone of twenty-five and a half million, that is, forty-one per cent of the total Muslim population of the whole of pre-partition India.\(^1\) If this is considered an adequate explanation, it should apply with as much force to other parts of India as Bengal and should yield similar results everywhere. The writers on Bengal could not help modifying their notions about the use of force as a method of securing conversions.

The Imperial Gazetteer says:

It is difficult to apportion the result between the peaceful persuasion of Mussalman missionaries and forcible conversion by fanatical rulers, but probably the former had the greater influence. That conversion at the sword's point was by no means rare is known from history, but... its influence alone cannot make very many converts....\(^2\)

Gait speaks in the same vein:

In spite, however, of the fact that cases of forcible conversion were by no means rare, it seems probable that very many of the ancestors of the Bengal Muhammadans voluntarily gave in their adhesion to Islam.\(^3\)

Beverley comes very close to the crux of the question:

Persecution has rarely, if ever, succeeded of its own innate force to establish any religion.

The times and circumstances of the country

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\(^1\) The Imperial Gazetteer of India, I, 474.
\(^2\) Ibid., 475.
must demand the revolution before it can be brought about by persecution alone.¹

Nothing could be of greater relevance to the whole question than what Beverley calls 'the times and circumstances of the country'. Unfortunately, again it is this part of the question which presents the most serious problem for the student of history. If the question of voluntary acceptance of the faith lends itself to nothing more than rational conjecture, the motive forces behind it remain an even more speculative historical problem.

The social identity of the bulk of the Muslim converts has set the tone of a consensus of opinion that the social underdogs - 'the hewers of wood and the drawers of water' under the invidious Hindu system of caste distinction - in contemporary Bengal championed the cause of Islam in the land. Two factors, apparently contradictory, have been particularly emphasised. The first is the rigours of the Hindu caste system with all the baneful consequences of invidious social discrimination. The second is 'the weak and uncertain foundations of Hinduism' in Bengal in general, and especially among the social groups which supplied the bulk of the indigenous converts. According to The Imperial Gazetteer:

...in the east and north of this tract [Bengal] where the Muhammadans are most numerous the bulk of the inhabitants had not been fully Hinduized at the time of the Muhammadan

conquest, and were thus more easily brought under the influence of Islam.¹

Beverley writes:

...The Musalman invasion found Hinduism resting on weak and uncertain foundations, with but a feeble hold over the minds and affections of the great bulk of the inhabitants....The Hindu religion itself was of a baser and more degraded type, being driven to assimilate and adopt the barbarous practices and superstitutions of the aborigines which it sought to embrace within its folds.²

The 'shabby' character of the Hindu social and religious organisation is supposed to have helped a process of alienation of the masses of its votaries that originated from galling social apartheid in the rigid framework of the Hindu caste system. In the words of Beverley, again:

...these huge masses found themselves occupying the position of serfs to a superior race who had overcome them by brute physical force, and in whose system no social place could be found for them. They were merely the hewers of wood and drawers of water for a set of masters in whose eyes they were unclean beasts and altogether abominable. Hemmed in by the sea, it was no longer open to them to retire further before the face of their pursuers, even had the Aryans ever entered Bengal in sufficient force to drive them to such an extreme measure.³

The situation has been contrasted with the egalitarian principles of Islam. Beverley thinks that the Muslim

¹ I, 474.
³ Ibid.
conquerors in deltaic Bengal 'were not altogether
unwelcome' and adds:

At any rate they brought with them a religion
and social system under which, instead of being
a despised and outcaste race, the semi-
ampibious aborigines of Bengal might occupy a
rival, if not equal, position to that of their
late masters.¹

Gait shares the same opinion:

The Mussalman religion, with its doctrine that
all men are equal in the sight of God must
necessarily have presented far greater
attractions to the Chandals and Koches, who
were regarded as outcastes by the Hindus, than
to the Brahmans, Baidyas, Kayasthas, who
in the Hindu caste system enjoy a position far
above their fellows. The convert to Islam
could not of course expect to rank with the
higher classes of Muhammadans, but he would
escape from the degradation which
[Brahmaism] imposes on him; he would no
longer be scorned as a social leper; the
mosque would be open to him; the Mulla would
perform his religious ceremonies, and when he
died, he would be accorded a decent
burial.²

To the prospect for social amelioration by conversion,
Wise adds the desire of belonging to the ruling class.
He says:

¹ Ibid.

² Op. cit., 169-70. The same notion is also expressed by
Hunter (op. cit., 154). Rahim subscribes rather
forcefully to the same view: 'The real cause of the
spread of Islam in Bengal was its great inherent quality
which fascinated the educated and enlightened Hindus and
offered equality, justice and a status of respectability
in society to the degraded and persecuted humanity'.
When the Muhammadan armies poured into Bengal, it is hard to believe that they were not welcomed by the hewers of wood and drawers of water, and that many a despised Chandals and Kaibarttas joyfully embraced a religion that proclaimed the equality of all men, and which was the religion of the race keeping in subjection their former oppressors. Hinduism...had forced him to perform the most menial and repulsive occupations, and had virtually treated him as an animal undeserving of any pity, but Islam announced that the poor, as well as the rich, the slave and his master, the peasant and the prince were of equal value in the eyes of God. Above all, the Brahman held out no hopes of a future world to the most virtuous helot, while the Mulla preferred not only assurances of felicity in this world, but of an indefeasible inheritance in the next!1

Religious underdogs are also said to have followed in the footsteps of their social counterparts. The Buddhists are believed to have gone over in large numbers to Islam which came to them as 'great deliverance' from Brähmanical persecution. Gait observes:

Although the days when Buddhism was a glowing faith had long since passed, the people of Bengal were still to a great extent Buddhistic, and when Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered Bihar and massacred the Buddhist monks assembled at Odantapur, the common people, who were already lukewarm, deprived of their priests and teachers, were easily attracted from their old form of belief,...to the creed of Muhammad.2

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1 Notes..., op. cit., 5.
Mitra is of the same view:

Bad blood between the Hindus and the Buddhists might conceivably have favoured conversion to Islam, and this may partly account for the large percentage of Moslem population in Bengal.¹

Rahim asserts that 'Islam came as a great deliverance to the persecuted Buddhists of Bengal', as 'the Brahmins were persecuting the Buddhists in a worst [sic] form'.²

Brāhmaṇical persecution of the Buddhists in the period of the latter's decline has long become a commonplace observation as an all-India phenomenon. In Bengal itself instances are found to uphold this observation. Jātavarman of the Varman dynasty is said to have burnt a portion of the Buddhist vihāra at Sumpur.³ In the concluding portion of the Dāna-sāgara, generally ascribed to Vallīśa-sena, the king is represented as rising for the uprooting of the nāstikas (atheists, implying the Buddhists) in the kali age. Buddhists are contemptuously mentioned as pāśandī in medieval Bengali literature. The height of hatred is reached in the Caitanya-bhāgavata, where Nityānanda is described as kicking the Buddhists on the head.⁴ In the chapter called Niraṅjaner-ugmā in the Śunya-Purāṇa and in the Dharmapūjā-vidhāna, the followers of Dharma are

¹ Mitra, R.C., op. cit., 82.
³ Ray, Nihar Ranjan: Bāṅgālīr..., op. cit., 524.
represented as welcoming the advance of the Muslims and later rejoicing at the oppression and humiliation of the Hindus by the Muslims at Jajpur in Malda and other places.¹ Tārānātha, the noted Tibetan traveller accused the Buddhists of acting as the agents and intermediaries of the Tūruṣka invader of Magadha.²

This is true enough, but not all. The incidents mentioned above, judged independently of the developments of Buddhism in Bengal and its relation with Hinduism, tend to create a wrong impression about the question. For Buddhist-Hindu relationships in Bengal were basically geared to the principle of attraction rather than repulsion. Even in the palmy days of Buddhism in Bengal under the Pālas, an eclectic tendency is evident from the literary and epigraphic sources. The inscriptions of the Pālas are redolent of a spirit of deep reverence to Brāhmaṇical deities and the very language of the inscriptions betrays a saturation with Hindu imagery and religious concepts.³ In the Khalimpur Plate the relation of Dharma-pāla with his queen, Diddā Devī is illustrated by a series of likenesses from Hindu mythology, such as the relation of Candra to Rohinī, of Agni to Svāhā, of Śiva to Sarvāṇi, and of Indra to Pūlomaya and of Viṣṇu to Lakṣmī. Again, the devout Buddhist Rāma-pāla is described in the Rāmacarita as being blessed by the lotus-like feet of Caṇḍī.

² Mitra, R.C., op. cit., 81.
³ Ibid., 53.
In the Kanauli Copper Plate the Pālas are described as the right eye of Hari by the royal preceptor, Manoratha, who was himself an orthodox Brāhmaṇa. In the Monghyr Plate of Deva-pāla, Dharma-pāla, the great patron of Buddhism, is eulogised as one who, in conformity to the injunctions of sacred texts, reinstated the various varpas as orders which had deviated from their proper path in the pursuit of their respective duties, as enjoined by the scriptures. In the Amgachi Plate Vigraha-pāla is praised as the mainstay of the Brāhmaṇical social order of varnāśrama. It is no mere accident that by far the largest number of gifts recorded in the Pāla inscriptions are made, not to Buddhists, but to Brāhmaṇas.1 Nārāyaṇa-pāla built a thousand temples of Śiva, and Rama-pāla is also credited with the construction of three Śiva temples and a lofty tower to the eleven Rudras, besides temples for Sūrya, Skanda and Gaṇapati. It is recorded of Mahi-pāla in the Bangarh Grant that he duly took his bath in the Ganges before he granted lands to a Brāhmaṇa on the sacred day of the viṣuva-saṃkrānti.2 Madana-pāla, according to the Manshali Plate, granted land to a Brāhmaṇa in the name of Buddha, for having read out the entire Mahābhārata to his queen, Citramatikā. The Brāhmaṇa family of Garga provided hereditary ministers to the Pālas.3

1 Ibid., 53–4.
2 Ibid., 54.
3 Garuda Pillar ins.; ibid., 55.
marked by the same catholic and assimilative spirit. King Śrī-candra granted lands to two Brāhmanas for having performed numerous and elaborate homas or sacrifices. Prabhā-vaṭī, queen of the Buddhist Deva-khadga, erected the temple of Sarvāṇi at Deulbari in Comilla. The mother of the Buddhist Kānti-deva was a Śaiva princess named Śiva-priyā, while his father Dhana-datta was a Buddhist who took pride in his knowledge of the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. Kānti-deva's royal seal was a compound of the emblems of the respective religions of his parents, the lion and the serpent. During the tenth or eleventh centuries Buddha and Vāsu-deva were invoked together on the occasion of the setting up of a Dharma image by one Manamra-śarman in the village of Bajrayogini in the Dacca district.

Conversely, there are frequent references to the Hindu reciprocation of Buddhist leanings towards Hinduism in Bengal. As early as the Gupta period, Dharma-dāsa, the commentator of Candra-grammar, acknowledges Rudra Viśvesvara as the 'titular deity' of his family, while 'Lord Buddha, the conqueror of evil', was the ornament of his family. In the sixth century Śaiva Vaiṣṇya-gupta made grants to a Buddhist monastic establishment.

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2. DHBI, 426.
4. BSI, I, 58.
5. DHBI, 426.
The Bajrayogini Copper Plate of the Vaiṣṇava king Śyāmala-varṇa mentions his generous gifts to the temple of Prajñā-pāramitā. The Buddhist grammarian, Puruṣottama-deva, the author of Bhāṣā-vṛtti, a commentary on Pāṇini is stated in a tradition to have composed his work under the direction of the Vaiṣṇava king Lākṣmana-sena. It is however beyond doubt that Jaya-deva, the court-poet of the same ruler, respectfully placed Buddha in the list of avatāras of Viṣṇu. About the twelfth century A.D., a Śākta prince seems to have made an icon of Mañjuśrī. The Kriyā-yoga-sāra in the Padmā-purāṇa salutes Buddha, the merciful, for having prevented animal sacrifice even at the risk of defying the Vedas. Certain iconographical specimens are also highly suggestive of this process of rapprochement and assimilation. The Kalandharīpur stone image of Viṣṇu has a dancing Śiva below it. In the image of Viṣṇu found at Sagardighi three of the four attributes of Viṣṇu, the conch, disc and mace, are placed on full-blown lotuses standing on stalks in the hand of the deity as in many Buddhist icons. An extremely interesting iconographical

1 Ibid., 200.
2 Mitra, R.C., op. cit., 57. Its authenticity is doubted.
3 Jaya-deva: Gīta-govinda, I, 9; ibid., 57.
4 Bhattashali, N.K.; Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum, 28.
5 Mitra, R.C., op. cit., 61.
6 Ibid., 61.
specimen has been discovered at Kesabpur in Barisal; this is a standing metal image of the tenth century A.D., representing Śiva with four arms; it has been named Śiva Lokeśvara, but it contains a figure of Dhyānī Buddha on the top of the image. The presence of five miniature figures on the top of the black slabs of many Śakti images in Bengal is traced to Mahāyāna influence. A stone figure of Buddha has lent itself to an almost unconscious transformation to an image of Śiva in the mind of Hindu devotees and is still being worshipped as such in Shib-bati in Khulna. The image of Mañjuśrī is being worshipped as the Brahmānical Tantric goddess Bhūvaneśvarī at Bara in Birbhum. The syncretism of Buddhist and Hindu divinities, along with their concomitant rites and mystic beliefs, was accelerated with the growth of the Tantras and soon reached a point where their dividing line was largely obscured. Mahāyāna deities like Akṣobhya, Amogha-siddhi, Kurukulla Pantrā, Tārā etc. are found in very orthodox Tantras. Hindu iconography also assimilated and yielded places of honour to Buddhist deities like Čāmuṇḍā, Vāsuli, Tārā and Kṣetra-pāla. Ugra Tārā is taken straight out of the Buddhist pantheon—colour, attribute, parental Buddha Akṣobhya and all. The five miniature figures at the head take the place of the five Dhyānī Buddhas.

1 Dasgupta, N.: Bāṅglāy Baudhā-dharma, 89.
3 Bhattashali: Iconography..., op. cit., 206.
If such instances are the only criteria for determining the actual state of relations between the two religious systems and communities, the few cases of intolerance and hostility are far outweighed by contrary evidences of harmony and coalescence. In the circumstances, a picture of total estrangement of the Buddhists in Bengal leading to their connivance with the Muslim conquerors and large-scale conversion to Islam makes much too large a demand on one's sense of proportion. The Buddhists undoubtedly contributed their quota to the ranks of the converted Muslims in Bengal, but there is nothing particular in the religious life of Bengal before the advent of Islam to conclude that they formed a special plank for recruitment to the cadre of Muslim converts in Bengal.

Just as religious discontent among the Buddhists does not explain the motivation behind the conversion of the masses in Bengal, it is not necessarily the case also that their conversion was actuated either by social differentiations or discontents. The sharp polarisation in the social structure of Bengal on the eve of the Muslim conquest is a reasonable point of departure for those who emphasize the role of Islam as a great force of social liberation. This line of reasoning is stimulated further by the existence of popular traditions of the nature of that about Şah Muḥammad Sulṭān Mahīsawār. It is said that Şah Sulṭān in his struggle against Paraśurāma, the Rājā of Bagura, received invaluable help from the Rājā's sweeper, Harapāla, who gave out the secret of Paraśurāma's strength.¹ It is

¹ Beveridge, H.: 'The Antiquities of Bagura', JASB, 1878, i, 1.
always difficult to apportion the right place to such traditions in the scale of historical assessment. These are generally either exaggerated or ignored. The tradition about Harapāla can at best throw some light on the process of expansion of Muslim arms in Bengal. It is to be noted also that it has nothing to say about the process of conversion.

This leads us to the crux of the question. That Islam drew its numerical strength primarily from the local masses in Bengal has already been noted and appears quite reasonable. But the simple fact that they belonged to the depressed social groups does not prove that their conversion was consequent upon this. We do not have any clear knowledge about the nature and extent of the caste distinctions in medieval Bengal. The caste organisation, peculiar to Bengal consisting only of the Brāhmanas and Śūdras as pointed out earlier has always been rather lax in Bengal. This offers an interesting puzzle. If caste discrimination explains the success of Islam this should be less true of Bengal and more so of other parts of India, where cast organisations were far more rigid and oppressive. But this is not the case. Besides a large number of converted Muslims, especially those belonging to the functional or occupational groups are known to have retained their original caste habits and prejudices down to the present century.1

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1 Buchanan-Hamilton writes that the idea of caste seemed to have 'a practical ascendancy' over the Muslims of some parts of Bengal and Bihar. (Martin, M., Eastern India, III, 150). 'Certainly Islam does not recognise class distinctions but places the whole humanity on one common platform of universal brotherhood...yet paradoxical though it may (continued p. 163)
We should naturally look for explanations other than these. That the masses did not come to the fold of Islam with adequate knowledge of the doctrinal aspects of the religion is evident from the writings of the new Bengali Muslim group, as already noted.1 This is significant.

1 (continued from p.162)

seem, people among Muhammadans do ask "so and so what caste is he?"...there are classes among the Muhammadan population who are divided according to their trade and calling. The Dhuniyas, the Jolahas and the Kunjras, the Darzis and many others too numerous to mention who have their own peculiar customs and are governed by their rules of 'panchayets'....There are some classes who hold in great regard the custom of early marriage. Forced widowhood although prohibited by religion is rather the rule than the exceptions'. (Khan, Moulavi Muhammad Mustafa: 'Social Divisions in the Muhammadan Community'. The Calcutta Monthly, July, 1896, I, i, 3).

'Caste prejudices have left their mark upon many. There are about thirty-five separate Moslem Castes in Bengal. We use the term advisedly, for in some cases the division is a clear differentiation of race, in others it means a kind of trade-guild with strong Hindu caste significance. In fact, in many instances functional groups have become so distinct, that they will never inter-marry, nor even dine together'. (Talke, J.: 'Islam in Bengal', The Muslim World, 1914, IV, 12).

Referring to the Muslim functional groups in Bengal, Gait says that they are 'as strongly endogamous as the members of the Hindu castes'. (Op. cit., 442; cf. also, 439ff).

Wise noted the existence of governing committees called 'panchayat' to manage the affairs of individual Muslim functional groups (qaum). (Notes..., op. cit., 57). Similar managing committees for Muslim occupational groups were noted by Gait bearing different names, such as, 'Pradhan' in Jessore, 'Mandal' in Murshidabad and 24-Parganas and 'Matbar' in Dacca. (Op. cit., 439).

Cf. also Wali, op. cit., passim; Wali, JASB, 1899, pt. iii, no. 1.

1 Supra, 51ff.
It proves at least that they were not attracted to the religion by a thorough knowledge of its intrinsic merits. We may recall Saiyid Sulṭān's regret that they did not 'grasp a single precept of their own religion'. One is drawn at this stage to suggest and examine any possible connexion that a category of Muslims, who were almost ubiquitous and widely popular by the generic name of Pīr in rural Bengal, might have had with this vexed question of medieval Bengal as well as of medieval India. A few explanatory words are necessary for the use of the term Pīr in this connexion. Etymologically 'elder', Pīr strictly denotes a spiritual director or guide among the Sūfīs. But Pīrism, as developed in India especially in Bengal, far outgrew its strictly formal meaning and structure. It appeared to have developed a cult by itself incorporating elements thoroughly devoid of its mystic associations. For a large number of Pīrs commanding the veneration of both Hindus and Muslims in Bengal for centuries were neither Sūfīs, nor Muslims and nor even human forms but animistic spirits. This is important, if only because it reveals a metamorphosis of a religious phenomenon in response to particular religious and social demands. The tremendous popularity of the Pīrs and the striking transformation in their religious character point to the religious and social roles that they performed or were expected to perform at the level of those believers in them, with whom they remained most popular with all that they stood for.

1 Supra, 52.
2 For a detailed discussion on Pīrs and Pīrism in medieval Bengal, see, infra, Ch. IV.
The distribution of Muslim population in Bengal with large concentrations on the one hand in the area east of the Jamuna-Padma-Meghna line forming a great embayment of lowland and the Meghna-Surma Valley comprising the vast areas of Mymensingh, Dacca and Sylhet districts and on the other the middle (moribund) and lower (active) regions of the Ganges delta proper extending over 24-Parganas, Khulna, Sundarbans, Faridpur, Bakharganj, Barisal and Noakhali is a significant feature of human geography of the land. These were again the areas where, as we have already noted, the absence of elaborate Hindu caste-structure and the presence of dominant lower castes like Pods and Namaśūdras or a caste-like group of Muslim agriculturists locally known as Sekh (Shaikh) were observed in modern time. We have also noted the anthropometric correspondence between the Namaśūdras and the Bengali Muslims surveyed by Majumdar and Rao. The identification of the bulk of the Bengali Muslims with the Namaśūdras or similar dominant castes of the area takes us to the basic questions relating to the new deltaic culture as possible explanations for the conversion of the local masses. We feel incumbent here to stress the suggestive nature of the following discussion inspired by an urge for more basic explanations for the phenomenon of conversion than 'force', Hindu-

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1 Supra, 73.
Buddhist 'antagonism', 'democratic' and 'egalitarian' ideals of Islam\(^1\) and so on.

The peculiar nature of the new deltaic region of Bengal has already been discussed at some length to point out the existence of conditions for the development of a culture, both material and non-material, different from that in the old seats of culture based on the alluvial plains of the old moribund Gangetic delta.\(^2\) The peasant in the new delta pushed gradually by the influx of the new settlers and by the caprices of the rivers and the sea bore the brunt of elemental depredations. He had to live and fight against a mighty array of adversaries - the fierce floods, storms, brackish waters, crocodiles, snakes and tigers. There was another aspect of the problem in the active part of the new delta, which, by its peculiar nature, may be characterized as a no man's land comparable to a 'frontier society'.\(^3\) The history of this region is largely marked by turbulence and rioting linked with the conditions of local geography. The inundation as it built new mud banks or destroyed old homesteads, tanks, orchards and cultivated fields was the

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\(^1\) Without making a categorical rejection of this particular factor, we have attempted to show the possible practical working of this idea in the mind of the rural folk. We accept this factor as a contributary one, based on a prior recognition of far more basic and material factors that the situation demanded.

\(^2\) Supra, 74ff.

\(^3\) Nicholas, R.W.: 'Vaishnavism and Islam in Rural Bengal', in Bengal Regional Identity, ed., Kopf, D., 44.
uncertain source of riches or poverty, and in this fluctuating environment he who risked most often had most. This made the population full of daring and adventure, while the flood waters that destroyed all marks or boundaries between the fields were indirectly a constant source of social disorder.¹ The very nature of the lower delta precluded strongly organized administrative authorities. Even the British administration confronted this problem to a great extent. While underlining the problem of social order, they pointed out its peculiar nature linked up with the local geography. According to a settlement report in the region:

As soon as the river has receded the land is ripe for cultivation, and, if any delay occurs in transplanting into the liquid which the river has left, there is great danger that the river will rise again too soon for the crop to be harvested. The situation is conditioned entirely by the rapidity with which agricultural operations must begin on the land covered by water. It is this rapidity which makes determination of rival claims untenable before the cultivators have fought for the land.²

All this combined to create a situation of some special character and significance in these areas. The situation in its totality emphasised the supreme need of some focal points radiating the spectrum of security, assurance and authority. Political authority was practically non-existent and social authority minimal,

² The Faridpur Settlement Report, 56.
for the caste organization, as noticed before, could hardly function with any degree of authority and relevance in a shifting and fluid physical surface of this nature. The peasant sought security, comfort and assurance against elemental tenacity in deified animistic spirits like the tiger-god, the snake-goddess, the crocodile-goddess etc. But the gods and goddesses remained too remote and impersonal for his crying needs, and they were at least incapable of providing authority, counsel and guidance, which the anarchical delta so badly needed. This constituted the vantage ground for the Muslim Pir, a generic name for a conglomeration of diverse elements, to step into the arena. We consider it very significant that the Pir, as known in deltaic Bengal, incorporated elements of heterogenous character. This was because they were not all essentially religious figures and performed different roles in response to the needs, material and/or non-material, of the deltaic region. But the people's recognition and respect for their respective roles were reflected in their common attitudes towards them and in lumping them together into a single category known as Pir. After all, the material needs for order, counsel and leadership and the spiritual need for assurance, security and faith were for them mere complementary aspects of the same grim struggle for existence in an explosive and hostile surrounding.

From popular traditions coupled by the existence of shrines (dargah) preserving their memories still cherished and venerated by the local folk, we come to know of a staggering number of Pir associated with this
region. More important still, we have in certain cases specific reference to their direct involvement in works like reclamation of lands for settlement and cultivation. The most well-known of them was Khān Jahān 'Alī, also known as Khān Jahān Khān, whose tomb at Bagerhat in Khulna was one of a few most popular shrines in east Bengal. At Ambarabad or Umarabad in Noakhali, there existed the shrine of Ambar or ʿUmar Shāh, who was known to be living in a boat himself to reclaim land north-east of Bhulua. His name came to be attached to the pargana of Ambarabad. In the district of 24-Parganas, Mobārak Gājī (Mubārak Ghāzī), popular as Mobra Gaji, is said to have been a Pīr, who 'reclaimed the jungly tracts along the left bank of the river Hugli', and each village had 'an altar dedicated to him'. No one would enter the forest and no crew would sail through the district, without first of all making offerings at one of the shrines. The Faqīrs 'residing in these pestilential forests, claiming to be lineally descended from the Ghāzī' indicated with pieces of wood, called sang, the exact limits within which the forest was to be cut. Besides, the Bengali folk literature, both Hindu and Muslim, underlines the influence and importance of a tradition involving a Gājī (Ghâzī), a close associate of

Infra, Ch. IV, A.

JASB, 1867, 118; for an inscriptional reference to him, Dani, op. cit., no. 28.

Noakhali, DGEBA, 101.

Wise, JASB, op. cit., 40.
him and some elements of Hindu opposition. The Hindu Rāya-maṅgala literature depicts the conflict between Dakṣīna-rāya and Gājī assisted by Kālu, over the control of the active deltaic region of southern Bengal. An even battle, it is, we read, ended by a happy compromise based on territorial divisions dictated by God appearing in a significant form, half Hindu and half Muslim.\(^1\) The Muslim counterpart of this tradition makes Gājī and his closest pal, Kālu, arrive and land at Sundarban in south Bengal 'infested by tigers, snakes and crocodiles'.\(^2\) The tradition also makes them associate with the local wood-cutters, who owed their prosperity to the former.\(^3\)

It is quite significant that in their respective traditions both Dakṣīna-rāya and Gāzī are believed to have command over tigers and crocodiles. Aside from these specific references, a large number of Pīrs associated with the lower Gangetic delta and the Brahmaputra-Surma-Meghna valley might have owed their reputation to their ability to perform some role with reference to the requirements of the material culture in the active delta. Traditions associate 31\(^4\) disciples with Shāh Jalāl of Sylhet alone, who worked and settled in widely scattered and remote parts of the region containing shrines associated with the names of a large number among them. Similar beliefs assigned 12 Pīrs to

\(^1\) Kṛṣṇarāma-dāsa: Rāya-maṅgala; HBL; supra, Ch. II, A.

\(^2\) 'Abd ul-Karīm: Kālu-Gājī-Śyāmapāvatī, 10; infra, Ch. IV, B.

\(^3\) Ibid., 15-7.

\(^4\) JASP, 1957, II, 66ff.
TARAF in the same region.¹ We are rather unfortunate in having no knowledge about the activities of these innumerable Pîrs spread into the remotest corners of the new deltaic areas. It may, however, seem quite revealing that their successors in the first quarter of the present century had been performing roles appropriate to the locality. It is said about the Sundarban area in south Bengal that the wood-cutters, Hindu and Muslim, went in boats to certain localities in the forests called 'gaîs', each of which was 'presided by a fakir', who was supposed to possess 'the occult power of charming away tigers' and who had undoubtedly 'some knowledge of woodcraft'. The wood-cutters worked 'six days in each week', for one day in the week was set apart for 'the worship of the sylvan deity presiding over that particular forest'. The Fâqîr, who was to have some 'personal knowledge of this supernatural personage', acted as 'high priest on these occasions'.² Besides, if the beliefs associated with the particular Pîrs were any index of either their actual roles or what were expected of them, most of these Pîrs were clearly identifiable in the cultural milieu of the new deltas. Their names were invoked either as protective spirits against tigers, crocodiles and snakes or in connexion with agricultural needs. In southern Bengal, especially in the Sundarban area, Mobrâ Gâjî³ and

¹ Chaudhuri, A.C., op. cit., I, ii, 98-100.
² Khulna, BDG, 193-4.
³ 24-Parganas, BDG, 74-6; De Tassy, op. cit., 355; infra, Ch. IV, A.
Bađa-khān Gājī or simply Gājī were extremely popular as possessing power over tigers. Same was believed about Sahijā Bādshāh in the vicinity of the tiger-infested forest in the Pratapgarh Parāgana in Sylhet. The Gājī mentioned earlier, his close associate Kālu and even Khān Jahān 'Alī were believed to have controlling authority over crocodiles. Shāh Kamāl with his dargāh in Sirajganj was renowned for his power over serpents. At Astagram in Mymensingh, no cultivator used to yoke cows to a plough without remembering Quṭb Sāhib. Besides, Mānik Pīr and Hajir Pīr were believed responsible for the protection of cattle.

These were the particular roles that the Pīrs in the new deltas were called upon to enact, and the measure of their success in what was expected of them should be sought in the fact of overwhelming majority of Muslims in the areas of their activity. But this answers only one, though a very significant aspect of the entire question of conversion - an aspect that relates to the special conditions of the new deltaic Bengal. To this was added the strength and novelty of an institutional element epitomized in the shrine associated with the name of a Muslim divine. Such shrine may either be a tomb (dargāh)

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1 Infra, Ch. IV.  
2 Sylhet, ADG, 83; Chaudhuri, A.C., op. cit., I, i, 141; infra, Ch. IV, A.  
3 Infra, Ch. IV, A.  
5 Mymensingh, BDG, 38.  
6 Infra, Ch. IV.
placed in the care of his followers or khānqah or hospice of a particular Pīr. A remarkable feature of Bengal landscape, now as before, is the existence of countless dargāhs even in the extreme back-water of a village. Karim observes:

...the dargāhs quite naturally have played and are playing to-day the most important part. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they are the nerve-centres of the Bengali Muslim society.¹

The large number of dargāhs should hardly appear surprising, for as early as the first quarter of the 15th century Saiyid Ashrāf Jahāngīr Simnānī of Jaunpur noted:

...what a good land is that of Bengal where numerous saints and ascetics came from many directions and made it their habitation and home...in the country of Bengal what to speak of the cities, there is no town and no village where holy saints did not come and settle down.²

The dargāh in Bengal, as in other parts of India, has ever constituted such a tremendous and peculiar attraction for the people irrespective of religious affiliations that while on the one hand the phenomenon attracted almost universal attention, it remained on the other rather inexplicable. The tomb of Pīr 'became an object of great veneration which verged on actual worship'. People 'attributed to it such miraculous feats as even the Pīr could never have thought of in his life

¹ Social History... , op. cit., 138.
² Quoted, Bengal: Past and Present. 1948, LXVII, 35-6.
time', and consequently, it became 'a greater source of inspiration to the credulous believers than the Pir himself'. It is not so much the veneration of the Muslims but that of the masses of the non-Muslims in Bengal, despite their innumerable gods, goddesses and godlings which appears quite significant. Without hazarding any opinionated view in the matter, it is still possible to ask oneself as to how far did the Muslim practice of burying the corpse, instead of consigning it to the flames like the Hindus, as well as of erecting tombs over the body, particularly of a popular saint, serve to draw personal and emotive responses from the people. Fulfilment of a vow or an expectation taken at a shrine could only reinforce a growing conviction in the divinity of a dead saint. In many cases, a formal conversion of a supplicant might have followed much later than an emotional and psychological conversion to the faith of a dead saint or a living divinity.

The importance of the dargah is an indirect measure of that of the khānqah, one being complementary to the other. The importance of the khānqah in the life-time of a popular Pir is perpetuated in the dargah enshrining his ephemeral body and transcendent spirit and memory. The khānqah may also be taken to have introduced a new element into the religious and social life of the country especially at the level of the humbler folk. A good number of them had always found the access to the temple denied to them beyond a certain limit. The Buddhist and the Jain monasteries had neither access nor

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1 Rizvi, op. cit., 7.
attraction for the people belonging to the lower ranks of the social echelon. The Hindu and the Buddhist esoteric religious groups that cut across the caste and the social barriers were confined to a select and initiated few. The popular Yogico-Tantric cults, such as Nāthism, should gradually tend to wane in popularity with those among the people who opted for more of emotive and personal contents of religion than the rigorous practice and ideal of psycho-physiological techniques. The sweeping, levelling and intensely personal and emotional call of Bengal Vaishnavism was not yet sounded. In the circumstances, the medieval Bengali folk suddenly found a new temple brought to his door with no inhibiting or frowning priest at its entrance. With a mixed feeling of wonder, awe and reverence he found himself inside its walls seated face to face with a living divinity whom he could only hope to worship from a distance. ¹ He found him as simple, quiet, austere and ascetic as a Hindu Yogi or a Buddhist and a Jain monk. ² Shaikh 'Alā' ul-Haq is known to have followed his murshid, Shaikh Akhī Sirāj ud-Dīn 'Uṣmān, with a heated stove on his head so that he could provide his master with hot food on demand, as a result of which he became bald. ³ Nūr Quṭb 'Ālam used to

¹ We are informed by Ibn-Baṭṭūta as to how the local people used to visit Shāh Jalāl in his hospice with 'presents and gifts'. He also mentions that the local 'inhabitants' had 'embraced Islam at his hands' and adds: '...for this reason he [Shāh Jalāl] stayed amidst them'. (Rehla, ed. and tr., Husain, A.M., 239).
² A.H. Dehlavī, op. cit., 44.
³ Ibid., 143.
perform all sorts of menial work including the carrying of wood and the cleaning of the lavatory.\(^1\) Shāh Jalāl of Sylhet observed fasts for forty years which he used to break only after ten consecutive days. He 'wore a garment with patches all over'. A cow was his only possession.\(^2\) The Muslim saint in the eye of the Bengali peasant appeared as contemplative and immersed in the thought of God as a Hindu saint. He also appeared as endowed with supernatural power as his Hindu or Buddhist counterpart in working miracles - bringing the dead back to life, taking life at will, restoring sight to the blind, curing all maladies, having the future in his control, being present in several places at a time and so on.\(^3\) But what distinguished a Pīr in the eyes of the humble Bengali was his accessibility and concern for the latter's spiritual, emotional and even material needs. If the peasant discovered the atmosphere of the khanqah congenial to his spiritual demands, the institution was no less attractive for its eagerness and ability to cater to his material needs. The khanqahs were often supported by extensive grants of land, made by the king or members of the nobility.\(^4\) An inscriptive reference to Nūr Quṭb 'Ālam mentions among his other qualities that of bestowing 'advantages upon the poor and the indigent'.\(^5\)

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1. Ibid., 152ff.
3. For further details about miracles, infra, Ch. IV, A.
4. Supra, 12-3; infra, Ch. IV, A.
The Chishti establishment of Pandua and Sonargaon in the time of 'Alâ' ul-Haq, his son Nur Quṭb 'Alam and his grandsons, Shaikh Anwâr and Shaikh Zâhid, amassed such a large treasure as to excite the 'jealousy' or concern of the royal authority, which led to royal intervention in the time of Sikandar Ilyâs and Râjâ Gañâša.¹

The economic and social implications of the institution of the Khanqâh deserve greater attention than what they have received. The depth of its full implications may be partially gauged from the analogy of its Christian counterpart in Bengal in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. What little success that the Christian missionaries could achieve in the matter of conversion, in the changed circumstances of contemporary Bengal, was almost exclusively confined to the lower strata of the society, where material and economic incentives supplied by well-organised and well-provided for Christian missionary organisations are known to have played the determining role in most cases. The Khanqâh combining the mystique and charisma of a presiding living divinity with the twin functions of catering to the temporal and spiritual needs of the masses went a long way to rally them round its banner.

We conclude the discussion by giving an extract bearing on the process of conversion from a ballad on the life of an outcaste Brâhmaṇa named Kaṅka, who accepted the discipleship of a Pîr. The ballad in this respect deserves an unique place in the whole gamut of Bengali

¹ Supra, Ch. II, B.
literary compositions, throwing clear light on the activities and roles of a Pir in the rural setting of medieval Bengal with possible bearing on the question of conversion of the masses. Kaṅka refers to a village, named Vipra in Mymensingh, where one day:

A Pir along with five disciples (sākret/sagird) appears on the village pasture-ground. The Pir clears up the place underneath a banyan tree, builds a shrine (dargā) and lives there. He attains a wide renown and possesses immense power (hekmat). He cures all sickness by applying dust, does not let anybody tell his secret, for he himself [anticipates and] tells everything in detail, makes sweet (mewā) of clay uttering charms (mantra) and distributes among children. All are struck by his miracles (keramat) and people come in hundreds to have a glimpse of him (darṣan mānaye). Everyone's desires get fulfilled, and his name spreads far and near. Rice, banana and sinnī [shirnī] continue pouring in, and there is no end to the [gifts of] fowl, goat, and pigeon. But the Pir does not take himself even a particle of the gifts and distributes all among the poor and the famished.¹

The writings of the new group of Bengali Muslims are replete with indigenous religious and cultural notions, idioms and symbols. We have already noted the possibility of much of this being inspired by an urgency to reduce the Islamic ideas and traditions to local need and genius. A conscious and purposive attempt to mould Islamic ideas in the local cast to facilitate their currency in the local habitat is self-evident in many cases. And yet a sharp line cannot be drawn between the motivated and spontaneous elements in the whole. Undeniably, much of the indigenous elements found a natural home in their hearts that breathed in the local air. Whatever the inspiring motives, the ideas as such presented in their works carried about them a strong air of familiarity which cannot but be regarded as a vital factor in their acceptance by the people concerned.

The ideas of these writers may be studied under the following heads:

A. The Mystical Thought:

The mystical ideas, as presented in the writings of this new group of Bengali Muslims, make a significant study. From the whole mass of their mystical writings emanate notions that are characteristically familiar ones in the corresponding local framework. Apart from some common mystical speculations on the nature of Godhead, there are on the one hand attempts to introduce Islamic concepts often diluted with indigenous

\(^1\)The use of the term is based on the recognition of a
materials and on the other clear, direct and outright recourse to locally known mystical techniques, formulas and symbols. The cumulative effect of all this was to raise an air of strong familiarity about their contentions in the local context. This unmistakable stamp of the environmental forces in this mystical literature steers it clear of the raging polemics surrounding the question of contact, communication and interaction between the Islamic and the Indian mystical systems.¹ Even a casual glance suffices to show the extent to which the mystical notions of a large majority of these Bengali Muslim writers are permeated by Yogico-Tantric esoteric concepts.

With this prefatory observation we approach the different facets of their mystical thought.

Contd. from page 179.

¹ Pursuing the lines of Tholuck (1821), Von Kremer (1888), Goldziher (1910) and Max Horten (1927-8), R.C. Zaehner (Hindu and Muslim Mysticism, 1960) has noted effective Indian influence on Sufism, while following Nicholson (1914), Massignon (1922) and Moreno (1946), A.J. Arberry (Sufism, 1950) does not subscribe to this view. Cf. the observations of Aziz Ahmad (op.cit.,118) on the 'general trend of exclusiveness of Sufism in India from Hindu mystical schools, with 'which it had so much in common' and 'the merely occasional, more negative than positive contact of the two mystical systems on the Indian soil.'
i. The Nature of Godhead:

The nature of Godhead with particular reference to the relation between God and the individual, which forms an important part in the writings of this group, is a highly significant question in the mystical and theological disciplines of Islam. To express the relation and contrast between God as the Creator and the world, the Muslims have usually used the pair of terms Haq and khalq. God's superiority over man and the world is particularly apparent from the Qur'an, and in Islamic theology the distance between the Creator and the creature is strongly emphasized. In general it is concluded from the transitory character of this world that its Creator is eternal. In the school of Ash'arite theology the absolute transcendence of God with respect to the world (tanzih) and the 'infinite' gulf separating khalq from Haq is emphasized to such a degree that the individual nature of things, as well as Nature as a distinct domain of reality, melts away in the absolute power of the Creator. All partial and immediate causes are absorbed into the Ultimate Cause, and God is considered as the direct cause of all things. The Ash'arite theologians emphasize above all else the discontinuity between the finite and the infinite, all the stages of the cosmic hierarchy being absorbed, in their view, in the Divine Principle. But the Ash'arite stance of drawing this sharp distinction was assailed from three directions - by the Mu'tazilīs, the philosophers and the mystics. According to the Mu'tazilīs, God only creates what is good, and man is the creator of his own actions. God's will is a kind of intermediary between the Creator and the created world. Al-Jahiz opines that God cannot destroy the created world. Among the philosophers, the more Neo-Platonic school like

1De Boer, Tj., El, II, 892
the Ikhwan us-Safâ as well as the more Aristotelian one represented by Ibn Sînâ and Ibn Rushd both regard God only as the first cause but stress on many intermediaries existing between His activity and the temporal world. The latter go so far as to describe the development of the intellectual and material world as proceeding by stages and without beginning and parallel. The Sûfîs stressed the continuity between the Divine Principle and its manifestation. Without denying the absolute transcendence of God, the Sûfîs pointed out that since there cannot be two absolutely distinct orders of reality, the finite must somehow be none other than the infinite. While they regard this world simply as a ladder to God, they could intensify the spiritual life of the soul up to the feeling of god-like creative activity. Qur'ânic passages like Sûra (15:29), (38:72) where it is said that Allâh, after forming man, breathed of His spirit (rûh) into him, reduced the gulf between the Creator and creature. 1

In the struggle against the Mu'tazilîs and speculative philosophy, the Sunní doctrine developed along the lines suggested by the mystics. The bond between orthodox Ash'arî beliefs and gnostic-mystic speculation is to be noticed in al-Ghazâlî. According to him God and man are not simply in the relation to one another of Creator and creature. The world is divided into the 'âlam ul-khalq (the material spatial world) and the 'âlam ul-amîr (the non-spatial world of the angels and the human spirits) 2. As a member of the world of spirits, man in his being, qualities and actions shows similarity to God. In the Kîmiyâ'i Sa'âdat, al-Ghazâlî lends the immense weight of his authority to two doctrines—

1 De Boer, ibid.
2 Cf. Sûra (7:72) cited, ibid.
that 'the soul and God are one thing' and that 'God and Universe, are co-terminous'. The Muslim thinkers especially at the Sufic level were very keen about striking a correct balance between transcendence (tanzīh) and immanence (tashbīh) of God. The concept of tanazzulāt or 'the descent of the Absolute' found favour with them which indicates the process by which the Absolute, from the state of bare potentiality, gradually becomes 'qualified' till it reaches the plane of unity (wahdat) in multiplicity - the one in many. The doctrine, which in popular mystic parlance, was known as Wahdat ul-Wujūd or Tāḥīd-ī Wujūd (Unity of Being) was first formulated by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 678/1240) and was further systematised by Jīlī and Farghani. For Ibn 'Arabī at bottom 'the existence of created things is nothing but the very essence of the existence of the Creator'. He teaches that 'things necessarily emanate from divine prescience in which they pre-existed as ideas' and that 'the soul by an inverse involution logically constructed reintegrate the divine essence'. In other words he holds that 'all Being is essentially one, as it all is a manifestation of the divine substance' and that different religions are identical. According to Jīlī:

His manifestation interpenetrates all existences and He manifests His perfection in each atom and particle of the Universe. He is not multiple by the multiplicity of the manifestations, but He is one in the totality of manifestations.... And the mystery of this permeation is that He created the Universe out of Himself. And He is not divided into parts but everything in the Universe by reason of His perfection has the name of creatureliness as a loan. Not as some suppose, that it is the divine attributes which are lent to the creature... for that which is lent is nothing but the relation of creaturely existence to the attributes and verily Creative Existence is the source of this relation....

1 Zaehner, op.cit, 170-1
2 Massignon, L. in EI, IV, 684
3 Margoliouth, D.S. in EI, II, 362
The Universe is like ice, and God, the Magnified and Exalted, is the water, which is the origin of this ice. The name 'ice' is lent to that frozen thing and the name 'water' is the right name for it.1

The panentheistic theory of Ibn 'Arabī, also called 'existentialist monism' by Massignon, remained largely popular with the Muslim mystics2, despite inveterate opposition and tirades of the orthodox elements spearheaded by Ibn Taimiya (b.661/1263) and 'Alā' ud-Daula Simnānī (b. 659/1261). According to A. Simnānī the goal of the Wujūdīyas was 'a very low order of Mukashīfa (mystic revelation), belonging to the earliest stages in the mystic journey'.3 Further:

Creation is a gift of the Almighty. Mumkin ul-Wujud (Contingent Being) can therefore in no circumstances be one with the Holy Being of Wajib ul-Wajud (Necessary Being). The Ma'ul (effect) can never become the Illat (ultimate cause). It is impossible to become one with the Zat u-Sifat (Being and Attributes). The most Holy God is the bestower of Wujud (existence) to all that is Mājud (existent)... Creation is a reflection and not a manifestation of the Divine Being and that existence is separate from, and external to, essence.4

This viewpoint in contradistinction to that of the Wujūdīya became popular as Wahdat uš-Shuhūd or Taḥṣīd-i Shuhūdī. In India both these schools of thought fought out the issue between themselves. On the one hand Ibn 'Arabī's ideas were disseminated by Fakhr ud-Dīn Ibrāhīm of Ḥamadān, popular as Irāqī, Ja'far-i Makkī, Mas'ūd Bak, Shaikh Sharaf ud-Dīn Yuḥyā Manyarī, Shaikh Ashrāf Jahāngīr Simnānī, the leaders of the Shattārī silsila like Shāh 'Abdollāh Shāṭṭārī,5

2 Massignon, Loc.cit.
3 Rizvi, op.cit., 37.
4 'Alā' ud-Daula Simnānī: Al-'Urwa 1 f̲ā 1 Alī al-Khalwa, fols. 112b, 25b-26a, quoted, ibid., 38-9
5 In course of his journey, he came to Bengal, and Shaikh Muḥammad 'Alā', subsequently known as Shaikh Qazan Shattārī accepted his discipleship and proved himself one of his most noted disciples. (Rizvi, ibid., 63)
Shaikh Muḥammad Chauṣ (b. 906/1500-1) and so on.¹ On the other, Saiyid Muḥammad Gesu Darāz (d. 825/1422) and much later Mujaddid-i Ali-i Ḡānī Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī pledged themselves against the doctrine Taḥīd-i Wujūd.² But the popularity of the ideas of Ibn 'Arabi steadily went on increasing in India and 'Wahdat ul-Wujūd came to be regarded as the dominant system of mystic thoughts'.³ The efflorescence of the Bhakti Movement fostering inter-communal rapport and the liberal forces unleashed by the Mughul policy of 'peace with all' (ṣulh-i kull) paved the ground for greater interest in and appreciation of the Hindu and Buddhist mystical speculatives of the Ultimate Reality resulting in the final triumph of the doctrine of one in many in Indian Islam.

The mystical speculations concerning God in Islam present interesting parallels in the Indian systems. Strictly speaking, Indian mysticism advanced slowly towards the idea of a Personal God; yet, in the Upaniṣads there is a just perceptible movement away from a monist-pantheistic view of the Universe towards a more overtly theistical one. God begins to detach himself from the universe and to take on personal characteristics'.⁴ In Gītā God clearly assumes personal features. The question of transcendence and immanence of the Absolute is an integral one in the Indian mystical and speculative thought. All possible shades of opinion bearing on the question have come to exist principally around the interpretations of the Upaniṣads. Dasgupta writes:

¹ Ibid., 43-53, 62-4
² The Shāfiṣūris put great emphasis on ascetic exercises like the Yogiś and studied Yoga and Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara. (Ibid., 62-3).
³ Ibid., 59.
⁴ Zaehner, op. cit., 54
The various commentators upon the Upanishads belonging to different schools of thought and yet each interested to secure for himself the support of the Upanishads, have been fighting with one another for the last twelve hundred years or more to prove that the Upanishads are exclusively in favor of one party as against the others. Thus some contend that the Upanishads teach that Brahman alone exists and all the rest that appears is false and illusory. Others hold that the Upanishads favor the doctrine of modified duality of man in God and of God in man. Still others maintain that the Upanishads give us exclusively a doctrine of uncompromising duality. And so forth. Passages have often been twisted and perverted, and many new connections and contexts have been introduced or imposed upon the texts, to suit the fancy or the creed of the individual commentator.

The relative merit of the different contentions is of no matter to us except that they take us to different approaches to the nature of Godhead in Indian thought. Notions ranging from Śaṅkara’s perfect non-dualism, (Advaita) and Rāmānuja’s modified non-dualism (Viśistādvaita) to downright materialistic pantheism are all part and parcel of the Indian system. Some of these view-points, with emphasis either more or less on non-dualism, correspond closely to those represented by the different schools of Muslim thought as we have noted above. Viewed from this angle, Rāmānuja’s ideas rather than Śaṅkara’s come closer to the dominant Sūfīc doctrine of Wahdat ul-Wujūd underlining modified non-dualism and the importance of the soul in bridging the gulf between God and the individual. This aspect of the Wujūdī doctrine is brought out in Jīli’s observations:

While every appearance shows some attribute of reality, man is the microcosm in which all attributes are united, and in him alone does the Absolute become conscious of itself in all its diverse aspects... the Absolute, having completely realised itself in

1 Dasgupta, S.N.: Hindu Mysticism, 53
human nature returns into itself through the medium of human nature... Hence the upward movement of the Absolute from the sphere of manifestated Essence takes place in and through the unitive experience of the soul...

On the other hand

The kernel of Rāmānuja's teaching... is... to realize the nature of one's immortal soul as being unconditioned by time and space and to see all things in the soul and the soul in all things, is inherent in all men naturally, and it is a godlike state. But this is not to know God: to know God is to love him, and without a passionate and all-consuming love there can be neither communion nor union with the beloved. Any mystical state which is one of undifferentiated oneness is the experience that one individual soul enjoys of its own individual self: it has nothing to do with God. Thus in any form of mystical experience from which love is absent, there can be no question of God: he is absent too. To interpret the experience as being identical with the One or the All is absurd; beguiled by the beauty and apparent infinity of its own deep nature, the liberated soul—so Rāmānuja holds—mistakes the mustard-seed for Mount Meru, the drop for the sea.


2 Zaehner, op.cit., 85.
To the extent these doctrines were common to both the traditions, the ideas concerning such matters presented in the mystical writings of the new group of Bengali Muslims carried a note of familiarity in the local context. The appropriateness and applicability of this observation regarding this literature with reference to the common run of the people may be doubted. But an undercurrent of mystical traditions even at the level of the masses is not a strange phenomenon. We quote a very suitable excerpt from Dasgupta referring to the Bengali masses:

Through oral instruction, tradition, and the example of great men who renounced the world in pursuance of the high ideals of philosophy, the essence of these different systems, with their spiritual longings and their yearnings after salvation and the cessation of rebirth, have gradually been filtering down into the minds of the masses of the population. The tiller of the soil and the grocer in the shop may be uneducated and often wholly illiterate, but even they, while tilling the ground, driving a bullock cart or resting after the work of the day, will be singing songs full of mystical meaning, and for the moment transporting themselves to regions beyond the touch of material gains and comforts... So the sublime teachings of philosophy and the other-worldly aspirations of mysticism, with their soothing, plaintive and meditative tendencies, have watered the hearts of Bengal right into the thatched cottages of this land. 1

1 Dasgupta, S.N., op. cit., 165-7. He says further: A traveller in the village of Bengal, or on board the steamers plying the rivers of the interior of rural Bengal, may often hear a middle-aged or old Mohammedan or a Hindu singing mystical, philosophical or mythical songs of the love of Krishna and Radha, or of the renouncement of the world by Chaitanya, while a large crowd of men is assembled around the singer listening to him with great reverence and feeling. The singer is probably describing the world as a mirage or a mere phantom show of maya, or is expressing the futility of his worldly life on account of his having lost his friendship with his own self. (Ibid., 166).
In the Muslim Bengali mystical writings any trace of dualistic thought is characteristically absent. Emphasis is put not so much on the transcendence of God as on His immanence. All of these writers hold in common a deep conviction about God being the source of all existences and their notions often partake of a pantheistic character. While some of them do not carry their point beyond revealing the presence of the formless in the form, of the creator in the creation, some others do concern themselves with the relation between the two and seek answer in what may be characterized as monistic pantheism.

Saiyid Sultan finds God 'ever concealed as the formless in the form (rupeta nirup rup) like heat in the fire, hardness in the clay, drops in water and rays in the sun and the moon'. Elsewhere he says that God is unmanifest (gopat) in the manifest (bekat) and vice versa. He is, as it were, 'the fragrance of the flower in the vase'. Ishara (God) resides in every entity (ghat). All the characters (paracin) of the form (kay) are there in the shadow (chaya), and the two are the same and no different (chaya jei kayai sei nahe bhinna bhin). But the body (tanu) of the shadow cannot be pierced (chedan na jae). The water takes the form of the pitcher (kumbha). The pitcher in water (jale kumbha) and water in the pitcher (kumbhe jal) make a unity (milan). All that are stationary (sthabar) and mobile (jañgam) are poised (sthir) in essence, bearing but different names (bhinna matra nam).

Similar ideas are expressed in other writings. According to Shah Muhammad Saghir:

'You and I are but fruits and flowers, He being the root of the tree (taru mul) ... You should search for the root in the fruit just as the ocean (samudra) is to be sought in a single drop (bindu) of water'.

1 Ny, fol. 1b mc
Trāṇa-patha, also called Rāh-i Nijjat, a much later work (1275 B.S.), airs similar views:

You read the signs of the Lord (Prabhu cihna) in all that you see around - grasses, creepers, worms and beasts.¹

'Ali Raja' appears to be the most articulate and poignant in the elucidation of ideas of this nature. The infinite and the formless nature (ananta alekha rūp) of God, according to him, beggars description (nā jāy likhan).² Who is capable of penetrating His nature (caritra)? Even the wise, the sages and the seers are unable to know Him (bujhite nā pāre). He runs (lāle pāle) the entire universe through a mechanism (kal), which He has kept secret (gopat) with Himself. He is revealed to all and sundry in His manifested forms (bhyāka rūpe) and people are duped by their transitory (anitya) characters.³ There is the Lord alone who assumes diverse forms to perform His cosmic sports (Ek Prabhu līlā kare nānā rūp dhari). This is like the puppet-player who pulls (lāde/nāde) the strings (potlār duri). It is the player who does the thing but the credit goes to the puppet (bājigare bāji kare nām potlār). So does God (Allā) perform all the acts making, as it were, the puppets dance at His instance (bājir potlā jena iṅgite dolay).⁴ In different forms He enjoys His līlā (Nānā rūp dhare Prabhu līlā bhog kare). The world stands like the puppet - all so impermanent. He is both unmanifest and manifest in His hidden essence (gopate nirūp Prabhu gopate prakāś). He is also manifest in the world (Jagat bidita) and resides everywhere (sarbbatre nibāś). He is concealed (gopat) and known (bidita) through gnosis (bijnāne) and manifest in knowledge (suṣjnāne).⁵

¹ Hamidullah Khan, 3
² Agama, (MS T46a: sl.9) fol.73
³ Ibid., fol. 47
⁴ Ibid., fol. 73
⁵ Ibid., fol. 74
'Ali Raja' refers to the sublime (nirmal) subtle body (sukṣma tanu) of the Lord which permeates every atom of existence. The three worlds (tin bhuban) constitute the body (tanu) of Allah, who is attested by the Qur'an, the Purāṇas and other texts (māna śāstra) to be the sole Essence (ek Prabhu sār). He is fire (bāhni), air (bāyu), water (jal) and earth (bhumi) - all Himself. Man, fairies (parī) animals and birds are all His forms (rup). All the Paighambars are but the same Lord (Kartār) in their respective names. The form (kāya) of Adam is made of earth (mātī) by God who lives within this form as the creative power (maha māya). Human beings (nara sāb) form the branches (dāl) of a tree (mūl brksa) which is God Himself. A tree contains innumerable fruits (phal) Similarly, there are infinitesimal number of people, but one God. A single human body contains endless matters, so does God. He covers the human figure in the form of the skin (cārma rūpe), and the flesh (mūnsa) behind the skin is again but another of His forms. It is God who hears in the form of ear (karna rūpe), sees in the form of eyes (caksu rūpe), knows everything in the form of mind (man rūpe), speaks in the form of mouth (mukh rūpe), holds in the form of arms (hasta rūpe) and walks in the form of feet (pada rūpe). He is manifest (byākta) in the form of the body (tan) and concealed (gupta) as mind (man). The manifest aspect of His being assumes all forms (sarba kalebar), but in His essence He is the supreme Absolute (īśvar). Elsewhere, 'Ali Raja' mentions the Hindu symbolism of Paramātmā (the supreme soul) and Jīvātmā (the individual soul) forming a union between them (yugal mīṣrīta). Paramātmā remains dissociated from the material body (kāya hante bhin).
which is the abode of Jīvātmā. But Paramātmā is ever associated with the mind (maner saṅgati pratinita).\(^1\) 'Alī Rajā's faith in the immanent notions of God takes him to forbid violence (hiṃsā badh) against all creatures (jīb), for these are all tokens of the greatness of God (Bidhātār mahimā sakal).\(^2\)

The distinction between God and His creation is particularly alive in the mind of some of these writers as we have already mentioned. While identifying the Divine attributes manifested in the creation and believing that He is all, some of them at least find it at ease to identify all with Him. Shaikh Manṣūr raises the question and seeks answer in a monistic framework. He mentions Mancor Ḥallāj (Maṇcir Ḥallāj) being the foremost among saints (āuliya pradān/pradhāna) who dissolved his individuality, remained lost in himself (āpanā pāsari āpe misiā rahilā) and declared himself God (mui Hakk hena kari sadāe kahilā).\(^3\) He also refers to Sek Farīd Ṭātā (Shaikh Farīd ud-Dīn Muḥammad 'Attār) as a great saint (mahā pir ali/walī), who called himself God, being lost in God's thought (mui Khodā hena kailā Prabhu bhābe bhuli).\(^4\) Shaikh Maṇṣūr concerns himself with the rationale of such contentions (ki hetu kahilā Pire emata bacan). He finds it in God Himself uttering those words having assumed their individual forms (tār rūp dhari kahe Prabhu Niraṅjan). The individual merges into God (Prabhur sane miliā rahila), as it were, the moon sets in the sun (ṛurjer/ suryaer nikaṭe jena candra asta gela). Maṇṣūr drives his point further by an emphatic assertion that the truth of Islam is not to be equated with

1. Jñāna-sāgara. (DMS 146b: s1.9), fol. 129
2. Ibid., fol. 83
3. Sirr Nāma (DMS 569:s1460), fol. 3b
4. Ibid.
the practices of disbelief (Muhâmmadi din nahe kâfiri ācâr). Unless it is God who else is empowered to call himself God (nahe kâr sakti āce Khodâ bolibâr)? If a man would introduce himself as God, his head should at once be severed from his body (sekhane tâhâr sir chedi kara judâ). 1 It is the Hindu scriptures (Hinduâni Sâstra) - the four Vedas, twenty two Purânas and the fourteen scriptures - that teach that one in contemplation of 'Brama' (Brahmâ) merges into Him and becomes Brahmâ himself (Brama se bhâbiâ Brahmâ hae sei jân).2

The most brilliant exposition of what we have noted as Monistic Pantheism is offered by Ḫâji Muḥammad, who appears to have been one of the leading religious guides (Pîr), like Saiyid Sulṭân, as known from the writings of his disciples. Ḫâji Muḥammad expounds clearly the manifestations of God's attributes in His creation but takes particular care to emphasise the essential difference between the Creator and the creature - the Lord (Khodâ) and the servant (bândâ). But even this distinction appears finally in his writings to divest itself of all dualistic implications underlining a notion of distinction. God, says Ḫâji Muḥammad, unites pure essence (jât/zât) and attributes (chifât/sifat) in Himself (jâte ar chifâtêta āchila ek kây) and makes Himself clearly manifest (jâher/ zâhir) later in the same way as the bird concealed in the egg (dimba) comes out of it and the tree (brksa) from the seed (bîj).3 He is both manifest (byâktar/byâkta) and unmanifest (abyâktar/abyâkta) and remains omnipresent (byâpita sarbba thâm). He is Himself flower, fragrance and bee (bhramar); insect (kît) and honey (madhu); milk (dugdha),

1 Ibid., fols. 3b-4a.
2 Ibid., fol. 4a.
butter (nānī) and the churner (mathan); female (strī), male (purus/puruṣ) and the neuter (napuhsak); the eater, the eatable (bhakṣak) and the preserver (rakṣak). He assumes the form of one castigated to hell (dojakhi) and suffers, while He also enjoys bliss in the form of a dweller in paradise (bhīhisti). He takes the form of water (āb), fire (ātas), earth (khāk) and air (bād). He reduces Himself to the forms of four angels - Azra'il Jibrā'il, Mīkā'il and Isrāfīl to perform their respective functions. It is confusing to know (sunite lāge dhanda) that faith and disbelief (kufar) are different (dui hena balae). Let it be known that truth is only one (ek jānio tattva). In the interpretation of the Hindus God, (Niranjan) is personified in Muhammad (Mohammad Niranjan Hindu sabe kahe). According to the Vedas and the Purāpas, one is transformed to Brahmā on His contemplation (Brahmā bhābite seje āpanē Brahmā hae). Even the Muslim scriptures contain similar provisions (Kitābeta ehimata farman āchae). One attaining (wāsil) the station (mokām/muqam) of 'Lāhūt' does not see anything else than God within and without (bāhire bhitare dekhe sab Āllāe). Known as Allāh, Khodā or Gosāīn, there is no limit to His forms (ananta rūp) through which He discharges all His functions (cālaanta sarbakām). He is all, and all is He (sei se sakal jatha/yata sakal sej se). He is neither near nor far - He is everywhere (dur nikāt nahe sarba tham baise).

Hājī Muḥammad's ideas, as outlined above, often lean sharply towards a pantheistic concept of the Divinity. But there is a strong undercurrent of transcendentalism running throughout his work. He reveals a clear awareness of the essential difference between God and man and resorts to a

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1 Ibid., fol. 6 mc
2 'Lāhūt is the final stage in the Sūfic journey to God (see below).
few illuminating analogies to bring out at once the duality of the Creator and the created and the essential unity of Being. He mentions the trinity of the seed giving birth to the tree and the tree to the fruit - each of the three having taken a different name. The one makes the three and the three unite into one. The seed, the tree and the fruit are no different from one another (kēha bhinne nahe). And yet, Ḥāji points out, the fruit can never be called tree (tathāpi phalerē brkṣa kahan na jāē). The tree is not affected by the sufferings of the fruit (phaler duḥkke gācher duḥkha nāi), and the death of the latter does not result in the death of the former. The sea (sāgar), waves (dheu) and each drop of water (bindū) form a unity. The sea and the waves make the same water (pāmi), there being, as it were, no difference between the two. But the waves are in reality produced by the sea. In the same relation God (Allā) and the servant (bāndā) stand to each other; the former giving birth (paydā) to the latter. God is not affected by the sufferings (duḥkha) and conducts (ācār) of the bāndā.

Ḥāji Muhammad does not appear in the ultimate analysis more anxious to emphasize this distinction than resolve it into a supreme all-embracing monistic truth. He proceeds further to realise that bāndā is a mere name for Him, who is all (bāndā-hina nām mātra āpane sakal). The One has assumed variegated forms with different names. 'You and I', he says, 'are but names alone', and He is all (tumi āmi nām mātra sakal sei se). He introduces a homily

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1 Ibid., fol. 5 mc.
2 Ibid., fol. 8 mc.
3 Ibid., fol. 5 mc.
4 Ibid., fol. 8 mc.
5 Ibid., fols. 5, 8 mc.
6 Ibid., fol. 5 mc.
culled from a living experience of the material existence in rural Bengal in order to put the final seal of his convictions regarding the truth of God. He says:

While everyone talks in the market-place (hāṭ) myriads of sounds (dhvani) and words (bāni) are heard. Anybody listening to this from a distance (dureta thākli) experiences one harmonious note combining all (sakal mili dhvani ekai sab suna). This is the key to the truth (tattva-paricay). One is manifold and manifolds are One. One who attains this truth in gnosis (Marifat) cannot see anything but God alone.1

ii. The Approach to God

The mystical trend in a system of religious thought has always presented some complexities and generated tensions in relation to the 'authority' in the particular religious system. Primarily aimed at personal communion with God, mystical thought and practices have often appeared suspect in the eye of religious dogma. Consequently the recognition of mystical forces in a religion has quite often been a slow process working itself out through conflicting tendencies ranging from heresy to abject surrender. Most often the progress is maintained by steering a middle course between dogma and extreme non-conformity - the demand of adherence to the fundamentals of a religion and the need for an essentially personal God. The development of the system or systems of mystical thought in Islam reveals similar stresses and strains in effecting compliance with the requirements of the Shariat. The uncompromising monotheism of Islam imposed greater obligation for a believer to abide by the Shariat and closer vigilance over deviations. We have already noted that while on the one hand reformistic zeal of Ibn Taimiya and 'Alā' ud-Dīn Simnānī demanded stricter and more orthodox role of the believers, attempts were made by people like al-Ghazālī to stimulate concordance between

1Ibid., fol. 10mc.
Sufism and orthodox Islam. Similar tendencies were also noted in the development of Sufic thoughts in medieval India, as also noted before.

The mystical literature of the medieval Bengali Muslims does not ignore some of these questions vital to a mystic's aspirations. The merit and importance of the mystic path to God remain as alive in their mind as the need for harnessing it to the chariot of doctrinal Islam. The ideas expressed in this regard lend themselves neither to an uniform pattern nor a water-tight division. While different answers are sought to express their individual mystical stance, varying attitudes are often found to co-exist in the mind of an individual writer. It may be far from reality to inflict a notion of contradiction on some of these writers holding differing views in themselves. The totality of an individual mystical experience can very well harmonise them into a single precept of truth and transcend them. 1

From an analysis of this literature emerge a few trends of thought relevant to this question. One of these is to emphasise the distinction of the mystic esoteric path. In certain cases it is done through mere assertions or with

1A similar problem confronts an evaluation of the mystic ideas of the Upaniṣads. Referring to the subsequent attempts to interpret the Upaniṣadic thought in keeping with the individual outlook of the commentator, Dasgupta comments: 'The Upaniṣads reveal to us different phases of thought and experience, not a consistent dogmatic philosophy. The apparent inconsistency of the different phases of thought is removed if we take a psychological point of view and consider them as different stages of development in the experience of minds seeking to grasp a sublime, ultimate but inexpressible truth. This truth has a logic of its own, different from the logic of discursive thought wherein distinctions are firm and rigid, where concepts are like pieces of brick mortared together by the logical movement of thought. Its logic is that of experience in which the apparently contradictory ideas or thoughts lose their contradictoriness and become parts of one solid whole'. (Op.cit., 53-4).
the help of some religious authority cited in favour of the contention. But the more systematic and rational method is generally used to bring the esoteric approach to God into contrast either with the path of scholastic knowledge ('ilm) or with the formal professions and practices of the religion as required by the Shari'at. We have already noted, and as we shall presently see that the mystic path in their writings is variously called Darweshī, Faqīrī, Āgāna\(^1\) and Yoga, Bimukha or Ulta\(^2\) Pantha or Pantha (path). Shaikh Manṣūrsays that there is 'no greater merit elsewhere than Darbāresi'.\(^3\)

The Prophet, according to him, is said to have admitted in a 'hadīc' (hadīs) that he begged the virtue of 'Fakīrī' from the Lord. The Prophet also said that there was great love (pirītī bahul) between a person accepting (kabul) the life of a Faqīr and himself, and both should reach the same goal (ekgati). No one else than a Faqīr can reach God and there is always triumph for Faqīr with God (Allār nikāte jēna Fakīrer jēj/jaya)\(^4\).

The most serious attempt to vindicate the position of the secretive esoteric path, almost invariably called Āgām or 'Jugi [Yogī]-pantha' or 'Siddhi-pantha' in his writings, is found in 'Allī Rājā'. He sets it clearly apart from the exoteric knowledge and discipline (Ṣāstras) and categorically declares the supremacy of the esoteric means. 'Sariyat' (Sharī'at), he says, bears the characters of exoterism (Sariyat saṃsārer prācār laksan). The Qur'ān and the Purāṇas are all explicit (prācār kathan) and so are all Śāstras with worldly orientations (saṃsāri byābāhar).

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\(^{1}\)Generally a Tāntic expression for esoteric truth.

\(^{2}\)Both 'bimukha' and 'ulṭā' mean reverse and are very popular terms for the 'regressive culture' as practised by all the popular Yogico-Tāntic cults in medieval Bengal.

\(^{3}\)DMs, op.cit., fol.13a.

\(^{4}\)Ibid., fol.9b.
These will never lead to the path of Yoga (Siddhi Jog Panthā), which is the command of God (Īśvarer ājñā) and a concealed truth for ever (satata gopat tatta/tattva). One may commit the whole of the Śastra-sto memory, read the religious texts (dharma Śāstra) continuously (abirata), read the Qur'ān for a hundred years (sata abda keha yadi paraya Korān); and yet, he is not as purified (śuddha) as the leading Fāqīr (Fakir pradhān). The Śāstras are concerned with the determination of right and wrong (bhāla mander bicār). The revelation of God (Āllār didār) is not through these. God (Bidhātā) shall refuse to meet (dekhā nā kariba) the person, who reaches heaven (svarga) by virtue of individual piety (pūnya baile) without Yoga (Jog binā). God (Jagat Īśvar) has ordained people in the Qur'ān to follow the path of Yoga (Jog panthe nara-nāri sab calibār). Niraṅjana shall reveal Himself (darsan) to him who makes his mind steady (drdh man), attains a knowledge of the body of his own self (āpta/ātma kāyā). The kings (nṛpati) and the learned (pandits) do not understand the creative mystery (lilā). Those, who are not inclined to Yoga-pantha, are born in vain (brthā jana). The king runs between his royal stakes and Yoga, and the pandit between Śāstra and Yoga (kṣane śāstra kṣane Jog). Caught in two minds (dui dike gati), they are denied of final attainment (siddhi). There is no salvation in bringing dual approaches to bear on the worship of God (du bhābe Īśvar puji nāhi mukta path). Even the worship of a tree with a fixed resolve leads to fulfilment of desire (ek citte bṛkṣa puje pure manorath). The learned are so by reading various Śāstras which is never rooted in the mystic path (Śāstra mule kadācit nāhika Fakiri). The chief among the learned (pradhān pandit) is but a  

1 Jñāna-sāgaga, fol. 208  
2 Ibid., fol. 215  
3 Ibid., fol. 216  
4 Ibid., fol. 217
servant (dās) of the Faqīr. 1

Same ideas are developed in other works of 'Alī Rajā'. He identifies Marifat with Āgama (Marifat ye hae Āgama bali tare) and draws the same distinction between Sharī'at, which is open (byākta) and Āgama, which is hidden (gopān) and is the secret Vṛndāvana of the Lord (Āgamata Prabhur gopat Bṛhadāban). 2 While the Sharī'at contains several matters (mānān prakār), Āgama is the essence of one single truth (tattva sab ek sār). 3

In carrying the distinctiveness of the esoteric path further, 'Alī Rajā' writes that everybody can see the merit of the Siddhi-panthā, if it remains open before all; but there cannot be any great virtue (mahatta) in what is always exposed to human senses. God has kept the ultimate truth (Siddhi) in secret (gopāne), because what is so hidden has great merit. In fact, one has only to know how to convert (pālti) what is before (samukh) to what is beyond (bimukh). 4 It is not for everybody to understand the supreme value of the regressive (ulṭā) path, which consists in the treatment of high (ūrdha) as low (adhah) and vice versa; right (suddha) as wrong (aśuddha) and vice versa; sadness (duṣkha) as happiness (sukh) and vice versa; front (samukh) as behind (bimukh) and vice versa; fire (bhairi) as air (pabān) and vice versa; water (nir) as earth (medni/medini) and vice versa; water (pani) as fire (kṛṣānu) and vice versa;

1 Ibid., fol. 218
2 Āgama, DMs op.cit., fol.26
3 Ibid., fol. 27
4 Jñāna-sāgara, fol. 115
Another facet of the attempt to distinguish between the mystical and the non-mystical approaches to God is to identify and emphasize the element of love (prema) as the essence of the creative process. To this element other attitudes are thoroughly subordinated. 'Ali Rajā in his characteristic intensity of mystical fervour as also felicity of expression seeks to establish the consuming force of divine love encompassing the Creator and the creation in a single fold. The Śāstras embodying written words (akṣar) are never the essence (sār) of truth. If there is anything to be learnt (pāth) this is the lesson of love (prem pāth) to be taken by the core of heart (hrde mūle) which leads to the goal (Siddhi). The lesson of written words studied through material eyes (carma cakṣe) appears as night (rajanī) as compared to the lesson of love (pirīti) which is like the light of day (dināmāgi). The four Vedas and the fourteen Śāstras (cāri Bed cauddha Śāstra) are mere dry pieces of wood (śuṣka kāṣṭha), while the supreme love (param pirīti) is full of nectar (ras). The differentiation between the mystical attitude of divine love and the formalist approach of scholastic theology is sealed as the 'ālim is debarred from the abode of love (ālim nā thāke yena prem Bindābane). No knowledge or meditation is of any consequence without love (Prem bine jhūn dhyān kichu nahe sār).

1 Ibid., fol. 194
2 Ibid., fol. 116
3 Ibid., fol. 117
Love is identified as the exclusive content of the Divine nature and God is said to be only where there is love (Yathāte pirīti thāke Ṛṣvār tathāte). The seat of love (premer āsan) extends as far as the sphere of the three worlds (trilok) created by God (Kartār). There is no life (jīban) without love.

The God's throne (simhāsan) is fastened (bandhan) by love and the throne covers the three worlds (tribhuban). The creation (saṁsār) has proceeded from the love of God, and no atom (renu) is devoid of God's love. All is sustained in love and all dies without it (prem hante jiye sab prem bine mare). God (Kartār) in the name of Isvar is immersed and concealed (dubiā lukita) in the cosmic ocean of love. The creation (saṁsār) represents the sea (sāgar), the creatures (jīb sab) are like fish (mīn) in it, while love is the net (jāl). Love binds and holds every object of creation in a unity - fire is in love with air, earth with water, sky (gagan) with heaven (svarga), heaven with earth (martya), hell (narak) with the nether world (pātāl), water (bāri) with sea (sāgar), fish with water, night (yāminī) with moon (indu), and day (dīn) with sun (rābi). The world (jagat) is bound in love just as the tree is in the root (brkṣa bandi mūle), the bee in the lotus (kamale bhrāmar bandi), the fish in water (mīn bandi jale), male (puruṣ) in female (nārī), the mind (man) in the body (tan) and breath in the mind.

The realisation of the essence of love is effected through the union of the twin aspects of the Reality. Love is never realised without a couple (yuga). The creative

1 Jnana-sāgara, fol.101
2 Ibid., fol.102
3 Ibid., fol.109
4 Ibid., fol.110
5 Ibid., fol.111
6 Ibid., fol.100
action is impotent without yugala. God has created the
world in dual form (yuga-bhābe). He was alone in the
beginning and made His dual in Muḥammad out of love.
They formed the pair of Bhāvaka and Bhāvinī whence
everything followed. The devotee (bhakta) and God
form the same relation. God accepts His lover as the
master (karta) and Himself as servant (sebak). Nārāyaṇa
Hari has appeared Himself as the devotee (bhakta) in
every age (janme janme) and assumed human form (nara rūp)
to act (kryā/kriyā) with Rādhā. Rāma Nārāyaṇa became
devoted to the beauty of Jānakī. The chief of the gods
(deba-kul rāy i.e. Indra) became devoted to Śacī.
Zulāikha fell for Yūsuf and Amīr Ḥasan for Zainab. Dīwān
Ḥāfiẓ was devoted to a prostitute (besyā) and Bū 'Alī
Qalandar was devoted to handsome Mūbārak. Dīwān
'Alī became bhakta of Samaddin (Shams ud-Dīn), Ādam of
Ḥauwū, Śiva of Gaurī and Muḥammad of 'Ayishā.

On the other hand, ideas are not lacking in their
writings that put primacy to doctrinal knowledge ('ilm)
as a means of realisation of the essence of God. Knowledge
(elem/'ilm), opines Ḥayāt Maḥmūd, is the root of everything
(sabhār/sabār mül). A life without knowledge is a barren
one (nisfal jīban). Such a person is unable to recognise
God (Ye nā jāne elem se nā cine Khodāke). He cannot
distinguish between good and bad (bhāla manda) and what
is permitted (hālāl/halāl) and what is not (hārān/harām).
Allāh is immanent as a sweet fragrance (khus bas) in
knowledge, as butter lies in milk (dudher bhitar yena
rākhiāche ghṛta). A Faqīr is never made without knowledge

1 Ibid., fol. 104
2 Ibid., fol. 105
3 Ibid., fol. 106-9.
4 Ḥv, 35.
just as butter is not made without milk, and rain (nūr) without cloud (megh). Knowledge may be either exoteric (elem jāher/‘ilm ẓāhir) or esoteric (elem bātin/‘ilm-i bātin). The former is comparable to milk, while the latter to the butter produced of this. None of the Ṣirs and saints (auliyā) in the past (kadim/qadim) could become Faqīr without knowledge (be elim). For it is the faith of the unbeliever that 'roars' inside a Faqīr without knowledge (be elim fakir haite keha nāre/Kofarer dīn yena gad gad kare).

Hājī Muḥammad distinguishes between the orthodox path of Ṣarīat and the mystical one of Ṣarīqat. None can as he points out, step on Ṣarīqat disregarding Ṣarīat (bini Sariat nāre jāite Tarikate). It is only after the realisation (ādat) of the station (manjil) of Ṣarīat that one can step forward to the path (pant) of Ṣarīqat. All the mystical stations are covered (dhākiāche) by Ṣarīat, and all of them are located in it (sakal manjil āche Sariat bhitar). The way to the revelation of Allāh (Allār didārer pat) is only prayers (ebādat) at the station of Ṣarīat. Hājī Muḥammad advises people to adhere to the path of Ṣarīat, to perform repentance (tauba) before prayers, to distinguish between (kario farak) harām and halāl and to observe all the injunctions (farman) of Allāh, either permissive or prohibitory.

Shaikh Manṣūr addresses the Faqīrs (Fakir sabere kahi ẓuna man diyyā) and requires strict adherence to the Qur'ān and Hadīṣ of them. The ways of life in the world (calācal samsār mājhār) are what find mention in the Qur'ān (je sab āchaye lekha Kurān bhitar). The Lord (Prabhu) is

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1 Ibid., 36
3 Ibid., fols. 1-2 mc.
unseen but His words (bacan) exist, and the words reign supreme (adipati/adhipati) in the world. Similarly
the Prophet is no more here in the world but his words
exist in the Hadīṣ, which should be relied on (pattay/pratyaya), and according to which life and activities
(kārya karma) should be guided.¹ Nothing should
be said beyond what are contained in the Śāstras.
The Kalima should be uttered in all sincerity, and no
fear of sin can exist once the spirit of the Kalima is
penetrated. In the same breath Maṇṣūr emphasizes the
importance of practising the doctrinal observances
like namāz, ṛoṇa, ḍaṭi and zakāt, ceremonial cleanliness
(bini pāke namājεr nikaṭe nā jāo), making distinction
between hārām and hālāl and so on.² The Faqīrs and
Darweshes, not abiding by these essential obligations,
are not entitled to being called Shaikh (emat nā hae jadi
Fakir Darbes/Sek kariā tāre nā kaha bises). Because, only
those who practice these observances should tread on the
path of Tariqat (tabe Tarikat pante kara calācal).³

The recognition of the merit of conformity with
the Shariāt is also found in 'Alī Raja', who appears to be
the most unorthodox among his fellow mystics. He
recognises Shariāt (Sarā) lying at the root of all (Sarā
sakaler mūl) and that the mystic truth (Āgam) cannot be
realised without it (Sarā bina nā pāibā Āgam uddis).⁴
Elsewhere he observes that those who are able to follow
the obligations set by the Prophet (Ye sabe pālite pāre
Rachuli niyam) are alone worthy (yogya) of practising Yoga.⁵

¹ Op.cit., fols.4-5
² Ibid., fols.14-8
³ Ibid., fol.18
⁴ Šārīma, op.cit., fol.22.
⁵ Jāna-sāgara fol.203.
Faqīrī is not so called if divorced from the practices of the Prophet (Rāchulī byāsār/vyāvahāra). A perfect Faqīr (Fakir sūddha) - a true servant (sebāk) - a great sage (mahā munī) is only one who is firmly resolved on the practices of the Paighambar (Paygāmbarī hāl yār ati dydh man). The body of the Prophet (Kabīr kāyā), reminds 'Alī Rajā', was scrupulously covered by cloth (bastra) in all conditions. A Yogi is not one for having matted hair on the head (jātā kes). He is never concerned with any affectation or posture (bhāngimā) even in his dress (bhes/bes).

"Alī Rajā" attacks with pungent sarcasm all types of miraculous feats associated with the pseudo-Faqīrs. A true Yogi should not approach people seeking favour. An iota (renu) of malice (hiṃsā) and hypocrisy (kaṇṭā/kapāṭātā) should undo all the fruits of their knowledge (paṇḍitī) and mystical pursuits. Such people bear all the characters of the beast (pasūr laḳṣān) and not of mendicants (sadhu).

It is apparent from the foregoing discussion that the mystical attitudes reflected in these writings could not be kept entirely free from the undercurrent of a tension stemming from the need of reconciliation of mystical realisations with the rigid demand of the Shariat. We have noted the keen anxiety in some of them to secure the primacy of the esoteric approach to God vis-à-vis the formal, dogmatic and scholastic one. And yet at the same time Shariat is taken as the primal basis. The inherent difficulties in the approach is epitomized as noted above in 'Alī Rajā's acceptance of the Shariat as the 'root of all' and in his faith flowing from his mystic realizations that God and man are the same - a notion that was long stigmatized even in the mystic circle of Islam as the heretical concept of hulūl or anthropomorphism of God.

1Ibid., fol. 209
2Ibid., fol. 219
A conscious or unconscious attempt at reducing the gap was, following the general line of Sufic thinking, to emphasize the close interdependence of the traditional four-fold divisions of Sufic stages (muqām) - Shari'at, Tariqat, Haqiqat and Ma'rifat. Various analogies and symbolisms are resorted to with a view to bringing out the essential harmony and continuity between the earliest stage of Shari'at and the final one of Ma'rifat. Shari'at is compared to a lamp (cāpani), Tariqat to the wick (palīṭa), Haqiqat to oil (taila) and Ma'rifat to ignition (agni). The interdependence is clearly underlined in the further observation that any three of them leaving out one cannot serve the purpose and all the four put together light the lamp (ek nā thākile tine kām nā hi cāle / Cari ekattar hai le sei dip/din jale).1 'Ali Raja' observes that Tariqat is not born (janma) without Shari'at, Haqiqat without Tariqat and Ma'rifat without Haqiqat. Shari'at, he continues, is father (janak), Tariqat is mother (janani), Haqiqat is the infant (sīsu) and Ma'rifat is the preceptor (guru).2 Again, Shari'at is the creation (samsār). Tariqat is human being, Haqiqat is Paighambar and Ma'rifat is God (Īsvar). Body (tan) is Shari'at, mind is Tariqat, breath (paban) is Haqiqat and God (Īsvar) is Ma'rifat. Shari'at is samsār, Tariqat is guru, Haqiqat is knowledge and Ma'rifat is disciple (sisya). The earth is Shari'at, the sea (sindhu) is Tariqat, water (jal) is Haqiqat and Ma'rifat is fish. Shari'at is cow (gābi/gābhī), Tariqat milk (dugdha), Haqiqat is butter (nani) and Ma'rifat is clarified butter (ghṛta). The earth (bhumi) is Shari'at, root Tariqat, tree (brkṣa) Haqiqat and flower is Ma'rifat. Shari'at is fire, Tariqat air, Haqiqat water and Ma'rifat is earth. From fire is produced air, water from air and the earth from water and hence, Ma'rifat from Shari'at.3

1 Hāji Muhammad, fol. 2mc
2 Āgama, fol. 22
3 Ibid., fol. 22-4
In 'Alī Rajā' we find a further step forward to reduce the polarisation, as from the position of interdependence he moves to assert the essential identity of all the four stages. He no longer finds them component parts of the whole, but each is conceived as a complete unit representing the same indivisible truth. In this supreme state of mystical realisation he goes to attribute the birth of Shariat from Ma'rifat (Mārfat haite janam hae Sariyat). He puts his final realisation in the form of several symbolisms. He says, at the first instance, that the fruit (pha1) is produced from the tree and the tree again shoots out from the fruit. The egg (dimba) is produced from the fish (min) and the fish again is born from egg—so is the egg from the bird (pakṣī) and the bird from the egg. There are four doors on the four sides of a single house—four avenues (pantha) leading to the same city (nagar) and four ghāts around the same lake (sarobar)—the same one fruit in four trees (cari gāche). Shariat and Ma'rifat are no different (kichu nahe bhin) and are one in essence (nule ek sār). 1

iii. The Mystic Disciplines and Techniques:

Besides the broad questions relating to the Godhead from the mystical standpoint, the literature under review deals with many other issues bearing on the mystical disciplines and techniques. The most dominating feature of these writings is the abundance of elements clearly identifiable in the indigenous systems of mystical thought and practice especially of the Yogico-Tantric varieties, alongside those of undisputed Islamic legacy. The materials at our disposal are so well-defined in their terms of reference and so unambiguous and direct in their language that we are spared a good deal of intellectual dissipation in

1 Ibid., fols. 24-5
tracing the sources of these ideas. Aside from some marginal elements that the most, if not all, mystical systems are likely to hold in common, the Islamic and the indigenous ideas presented in this literature are clearly distinguished and belong exclusively to their respective traditions. There is no reason, for instance, to dispute the established identity of the Ṣūfic concepts of stages (muqām) like Shari‘at, Tariqat, Haqīqat and Ma‘rifat or the Yogico-Tantric notions of the culture of ‘nerves’ known as Ḷā, pīṅgalā and sūṣumṇā or the nerve-plexuses (cakra) ranging from Mulādhāra to Sahasrāra. And this is precisely the form, without any vagueness or suggestiveness about their contents and idioms, in which the mystical ideas of the two traditions found their place in these writings.

One set of ideas is liable to present some difficulties in this respect. This has reference to the notions and practices that are found in both these traditions in different names and forms. The attitudes of respect for the mystic guide is a point in instance. This is a religious phenomenon common to Ṣūfic and all Indian esoteric schools. In view of its integral nature in the Islamic mystical tradition, the phenomenon demands evaluation in its Islamic conceptual framework. And yet some reference to the local structure is forced on a student of this phenomenon as presented in these Muslim writings. The attitude of respect in their writings has clearly undergone a transmutation into that of veneration, adoration and worship of the religious guide hardly consistent with the theological demand of the Taḥdīd.¹ What is more important is to note an equation of the Islamic and the indigenous symbols - the Pīr (the mystic guide) is very often

¹ See below.
identified with his local counterpart - the Guru. Same is the case with some physiological exercises like the respiratory techniques practised by the Sūfis in the performance of zikr and the similar practices known to Tāntric Yoga. The question here is further complicated by the fact that even while the importance of the Indian contribution to the tradition of Islamic mysticism has been seriously questioned,¹ 'the more circumscribed problem of the origin of Moslem respiratory techniques remains open'.² The similarities between the technique of zikr and the morphology of Tāntric Yoga have often been noted. Eliade, who considers it probable that 'the regulation of bodily postures and breathing techniques (associated with zikr) is owing, at least in part, to Indian influences', observes:

We must emphasize the mystical physiology assumed by the practice of dhikr; there are references to 'centers' and subtle organs, to a certain inner vision of the human body, to chromatic and acoustic manifestations accompanying the various stages of the experience, etc. Respiratory discipline and ritual enunciation play an essential role; the process of concentration is not unlike the yogic method.³

L. Gardet has examined the relation of zikr with japa-yoga, and compares the 'zikr of the tongue' (zikr-i jalî) with dhāraṇā and the 'zikr of the heart' (zikr-i khaff) with dhyāna.⁴ Whatever might be the nature and degree of original indebtedness of these Sūfīc techniques to Tāntric Yoga, the

¹Supra, 180.
³Ibid., 216-7.
⁴'La Mention du nom divin (dhikr) dans la mystique musulmane', Revue Thomiste (Paris), 1952, LII, 670; 1953, LIII, 205, cited, ibid., 216, 408 (Note vi, 6).
significant point with regard to the respiratory and other physical and physiological exercises mentioned in the Muslim mystical writings in Bengali is the considerable use of indigenous methods and symbols as we shall examine below. Whether drawing elements directly from the Islamic sources or from the local ones or using local symbols for ideas and practices for which parallel tendencies are found in the traditions of Islamic mysticism, the total image conjured through the various facets of this literature is one of adaptation and similitude with the structure of local tradition - an affinity that should sound significant in the context of the acceptance of their ideas in the local environment.

A proper evaluation of these mystical writings, so remarkably permeated by the notions and practices of Tāntric Yoga, presupposes some acquaintance with the Tāntrico-Yogic ideas as prevailed in medieval Bengal. It is rather difficult to identify the channel through which these ideas watered the mind of these Muslim writers. The history of medieval Bengal bears witness to the emergence and nourishment of various cults and sects influenced by Tāntrico-Yogic ideas, such as the Buddhist Sahajiyās, the Nāthists, the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās and to some extent, the

1 The wide popularity of these ideas among the Bengali Muslims is not only evidenced by these writings but also from two other Muslim compositions in which the respective authors resorted directly to Hindu religious traditions influenced by Yogico-Tantric ideas. The one is Shaikh Faizullah whose Gorakṣa-vijaya (ed. Karim, Munshi, A., Bangiya Sahitya Parishad) is a direct contribution to the Nātha tradition. The other is Shaikh Cand, who in his Hara-Gaurī Saṁvāda [DMS 559:1556]. For the confusion surrounding this work, see supra, [Preface] makes a thorough exposition of Tāntrico-Yogic ideas, adopting the Tantric and Nāthist motif of revelation of the esoteric ideas put in the mouth of Hara or Śiva, or Mahādeva in response to the enquiries of Gaurī or Sakti or Mahāmāya. (Fol. 2).
Bauls. Naturally enough, there was much that these cults held in common like the supreme importance attached to the mystic initiator (Guru), the importance of the human body as the microcosm of the universe (deha-tattva) and the resultant psycho-physiological culture (kāyā-sādhana). And yet it appears that the Tantrico-Yogic ideas of the Muslim writers were largely derived through the Nāthist channel as evidenced by a large stock of Nāthist terminologies finding place in their writings. We have elsewhere noted how and why the Muslims were closely connected with the Nāthist traditions so that one of the earliest and most popular works on the Nātha traditions is one by a Muslim as already noted. This is also significant that the Nāthist literature in Bengali is the only medium through which the ideas of Tantric Yoga or Hatha-Yoga found circulation in medieval Bengal. The emergence of Hatha-Yoga itself is linked with the name of the most popular Nātha divinity, Gorakṣa-nātha. While the other forms of Yoga, such as Mantra-yoga, Laya-yoga and Rāja-yoga are rather philosophical, laying stress on the final arrest of the mental processes leading to liberation from the whirl of existence, the primary emphasis of Hatha-Yoga is on the physiological culture conducive to immortality initially in a perfect body (siddha-deha) and finally in a divine body (divya-deha).

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1See below, chapter V.

2To Gorakṣa-nātha is attributed a work named Hatha-Yoga which is no longer extant. The term Hatha-Yoga soon came to be the collective designation for the traditional formulas and disciplines aimed at perfect mastery of the body. (Eliade, op. cit., 228-9).

3Dasgupta, S.B.: Obscure Religious Cults, 218-9
In such Yogic texts there are repeated assurances for a Yogi of a body free from disease, decay and death based on the attainment of Siddhi, which is the summum bonum of all Yogic pursuits. From the supreme object of transformation and transubstantiation of the body preparatory to the attainment of perfect control over the mind follow the need of other psycho-physiological practices to control the nerves (nādis), nerve-centers, (cakra), ducts, sinews and muscles through respiratory technique (prānāyama), postures (āsana), gestures (mudrā) and other Yogico-Tantric methods. The nādis and cakras play the most vital parts in the body. The vital energy in the form of 'breath' (vāyu) circulates through the nerves, and cosmic energy exists, in a latent state, in the cakras. The control of the vital wind (vāyu) finds a prominent place in the Nāthist literature in Bengali. Though six 'centers' (sać cakra) are generally mentioned there are seven of them.  

1. The Mūlādhāra is situated at the base of the spinal column between the anal orifice and the genital organs (sacroccocygeal plexus). It has the form of a red lotus with four petals,  
2. The Svādhīstāna is situated at the base of the male genital organ (sacral plexus). It has a lotus with six vermilion petals,  
3. The Manipūra is situated in the lumbar region at the level of the navel (epigastric plexus). It has a blue lotus with ten petals,  
4. The Anāhata is situated in the region of the heart. It has a red lotus with twelve golden petals.

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1In Hatha-Yoga, Bandha or Mudrā designates a position of the body to 'immobilize' the semen virile.(Hatha Yoga-Pradīpikā, III, 61-5, cited, Eliade, op. cit., 211). 
2Ibid., 241-3; Avalon, A : The Serpent Power, 103-80.
5. The Visuddha is situated in the region of the throat (laryngeal and pharyngeal plexus). It has a lotus with sixteen petals of smoky purple.

6. The Ajna is situated between the eyebrows (cavernous plexus). It has a white lotus with two petals.

7. The Sahasrara is situated at the top of the head (cerebral plexus) with a thousand-petalled lotus head down.

The nadis are countless. The majority of the texts enumerate only ten: ida, pingalā, suṣumnā, gāndhārī, hastijihva, puṣa, yaṇasvini, alambaṇa, kuhu and śānkhini, of which the first three play a significant role in the Yogico-Tantric techniques. An extremely complex system of homologies has been elaborated around them. Ida and pingalā are often identified with prāna (inhalation) and apāna (exhalation), the moon and the sun, soma and agni, Śiva and Śakti etc. The quintessence of the visible body in the form of soma or celestial ambrosia is reposed in the moon in the Sahasrara. There is a curved duct known as śānkhini from the moon below the Sahasrara up to the hollow in the palatal region through which the soma-rasa passes, and the mouth of the curved duct is also called the tenth door (daśama-dvāra).

It is through the Yogico-Tantric process of khecari-mudrā that the Yogi saves the ambrosia from being trickled down into the fire in the navel region and dried up.

Thus dominating the entire background of the esoteric disciplines in medieval Bengal was the idea of supreme importance of the human body with all its varied ramifications. The point of departure for the various schools of esoteric thought was the transformation of the human body into a microcosmos, an ancient theory and

1 Eliade, 237; Avalon, ibid, 113-4
2 Also called baṅka-nāla in the Bengali literature. (Dasgupta, op.cit., 239).
practice, examples of which have been found almost all over the world and which in Æryan India, had already found expression from Vedic times.\(^1\) In Bengal the idea is boldly expressed since the time of Buddhist Sahajiyās. Saraha writes:

Here (within this body) is the Ganges and the Jumna, here the Gaṅgā-śāgara (the mouth of the Ganges), here are Prayag and Banaras—here the sun and the moon. Here are the sacred places, here the Pīthas and the Upa-pīthas—I have not seen a place of pilgrimage and an abode of bliss like my body.\(^2\)

Kāṅhā-pāda locates the mount Sumeru in the body itself.\(^3\) The idea was carried to its furthest consequences in Tantra in which the archaic cosmophysiologv received an elaborate treatment. Sensory activities were magnified with identifications of organs and physiological functions with cosmic regions, stars, planets, gods, etc. Hatha-Yoga and Tantra transubstantiated the body by giving it macranthropic dimensions and multi-layered homologization for 'realization'.\(^4\)

A significant feature of the mystical ideas as reflected in the Bengali Muslim literature is to seek an identity in the indigenous conceptual framework outlined above. We have already noted that in their abstractions some of these key concepts, such as the microcosmic view of the human body, had Islamic parallels.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) The Tantric theandry was only a new variant of the Vedic macranthropy'. (Eliade, op.cit., 235).


\(^3\) Ibid, 14.

\(^4\) Eliade, op.cit., 236

\(^5\) Man is the microcosm in which all attributes are united, and in him alone does the Absolute become conscious of itself in all its diverse aspects'. (Jīlī, quoted Nicholson, R.A.: Studies in Islamic Mysticism, 84) (Contd)
To the extent that the parallel tendencies were deep and living, it is likely to help bringing them closer. But more important still from the point of view of the development of Islam in the regional environment of Bengal, was all in their writings that had no common ground to share and was derived exclusively from the local sources. It is the presence of these elements in their writings that could be taken as more instrumental and effective in carrying their message to those for whom it was meant. Recourse to non-Islamic sources even in respect of some essential issues was not always confined to its symbolic implications. Yoga was not always taken for a mere bio-mental culture; the very objects of Hatha-yoga, that is, the attainment of a subtle body (suksma tanu) or a transubstantiated body and of the state of Siddhi were emphasised. The union of the nerves of idā and pingalā through suṣumna was meant to attain the non-dual state in the union of Śiva and Śakti.

An analysis of these ideas may assume various forms. In our treatment of these materials we have made no special effort to relate them to their respective sources. This is for two reasons. First, the writers themselves have left no room for any disputation in this regard. Secondly, the mystical ideas form a distinct category by themselves in so far as they grow essentially out of personal feelings and experiences. The mystic personality is an essential unity that comprise elements drawn from diverse sources, often contradictory in nature, but reconciled and integrated into a single truth revealed to individual experience. Any attempt at dissection of

Contd. from page 215.
'The mosque that is built in the hearts of the saints is the place of worship for all, for God dwells there'. Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī's Maqāmāt, quoted, Nicholson, R.A.: The Idea of Personality in Sufism, 78.
individual elements may often distort the vision of the whole, which need not necessarily be taken as a sum-total of these all. This is precisely what emerges of these writings. Ideas, drawn from the Islamic and indigenous sources, are so freely incorporated and intermixed to sustain the structure of a single system of thought that a study of those elements in isolation is likely to lead to a notion of incongruity non-existent in the mystic mind. We have confined ourselves to tracing the different aspects of their thought and studying them with reference to the individual contributions of the writers to the particular stream. The method itself is likely to bring out the points of agreement and difference among individual writers who either ignored or put greater or less emphasis on this or that aspect of the mystical thought and either shunned completely or resorted more or less to the Islamic or indigenous sources of their thought. In the following pages we reproduce the ideas of these Muslim writers reducing these to their salient aspects.

a. The Mystic Preceptor:

The mystic preceptor, variously called as Pir, Murshid and Guru in this literature, is invested with a highly exalted status and dignity. The attitudes to them vary from a due recognition of a spiritual master to an exuberant proclamation of his divinity.

The form and essence of Allah is beyond description and knowledge, and Guru alone is empowered to reveal a part of it.\(^1\) One is destined to get himself lost in his

\(^1\) Hajī Muḥammad, op.cit., fol. 4 mc.
way (panta/pantha hārāibā) for not having the thought of Murshid in his mind.\(^1\) Shaikh Cānū, who accepts 'Alī as the perfect guide (Mursed kāmil) in the way of the Faqīr (Fakīrī pantheā), desires himself to be disposed of at the feet of his own Murshid, Sāhā Daulā (Shāh Daula), (tomār carane Mursid bikāi āmmi) and entreats him for the means to passing through the world (bhuban tarībāre).\(^2\) Zain ud-Dīn compares the beauty of his Pīr, Shāh Muḥammad to that of Madana, the Hindu Cupid, and pleads inability to speak of his endless (ananta) virtues. He mentions of carrying the dust from his lotus-feet on his head (kamal caran renu śireta dhariyā)\(^3\). Ḥayāt Maḥmūd advocates in favour of worshipping the feet of Guru with firm resolve (dīḍa/dr̥dh mane bhaja bhāi Gurur caran) for Guru is faith by himself (dharma). He is also Brahma and the fulfillment of all actions (siddha-karma). Ḥayāt considers it a barren life (bṛṭhā tār janma) for one who does not worship Guru (Guru nā bhajīla yei).\(^4\)

Shaikh Mansūr\(^5\) advises those who are keen after knowing God (Khodā cinibār) to worship Pīr at the first instance. The Pīr is to take by hand the drowning man in the sea of life (sāmsār sāgar) to the shore (hāte dhari Pīre tāni tulībek kule). Once the discipleship of Pīr is

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1. 'Abd ul-Ḥakīn: Cāri-Muqām-bheda (DMs408:sl.247) fol.4 mc.
2. Tālib Nāma, op.cit., fol. 4.
3. Rasūl-vijaya, (DMs 494: sl.423) fol.29
4. Hv, 38.
5. Sirr Nāmā, fols. 6b ff.
accepted, he should be served in the same way as God (Prabhur jemata sebā temata kariba). Heedless to the words of Pir, one, though plunged in the thought of God, does not find God (Khodāre na pāi). The Murīd should consider it his supreme duty (mahā dharma) even though he is asked by his Pir to commit a wrong (akarma). The Pir leaves a mirror (darphan/darpana) with his Murīd in which the latter should find his own image (āpanār cin) as well as that of the former. The merit of the secret instructions (gopat kathā) of Pir should never be assessed (parīkṣya yācāi) with any one else. A single day's service (cākari) at the feet of Pir earns the virtues (puṇya) of a thousand years. Even while performing the namāz, the disciple should discontinue his prayer (namāj tejibā) to respond to the Pir's call. Thereby he earns greater merit than namāz (namājer adhik puṇya). One without a Pir ends up in disbelief (kāfiri) and finds his Pir in Iblis (Iblīs).

'Alī Raja', like Shaikh Čānd, represents 'Alī receiving mystic truth from Muḥammad.1 He refers to his Pir, Keyāmuddin (Qiyam ud-Dīn), whose greatness (mahimā) knows no bound. He is unqualified in his beauty (aparūp), the grace of the world (bhuban mohan), like the beams of heaven (svarger candrimā) on earth2 and the lamp of his own ('Alī Raja's) heart (ṛder pradīp mor). There is no greater friend (bandhu) in the three worlds, and he is the supreme knowledge

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1 Jñāna-sagara, fol. 1.
2 Sirāj Qulūb, fol. 2a.
3 Āgama, fol. 1.
(param jñān) and Īśvara. One should know none equal to Guru. All blessings of Siddhi and liberation (mukti) flow from the mercy of Guru (Guru kṛpā hante). Guru should never reveal the supreme knowledge to the disciple (śiṣya) until he puts him to tests for twelve years. It is advisable for Guru to conceal part of the truth (jñān) from his śiṣya until the latter attains a pure mind (nirmāl mati). There is none of the three worlds (tribhūbāne) to redeem one who has turned away (bimukh) from Guru. No greater sinner may be found than the person involved in embroilment (bibād) with his Guru.¹

Mir Muhammad Shafi' raises a fearful spectre. Everyone not accepting the discipleship (bemurid) shall be seized on his death by Izrā'il, forced to drink a cup of urine (Pelāiba pesāber peyālā) and beaten with iron-rods (lohār buruj mārī). For showing negligence (helā) to Murshid one shall be burnt in the fire of hell (narak anal maiddhe dahibā ekelā).²

Saiyid Sulṭān identifies Guru with Parama Īśvara to whom there is no equal in the three worlds.³ In his Jñāna-pradīpa Sulṭān adopts the motif of putting all esoteric secrets in the mouth of Muhammad in reply to the queries of 'Alī, who accepts the former as his Murshid. 'Alī addresses 'Nabī Paigambar' as Īśvara and says:

You are land, water and seven seas; you are the sustainer of the earth (dharanī-dhara) and my father; you are the moon, the sun, the sky, the tree, the creepers, the poise (sthābar) and the mobility (jaṅgam); you are Nīrāṇjan, Śyām and the name of Bisnu.⁴

¹ Jñāna-sāgara, fols. 90-9.
² Mūr Qindīl, (DMs 143:81.236) fols. 6a, 4 b.
³ Jñāna-pradīpa, (DMs 365 : 81.152) fol. 3 b mc.
⁴ Ibid., fol. 6b mc.
Saiyid Sultan, however, takes a critical view of the preceptor himself. He refers to a case in which certain Guru committed adultery with his disciple, earned a bad name, and finally committed suicide. Sultan says that the sin of Guru affects his siya. One should, therefore, enquire from other sources, especially from the neighbours about a prospective Guru. A good soul should always care for the interests of his neighbours (parasi). The body of Guru is but a clay container (mrttika bhanda) which should be turned into gold (kancan) through the fire (anai) of karma. He should always meditate on the great name (mahā mantra) of Ajapa. Having satisfied himself with these initial requirements in a prospective Guru, one should approach him and confront him with all the doubts of a spiritual seeker. Should he prove himself able to answer them well, one should have no hesitation in accepting his discipleship.

Saiyid Sultan himself as a Pir received veneration of his disciples. Muhammad Khan, one of his important disciples compares him to Abū Bakr in uprightness, 'Umar in the conviction of faith, Usman in humility and shyness, 'Ali in knowledge, Hasan in beauty, Hamza in prowess (bikram) and Hātim in generosity. Muhammad Khan admits to have forsaken the pleasures of life and the wealth of heaven (tejiyā/tyejiyā samsār sukha svarga sampad) to place the lotus-feet (pada-pankaja) of Pir Mīr Sāhā Choltān (Shāh Sultan) on his head and worship them.

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1 Ajapājapa or Haṃsa-mantra, often known as Mahāmantra associated with inhalation and exhalation, is highly regarded in the Nathist system of Yogic meditation (Mallik, K., op. cit., 459-60.

2 Ny, fols. 54-5.

3 Maqtai Husain, fol. 1a-b.
b. The Mystic Stages:

The Sufic concepts of four principal stages (muqām) in the mystic journey (safar) to God form part of the discussion of these writers. Aside from the differences in attitudes among some of these writers regarding the importance of Shari'at in the mystic discipline, as already noted in some detail, their ideas do not reveal any significant facets demanding special attention. They discuss in general terms the four muqāms of Shari'at, Tariqat, Haqiqat and Ma'rifat and their corresponding stations (manzil), Nasūt, Malkūt, Jabrūt and Lāhūt, with appropriate duties and attitudes pertaining to each stage in the spiritual advancement.

Ḥājī Muḥammad, while pointing out the integral nature of the four stages of Shari'at, Tariqat, Haqiqat and Ma'rifat, strongly emphasises the importance of Shari'at in the quest of God. He advocates at the first stage repentance (tauba) preparatory to meditation (ebādat/ʿibādat). Haram and halāl should be respected and all the injunctive commandments (farman) of God should be obeyed.2 The complete mastery in the stage of Shari'at leads to the next step of Tariqat in the journey. Of Tariqat 'manjil' Malkūt is the muqām, which is the station of the Firishtas. The traveller in the Tariqat loses his appetite and thirst, leaves no room for malice (hiṃsā) and envy (piṣun) in his mind and transcends desire (kām), anger (krodh), greed (lobh) and attachment (moha). All this render the body (kāyā) as clear (nirmal) as that of the Firishtas and the seeker meets (mulākāt) the Firishtas, while the essence (chifat/ṣifat) of Firishtā emerges out of

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1 The terms muqām and manzil are not rigidly distinguished in these writings; one often finds mention with reference to the other.

2 Nur Jamāl, fols. 1-2 mc.
the essence of man and makes itself manifest (jāhir/zāhir). One cannot, however, rest (sthir) at this stage and moves on to the manzil of Haqīqat to attain the state of Jabrūt. It is in the Haqīqat manzil that the supreme truth (āroha/urwa?) is to be recognised. One should realise his own self and merge (mi£iba) into the welter of the Creative Truth (Fānī Ḥak). Haqīqat is the stage of self-realisation (ātma paricay) where the true faith is revealed to the seeker. This is all one within and without (bāhire bhitare tār hae ekākār), and the identity of self and non-self (āpta/ātma par bhed) is non-existent. With the vision of the 'Āroha' one finds himself totally lost (hārāi āpāna), bereft of all reason and consciousness (hetubuddhi). 'Āroha' beggars all description. It is neither void (śunya) nor filled (pūrṇa); neither sky, nor moon, nor sun; neither low (adho) nor high (urdha) nor the middle (madhya des); neither left, right, front or back, nor reason (hetu), intelligence, more or less; neither sorrow, pleasure, worry or suffering, nor 'arsh, kursī, lauḥ or qalam; neither paradise, hell, good or bad, nor disease, death or the world hereafter (paralok); neither male, female, old or young, nor month, fortnight or age. The essence of Allah is endless (anantamahima) and He has infinitesimal forms (ākār bahul). Through Jabrūt is the way to Lāhūt where there is the 'manjil' of Ma'rifat. Muhammad Mustafa is the only recourse in the way of Ma'rifat. Ma'rifat is but the vision of Allah (Allār didār), and it has no beginning (utpati), no end (pralay) and no existence (parcār).

1 Ibid., fols. 2-3 mc.
2 Ibid., fols. 3-5 mc.
Saiyid Sultan opines in favour of meditation (ibadat) in the four manzils and identifies Nasut, Malkut, Jabrut and Lahut respectively with Shariat, Taritat, Haqiqat and Ma'rifat. In Shariat one is required to be careful (sabdhān) in the performance of the primary observances like namāz, roza, hajj, and zakāt. The requirements of halāl and harām, the distinction between things one's own and those belonging to others, the realisation of the implications of the faith (din) and of being a believer (mū'min), and cleanliness (pākiyā) are all to be scrupulously observed. In Taritat illusion of worldliness (māya), evil thoughts (badie bhābanā), desire, anger, greed and attachments are to be eschewed. Hunger, thirst and laziness (alaysa) should be foresaken. At the successful completion of duties and obligations imposed by these initial stages, one is entitled to look forward to the higher stages of Haqīqat and Ma'rifat in which the true nature of His self is revealed.2

In 'Abd al-Hakīm3 the exposition of these ideas contain elements that are typical of the indigenous bio-mental culture. Not only does he mention the term Jog (Yoga) with reference to these practices, the title of his work itself is quite suggestive in this regard. Piercing or penetration of the six cakras (centers), known as Sat-cakra-bhedā, is the central concept in the Tāntrico-Yogic systems. 'Abd al-Hākim's title - the piercing or penetration of the four muqāms - bears a strong suggestive value.

1 Jñāna-pradīpa, fols. 1-2a.
2 Saiyid Sultan does not elaborate his ideas on Haqīqat and Ma'rifat.
3 Čari Muqām-bhedā, op.cit.
Hakim starts with the usual notion of the integral nature of the four stages in the mystic path and affirms it with a fresh homology. Shari'at is like a boat (kisti), of which Tarîqat is the sail (pâl), Haqîqat is the anchor (laňgar) and Ma'rifat is the boatman (patwâl). One should be in constant utterance of kalima in the stage of Shari'at. In Haqîqat there should be sustained contemplation (dhyân) of ights (Nirãjan) and in Ma'rifat one gets the vision of Allah (Allâr darayan). But in the detailed exposition of his ideas Hakim clearly accepts each of these stages as a distinct road to the same goal.

Nasut which is the station of Shari'at is the abode of Jibra'il living in the form of a peacock (maur/mayûra). Luminous waves (Yutirmmay/Jyotirmay taraṅga) flow across it. The place consists of three colours - red, white and yellow. The throne of God and the Formless (Nairakâr) are ever present there. The truth (din) is revealed through the mouth, and if any one intends to exercise his spiritual discipline in this station, he should look at his own face, which is the reflection of the soul (âptma/âtma) itself. The image (murati) of the Murshid is also to be observed there. This is only to be visualised in mental perception (maner nayan). With the help of zîkî the practitioner wipes the mirror of his mind (maner mukur) and is able to see the lord of the body (taner thâkur). There is the cry of 'Allâ Allâ' inside the heart (dîl). The mind is turned away from other directions to this.

1 Ibid., fol. 1a-b.
2 He uses the term muqâm for both.
3 Ibid., fol. 2 mc.
His mind ever remains in this state, and the thought of food is banished from his mind and all other words from his ears. The repetitions of the name of Allāh (zikr) are followed by the sound Ḥū Ḥū. He assumes a posture (āsān) squatting on the ground and puts two hands on the knees. Thereafter he performs kumbhaka. The air from the lower region of the navel is drawn upwards to the heart. The zikr of Ḥū Ḥū goes on incessantly in the heart followed by filling the heart with the zikr. None else hears the sound. The hunger and thirst remains controlled in the stomach (udāre) and the body remains clean. The time is spent not in words but in the offering of namaz and reading the Qur'ān in solitude (birāle). The mind is completely shut against worldly interests (prithimār karma) and there is only one thought in one mind. If one is able to adhere to these duties, he is entitled to go through this muqām.

In Malkūt, which is the station of Ṭarīqat, air (paban/pavana) continues to blow all the time. Ātma is also ever-present taking air as its vehicle. The seat of air is heart (ridāya/hrdāya antare). From a green star in the navel region (nābi mule) air (bāyu) blows all the time through the body and nerves (rager antar). It goes out through the nostrils (nāsikār duyār). It has a passage on the right, which is the abode of the sun, and on the left graced by the presence of the moon. Isrāfīl in the size of a grain

1 The most important part of the Yogic technique of breath control, namely, the retention of the inhaled air.
2 Ibid., fol. 2a.
3 ...the commonest names for idā and pingala in both the Hindu and Buddhist tantras are "sun" and "moon". The Śārmahana-tantra says that the nādi on the left is (contd.)
sits there and stares at the root of the navel. The practitioner in this muqām also assumes a posture, performs kumbhaka and contemplates on the Murshid. From the divine or subtle eye (dirba caṅkṣa) he turns to see the root of the navel and fixes attention on the green star. He also observes the lotus with seven (hundreds?) petals (sapta/sata? dal pardha/padma). While retaining the inhaled air (kumbhaka) La īlāha is to be repeated and Illāllāh at the time of exhalation. At the time of drawing the air up Hu Hū is to be sounded. The longevity (āiū/āyu) increases as much as the air can be retained. The 'in' and 'out' of the body are reduced to one form. The pursuit of the way (panta) brings lustre to the body, and the practitioner acquires a power to make whatever he says come true (bākya-siddhi). 1

In the muqām of Haqīqat, which is called Jabrūt, Mīkā'īl presides in the form of an elephant (gaja). There is ever-existent water (jal) in which one finds the reflection of the moon (cānd). Intelligence (buddhi) stems from this source. The brain is deposited in the head (mastak) in three parts and its substance (marjā/majā) of the size of a pearl lies inside. The eyes get their vision from this pearl. The technique of meditation in this muqām is to effect a union between the gross and the mental visions and to contemplate on the pearl imagining it to be a lake (sarobar). This should serve as a mirror 3 (contd. from p. 226) the "moon" because of its gentle nature, and the nādi on the right is the "sun" because its nature is strong. (Eliade, op.cit., 239).

The sun and the moon refer generally to the two important nerves in the right and the left and their union generally refers to the union of the two currents of the vital wind, Prāṇa and Apāṇa or inhalation and exhalation. (Dasgupta, S.B., op.cit., 235). The word Hatha-yoga is taken to signify the union of the ha or the sun and the tha or the moon. (Ibid.).

1 Ibid., fols. 26-3a.
in which the image of the Murshid is visualised. Zikr is performed with thumbs touching the ears, fore, middle and little fingers covering respectively the eyes, the nostrils and the lips, and the heel pressing against the anus. The head is lowered down, while sitting on the knees, and the kumbhaka performed. Zikr is filled into the air and drawn upwards (upare khiciba), and the sound of Hu Hu is produced which none else can hear. The image of the lake should be ever present in the mind. The practitioner then comes to meet (darsan) Atmā. The image of Atmā in the lake is transformed into his own. All profane feelings of desire, anger, greed and attachment are forsaken and the image (murti) of Allāh is seen (tabe se Allār murti tathāe dekhībā).

The muqām of Lāhūt is the veritable seat of fire (agnir ēlāy) and is presided by Izrā'il in the form of a tiger (bergā/byāghra). The body contains a well (kūp) of fire (agni) burning like charcoals (āgārā) surrounded by three bones (asti/asthi) on the three sides. There is a bright star (tārā) in the well, illuminating the entire spot. Smoke (dhummra) comes out of the well incessantly and breath (niśvās) out of the smoke. Power (sakti), strength (bal) and sexual creativity (rati) stem from this fire, which is also at the root of hunger, thirst and all. A man lives as long as the fire exists in the body, and the fire deserts (śarir chariā) the man as soon as he dies. A successful pursuit of this muqām necessitates turning one's mind away from the falsehood of the world (saṁsārer mithyā) towards looking at the mirror of his own mind (maner darpan) through zikr. The divine eyes (dirbba cairkha/__________________________

Ibid., fol. 3a-b.
divya cauksa) should be cultivated and a red star (lāl barna ek tāra) is to be located there. The image of Murshid and Firishta should gradually become constant in one's mental vision, stimulated further by retirement to a secluded spot. The body should be thoroughly purged of all internal dirts (antarer mal), and this is how one could hope to find Allah. One should learn how to perform Yoga (Jog sādhite) and attain mastery over the four muqāms. This makes him free from the great sins (mahā pāp) of the world and invests him with an infallible power over his utterances (bākya siddhi).¹

c. Microcosm : Bio-mental Culture :

The mystical ideas of these Bengali Muslim writers are largely dominated by an exaggerated emphasis on the bio-mental culture as partially noted in 'Abd ul-Ḥakīm. The ideas bearing on the question are scattered in abundance throughout this literature. Compiled and studied carefully, these serve to focus attention on the supreme importance of the human body and mind in the process of attainment of their mystic objects. The object often does not expressly mention anything beyond attainment of physical perfection either in the sense of a subtle and mystico-physiology or in its gross material sense, with occasional emphasis on bākya-siddhi or long life untrammelled by diseases and decay or even immortality. But if the object does not seem to extend beyond the mystic's body, the body itself, one should not overlook, epitomizes the creative truth. An all embracing and elaborate structure of homologies - theological, cosmic, natural and physical - are brought into effective use to illustrate this mystic truth. The component elements of the structure of Islamic theology, cosmogony and eschatology, the Sūfīc stages

¹ Ibid., fol. 4a-b
with the presiding angels (Firishtas), the planets, the stars, the seasons, the elemental matters like fire, earth, sky and water are all located in the human body. The body itself, consequently, with all its physiological and psychic constituents assumes a prodigious dimension. The limbs, veins, nerve-plexuses etc. acquire great significance. The factors considered essential in the preservation and promotion of health and longevity, such as breath-control and retention of semen virile, receive considerable attention. The constituent elements in the body at birth, derived from parents and other sources, are dissected and the signs of death anticipated and analysed.

Shaikh Zāhid\(^1\) locates in the body air, fire, earth, heaven and the nether region. The sun, the moon and the stars in the sky find their parallels in the human body. The rivers (nad-nadi)—the Gaṅgā and the Bhāgirathī—send their ripples in the body throughout the day and night (śarirer mājhhe gheu bahiche dibārāti). Zāhid also identifies the four traditional Hindu ages of Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali, the four Vedas and the four Kitābs\(^2\) in the body.

Shaikh Manṣūr\(^3\) traces nine planets (naba graha), twelve houses or signs of the zodiac (rāṣi) and seven days (sapta bār) in the body (śarir). The navel is the region of Ravi (Sun), the top of the cerebral region (tālu mūl) is of Soma (Moon), the eyes are of Maṅgala (Mars), the heart is of Budha (Mercury) and of Guru or

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\(^1\) Ādya-paricaya, ed., Chaudhuri, M.M., loc. cit.  
\(^2\) Obvious reference to the four revealed Books of the Psalms, the Old and the New Testament and the Qur'ān.  
\(^3\) Sirr Nāma, fols. 24a-27a.
Vṛhaspati (Jupiter), semen (ṣukra) is of Venus (Sukra) and Nāda-cakra is of Śani (Saturn). Natural homologies are also found for the body. Mansūr specifically mentions the existence of rivers (nandi) in the body 'just as there are rivers in the earth'. He names the rivers as Forāt (Furat or the Euphrates), Royād (Rūd or the Oxus), Nil (the Nile), Sekhun (Saḥūn? or the Jaxartes), Hesun (Jaḥūn? or the Bactrus) and Kulsum (Kulsum). He gives the Hindu names (Hindumāni bhāse) for these rivers (dariyā), namely, Ikṣu, Ratnakara, Sindhu, Nabani, Kṣiroda and Dadhi. Again, 'just as there are hills and stones (parbbat pāśā) in the earth' there are bones (astu/asthi) in the body. The spinal cord (merudanda) is like the Mount Sumeru in the earth.

To Shaikh Čand Adam epitomizes the whole creative process. The empyrean, the throne of God, the Tablet and the Pen, the paradise, and hell are all placed in him. The seven heavens (āsmān) are put in his navel. Of the four elements constituting his body, air is placed in the navel, fire in the brain, water in the hairs and earth in the liver. Four parts of the moon (cāri-candra) penetrated four parts of Adam's body - Ardha-candra to his brain (māgaj), Nija-candra to breath, Unam (Ummatta)-candra to blood and Rohiṇī-candra to the hair. Of the four muqāms, Nāsūt is placed in his nose, Malkūt in mouth, Jibrūt in ears and Lāhūt in his eyes, each muqām being presided by the four great Firishtas.

1 Mansūr does not discuss the location of the houses of zodiac in the body.
2 Ibid., fol. 26a-b.
4 Tālib Nāma, fols. 8b-10a mc.
5 A Nāthist concept.
Saiyid Sultan traces the Sāma-veda, the Yajur-veda and the Atharva-veda respectively in the ear (karna), the navel (nābhi mūle) and in the mouth (mukh maiddhe). The twelve houses of the zodiac (rāśi) are also located in the six Yogico-Tantric cakras in the body. Aries (Mega) and Taurus (Vṛśa) are in the Mūlādhāra; Gemini (Mithuna) and Cancer (Karkata) are in the Svādhiṣṭāna; Leo (Simha) and Virgo (Kanyā) in Manipura; Libra (Tulā) and Scorpio (Vṛūcika) are in the Anāhata, Sagittarius (Dhanu) and Capricorn (Makara) are in the Bīṣuddha, and Aquarius (Kumbha) and Pisces (Mīna) in the Ājnā-cakra. In the same way six seasons (ritu/ṛtu) are located in the six cakras.1

Hayāt Mahmūd3 addresses his Muslim brothers (bhai Muchalmān) to recognise the empyrean (Ārs/‘arsh) of God as well as the four muqāms with the four presiding Firīshtas in their respective bodies (tan). The believers should enquire from their Murshids the locations of seven heavens (sapta svarga) and seven (nether) worlds (sapta māhi) in the body. The body contains the sun, the moon, the stars, the throne of God, the divine Tablet (lauḥ), the Pen (qalam), the water (ab), fire (āśa), earth (khāk) and air (bād), the four companions (cārī yār) and Iblīs. God has created Ādam in his own image (āpan ākār); one should worship (bhajiyā) his Murshid to realise this truth in his own body. The body is said to contain milk, water, honey, four rivers, the Jāhūn, the Saihūn, the Furūt and the Nīl.4 The body contains a lotus (kamal), the kamal a līlā (nīlā? a jewel), the līlā possesses brilliance (ujjal), the

1 Jñāna-pradīpa, fol. 10a mc.
2 Ibid., fol. 9b mc.
3 Hv, 33-5.
4 Supra, 231.
brilliance a heart (dīl), the heart a king (raā), the
king the divine light (nūr) and the light the abode of
God. This can be traced neither in the earth nor in the
sky, except in the mirror of the heart (del erāse).
The room needs a lamp with oil, wick and ignition to
get itself illuminated. The body contains the proof
(pramāṇa) of what constitute the room, the oil, the wick
and the ignition.

In Saiyid Murtaza¹ we read not only of the identi-
fication of the four muqāms inside the human body but
also about detailed instructions on psycho-physiological
techniques to be performed with reference to each muqām
associated with particular parts of the body. The
techniques mentioned by him bear perhaps the most direct
impact of the indigenous systems. Nasūt, he writes, is
the abode of Izrā'il and the seat of fire (anāl), which
is never extinguished. The Yogīs call this Muladhāra.²
The kalima forms the zikr of this station, and the
Faqīr remains with closed ears and eyes. Once the fire
that makes a perfect and indestructible body goes out,
it is rekindled through repeated (ghana graha) pressures
created at the anal root (gaurja/guhya mule). This
keeps the body free from the diseases (beadi/byādi).
The sound of Anahuta (Anāhata)³ rings in the ears
incessantly. In the Muladhāra, air (bāiu/vāyu) blows

¹ Yoga-Qalandar (DMs547:s1.394).
² Muladhāra-cakra is in the lower region of the body, as described above. The Yogico-Tantrists conceive the
sun as the source of fire in this part of the body.
³ Anāhata Sabda is the Yogico-Tantric mystical sound
produced without contact between two objects. (Cf.
Anāhata-cakra as described above).
all the time, and there is a lamp (dīp) the light of which reveals an image. The concentration on the image makes the body inaccessible to decay. A year before one's death the light remains hidden. The Sakti of Śiva should be kept confined (pandi) to the place. If the fire catches the stomach (udar) one should quench it with food immediately, and if it is neglected consistently the fire eats into the liver, brain and burns out the Sahasra-giri. At this stage, one should take some quantity of salt with rice. With the help of gikr the dirt of the mind is to be wiped. The gikr of La ilāha is inflicted in the air followed by that of Illāllāh nine times at a stretch. This is concluded with Rasūlullāh.

The Malkūt Muqām is in the navel region, being known as Manipura. The air of hemanta (the autumnal season) blows there continuously, and it is presided by Isrāfīl. The nostrils are the outlets for this region. Sura-candra resides in the centre of the navel. Five different airs blow in the region, and one should know about their directions and occasions to design his activities. So long as there is air (paban), there is life (jiḥan). The chin is placed on the throat. The right leg is placed on the left thigh, and the station of air is contemplated on the tip of the nose. This brings out the air from the body. An image of Ātmā is observed in this. Thereafter, the mind is fixed on a shining star in Manipura. The Firishtas, the Suras and the Asuras are observed there. The sun and the moon respectively occupy the right and the

1 Ibid., fols. 1-2b.
2 Ibid., fol. 3a-b.
3 Cf. Manipura-cakra as described above.
left positions, which are again the seats of father (janak) and the mother (janani). Mars, Mercury and Venus form the spheres of the mother, while Sun, Moon, Jupiter and Saturn are those of the father. A change of position from the sphere of father to that of mother and vice versa result respectively in happiness and misfortune. In the latter case one should take particular care of his person. The air should be restricted to the left nostril in the day time and to the right in the night. From Guru he should come to know of the great name hidden in the kalima which should be recited. This entitles one to Yoga-siddhi and Allah confers (bakṣiba) great longevity (umār bahut kāl).  

The muqām of Jabrūt alias 'Mokām Nāsirā', presided by Mīkāʾīl, is located in the cerebral region and contains water. The eyes constitute its doors. Near the liver there is a lake where the moon is ever shining. There are golden lotuses (kanak kamal) blossomed in the water. The body is kept firm (stir/sthir) by this water which is also called the reason and consciousness (hetu buddhi cetan) and known as Ājña-cakra by the practitioners (sādhaka). This is the fountain of the celestial ambrosia (amrta) by drinking which one becomes indestructible and immortal (arkāy/akāyā amar). The Para-āptmā (Paramātmā) and Jīb-āptmā (Jīvatmā) exist there at the united state, the former being the lamp and the latter its oil. Allah and His great friend (param sakha) Nūr Muḥammad (Nār-i Muḥammad) reside in the place. The waters

1 Ibid., fols. 4a-5b.
2 As noted above.
3 The Yogīs use it in the sense of quintessence of the body.
4 See below.
contain a white lotus (ched patta/sveta padma); an image is in the lotus and Nūr-i Muhammad is stationed in the image. The muqam possesses a hundred names. Ādi-candra and Mūla-candra or Garala-candra are stationed there. The food substance retained in the body in the form of liquid (ras) is divided into three parts — two going to the heart (dīl) and one to the head (mūnda) which are the stations of Lāhūt and Jabrūt respectively. The Guru is contemplated in Lāhūt, whence is produced the sound of Anāhata. The luminous substance resulting from it contains the mind within where the divine light (Allār roshan/rašhan) is visible. ¹

The Lāhūt Muqām is to be attained after Jabrūt. The abode of Jibrā'īl, Lāhūt is associated with heart (dīl) and resembles in shape (ākār) a banana inflorescence (kadalīr thor). Known to the Yogīs as Anāhata-cakra, the nature of Allāh is revealed here to the practitioner, performing the act of sealing the tenth door (dasāmir dvār).² The Ajapa-japa performed ceaselessly (abiśram) confers an inviolability. The Supreme Being (Param purus) gazes at His own form (rup) at this station and produces sweat (gharma),³ from which 'Nūr Nabi' is created. Paramātma forms a union with Jīvatma in the niche of the lamp (kandil/qindīl). Two lights (jut/jyoti) merge into one, as though wine is put inside an immaculate crystal container revealing no separate identity between the container and the contained.

¹ Ibid., fols. 6a-7b.
² The Hatha-yogi considers the body consisting of ten doors, the tenth being in the cerebral region and is called Brahma-randhra. The Nathist ideal is to close these ten doors and drink the ambrosia, oozing out of Sahasrāra through the help of khecari-mudrā.
³ The 'sweat' occupies a very significant place in the cosmogonical ideas of both Hindu and Muslim medieval
Paramātmā rests in the thousand petalled lotus. Iblīs with his entourage also occupies a corner of the heart and provokes evil thought, taking advantage of the moments when the friend (saṅkhā) is not gazing at his friend. The practitioner should embrace the zikr of Lā ilāha, start drawing the air (samīr) up from the lower region (ṁeciā tuliba) and transmit it from one nerve (nāri/ṛādi) to another. The sinful creature (Iblīs) is to be hurled with the zikr of Illāllāḥ, the repetition of which is accompanied by slow exhalation of air. This is how the sinner is driven out (dure palāiba).

From the exaggerated importance attached to the body stemmed ideas of contemplation (tibādat) exclusively associated with different parts of the body.

Shaikh Manṣūr mentions zikr, the continuous reading of the Qur'ān, speaking with kindness and speaking truth as being the tibādat of mouth (mukh). The tibādat of ears (karnya/karna) consists in listening to matters concerning the Lord (Prabhar bākhān), that of eyes (nayan) in perceiving the power (kudvarat/qudrat) of Illāh and that of nose (nāsiṅkā) is to smell sweet fragrance (sugandī) and to look at one's inner soul by holding back the rising breath. The sun and the moon each flow (baha) in the two nostrils and one should distinguish between them and perform acts accordingly. The copying of the Qur'ān, writing the different names of Allāh, making gifts to the poor, hurling the sword (asi) and scimitar (kharga/khagga) on the unbeliever (kāfir)

(contd. from p.236)

Bengali writers and the whole creation is represented as proceeding from the sweat of the Lord. (See below).

1 Ibid., fols. 8a-9b.

2 The sun and the moon, identified with prāṇa and apāṇa, inhalation and exhalation, are placed by the Yogīs in the right and left nostril respectively.
are all 'ibādat of hand (hasta). The 'ibādat of heart (dīl) is to think (fikir) and to contemplate on the greatness of God. The 'ibādat of stomach (udar) is to eat permitted (ḥālāl) food, uttering the name of God. The abstinence from copulation between a man and a woman, not married to each other (bini nikā), and from casting wistful eyes on woman belonging to other (paranāri) are 'ibādat of the genital organ (liṅga). The 'ibādat of feet (caran) is to go to Mecca and perform Hajj, to walk on the way of Islam (dīn Islām pante) and to visit Murshid on foot. Finally, the 'ibādat of the life-substance (prāṇ) is to contemplate on God and lose one's identity in oneself.  \(^1\)

According to Saiyid Sulṭān, the 'ibādat of mouth is continuous zikr, regular reading of the Qur'ān with unflinching devotion and sweet words (pīriti mukhe) to people. The 'ibādat of ears is to hear the great sound (dhani/dhvani) that contains the secret of longevity (yāīū/āyū) and health (nirugi) and to hear the Qur'ān with attention. The 'ibādat of nose consists in following the movements (yamana gamana) of air (bābi) in the body, filling the stomach (udar bhariba) by drawing air (khīcīā bān) and hearing the great sound (nād) in the void. This performed, the tree (taru) never grows old (birdha/bṛddha) and the diseases never approach. The sin is destroyed (pāp nās) and Siddhi is attained. The 'ibādat of heart (dīl) is to know one's own self (āptma-paricay).  \(^2\)

\(^1\) Sirr Nāma, fols. 21a-22b.

\(^2\) Jñāna-pradīpa, fol. 2a-b mc.
The entire fabric of the bio-mental culture is based on an elaborate system of mystical physiology. The constituent elements in the body are detailed with a view to making an effective use of them in their mystical pursuit.

The body is said to be composed of eighteen matters derived from God and the parents, the former contributing ten and the latter eight, the share of the father and the mother being equally divided. From the mother the body obtains flesh, blood, skin and hair, while the father contributes bones, nerves, brain and semen. From God are derived the faculty of seeing, hearing, speaking and smelling, the air, the heart the intelligence (ākal/'aql) and the faith (imān). They constitute eighteen stations (makām) in the body. Ten doors (das āyār) are located in the body, such as two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, mouth, navel, the genital organ and the anus. Excepting the navel, the other nine are included by Shaikh Čand in his list of eighteen stations in the body. He also mentions 72 compartments (koṭā/kothā, buruj) consisting of the bones and joints in the body.

1 In many cases the references to physiological matters are purported to carry some mystical implications rather than biological.
2 Shaikh Manṣūr, fols. 23b-24b; Hy: 35.
3 Manṣūr, fol. 23b; Saiyid Sulṭān: Jāna-pradīpa, fol. 2b mc.
4 Manṣūr, fol. 25a-b. Manṣūr refers to 'four hidden doors', which he prefers not to disclose. (Ibid.).
5 Taļib Nāma, fols. 14 mc, 16 mc. The idea of 72 koṭā in the body is quite popular with these Muslim as well as non-Muslim mystical writers of medieval Bengal.
The nerves in the body occupies a very important place in the mystico-physiology. Various shades of light have been thrown on this matter.

Shaikh Paran mentions four nerves (rag) in the head spreading all over the body as well. These are named 'Abd ur-Rahim, 'Abd ul-Karim, 'Abd ul-Qahr and 'Abd ul-Zabar. These are said to possess different colours, being respectively black (kālimā baran), white (svet), red (lāl) and green (chabuj/sabuj). Paran also refers to 1,213,352 hairs (lom) in the body.

According to Ḥayat Maḥmūd, there are 2,070 nerves (rog/rag) in the body, of which twelve are principal ones. The twelve nerves are placed in the right and left sides of the body, each side containing six. Another set of twelve nerves connected with the principal twelve are placed in equal proportion in the front and back. The rest of them are also in some way connected with the root (mūl).

Shaikh Cānd’s estimate of nerves in the body reaches to 60,000. He reduces them to 362 from which all the rest have originated. The 360 nerves again boil down successively in terms of their importance to sixty, thirty, fifteen, five and three. The most important three are called āṅgila, pīṅgila (piṅgalā) and tripini (Trivenī).
Shaikh Manṣūr mentions 360 nerves in the body, of which two are principal (pradhan). These are igā, pingoḷā, suṣumṇā, gāndhāra, hasti-jihvā, pūṣā, sāṅkhinī etc. Manṣūr mentions Brahma-nāri (Brahma-nādi) as the eleventh one that runs across (bhedaice) the spinal column. Ingila and pingoḷa form two poles (meru) on two sides. Hasti-jihvā lies on the top of the head (tālū-mule), 'masa' in the mouth, sāṅkhinī in the head, kuṇḍali in the genital organ; suṣumṇā in the right ear, paksini in the left, gāndhāra in the left eye and pūṣā in the right.

According to Saiyid Sultan, the body contains thousands of nerves, of which ten are important, such as ingila, pingoḷa, gāndhāra, 'hasti (jihvā)', alambuṣā, 'saksini' (sāṅkhinī) etc. Ingila on the left side of

1 Sirr Nama, fol. 25b. The reference is clearly to the well-known nerves in the Yogico-Tantric system. Manṣūr mentions three others, namely, 'paksini', 'masa' and 'kuṇḍali'. The three Yogico-Tantric nerves other than the seven named above are generally known as yaṣāsvini, alambuṣā and kuṇḍali.

2 Ibid., fol. 26a.

3 Jhāna-pradīpa, fol. 10a mc. Subsequently he mentions 70,000 nerves in the body.

4 Ibid., fol. 10a–b mc. Sultan's other names are not quite clear in our Ms. Tarafdar (op.cit., 205: 371); basically relying on the same Ms., reads the other nerves as kuṇḍali, pūṣa, yaṣāsvini, and payasvini.
the spinal column is like the moon (sosadhar/śaśadhara)\(^1\) and piṅgala\(^2\) is on its right like a vast sea (nandi sāgar).\(^2\) Iṅgila is Gaṅgā and piṅgala is Jubunā (Yamunā), while Sarasvatī\(^3\) is in the middle with the name of susumna. The wise people (jñānī) call it the 'ghāt of Tripini [Triveṇī].' A bath in this ghāt washes away the sins of millions of years. One should lie on his left side. The air in the day time should remain in the left nostril and move to the right. The entrance to the susumna in the middle, which is the central among all nerves (sarbba maiddhe sār), is where 'Ardhya Sakti' (Ādyā-sakti)\(^4\) is propitiated. The air is to be inhaled in pūraka\(^5\) in the same way as the thread enters the point of the needle (suci mukhe sutā jena kare prabesan). Through gradual opening of the passage, air comes in and produces a sound

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1 We have already noted the identification of the moon with idā or iṅgala on the left.

2 Tarafdar's reading (ibid.) of 'divākara' for 'nandi sāgar' is not warranted by our Ms., but appears a quite reasonable emendation of what seems to be the copyist's confusion. The sun (divākara) is identified in Yogico-Tantric systems with piṅgala on the right, as noted before.

3 The Ms. here reads: Surāṣur maiddhe baise nāmeta susumna (susumna). Here we suggest an emendation in reading 'Sarasvatī' for 'Surāṣur'. Tarafdar (ibid.) translates the whole as: 'The nerve running between the god and the demon is called Susumna'. This reads rather incongruous in its context. On the other hand, 'Sarasvatī', instead of 'Surala', should appear quite consistent with the references to Gaṅgā and Yamunā and little later to Triveṇī, which is the confluence of Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarasvatī - a symbolism widely used by the Yogico-Tantric mystics with reference to the union of the three nerves of idā, piṅgala and susumna.

4 The primordial goddess in the Tantras.

5 The Yogic term for inhalation of air especially through the left nostril.
as it rises. The mind becomes composed (sthir) listening to the sound and should recognise a light amidst the sound, on which the mind should be concentrated and lost. This luminosity itself is nothing else than the feet of the Lord (Prabhur pada).¹

The respiratory techniques, in which the nādis play the most significant role, are highly emphasized in this literature. Saiyid Šultān develops his ideas on the nerves further to delineate the respiratory techniques. The pursuit of respiratory discipline, he writes, confers eternal life (cīra āiū).² Ingilā, which contains air (poban) has thirty subsidiary nerves, while pihgilā contains forty-one. To susumna goes all that is eaten. Sañkhinī (trīgun mārī/nāḍī), curved at three points (tin ūbe nlā), is the one the knowledge of which removes 'the fear of death'. The culture of the nerves explains the continued life of the old and the death of the young (bīrdher jiban kene śisur maran). The ten nerves are attached to the ten doors or passages. Pihgalā is positioned in the right ear, idā in the left, and susumna in the middle. The air passes from the seven other nerves through susumnā. It is carried to the left in the ear, brought back to 'tripini' with care and then passed out through the right ear. The secret of the body lies in the stream called 'Bramma-nandi', or Gaṅgā or Bhāgirathī. The supreme knowledge (param jñān) is attained if the mind is taken into this.³

¹ Jñāna-pradīpā, fol. 10a-b mc. Tarafdar's reading here is 'pantha' for 'pada', which he translates as 'the Path leading to the Lord'. (Op.cit., 206, 370). The Ms. contains the word 'pada' very clearly, which does not seem out of tune with its context.
² Ibid., fol. 10b mc.
³ Ibid., fols. 3b-4b mc.
The air keeps the fire in the body burning. One lives for eternity (jie sarbbakāl) provided the fire remains inextinguished. It is produced in the four-petalled lotus (cāri dal kamaletā tāhār upati), and the fire is kept alive by the device of sustained pressures in the anal orifice. All the enemies (ripu) are destroyed in the fire which is to be kept burning by drawing fresh air (bāu bakṣan). The body is made perfect by the fire and the shadow of death (śamaner chāyā) is kept away. In this whole process khemā, which is the supreme knowledge (param Brahma), truth (param tattva) and dharma, is the vital force to be resorted to. The Yogīs have attained immortality (amar) having resorted to khemā.

The physical postures (āsana) and gestures (mudrā) should naturally tend to attain considerable importance in this bio-psychic disciplines. Certain āsanas are prescribed with a view to warding off 'eighty-four diseases'. Padmāsana (the lotus posture) with the chin (cibuk) bending on the chest, left leg placed on the right, hands resting on the legs and the mind fixed on the nose, is highly recommended. Another variant of padmāsana is said to consist in touching the end of the pelvic region with the left heel and placing it on the

We have already noted this technique in 'Abd ul-Ḥakīm.

Khamā or khemāi, as the vigilant sentinel of the body against all illusions and temptations, is a significant factor in the Yogico-Tantric traditions, especially Nāthism.

Ibid., fol. 3a mc.

Reference has already been made to such practices as mentioned by 'Abd ul-Ḥakīm.

Ibid., fol. 10a mc. The number 84 possesses some mystical significance in the Nātha traditions.
right thigh (urū) and fixing the mind in the point between the eye-brows (bhurū). 1 In his discussion on mudrā, Saiyid Sulṭān includes the well-known Nathist practice called khecari mudrā. He refers to the practice of turning the tongue back to the root of the cerebral region, reaching the source of divine ambrosia (amīt/āmṛta lāg pāe) and transcending physical decay (ajar hae kāc). 2 Another Mahā-mudrā is mentioned which involves placing the chin on the chest, putting the left foot on the anal opening and taking hold of the right leg with two hands. This is accompanied by the performance of kumbhaka or retention of inhaled air. The Mūla-mudrā consists in placing the left foot in the opening of the anus, the right leg on the left and finally pushing the air up through the anal canal. Through the practice of Sītāli-mudrā the practitioner attains siddhi. The air inhaled through pūrak is transferred to the navel and further driven down the stomach after sometime. A successful practitioner of Bharjari-mudrā defies death (Jāma/Yama). Connected with the control of semen virile (raja birjja/vīrya), Saiyid Sulṭān chooses not to make it open and advises caution on its practitioners. Several other practices are discussed concerning respiratory control involving the thirty nerves around the spinal chord, the performer of which is dreaded by gods and nymphs (deb kinnar), does not perish in fire and water, becomes omnipresent (hae sarbbame/sarvamaya), and attains the supreme feet (param pad), bākya-siddhi, sarva-siddhi and samadhi. 3

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., fol. 11a-b mc. A careful reading of the text clearly shows the term 'khecari hari' (the stealing of the ambrosia), which may escape a casual glance due to the copyist's confusion.
3 Ibid., fols. 13b-14a mc.
Similar ideas of respiratory discipline are discussed by Shaikh Mansur, according to whom, where there is air, there is no disease (jatata phirae babi tathā rug/roga nāi). He also advocates for drawing the air up through the anal channel by pressing its opening by feet and concentrating attention on the tip of the nose (nasikā agreta). His description contains numerous predictions for a person in his daily life connected with the blowing of vital wind either through the right or the left nostril.

'Ali Rajā's ideas in this regard claim some distinction. His ideas are no doubt permeated by the prevailing current of physical culture (kāya-sādhan). But he puts pronounced accent on the supreme importance of the mind in the psycho-physiological processes. He calls a person a great Fagīr, who recognises his own body and mind (tīr man) and comes to know that the three worlds are 'no different from the mind'. The mind is the essence of the three world (tri jāt sār). The mind is the body (kānta) - its nose, eyes, lips (asta/oṣtha) and feet. The king of the mind (maṇurā) is the servant (sebak) as well as God (Īsvar). The mind is Allāh and the mind is the Prophet Muḥammad (Mahāmād Nabi-bar). The mind is secret as well as revealed, Marshid as well as disciple (śīṣya), the heaven, earth and hell, the empyrean, the throne of God and the celestial light (Nur). The mind is both learned (ālim) and fool (mūrkha). The mind is a devoted Yogī - Saṅkar (Śiva) and Brahmac, the chiefs of the mendicants (bairagī).

2 Āgama, fols. 55-6.
3 Ibid., fol. 57.
The body contains the mind and the mind a light.

There is the sound called 'Anahetu Šabda', produced inside the light. The truth of the sound (se dhvanir tattva) leads to the fulfilment of one's wish (siddhi manaskām). The heart, which is of the shape of the bud (kali) of a lotus (kamal), rings the great name of the Lord (Prabhur param nām). This name is the greatest among all the names of God (Īśvar) written in the Books (Sāstras). The sound is far greater than all the names contained in the Purāṇas, the Qur'ān and the Vedas. As the bud of the lotus begins to blossom, the body starts shaking. Twelve years of meditation (dhan/dhyan) at the source of the sound quietens the sound as well as composes the mind. From the composure of the mind follows that of the body, and it is this steady body that is set for the physical culture (kāyār śādhan). The Siddhas call this sound Parama-hamsa, and the power (tej) of the name of Hamsa purifies the body and mind. There are different ways of worshipping God, but none is superior to Ajapa. Ajapa is the root, while all other knowledges are like branches (śākhā) and flowers (phul). The body contains the lake and the 'ghat of Tripini' combining Hamsa, pūraka and recaka.

1. Jñāna-sāgara, fol. 132. Anahata Šabda has been noted above.
2. Those who have attained Siddhi in Yoga.
3. The name Hamsa, also known as Ajapa, occupies the central position in the Yogico-Tantric thought. Combining two syllables, ham and sah are often identified with exhalation and inhalation and also with Śiva and Śakti. Parama-hamsa (Paramātma) is obtained by the meditation of the name of Hamsa. (Mallik, K., op.cit., 459, 468).
The mystic concern for a perfect body was also underlined by a clear anxiety to prevent dissipation of semen virile, that came to be associated with physical vitality.

Shaikh Maṇṣūr mentions mani (maṇi) and notfā (nuṭfā) as being the Arabic equivalents (Arabi bacaṇ) of the Bengali words for semen like candra, rītu, sukra (ṣukra) and birja (vīrya). From maṇi, he writes, follows beauty (rup), strength, long life (śyu dirga/dīrga), and the power of the eyes (cakṣer yuti). Maṇṣūr points to the Qur'ānic injunction of drinking water before reading the prayers (duyā/duʾāʾ) and interprets this as a measure of the importance of water in the God's creation (jāl hunte rākhiṇcī sab jiyāīyā). The maṇi is to be treated as the treasure of the body (śarirer dhan) and life is fruitless (nisphal) without wealth. Maṇi is the ocean of divine ambrosia (amrita). By expending this wealth through sexual enjoyment (cingar/sṛṅgāra), the body becomes weak (nirbbal) and devoid of energy (niśakti). The eyes are the roots of maṇi, and copulative acts (sṛṅgāra) steal the light of the eye. The store-keeper (bhāṇḍāri) of semen in the body is khemāi, 1 who has to guard it against attempts to draw on the fund, being shot by the arrow of love (kamdhanu). The effective use of this precious wealth involves a knowledge of the changing locations of physical desire (kām) in different parts of the body, consequent upon the lunar movements (tithi). On the day of the new moon it is located under the foot (padatāle), on the first day of the bright moon in the toe (birdhāṅgule), on the second on the top of the foot, on the third in the ankle, on the fourth in the knee, on the fifth in the thigh, on the sixth in the region of

1 Discussed above.
anus and genital organ, on the seventh in the navel, on
the eighth on the wrist, on the ninth in the heart, on the
tenth in the throat, on the eleventh in the mouth, on the
twelfth in the nose, on the thirteenth in the eyes, on the
fourteenth in the forehead and on the fifteenth on the
top of the cerebral region. The position of candra in the
body also changes everyday in a week. On Monday it is
stationed in the anus, on Tuesday in the navel, on
Wednesday in the heart, on Thursday in the throat, on
Friday in the mouth, on Saturday in the eyes and on
Sunday in the head. 1 Similar description of changes in
the position of candra in the body in each lunar day,
followed by some observations on the consequences of
copulation (saṅgam) in each particular day, are
furnished by Shaikh Cand. 2

According to 'Alī Rajḥ, the essence of the body is
contained in the semen (maṇī candra), from the power
of which flow strength, intelligence and knowledge (jñān).
The importance of the moon in the sky (gaganer candra)
for the world is only matched by the importance of semen
(candra) for the physical body. To his semen a man owes
his life, and this may again cause his death. The tree
cannot stand without its root, the fish cannot live
without water and there is no day without the sun. So
cannot exist a body without semen virile. The Yogi is
not advised to perform coition much. The less he does
(yata rati alpa kare), the more meritorious (dhanya) is
his performance of Yoga. He cannot afford to empty the
store of semen (candra bhāṅgār) and render himself
unable to perform his duties. He is permitted to indulge
in sexual enjoyment (ramaṇ) only on specific days
connected with the lunar movements (din tithi jāni). 3

1 Sirr Nāma, fols. 36b-38b.
2 Tālib Nāma, fols. 12b-14a.
3 Jñāna-sāgara, fols. 178-80.
B. Cosmogony and Ontology:

The cosmogonical and ontological ideas, as presented in these writings, are marked by the same tendency of seeking identity in the milieu of corresponding indigenous thought. Both the Muslim and the non-Muslim streams of medieval Bengali literature delving into these questions reveal a striking correspondence in their forms and contents. The ideas contained in both of them do not lend themselves to a uniform and systematic theorisation, being drawn, as they are, from diverse sources. The non-Muslim stream represented by the Mangala-kāvyā literature is fed by an amalgam of ideas, drawn on the popular level from various sources of Indian religions and mythologies, especially through the popular Purānic channels. The Muslim stream, despite its basic reliance on the framework of Islamic cosmogonical system, converged remarkably to the parallel indigenous one. The agreement between the two has, however, to be viewed from the larger background of the convergence and parallelism between the Islamic and the Indian cosmogonical notions, with regard to some important questions that found their place in the Bengali writings in some form or another. The Islamic and the Indian ideas no doubt differed on some of their salient features, which should seem quite natural. It is not the differences that appear surprising but all that they have in common, despite the fact of the Muslim cosmogonical traditions being largely an heir to the Judeo-Christian legacy. Viewed historically, this need not take us entirely by surprise.

In addition to being the last revelation in time and, therefore, symbolically the synthesis of all the traditions before it, Islam spread geographically over the middle belt of the world, and consequently became historically the heir of many of the earlier civilizations.
of Western Asia and the Mediterranean world, which provided the necessary material and substance for the later flowering of the Islamic arts and sciences. With the establishment of the 'Abbāsid caliphate, translations of Greek, Syriac, Pahlavi and Sanskrit sources on the various sciences became available in Arabic, with the result that in addition to the earlier schools of grammarians and poets, traditionalists, commentators, historians, and Šī'ī ascetics, all of whom relied almost entirely upon the Islamic revelation for their knowledge, there now began to appear new schools which also drew from non-Islamic sources. These new schools ranged from the logicians and rationalists, like the Mu'tazilites, to the astronomers and mathematicians, and finally to the followers of the more esoteric forms of the Greek, Alexandrian, and Chaldean sciences connected with the Sabaean community in Harran.1 During the caliphate of Mašūr (754-75) and Ḥarūn ur-Rashīd (786-809) some Indian scientific works were translated into Arabic partly from the Persian or Pahlavi translations, and the rest from the Sanskrit. The astrology of the Brahma-siddhānta of Brahma-gupta, which was translated from the Sanskrit under Mašūr with the assistance of Indian scholars, was known even before Ptolemy's Almagest.2

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1 For general historical background of the Islamic sciences and the means of transmission of the ancient sciences to the Muslims, see, O'Leary, D. DeLacy.: How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs; Meyerhof, M.: 'On the Transmission of Greek and Indian Science to the Arabs', Islamic Culture, 1937, II; Sarton, George: Introduction to the History of Science, I-II.
2 De Boer: The History of the Philosophy of Islam, 9.
Jābir ibn Haiyān, the most celebrated of all Muslim alchemists, claimed himself to have been 'acquainted with the sciences of the Hindus'. The direct contact of Buddhist monasteries in eastern Persia, Transoxiana and Balkh also facilitated the process. It was, however, through the keen intellectual curiosity of the individual scholar like Al-Bīrūnī that notions of Indian science and philosophy worked their way into Islamic traditions. He was one of the most significant contributors to the formulation of the Islamic cosmogonical and ontological principles.

The convergence between the two systems of cosmogonical thought may be noted broadly under the following heads:

a. The Creator and the creation

The ancient and medieval cosmological sciences shared in common the element of the unity of Nature, which all of these sciences sought to demonstrate and upon which they were all based. This unity is the natural consequence of the Unity of the Divine Principle, which formed the basis of all the ancient 'Greater Mysteries' and which, either veiled in a mythological dress or expressed directly as a metaphysical truth, is to be found as the central idea in nearly all traditional civilizations. The question of the Unity of the Divine Principle and the consequent unity of Nature is particularly important in Islam where the idea of Unity (Tauhīd) overshadows all others and remains at every level of Islamic civilization the basic principle upon

1 Nasr, S.H.: An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, 98.
3 Nasr, S.H., op.cit., 111.
4 The question has already been discussed in the preceding section from a slightly different angle.
which all else depends. The ancient cosmological sciences were for the most part based upon the unity of Nature and search for the transcendent cause of things and were, therefore, far from un-Islamic even if they antedated the historical manifestation of Islam. It was this common factor of seeking to discover and demonstrate the unity of Nature among the ancient cosmological sciences that made them conformable to the form of the Islamic revelation and easily assimilable into its perspective. Apart from a small number of investigators inspired by Greek philosophic ideas, the Muslims, who engaged in the pursuit of science, did so, like the Hebrews, in order to discover in the wonders of Nature the signs or tokens of the story of God.¹

Khālq is the term applied in the Qur'ān² to God's creative activity, which included not only the original creation ex nihilo but also the making of the world and of man and all that is and happens. To express the relation and contrast between the Creator and the creation, the Muslims, as we have noted before, use respectively the terms Ḥaqq and khālq. We have further traced in outline the process marked by stress and strain through which Islamic theology and metaphysics, largely aided by the Sūfī ideas, was able to strike a balance between transcendence (tanzīn) and immanence (tashbīn) of God.

The significance of this compromise from the cosmogonical standpoint may be viewed in the process of gradual 'individualisation' and 'qualification' of the Absolute from the state of bare potentiality to one

¹ Levy, op.cit., 460.
² Sūra (2:159), (11:59), (67:3).
of unity in multiplicity. In Sufic parlance this is known as the gradual descent (tanazzul) of the Absolute from what is in the initial stage a bare potentiality, purely negative and supra-existential (al-'Ama'), through a stage where the divine consciousness moves to the realisation of its thought and knows itself as transcendent unity (Ahdīyat)¹ to the third stage of oneness in multiplicity (Wahdat), or Raqīqat ul-Muhammadīya or Nūr-i Muhammadīya, as this particular stage is often identified with. The Sufic model of this triad is but a different version of what the Muslim rationalists, metaphysicians and theologians had already put in the form of Absolute, the Universal Intellect ('aql) and the Universal Soul. According to them the first thing that the Creator called into existence is Intellect, an 'extremely perfect and excellent substance in which the form of all things is contained' and from which other beings proceeded by stages. In the writings of the Ikhwan us-Safā God is sometimes placed above Being, while in other instances they imply that Being is divided into God and Universe.² This led some philosophers and many mystics to the assumption that before the manifestation of His creation 'the eternal creator was concealed in God'.³ Philosophers like Fārābī and Ibn Sinā laid the basis for the development of the Sufic notions of the creation by establishing a connection between the Nūr or the divine light⁴ and the Intellect, the former being communicated to the latter.

² Nasr, op.cit., 53n.
⁴ The idea that God is light and reveals himself as such in the world and to man is very old and widely disseminated in oriental religions as well as in Hellenistic gnosis and philosophy. (De Boer, EI, III, 955).
at the first instance by the prime cause, the Creator.

Around the nuclear concept of Nur the Sufis developed
their elaborate doctrine of Nur ul-Muhammadia or
Nur-i Muhammadî, which is believed to have been created
before all things.

The concept of the triad as noted above bears a
striking similarity on the one hand to the Neo-platonic
triad of the One, the Divine Mind and the All Soul and
on the other to that of its Hindu counterpart consisting
of the Absolute (Brahman), the Creative Spirit (Īśvara)
and the World Spirit (Hiraya-garbha) representing
respectively God as unmanifest potentiality, God as
creative power and God as immanent in this world. The
integral nature of the supreme reality is explained in
Taittirīya-upanisad by the conception of tri-suparna in
which the Absolute is conceived as a nest from out of
which three birds have emerged, namely, Īśvara, Hiraya-
garbha and Viraja. 1 The Hindu metaphysical and
cosmogonical ideas make a clear distinction between the
Absolute qualityless aspect of the Supreme Being, which
can only be negatively described, and His self-conscious
Being representing His will as the Creator. The
Vedantic conception of the ultimate reality or the
Brahman has two aspects - the unqualified inactive
absolute aspect and the qualified active aspect, which
is called Īśvara. While the Absolute remains unconcerned
with the material world, Īśvara in association with Maya
calls the illusory world into existence. The Absolute
in its unqualified aspect is not the Creator of the
Universe, being neither existent nor non-existent. 2

2 Ibid., 35-7, 63, 65.
According to Manu (5:9), the Hari-vāṃśa and the Purāṇas God Himself was born in the golden germ as Brahmā or the Creator God.¹ In keeping with this general trend of cosmogonical thought, as popularised especially through the Purānic channels, the medieval Bengali Hindu writers make consistent reference to Dharma or Nirañjana, who, being himself produced by the Supreme Lord (Prabhu), was responsible for the rest of the creation.²

b. The Primal or Cosmic Elements:

The Hindu and Islamic cosmogonies shared a common ground also in respect of their notions of the primordial elements. The concept of creation ex nihilo was practically unknown to the ancient world. It is present neither in Babylonian, Egyptian, nor Greek tradition, and its existence in Iranian thought is at least problematical.³ On the other hand, "the keenest philosophers of antiquity, the Hindus, evolved the idea as early as the Rigveda, even though but vaguely ..."⁴

¹ Radhakrishnan, S.; Indian Philosophy, 100.
³ Gray, L.H. in ERE, IV, 126.
⁴ Ibid. The concept of creation ex nihilo as understood in Hindu cosmogony does not refer to the creation of being from non-being. The Absolute is non-dual (advaita). This does not mean that the Absolute is non-being, rather it means only that the Absolute is all inclusive and nothing exist outside it. So reference to creation ex nihilo in the Hindu cosmogonical system has only to be understood as creation out of a state of non-existence of primal elements co-eval with the primal state of Being in unmanifest potentiality.
In the Rg-veda (10:129:1-3) we read:

Then there was neither Aught nor Nought, nor air nor sky, beyond. What covered all? Where rested all? In watery gulf profound? Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor change of night and day. That One breathed calmly, self-sustained; sought else beyond It lay. Gloom hid in gloom existed first—one sea, eluding view. That One, a void in chaos wrapt, by inward fervour grew.1

A later hymn (10:72:2-3) says:

In the primal age of the gods, being was born of non-being.

The Chāndogya-upaniṣad (6:2) makes the position very clear. It contains the following conversation between Uddālaka and Śvetaketu:

In the beginning, my dear, there was that only which is, one only, without a second. Others say, in the beginning there was that only which is not, one only, without a second; and from that which is not, that which is, was born. 'But how could it be thus, my dear?' the father continued. 'How could that which is, be born of that which is not?' No, my dear, only that which is, was in the beginning, one only, without a second.2

According to the Śvetāsvataropaniṣad (4:18):

When there was neither darkness, nor day, nor night—neither the existent, nor the non-existent;—there was only the All-good One.

In the Taittirīyopaniṣad (2:7) the non-existent (asat) is said to have been in the beginning; from this arose the existent (sat) and the sat produced its own self by itself. The same ideas are also expressed in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad (4:10-11) and the Nārāyaṇopaniṣad (1:1).

1 **ERE, IV, 156.**
2 **Ibid., 157.**
Islamic cosmogony, consistent with its cardinal doctrine of non-dualism, similarly stresses on the creation of the world ex nihilo.

Inspired by this outlook the Muslim cosmologists such as al-Birūnī made a total discount of the view of the eternity of the world, as advocated by the Greek philosophers. According to Bāzā'ī:

God could create absolutely ex nihilo, as He created the heavens and earth, or from matter already existing, as He created all that lies between the heavens and the earth.2

The latter part of the above statement postulating 'matter already existing' underlines, however, the presence of some dualistic elements in Islamic cosmogony. The earlier traditions developed such ideas. According to al-Tirmīdī, Allāh was 'in the clouds' before the creation;3 and He created 'in darkness'.4 In the later traditions these are further developed and the process of creation is elaborated with speculations regarding God's throne, primeval water etc.5 The primeval water played a significant role in Islamic cosmogony, as in many other ancient theories.

According to the Qur'ān (21:31; 24:44), all living things were created from water; but man was created of clay

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3 Tafsīr, Sūra 11, bāb 1, cited, De Boer, EI, II, 892.
4 Tmān, bāb 18; cf. Sūra (39:8), cited, ibid. This reference to 'darkness' with corresponding notions of 'light' tended to produce the suspicion of dualism akin to that in Manichaeanism between Nūr and gulumāt as the eternal principles until the monistic doctrine of light of the Neo-Platonists in the ninth century was found compatible with Islamic Monism and was integrated into it. De Boer, s.v. Nūr, EI, III, 955-6.
5 The Qur'ān, Sūra (11:9).
The subsequent development of Muslim cosmology totally dispensed with all dualistic incompatibilities.

If Islamic cosmogony reveals traces of dualism in its early stages, it is hardly surprising that the Hindu cosmogony, despite the texts cited above in favour of creation ex nihilo, should also show traces of dualism, especially in its early stages. The Hindu cosmogonical ideas, never systematized and shaped into a single universally accepted body of consistent elements, acquired monistic notions only in course of development. In the Rig-veda itself, where the beginning of Hindu Monism is traced, the cosmogonical ideas derived from 'various bases' are not 'mutually reconciled' nor are they 'considered or even suspected to be incompatible'.

The primordial nihil often boils down to primeval water or/and primeval darkness. The significant Rig-vedic cosmogonical hymn (10:129) mentioned earlier says:

In the beginning there was darkness shrouded in darkness; indistinct was all - and water was everywhere.

The idea of primeval water is discernible in the other Rig-vedic hymns also. One of these (10:82:5) runs:

That which is beyond the heaven, beyond this earth, beyond the gods and the asuras - what primeval germ indeed did the waters set down, where all the gods perceived it?

The Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa (11:1:6) says:

In the beginning the Universe was water, nothing but water.

The Brhad-āranyaka-upaniṣad (5:5:1) puts it more emphatically and says that water alone was in the beginning; Satya arising from water, Brahmā from

Satya, Prajāpati from Brahmā and the gods from Prajāpati. According to Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa (1:1:3) and Taittiriya-saṁhitā (5:6; 7:1,5) Prajāpati was born in a lotus leaf in water which existed in the beginning. The Purānic literature represents the Supreme God as floating in the primordial water and hence known as Nārāyaṇa. Thus the notion of primordial elements with occasional suggestions, often unintentional, of their being co-eval with the Creator are met with in the earlier stages of both Hindu and Muslim cosmogonical thought in general. But both systems in course of their development divested themselves of the vestiges of dualistic elements and consistently projected the concept of creation ex nihilo. Both Hindu and Muslim literature of medieval Bengal present, as we shall presently examine, a theme of creation ex nihilo with unbroken consistency.

c. The Cosmic Principle and Process:

The cosmic process and the principle underlying creation constitute another sphere in which the Islamic and the Indian cosmogonies converge on certain points.

One of the most potent metaphysical principles underlying almost all systems of Indian cosmogony - Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina - is the passive and the active or the static and the dynamic aspects of reality as revealed through the process of creation. In this regard the Sāṁkhya philosophy has been freely laid under contribution by all these systems. The Puruṣa in the Sāṁkhya system is taken to be the unchanging principle of pure consciousness, while Prakṛti or Pradhāna is the primordial cosmic substance. Creation proceeds from Prakṛti coming in contact with Puruṣa. Through the association or the contact of Puruṣa with Prakṛti the character of the one is infused in the other and the
creative process follows as a result of the infusion. From this philosophical idea of the association of Puruṣa and Prakṛti has followed the tendency to conceive of Puruṣa as the male and of Prakṛti as the female and of their contact as their union, through which proceeds the Universe.

Islamic cosmogony is similarly based on the principle of active-passive polarization in the Universe which has also been referred to as 'masculine' and 'feminine' respectively.\(^1\) As numbers two and three in the 'hierarchy of beings', standing just below the Creator, the Universal Intellect and Soul assume the role of the principles of the whole Universe; the duality upon which things are based returns to them in one way or another. Referring to the duality of form and matter, light and darkness, spirit and body, cause and effect etc., it is said that 'the duality refers to the Intellect and Soul which contain in themselves the active and passive principles through which the life and activity of the Universe can be understood'. Creation is the 'dynamic' and 'feminine' aspect of the Divine. It itself possesses an 'active' and 'masculine' aspect which is called Nature and which is the source of all activity in the Universe; and a 'passive' and 'feminine' aspect which appears as the 'matter' or 'inert' base of this activity. With respect to God, the Intellect is purely passive, in obedience, tranquility and permanent desire for union with the Divine Principle. The Universal Soul in turn remains passive and feminine with respect to the Intellect.\(^2\)

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Again, Muslim cosmogony especially in its Sufic orientation makes use of the symbolism of love (‘ishq) to show the attraction between God and the universe. The Creator is, in fact, the only Beloved (ma’shuq) and the only object of desire (muğad). The power of this yearning (shawq) is made the very cause of the coming into being of things and the law governing the universe. That creation proceeds from the desire (kama) of the Creator is a motif common in Hindu cosmogonical thought. In Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (1:1:3), Taittirīya-saṁhitā (7:1:5) and Brhad-jābālopaniṣad (1:1) the universe proceeds from the 'desire' of Prajāpati. In Nṛsimha-pūrva-tāpanī it is said:

All this remained as water along (without any form). Only Prajāpati came to be in the lotus-leaf. In his mind arose the desire, 'let me create this' (the world of names and forms).2

The cosmogonical notions in medieval Bengali literature both Hindu and Muslim are thoroughly permeated with the concept of love (prema) or desire on the part of the Creator preceding the creation.3

It is in this general background of some conceptual identities between the Islamic and the indigenous cosmogonical systems that a study of the works of these writers finds its proper perspective. Unquestionably, their ideas are often directly permeated by indigenous cosmogonical views, expressed either by their preference for the use of indigenous terms and symbols or by a rather conscious attempt to graft local traditions into their writings. A part at least of what they attempted

1 Ibid., 53.
2 Radhakrishnan, S.: The Principal..., 55n, 37.
3 See below.
thus bears unmistakable stamp of their mission and smacks of strong local influence. But there were also some parallel trends in the Islamic and the indigenous traditions, as noted above. And yet, in respect of the latter, their contribution lies in what they had adopted to suit the local climate and serve their need.

The most significant facet of their scheme is the disproportionately large accent on the mythological aspect of cosmogony, rather than on its scientific and speculative side. It is important to bear in mind that while cosmogonical myths are not stressed or encouraged in Islam, although later traditions did build up an elaborate imaginary superstructure with the scanty materials supplied in the Qur'ān, the indigenous cosmogonical traditions put great emphasis on the mythical. Whatever place speculative ontological ideas found in the cosmogonical thought of the Bengali Muslims, those were derived almost entirely from the Şūfic notions of the Godhead in relation to the creation. This brings us to the other important facet of their cosmogonical writings, namely, the dominant strain of Şūfic cosmogony in their writings. Apart from its speculative implications, Şūfic thought about the Creator and the creation led also to some conceptual developments of mythical nature, which were not only accepted by these Bengali Muslim writers but were often subjected to further mutations in keeping with the tenor of local beliefs. Almost all of them resort to the Şūfic concept of the universe proceeding from the love of God through the creation of Nur-i Muḥammadī. The Şūfic concept of Nur-i Muḥammadī appears

1 'In conformity with the non-mythological perspective of Islam, al-Bīrūnī rejects the mythological cosmology of the Hindus'. (Nasr, op.cit., 134).
to be the most dominant theme in this literature, but with a significant alteration in its character. In this the abstract concept of \(\text{Nur}\) assumed a clearly anthropomorphised and mythical form. Consistent with this transformation the abstract concept of Nur-i Muhammadi is invariably represented in its anthropomorphised form, being introduced as Nur Muhammad.\(^1\) Produced by the Supreme Being, Nur Muhammad in his turn brings the whole world into existence from the drops of perspiration (gharma, gham) arising in the different parts of his body. In the creation of Nur Muhammad the \\(\text{Sufi}\\) notion of love is adopted by these writers. The divine love is epitomized in that between God and Nur Muhammad, the latter being called the friend or lover (sakhı, mitra) of the former. Unable to 'enjoy' or 'realise' Himself in the infinite void, God brings Nur Muhammad into existence out of His own self.\(^2\)

We have already noted that the corresponding Hindu Bengali literature harps on the same tune of the unmanifest Lord creating out of His own self a form called Dharma or Nirañjana, who becomes responsible for the work of creation. The idea of primordial beings created from the perspiration of the Lord is also noticed in some of these Hindu writings. In the Dharma literature of \(\text{Śunya-purāṇa}, \text{Adyā-sakti}\\) (the primordial energy) is produced from the sweat of the Lord.\(^3\)

\(^1\) For this reason we have, in our discussion, referred to Nur Muhammad in this personalised form, unless it is otherwise indicated in the text concerned.

\(^2\) Cf. Maṇṣūr Ḥallāj believed that God in the state ofaloneness could not realise Himself so that He had to bring into being the divine image personified by the newly created Adam. (Nicholson: Studies..., op.cit., 80).

\(^3\) (Ed.), Banerji, C., Srṣṭi-pattan (section), 1-42; Dasgupta, S.B., op.cit., 317, 320.
Hindu Bengali writers give prominence also to the idea of desire lying at the root of creation,\(^1\) which is a quite archaic concept in Hindu cosmogonical thought as observed before.\(^2\)

The state of the unqualified Absolute containing the potency of creation has been consistently emphasized by the Bengali Muslim writers. Saiyid Sultān,\(^3\) as noticed earlier, refers to God as having no beginning (ādi), end (anta), abode (śṭhān) and existence (ṭhit/ṣṭhiti). He is indivisible (khandaṇ barjjita) and formless (nirūpākār).

The state of non-existence is described as one without directions of right, left, high and low. Sultān, however, takes care to emphasize the potential character of the primordial non-existence as distinct from non-being. The Supreme Lord is described as Omnipresent (sarbbatreal byāpita) and not a void (nahe śūnya sthal), but a manifestation of the formless in non-existence (śūnya ghaṭe śūnyākār haiche prakāś). The creation was not possible without the existence of Nirāṃjana (bini Nirāṃjan ghaṭe na haiche śṛjan). He is ever concealed as the formless in the form (rūpeta nirūp rūp) like the heat in the fire, the hardness in the clay, the drops in the water and the rays in the sun and the moon. The same idea is reflected in other writings. In an earlier work Shaikh Zāaid\(^4\) has given a poignant expression to the same idea:

No land or water, no earth,—there was no manifestation (prakāś) in the void (śūnya madhye). Heaven, earth and hell, all wrapt in darkness, there was no sky, moon, sun, or star...nor fresh cloud, air (baruṇ), fire...nor mountain-peaks...nor rivers, jungles, oceans...the universe was bereft of everything...and there was God (Bhagabān) alone.

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1 Dasgupta, ibid., 315-6.
2 Radhakrishnan, S.: Indian Philosophy, I, 102.
3 Ny, fol. 1a-b mc.
Shaikh Čand¹ writes that the Lord (Prabhu) was the form of the void (śunyaśarīr) in the beginning. According to Shaikh Parāṇa², it is the form in the formless (nairūpakār) that lay at first in concealment (gopate). 'Ali Rajā' also speaks of the form and formless being united into the Divine essence.³

The process of manifestation or gradual 'descent' of the Absolute as read in this literature takes the general line suggested by the conception of the triad referred to earlier. The triad is unmistakably represented as a basic unity, the form and symbolism of which are variously drawn. The Divine essence is said to contain these elements in an unmanifest unity, the separation of which in the process of actualisation of the Supreme Being disturbs the cosmic equi-poise and sets the process of creation in motion. This idea is very close to the Sāmkhya system in which the cosmic process follows from the disturbance in the equilibrium in the nature of Prākṛti consisting of three qualities (guna) - sattva (intelligence stuff), rajas (energy) and tamas (inertia).⁴ In fact, some of the Muslim writers make explicit reference to the three guṇas. According to Saiyid Sulṭān God combines the three guṇas of sattva, rajas and tamas in Himself, by virtue of which He performs the function of creation (ṣāja), preservation (pañjan) and destruction (saṁhār) respectively.⁵ He says further that 'the separation of the three qualities from the One' results in the inception of 'many from the three'.⁶ 'Ali Rajā' writes that the three

¹ Ṭālib Nāma fol. 8 mc.
³ Supra, Ch. III, A, 190-2.
⁴ Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, 502-3.
⁵ Ny, fol. 1 mc.
⁶ Ibid., fol. 3 mc.
ganas remain merged in One (sattva tama raja guna chila eke līn) and have no separate entity (tin guna kanta keha nā achila bhin)."  

The actual form of the triad symbolising the Unity of Godhead has, however, been variously represented in these writings. A differentiation, clear or vague, between the highest unqualified Absolute and its conscious state of being is generally maintained. Saiyid Sultān clearly refers to the unconscious (ajñān) and conscious (jñān) states of being, and compares the former to a state of rest (biṣrām), representing what we have noted as the static aspect of the supreme reality. Further, consciousness is considered hidden in the unconscious, just as the fragrance is immanent in the flower (puspita āchaye jena sandha chapaiyā). He then writes about the dawn of jñāna in ajñāna, and the conscious (cetan) self of the Lord. Shaikh Čand compares the state of unconscious being with one of slumber (nidrā) and says:

Consciousness or ego (caitanya) awakens Him from absolute slumber. From the conscious and active aspect of God to the creation of Nūr Muḥammad, who is the final link in the chain of the triad and is the direct cause of creation, is a point shared by these writers almost in common. But the idea is expressed through different symbols.

1 Agama, fol. 3.  
2 Nv, fol. 2 mc.  
3 ShM, fol. 1a mc.  
4 Nv, fol. 2.  
5 Caitanya cetaśila tāre cetan nidrā hate. Talib Nāma, fol. 8.  
6 Nv, fol. 3; ShM, fol. 1b; Mīr Shahīd Nūr Nāma, fol. 2a; Shaikh Parān, fol. 1a; Shaikh Čand Talib Nāma, fols. 7-9; Muḥammad Khān Maqtal Husain, fol. 1.
Some have attempted to reduce the concept of the triad to the symbolic inter-relations of 'Ahad (One or The One), Ahmad and Muhammad. God created Ahmad as the active principle of the supreme reality represented by 'Ahad. Hayat Mahomad writes:

\[ \text{Allāh is the Supreme One, Āhad without a second} \]

\[ \ldots \text{He made Khāmmad from Āhad} \ldots \] You should know both Āhad and Khāmmad as One.

Hayat emphasizes the esoteric importance of the letter mim and its Bengali equivalent ma. He finds that the letter added to 'Ahad makes Ahmad and makes Muhammad too. He develops further on this idea of mim in which the three worlds (tribhunan) remain plunged, and points out that one mim gives rise to three names in the three worlds (ek mime tin nām haila tribhubane). He writes:

The name Khāmmad is remembered (jāpe) in heaven (svargete), that of Mahamad in earth, and that of Mahamud by the snakes in hell.

Hayat makes an interesting attempt to find corresponding ideas in the Hindu system. He equates 'Ahad with the Hindu concept of Ādyā and Ahmad with that of Anādyā. He carries the analogy further and in the making of Anādyā from Ādyā traces the importance of the additional Bengali letter na from which he derives the origin of Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu in the same way as the letter mim makes Muhammad. Finally, he makes use of the symbolism of mim to introduce the concept of Nūr. It is mim that

1 Hv, 6; Av, 8.
2 Av, 8.
3 Martapure jāpe lok nām Mahāmmad.
4 Pāṭāle Mahamud nām jāpe nāg gane. (Hv, 6).
5 Ibid. (Āmṛa Āhād kahi Hindu kahi Ādyā / Khāmmad kahi morā Hindu se anādyā).
6 Ibid. (Ek akṣar adhik bine nāhika duhete / mime Mahāmmad Nārāyaṇ na akṣare).
distinguishes between 'Ahad and Ahmad and makes Muḥammad.

Mīm may be substituted by Nur, which splits into two and makes Ahmad as well as Muḥammad, the Nur of the latter having resulted in the creation.¹

Some others resorted to the Hindu symbols of the triad represented by the sounds of Ṛkāra (ṛ), Ṛkāra (ū) and makāra (ma) combined into Om.² 'Ali Rajā' writes:

As Ṛkār is born of niṛkār (formless), ukār is produced (nirmila) by the combination of Ṛkār and niṛkār. Thereafter makār emerges between Ṛkār and ukār.³

As regards the motive force in the actualisation of the passive non-conscious Absolute, most of the writers talk of the absolute solitude of the Supreme unmanifest, unable to realise Himself.⁴ Shaikh Zāhid refers to God's loneliness (ekā chila nijṛupa) and consequent unhappiness (kicchu nā pāilā sukha).⁵ 'Ali Rajā' dwells considerably on the mystic principle of duality uniting in the One. He mentions categorically that there is no love and dalliance in the form of the Absolute (akhaṇḍa akāre nāhi kalā rati ras), that the mind does not conjure up a name other than that of the dual (jugal bihane nām rā dhare mānas), and that the creative spirit is not expressed without the dual (jugal bihane byākta nahe kṛti nām).⁶ The idea of cosmic desire and love is underlined in some of their writings. According to

¹ Ibid.; also Ḥx, 6.
² ShM, fol. 1a-b; 'Ali Rajā': Agama, fols. 4-5.
³ Ibid., fol. 4.
⁴ Cf. Brhad-āraṇyaka-upaniṣad (1:4). "...as there was nothing but himself; he felt no delight, and therefore "made this, his Self, to fall in two, and thence arose husband and wife"." (Jacobi, H. in ERE, IV, 157).
⁵ Ādiya-paricaya, loc.cit.
⁶ Agama, fol. 3.
Saiyid Sulṭān, God having projected His image looks at Himself, as it were, on a mirror (mukur) and feels overpowered with desire (kamātur). 1 'Alī Rajā' puts this idea with greater emphasis. He also mentions God discovering His image, projected in the mirror (darpan), and getting enamoured. He falls back on his symbolism of ākār and ukār and says that He discovers Himself in the ukār on which He remains in contemplation (ukāreta drṣṭī kari rahilek dhyānae). He compares the formless and formal aspects of the Divine essence to Bhāvaka and Bhāvinī respectively. He writes:

Bhābak, as it were, is plunged in the sea of Bhābini. Bhābak knows the bliss of love....
The bee (bhramara) alone knows the value of the lotus (kamal)....The bee is ever steeped (bibhoro) in honey; so is Bhābak in the mind of Bhābini. The Formless (Nairākar) is consumed by love. 2

According to 'Alī Rajā', Nūr Muḥammad is created in the likeness of God as reflected in the mirror before Him. 3 The symbolism of Bhāvaka and Bhāvinī is also extended to cover the relationship of God and Nūr Muḥammad, created out of the former's Nūr. 4 The creation of Nūr Muḥammad from the light of God is, as already noted, a very common theme in this literature.

Shaikh Zāhid, possibly the earliest known Bengali Muslim poet, is a striking exception to this general trend. He talks, as mentioned above, about the loneliness of the Absolute, refers to the creation of the friend (mitta/mitra) of God, but remarkably enough, nowhere mentions the Nūr. Rather, God's creation of His friend

1 Nv, fols. 2-3 mc.
2 Āgama, fols. 5-6.
3 Ibid., fol. 10.
4 Ibid.; Nv, fol. 3 mc; ShM, fol. 1b mc.
and the rest of the creation follow a pattern, which is only familiar to the local eye. God is said to have taken His own seed - a potential image of His own self - and deposited it in the inaccessible cosmic ocean. It may seem 'easy to detect a few Şufi elements' in the cosmogonical ideas of Zāhid expressed here, as noted by Tarafdar. The reference to the 'friend of God' and to his creation in the 'image of God' may suggest the influence of the Şūfic concept of the Perfect Man (Insān-i Kāmil), who is the image of God. But a reading of this portion in the larger context of Zāhid's cosmogonical notions, a close examination of his ideas and words, and finally, a knowledge of the Hindu cosmology do not permit us to draw any 'easy' conclusion. The excerpt under consideration contains three component elements:

a. The seed (rati) of the Lord; b. the potential image of the Lord in the seed; and c. deposition of the seed in the ocean.

All of them appear to be integral ideas of indigenous cosmogonical thought. Tarafdar has taken the word rati for 'love or passion', while we prefer to read it as 'seed'. In Tarafdar's reading the first two elements stated above, appear consistent, but the third one seems as irrelevant as baffling. According to our reading all the three elements assume meaning and relevancy. The creation from the seed of the Lord, which contains His image, and depositing the seed in the waters are quite popular Hindu ideas found in many Purānic cosmogonical accounts. Leaving aside the concept of Hiranya-garbha (the Golden-germ), emerging out of the

1 Ḡapanār dīvā rati / nījē lāye ek murtti / rākhīla gosāin alanghyā sāgare/, loc. cit.
3 The Qurʾān refers to the creation of Ḍādam in the image of God.
primeval waters as the Creator, and also that of the world-egg (Brahmāṇḍa), associated with that of Hiranya-garbha and Brahmā,1 we have reference to the cosmic seed, containing an image of the Lord Himself, deposited in primeval waters as early as the Manu-samhitā (1:8-9):2

He (Śvayambhu, i.e. the divine Self-existent), desiring to produce beings of many kinds from his own body, first with a thought created the waters, and placed his seed in them. That (seed) became a golden egg, in brilliancy equal to the sun: in that (egg) he himself was born as Brahmā,3 the progenitor of the whole world.

Finally, the reference to the 'friend of God' excepted, there is nothing else in the entire cosmogonical composition of Shaikh Zāhid to infer Sufic inspiration. On the contrary, the striking absence of the idea of the Nūr, so important in the Sufi cosmogonical thoughts and so common with all the Bengali Muslim writers, points to the other direction. The rest of his discussion on the order of the creation is entirely on the Hindu model, such as primordial waters from His joy, air from His speech, fire from His anger, all that is terrible from Omkār, the triad (possibly Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara) with assigned duties, the gods (deva) and the demons (āsuras).4

With the solitary exception of Shaikh Zāhid, the other Bengali Muslim writers on cosmogonical questions attach a good deal of importance to the concept of Nūr.

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1 Jacobi, H., op. cit., 156.
2 Cited, ibid., 158.
3 Loc. cit.
4 Bühler's translation, quoted by Jacobi, gives Brahmaṇ, which appears rather misleading in the context. The god Brahmā, not the impersonal Absolute, is referred to here. It may be noted here that the text (Manu-smṛtiḥ, ed., Sarman, V.R., 6) mentions Brahmā.
Some of them attempted to introduce this popular Muslim cosmogonical idea by drawing parallels with Hindu symbols. Saiyid Sultan urges in favour of accepting Nur-i Muhammad 'as called in Arabia' as the equivalent of what is known as the Divine light (ālo jutirmmay/jyatirmmay).\(^1\) Shah Muhammad Ṣaghīr also traces the essence of truth (tattvasār) as well as the whole creation (trijagasmār) to jyoti. There is a common feature in their treatment of the concept, all of them having imparted an anthropomorphic character to the abstract idea of light as already noted. But the agreement does not proceed further. Most of them make use of the interesting phenomenon of perspiration in the Nur's body, the drop or drops of which produced in different parts of the body become responsible for a particular item or items of creation.\(^2\) Some make no mention of the perspiration but trace the different objects of creation partly to some unspecified 'drops' (bindu), oozing out of Nur, and partly to the different parts of the body of Nur Muhammad himself. Some others make reference to neither perspiration nor any other liquid substance flowing from the body of Nur and attribute everything to the different organisms and locations in the body of Nur Muhammad.\(^4\)

The idea of perspiration in the body of the Nur, from which the creation stemmed, is intriguing. The Muslim writers themselves do not quite agree as to the circumstances of its origin in the Nur. While some derive it from purely materialistic causes, others offer

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\(^1\) Ṣaḥāb, fol. 3; Jāḥāra kahiye ʿuna ālo jutirmmay / Nur Muḥammad nam Arabe bolay.
\(^2\) Ṣaḥāb, fols. 3ff; ShM, fols. 1b ff; Shaikh Parāṇ, fols. 3b ff; 'All Raja': Agamā, fols. 6-7.
\(^3\) Av, 8ff.
\(^4\) Shaikh Gand: Talib Nāma, fols. 9 mc ff.
abstract and mystical explanations. Most of the writers attribute the perspiration to the mystical love kindled by God and Nūr Muḥammad gazing at each other, following upon the creation of the latter. God is here often represented, as the Lover and not the Beloved. We have already noted that the symbolism of Bhāvaka and Bhāvini has been resorted to. Bhāvaka has also been compared to the Contemplator (Sādhaka). Saiyid Sultān says:

Having seen Himself in the form of Mahāmmad, God keeps contemplating on his form as the Sādhaka. The Formless (Nairākār) becomes immersed in love... As He looks softly in love, slowly there arises perspiration from love. From the perspiration of Mahāmmad everything come into existence.

In Nabi-vamśā he says that Bhāvaka gazes at the Bhāvini and 'enormous perspiration follows from this vision'. According to Shaikh Pārān, the Lord (Prabhū) creates the Nūr and keeps looking (herite lāgila) at it. Like two mirrors they face and look at each other. The fixed gaze of Niraṅjana makes Nūr Muḥammad perspire all over his body. 'Alī Rāja' makes similar mention of the

1 The word given is 'entered' (prabesīla). We prefer to read ‘looked’ (darsīla) consistent with the idea as expressed in other works in the same context including Sultān’s own Nabi-vamśā.
2 ShM, fol. 1b.
3 Fol. 3. Sei dištī honte haila gharūma bahutar.
4 Fol. 1.
5 Ek dištī Niraṅjana lāgila herite / seī din honte nar lāgila jammite / sarbbagāye Nūr je uparjīla ghām. We suspect a grave mistake on the part of the copyist regarding the second line for which our reading is: 'sei dištī honte Nūr lāgila jarūhitā' - a reading which, unlike the existing version, seems fully consistent with the immediately preceding and the succeeding line.
Nairākāra, 'plunged in love' and gazing at Nūr Muḥammad, and adds:

(They) look at each other in love. From the heat (tej) of the feeling of love (prem ras) both of them perspire. Thereafter, the Lord (Prabhu Kartaṛ), without beginning (anāda) and without quality (nirgūṇ), creates the world (saṁsār) from the water of perspiration (gharma nīr).

An altogether different explanation in regard to the inception of perspiration in Nūr comes from Mīr Shafi', and Dīwān 'Ali. According to Mīr Shafi', as the 'Nūr Nabi' is created in darkness (andhakāre), God (Niraṅjan) remains unconscious (acētān). On gaining consciousness He finds brilliant illumination of the darkness (śyāmār rośān), and loses his consciousness again at the sight of 'Nūr Nabi'. He recovers and watches again his beauty in all its splendour. God enquires about his identity, but gets no answer. He then moves forward to hold him in His arm. Struck, as it were, by thunder, he moves away to the east followed by God and the east gets its name accordingly. There follows the flight of Nūr Nabi in every direction followed by God and the naming of the directions accordingly. Finally, God reaches him and asks his name, at which the latter replies:

You and I remained together in darkness with a single name.

The Nūr asks God to rename him by the same name. God calls him by the name of Nūr Muḥammad. At this stage Mīr Shafi' gives his clue to the origin of perspiration. He says that the Nūr Nabi gets tired after this continuous running and perspiration appears all over

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1 Āgama, fols. 6-7.
2 Nūr Nāma, fol. 2a ff.
3 A brilliant description of his physical beauty as well as his gorgeous embellishments follows.
4 Ibid., fol. 4b.
Diwan 'Ali, who also subscribes to the view of creation from the gharma bindu of Nur Muhammad, presents a slightly different version. There we read that Nur Muhammad after his creation travels at the instance of God in all directions to find the state of things for himself. This is how different directions have come to be known as they are. The travel makes him tired and causes perspiration, whence the whole creation proceeded.

Mir Shafti's and Diwan 'Ali's accounts, so strikingly different from the rest, have interesting parallels in the contemporary Dharmist cosmogonical writings. In the Sunya-puraña, the Lord gets tired after running around the world and finds Himself perspiring. From His perspiration is produced Adya-śakti (the primordial energy).3 In the Anadi-mangala of Rama-dasa-adaka Mahamaya or Adya-śakti, born from the left side of Dharma, tries to escape from his clutches, flees in all directions pursued by him and finally yields to him.4 In a song about Dharma, he is described as perspiring, and from his perspiration a girl emerges. The Lord becomes enamoured with her but she begins to flee in the western direction, hotly pursued by the Lord.5

Hayat Mahmud, as mentioned earlier, does not follow this line in so far as he makes no reference to the perspiration of Nur in this context. But he describes God as asking Nur Muhammad to shake his body (dolao tumi anga pañnar), as a result of which 124,000 drops (bindu)

1 Ibid. Dhārite dhārite jadi śramajokta haila / Nurer sakal ange gharma nikalila.
2 Nur Nama, fols. 2-5.
3 Ramai Pândit, op.cit.; Dasgupta, S.B., op.cit., 313.
4 (Ed.), Chatterji, B.K.; Dasgupta, ibid., 314.
5 Cited, Dasgupta, ibid., 317. All this probably looks back to Bhad-Āranyaka-upanisad (1:4).
ooze out (cūyī padīla) of the body to make 124,000 prophets (nabdī). Similarly many other spirits and objects are created from drops trickling out of the different parts of the body of Nūr Muhammad. In other respects, the creation in Hayat's writings proceeds from different divisions, sub-divisions and fragmentations of Nūr in the same way as the whole creation is produced in the writing of Shaikh Cand. On the other hand he recognizes the relation of love between God and Nūr Muhammad as evidenced by His declaration to the latter:

I shall create the world (samsār) for the sake of your love.

It is quite apparent from this context that most of the writers are inclined towards the idea of the perspiration of the Nūr as an immediate factor in the creation. Further, they connect this with the love between God and Nūr Muhammad, which is a significant element in the Sufic cosmogonical thought. Saiyid Sulṭān and 'Alī Raja' leave no room for doubt that they have precisely in their mind the thought of the heat of love (prem ras tej) resulting in the perspiration. The association of love, heat and perspiration is clear enough. But the element of perspiration in the creation-myths of medieval Bengali literature, both Muslim and Hindu, demands a more basic and satisfactory explanation. We are unable to offer any fool-proof answer to this. But with due recognition of the highly complicated nature of similar issues, we venture to propose some possible explanations.

1 Ay, 9.
2 Ibid., 8 ff.
3 Tālib Nāma, fol. 9ff.
'Ali Raja' mentions creation as noted above, proceeding from 'the waters of perspiration' (gharma-nir). Shaikh Chand contrives a situation in which Nur Muhammad, unable to see God, sheds tears so much as to cause a 'stream of water', from which the creation is made. Could these concrete references be taken to lend further substance to an otherwise reasonable supposition that the idea of creation from the waters of perspiration in the Hindu as well as Muslim Bengali literature is a survival or a transformation of the notion of the same proceeding from primeval waters, which is equally strong in Indian and in the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic cosmogonical traditions? With the Bengali Muslim writers the predominant influence of the doctrine of Nur as the source of creation left them with little choice other than grafting the older tradition into the latter in a changed form. Secondly, innumerable references to the word bindu (drop) in connexion with the idea of perspiration or of Nur may tend to drive inquiry into a different channel. The concept of bindu constitutes one of the most cardinal doctrines of the Hindu Tantras. The Tantric Advaitavāda, quite in line with the Vedāntic and Saṁkhya notions of the Supreme Reality, recognizes a distinction between the inactive transcendent and the active immanent aspects of the same as represented by Śiva and Śakti or to use other symbols, by Niṣkala-Śiva and Sakala-Śiva or Cit-Śakti and Maya-Śaktī, Mahāmāyā, Īśvarī or Devī. Śiva and Śakti represent two aspects of the Divine Unity or Brahma, who is Śiva-Śaktī.¹

When the Supreme Being desires to be 'many', this results in what is known as sadṛṣ aparimāma in which the Supreme Bindu appears. This Bindu or Avyakta, the sprouting root of the universe, is called the Supreme Bindu (Parabindu) to distinguish it from that aspect

of itself which is called bindu (kārya), which appears as a state of Śakti after the differentiation of the Parabindu in sadṛṣ aparipāna. The Parabindu is the Īśvara of the Vedānta with Māyā as His upādhi.¹ The influence of the Nāda-bindu concept is considerable on all religious systems inspired by Yogico-Tantric ideas, especially on Nāthism.² The contemporary Nātha literature of Bengal attaches great importance to this concept, associating it with the fundamental concept of the moon (bindu) and the sun (rajas), the former representing Śiva as the supreme state of pure consciousness and the latter Śakti, as the active principle in the cosmic process.³ The idea of bindu as a potent factor in the creation could not possibly have been absent in the minds of these Bengali Muslims writing on the same subject - writers who even otherwise appear to be so well-acquainted with the Yogico-Tantric ideas. They did not find much difficulty in adapting the idea of the heavenly light (Nūr), the first attribute of God, to the Hindu concept of the Jyotirmāyā. The idea of bindu had no reasonably similar motif in the corpus of traditional Islamic cosmogony. If the existing myths were not amenable to such an idea, myths could very well be created. In other instances, the Muslim writers of this group created myths where there was none. They could not fail this time, and so appeared bindu on the body of the Nūr in the shape of perspiration.

The details of the creation, whether or not proceeding from Nūr Muḥammad, and if from him, whether or not from his perspiration, vary a great deal from account to account. Not even a semblance of uniformity is

¹ Ibid., 397-400.
² Mallik, K., op.cit., 486-510.
³ Dasgupta, S.B., op.cit., 237.
maintained in tracing the different objects of creation from particular sources, whether from the different parts of the body of Nūr Muḥammad or from the perspiration arising in particular parts of his body. Divergent, fanciful and contradictory as those accounts often appear to be, no discerning eye should fail to find indigenous traditions interspersed in them.

Saiyid Sulṭān speaks of the creation of fire, air, water, sun, moon, from the ġharma. He also mentions the creation of the empyrean, the seat of the Lord (kẖāt-sīṅgāsan/sīṅhāsana), the heaven (sarga), hells (narak) and the tablet (paṭ). There is reference to 6,325,000 years covered by the four ages (cāṛi kāḷ) on earth before Ādam is born. 8,000 years is said to have elapsed between the birth of Ādam and that of Muḥammad.

In Shab-ā Miʿrāj, a later work than Nabī-vahṣā, Saiyid Sulṭān introduces some new elements in his account on rather more traditional lines. He mentions the creation of the celestial tree named Rabba Nūr in which Muḥammad stations himself in the form of a peacock for 17,000 years. Thereafter, instructed by God (Prabhu Niraṅjan), he remains plunged in the ocean for the same period and resumes his position in the said tree. God (Kartār) makes a lamp (kandīl/qindīl) to place Nūr Muḥammad inside. All the creatures (jibgaṇ) are asked by God to have a glimpse of Nūr Muḥammad. Those who pay respect (pargām/prapāma) to him are born as believers (mumin), those who do not, as unbelievers (kāfir), those

1 Nv, fols. 3-4.
2 'Arsh and Kursī.
3 Laḥ, on which Allāh's words are said to have been written with the divine pen (qalam).
4 The traditional Hindu concept of four ages, namely, satya, treta, dvāpara and kali. The standard Hindu formulation given in Manu is 4,320,000 years for the four ages (yugas).
5 Fols. 2a-4a.
who do so at first and then do not do so, as 'unbelievers among the Muslims', those who do not do so at first but in the end, as 'Muslims in the rank of the Hindus' and finally, those who do neither at the beginning nor at the end but only in between, as hypocrites (monāfik/mun afiq). Those who happen to look at the forehead (lalāt) of Nūr Nabi become Rasūls in the world. The saints (muliyā) are those who look at the face (badan) of Nūr Muhammad, while the kāfirs look at the back and the mun āfīqās at the feet.

'Alī Raja' traces from gharma the origin of the three worlds (tribhūban), everything esoteric and exoteric (gupta byākta), the Supreme knowledge (Brahman-jñān), mahāmantras (the supreme names), the four Vedas and fourteen scriptures (Sūstras), twenty-seven Brahmana, the individual soul (Jībāptmā), the Supreme Soul (parātmā/Paramātmā), the Firishtas, etc.

Mīr Shafi' s account of creation is interspersed with Yogico-Tāntric ideas, especially in their Nathist orientation. He begins with the creation of the prophets (nabi) and attributes the creation of 124,000 of them to the same number of gharma bindus, appearing on the head of Nūr Muhammad. Thereafter, he discusses the origin of the moon, revealing his own rapport with the local religious systems. We have already seen that the moon and the sun play a highly important symbolic role in the esoteric discipline of Tāntric Yoga. The moon is situated just below the Sahasrāra or the Lotus of Thousand Petals in the cerebral region and the sun is situated in the region of the navel or in the lowest.

1. Gāgama, fol. 7.
2. Fols. 4b-8b.
plexus (Mūlādhāra). It is highly significant that Mīr Shāfī', in tracing the origin of the moon, attributes it to the gharma of Nūr Muḥammad produced in the region below the forehead, that is, the region of the Sahasrāra. He traces the origin of the sun to the bindu in the terrible aspect of the mind (bhayaṅkara citte). The stars are born of the perspiration all around the forehead.

From the twelve drops on the left side of candra, that is, the region of the Sahasrāra, the twelve zodiacal houses (rāṣi) originate; twenty seven asterisks (nakṣatra) take their birth from the same number of drops of perspiration on the right side of candra. Shāfī thereupon digresses to mention four candras (cāri candra) - Ādi-candra, Nīja-candra, Unmatta-candra and Garala-candra - all important in Yogico-Nāthic systems. ¹ Mīr Shāfī' includes the Hindu divinities in the list of creation. Brahma is produced from the bindu in the left ear, Biskarmā/Viśvakarmā from the gharma outside the nose, and three crores (kuṭi/koṭi) of gods (debagan) from drops in the belly. The sages (muni) come from the lower abdomen (nic nābhi). Shāfī' also mentions the creation of Mārij/Marīci, 'the creature of fire' (agnir jib).²

Nūr in Ḥayāt Mahmūd³ appears to have retained its impersonal character. Ḥayāt combines creation from the parts of the Nūr with that from bindus trickling out of it, without any reference to perspiration. At the time of creation Nūr is divided into four parts, the three

¹ Cf. Shaiḵ Faiżu’llah in his Nāthic literature refers to these candras. (Gorakṣa-vijaya, 152).
² One of the seven great rāṣis and father of Kāśyapa, Marīci is often represented as springing direct from Brahma and this is why Shāfī' calls him the creature of fire.
³ Av, 8-21.
of them making respectively 'arsh, qalam, and bihisht. The fourth one, instructed by God, stays in the 'arsh. For the next 400 years the divine pen (qalam) writes the kalām. Thereafter the fourth part of the Nur is subdivided into another four, one producing the Rasūl, who is requested by God to shake his body, as a result of which 124,000 hindus ooze out of his body leading to the creation of the same number of nabis. Of the remaining three parts, one becomes responsible for the knowledge (jūm) in believers, the other goes to increase their vision, and the last is again withheld for the time being to lead to the rest of the creation. From a piece of a pearl (mati) created from Nur-i Muhammadi the kursi is made. Under the kursi a piece of yaqut is made to cause water in its turn. At the instance of God, four winds created in four directions start blowing on the water. The resultant commotion in the water sends up surf from which fire is made. The fire produces vapour from the water and this creates earth suspended in air. Thereafter, the earth is 'spread out' (bichāila tāni) on the water at the spot where Ka'ba lies now. The mountains are used as pegs to keep earth steady on water. Other means are also adopted to keep it steady. A stone equal to the earth in extent is made to support the earth. A Firishta is placed underneath the stone putting his legs on two mosquitoes. A tortoise (kūrma) sits on the stone with a bull (brṣa) standing on the tortoise and striking its horns against the earth to keep the whole structure steady. Two more mosquitoes are placed on the nostrils of the bull.‡

† This suggests the prevailing notion of a flat surface of the earth.
‡ Is this to account for the earthquakes as a result of the movement of the bull, being bitten by the mosquitoes?
Shaikh Când's account is rather more Şüfistic in spirit and content with occasional echoes of Yogic ideas and symbols. We have already noted that his version does not contain any reference to gharma or bindu. He appears to be the only one among our writers to mention the mystical sound of kun, the creation of the two letters of kāf and nun, through which 'Karīm' makes Himself known. The concept of the Supreme Truth, manifested in a mystical sound (Sabda-Brahman), for instance Om, is as popular in India from olden days as in many other countries. Shaikh Când makes a statement pregnant with deep meaning, when he says that the moon is born in the part of God and the sun in that of the Nur, and that the two proceed from the same semen. It is quite likely that the writer has had the Tantric and Nāthist ideas of the sun and the moon in his mind. He locates the seven heavens in the body. He mentions a situation that involves the fire. God is displeased with fire, that contains smoke, for claiming the distinction appropriate to the Nur, and punishes it by making a part of it impure and unbelieving (kāfir). He later takes pity on the repentant fire and frees it from its kāfir portion, out of which He makes Marīci. The earth is peopled by the descendants of Marīci, who take care of it for 60,000 years. They commit various sins for which God kills them all and creates Asuras. They continue for 30,000 years until they are similarly killed by God for their sins. They are followed by the 'Aśvagan', who look after the earth for 10,000 years. After their annihilation for the same reason, God creates Adam. In Adam, we have earlier noted, the

1 Tālib Nāma, fols.8ff.
2 The identity of Marīci has been noted above.
whole creation is located. Adam is represented as the microcosm of the universe and his body consists of the Yogico-Tántric nerves like idā, piṅgaḷā and Trivenī (i.e. suṣumṇā) as well as the Nāthist elements of the four candras.

The mythological aspect of cosmogony is stressed in all these writings and Hindu elements are replete in all of them. In Diwān 'Ali we read a very naive attempt to forge a connexion with the Hindu mythological traditions regarding the origin of music. While tracing the four Vedas and fourteen scriptures to the Lord's own self (cāri heṭ caudda śāstra Prabhur niḥ haita), Diwān 'Ali refers to the creation by God of the six scales (chay rāg) and thirty-six sub-scales (chatriś rāginī) from the body (aṅga) of Nūr Muḥammad. The latter seeks esoteric and exoteric knowledge from God and learns all the knowledge in Arabic and Persian (Arbī Fārsī jatha/yata śāstra) with the grace of the Lord. Nūr Muḥammad is taught 90,000 subjects, of which he is asked to preach 30,000 to the people and to treat another 30,000 as mystical secrets (guptar ḥakīrī). Later, 'Ali prays to the Prophet (Rasūl) for this knowledge. The Prophet dissuades him, saying that 'Ali will be unable to bear it (māribā sahte), and will lose his life (hārāibā prān), for a single one of these truths (mantra) is equal to the heat of a crore of suns. 'Ali puts great faith in the mercy of the Prophet and manages to get instructed by the latter in this knowledge.

1 Nūr Nāma, fols. 5-12.
2 A traditional Indian concept.
3 Many mystical schools in Islam regard 'Ali as the repository of esoteric knowledge and the same idea is found in other Muslim Bengali writers as pointed out in the preceding section.
Thereafter, 'Ali produces fire from his heart (antar) in trying to practise his knowledge. Unable to bear this, 'Ali entreats Hazrat Nabī to devest him of the great knowledge (mahājñān). The Prophet asks him to strip himself of the knowledge in a dense forest (aghor jāṅgal). 'Ali obeys his command, and the mountain-king (giri mahārāj), being unable to bear the heat of the knowledge released by 'Ali, causes a stream with his tears. Ordinary creatures like monkeys (banar) begin to die when they drink that water. But it endows Hanu (Hanumān)1 with all the secrets of the art of music. In the meanwhile 'Ali goes back to the forest to discover the full development of the six rāgas, thirty-six rāginīs and all rhythms and instruments (tāl lay jantra/yantra), including eight rhythms (aṣṭa tāl) and sixty-four sub-rhythms (cauṣṭi tālī), drums (ghol mṛdaṅga), cymbals (kartaḷi), conch shells (pināk), gongs (kamsa), bells (ghanṭā), flutes (bamsī), sānais, sitars (setārā) and dotārās. 'Ali learns all these arts and comes back to inform the Prophet. The latter, finding them no longer parts of secret knowledge (gopta kārya), asks 'Ali to pass them on to Mahādeva.2 'Ali, then goes to the assembly of Śiva (Śiva sabhāte), who entrusts Nārada3 with the knowledge. Nārada pleases

1 The introduction of Hanumān does not seem readily intelligible in the context. But apart from his popular image as a great warrior, Hanumān is also known to be a Yogācāra, from his power in magic or in the healing art, and Rajata-dyuti, 'the brilliant'. The Rāmāyaṇa says: 'The chief of monkeys is perfect; no one equals him in the śāstras, in learning, and in ascertaining the sense of the scriptures....' Muir IV, 490; Dowson, J.: A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature, 117.

2 Śiva is the traditional source of esoteric knowledge (āgama) in the Hindu religious systems.

3 Nārada is the divine rṣi who first elaborated the art of music in Hindu tradition.
the assembly with his songs and subsequently propagates them in the world (samsāretā dilon pracāri). Underlying the naivety of what appears to be a simple syncretic tale, the attempt to represent a truth, originally revealed to the Prophet, as being passed on to the figures of Hindu tradition, is too important and interesting to overlook.

But the most fascinating attempt by the Muslim writers at accommodating the indigenous creation-myths is that of Saiyid Sulṭān.1 We have already observed at some length the familiarity with the Hindu religious and cosmological notions and symbols in his writings and the facility with which he adapts them. We have also made very brief note of Sulṭān's ideas of cosmic time and sequence culminating in the birth of Muḥammad. We shall make an attempt here to examine his views in some detail, for they reveal a remarkable effort to make use of the Hindu cosmogonical mythology to serve as a foil to the creation of ʿAdam and 'the last of the Prophets'. Sulṭān, as noted earlier, accepts the Hindu concept of four ages on his own terms. The four ages are said to have intervened between the creation of earth and that of ʿAdam. He has compressed a series of characters of the Hindu mythological and religious tradition together with, very rarely, certain figures disfavoured in Muslim traditions into this span, underlining overtly or covertly their failure and ineffectiveness. The whole gamut of the four ages (yugas) is made to appear as a period of gestation for the true divine messenger, one of divine trials and experiments, for it is represented as a cycle of solicitations by earth to God for the right kind of divine representative, persistently ending in disappointment until God decides to create ʿAdam.

1 Nv., fols. 4ff.
According to Sultan, God creates a fire without smoke, whence a primal male (purus pradhān) with the name of Mārij (Marīci), firmly devoted to God, is produced. From the left part of Mārij a beautiful woman (nāri) emerges and the former becomes enamoured of her. There is a divine message (antaraikṣa/antarikṣa bāni), saying that she is created by God for Mārij. They remain ever engaged in making love (pratiniti śṛngar bhunjaye anudin). Sultan says that they are known among the Hindus as Tāyara and Pārvatī, from whom arise Brahmā and Bishnu/Viṣṇu. Another male (purus) named Jān and a female (nāri) are born of them, who marry each other, and out of this wedlock is first born an Asura named Jārn and later a female. The latter two having married, give birth successively to a son (putra) named 'Azāzil and a daughter, both of whom in their turn marry each other. 'Azāzil and his wife become responsible for the birth of Suras and Asuras. The Suras are placed in the heaven and the Asuras in the atmosphere between heaven and earth. 'Azāzil remains very devoted to God and gradually ascends to the seventh heaven. In the meanwhile, earth makes a representation to God that heaven is blessed with all good things, while 'grasses and insects' infest earth. It prays for someone to serve God on earth. The representations are made thrice before God asks Daityas to descend to the earth and lead a virtuous life.

1 Ibid., fols. 4-5 mc.
2 The name of a fallen Pīrīṣṭa, condemned by God for his refusal to pay respect to Adam.
3 All this seems to contain echoes of the legends of the appointment of the first king in the Mahābhārata.
4 Descendants from Diti by Kaśyapa. They are a race of demons and giants, who warred against the gods (Devas) and interfered with sacrifices. They and the Daṇavas are generally associated and are hardly distinguishable. (Dawson, op.cit.,76). Saiyid Sultan takes them as Asuras.
there. 1 At first the Daityas lead a pious life but with the passing away of the older generation, the younger Daityas lapse into a life of vice and profligacy, including adultery (paradār), appropriation of property by force, drinking (surēpān) and cow-slaughter (go-hiṃsā). 2 Unable to bear the weight of these sins (pāp bhār sahite nā pari), earth complains again to God, who makes this time a nabi named Am of the Asuras. Am is taught by a messenger of God in all virtues and in faith in God but he is killed by his fellow Asuras. Thereafter God sends to the Asuras a messenger (dūt), who is made to see the beauty, luxury and temptations of heaven as well as the ghastliness and terror of hell. The messenger tells them about his experiences of heaven and hell and urges them to be good and faithful. The effect of his sermon is only temporary. On earth's representation God makes another nabi named Chayāk, son of Nayāk. He proves no better success and is killed by the Asuras. In the same way 800 nabīs are made by God and killed by the Asuras. 3 Earth feels sad and regrets to be disappointed by God (Prabhū karilā nairās/nirās). Now the Suras are asked by God to come down to earth. A rabid struggle follows between the Suras and the Asuras in which the former, largely outnumbered by the latter, seek help from God. The Fīrishtas sent by God come to the rescue of the Suras and put the Asuras to death. 4 The Suras maintain the earth well for some time. Gradually they yield themselves up to the life of ease (sukher prabhābe) and sin (pāp karma). Earth appeals to God once more and

1 Fol. 7 mc.
2 Fol. 8 mc.
3 Fols. 9-13 mc.
4 Fols. 14-5 mc.
the Firishtas are now entrusted with the responsibility of the earth. They set the tone of a religious and virtuous life. The earth is again peopled by their descendants (tān baṃśe punī khiti haila bharan), who, as Saiyid Sulṭān makes one highly interesting observation, become known as Dvijas. The regularly practice the virtue of making gifts (dān dharma) and doing pious acts (sat-karma). After some time they too enter into the path of sin, and Nirajana with a view to imparting the knowledge of Nūr (Nūr-e jān) sends Vedaśāstra. To let the people know about right and wrong, the four Vedas are sent to four great beings (mahājān) - the Rg-veda to Brahma, the Yajur-veda to Viṣṇu, the Sāma-veda to Maheśa (Śiva) and the Atharva-veda to Hari. The four Vedas bear witness to God's will about the appearance of Muḥammad in the end. The people, unable to read the scriptures, remain in confusion. A Firishta from behind the veil of space (antarikṣa) teaches them how to read them. The Dvijas acquire the art of reading. Following the message of the Vedas, people begin to serve God faithfully. With the passage of time all good works are again forsaken. Earth pours out all its sorrows and lamentations to God for not being blessed with a true servant of God. Earth receives this time a Yogi clad in a tiger-skin, with matted hair on his head, a serpent locked around his head, skulls as his necklace, ashes all over his body and seated on a bull. He remains immersed in Yogic contemplation in Padmāsana without any consciousness of self or non-self (atmapar). But even an ascetic of his type is overpowered by

1 Fol. 16 mc. Dvija, lit. 'twice-borne' refers to the Brahmās.

2 Hari is but another name of Viṣṇu.

3 E cāri Bedeta sākṣā diche Kartāre / abaśeṣe Muḥḥammad byākta haila. Ibid.

4 The allusion is clearly to Śiva. Fol. 18 mc.
passion (kām). Saiyid Sultān represents Śiva losing his good sense (bhālamanda jñān) in a feat of drunkenness (surāpān) and making a gift (dān) of his lady-love to an Asura. The lady was subsequently redeemed after a great battle (mahāraṇ).¹

Thereafter God sends someone to protect (rakṣā karibār) earth. But even this new deputy commits adultery with the wife of his own preceptor (gurudār).² He is followed on earth by a powerful king, who commits many sins. He violates the words of a sage (muni)³ and displeases him, as a result of which the sage curses him and causes a deluge. A huge boat (nauka) is constructed, on board of which the king along with a pair of all creatures take shelter.⁴ A severe storm threatens the boat with submergence. It is only saved by God in response to the earnest prayers of a great believer in God, riding the boat at the time. The boat is kept floating on the back of a fish (matsya).

Similarly God prevents the earth twice from going down

¹This is only what emerges clear of the reading of the Ms. here, which otherwise seems very confusing, worse confounded by a possible bungling of the scribe. Although there is no straightforward mythical basis for Sultān’s contention, there is a doubtless tradition involving Śiva against an Asura in a battle, caused by the Asura’s desire for Pārvatī, the consort of Śiva. A protracted battle joined in by many gods, goddesses and demons, it ends in the Asura named Andhakāsura, being killed and the demons vanquished. (Matsya-purāṇa, Chapter 179; Varāha-purāṇa, quoted by GopinathaRāo, T.A. : Elements of Hindu Iconography, I. ii, 379ff ).
²Fol. 19 me.
³The reference is, most likely, to the seventh Manu and also the episode concerning the Fish or Mīna-avatāra of Viṣṇu.
⁴Reference to Nūh’s voyage.
into the hell (pātāl) under the burden of sins committed on its surface. On one occasion a tortoise (kūrma) and on the other a boar (barāha) keep the earth steady on their respective back (prajātha) and tusks (dasan).\(^1\) On another occasion the earth is relieved of a great tyrant and sinner in the person of Hiraṇyakaśipu, who is killed by Narasiṃha created by Prabhu Niraṇjana.\(^2\)

Thereupon a king named Bali becomes so powerful on earth that he threatens to occupy the kingdom of the gods (deb-rājya). The gods appeal to the Lord, who creates (srjila) a dwarf (bāban/vāmana). The vāmana makes Bali readily agree to his request for the amount of land covered by three steps. The dwarf places one step to the nether region (pātāl), one on earth and the third one on the head of the king, under the weight of which Bali goes down to the nether region.\(^3\) Saiyid Sultan next represents earth as having suffered from one, who severs the head of his mother at the instance of his father.\(^4\) Sultan adds:

Mother is superior to father, for it is the mother who nurtures from the infancy. The act of beheading such a mother is not a just act (sat karma) by a great man (mahājan).

Sultan brings two-fold charges against Parasurāma - the one is that of a matricide (mātrībad/mātr-vadha) and the

\(^1\) Fols. 20-1 mc. Allusions to the Tortoise (Kūrma) and Boar (Barāha) Avatāras of Viṣṇu.

\(^2\) Ibid., fol. 21 mc. Allusion to Nṛsiṃha-avatāra of Viṣṇu. It is to be noted that the allusion to the Hindu avatāras here is not in the form of incarnations of God Himself. God is not said to have assumed these forms (rup), but created (srjila) them.

\(^3\) Fols. 21-2 mc. Allusion to the Dwarf or Vāmana-avatāra of Viṣṇu. Sultan's version differs slightly from the traditional Hindu one in which the Vāmana-avatāra stepped over heaven and earth in two strides; but then out of respect to Bali's kindness he stopped short, and left to him pātāla. (Dowson, op.cit., 42).

\(^4\) Fol. 22 mc. Allusion to Paraṣurāma, the sixth Avatāra of Viṣṇu.
other is that of killing a Brāhmaṇa (bipra-badh). For this, God is said to have terminated Parasurāma's right (adhikār) over earth. The earth next complains to God against another of His representatives, who equally fails to discharge his responsibility for maintaining the earth (nārīla pālibār). He goes to the forest to honour the words of his father (i.e. Daśāratha), and as his father dies in his absence, he fails to be of any use to him. He loses his wife (Śītā) kidnapped by a demon (dānāb i.e. Rāvaṇa) and loses his sense of judgment too (jñān hārāilā), in as much as, following the advice of Sugrīva, he slays Bālī; whereas had he ingratiated himself with Bālī, the latter would have recovered Jānaki (Śītā) instantaneously. Sulṭān brings a more severe accusation against Rāma. He thoroughly disapproves of Śītā's banishment by Rāma after having been recovered and subjected to a fire- ordeal. Saiyid Sulṭān fails to condone the act of deserting a pregnant woman in a forest infested by ogres (rākṣas) and wild animals by one who is known for his greatness. Sulṭān says:

Had the ogres (rākṣas) kidnapped Śītā again, the sin of killing a woman (bipra-badh pāp) would be on him [Rāma]. Had the ogres' tears chanced to devour her, the calumny (jañāna) would engulf the world. 

1 Ibid. Allusion to Rāma-candra, the seventh Avatāra of Viṣṇu.

2 Rāma established friendship with Sugrīva, brother of Bālī, the king of Kīśkindhā, between whom there was no love lost. Rāma, siding with Sugrīva, killed Bālī in an unjust manner. Bālī, while breathing his last, bitterly complained against Rāma, saying that that the latter should have sought his help against Rāvaṇa, rather than that of Sugrīva, who was no match for his elder brother.

3 Fol.23 mc.
Saiyid Sultan points out that Sītā's death would have spelt the death of 'two more' in her womb. He strongly maintains that even if Rāma had no faith (pratyay) left in her, he should have removed Sītā to a safe place. Sultan assures himself that there was no wise man (pandit) in Rāma's court (sabhāte) to prevent him from taking such an unjust course.

This long list of unhappy experiences with the divine messengers of God, brought out through the cleverly devised motif of an anthropomorphised earth complaining to God Himself, sets the stage for the creation of Ādam and a line of prophets culminating in Muhammad. We cannot miss the undertone of pious conviction in the words Saiyid Sultan puts in the mouth of God, by now determined to have no more false starts:

Let this be known for certain
That I shall create Ādam:
And from Ādam
I shall maintain the creation.

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1 The foetuses of Lava and Kuśa, the twin sons of Rāma and Sītā.
2 Fols. 23-4 mc.
3 Fol. 25 mc.
C. History, Legend and Myth:

One of the most significant attempts by these writers in the way of introducing their religious traditions to the local milieu was to identify the forces opposed to Islam even outside India with Hinduism. It is highly significant that the struggle between Islam and non-Islamic religious forces in Arabia in the time of the Prophet Muhammad is represented as one between Islam and Hinduism. Abu Jahl, the uncle of Muhammad, who was opposed to the prophetic mission of the latter, is portrayed in their writings as the leader of the 'Hendus' (Hindus), addressing his god as:

Thou art Brahma, thou art Visnu and thou art Nirmajan. Thou art the protector of all and sundry. 2

He comes to know about the prospective birth of Muhammad and his mission, and tries various means to take the life of Muhammad before and after his birth. After his birth, Muhammad is safely concealed, while another boy is substituted for him. Abu Jahl, taking him for the son of 'Abdullah (i.e. Muhammad), rebukes him for condemning Hinduism (Hinduani), as he is the son of a Hindu (Hendurtanay) himself, 3 and for intending to preach the Muslim ways (Smar Muchalmant). Determined to burn the boy alive after subjecting him to a thorough process of Hinduisation, Abu Jahl says to the boy:

I shall first make a Hindu of you and this will bring you merit at the time of your death. If you follow the practices of your own order, good results will follow in the next life (parakal). I shall first draw an image (murati) on your

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1 ShM, fols. 22a-b.
2 Ibid., fol. 92a.
3 Consistent with the theme, Muhammad's father is taken as a Hindu.
forehead. Secondly, I shall make you wear a sacred thread (paitā). Thirdly, I shall make you perform all rites and ceremonies one after another. Fourthly, I shall make you bathe and offer oblations (chinān tarpan). Finally, you will be abandoned to the flames.

Hayāt Mahmūd refers to Muhammad's activities in Medina and says that the Prophet despatches great warriors in different directions who 'bring along the severed heads of the Hindus wherever they get them'. About the great power and qualities of Ṣū'īfaqār, the sword that 'Alī received 'by the command of Allāh', Hayāt Mahmūd writes:

The sword (khaṅdā) sucks up all water in the sea and burns out hills and jungles. Its power extends over the distance covered by seven days' journey. The Hindus keeping themselves at a distance flee in terror.

With the same end in view the non-Muslim power of Iraq, headed by king Jaikūm, who fought against the Muslim army led by the Prophet himself, is alluded to as a Hindu one. The protective deity of the kingdom is referred to as 'Gosāi' (Gosvāmī i.e. Viṣṇu), to whom the king intended to sacrifice (balidān) the Muslims.

The most interesting aspect of the attempt to bring Muslim traditions nearer to the religious and cultural life of the land was, however, to find parallels for Muslim heroes and characters in Hindu religious and mythological traditions and draw comparisons, favourable or unfavourable, between them. The authors of this endeavour were interested in establishing the superiority of the Muslim characters vis-à-vis their Hindu counterparts, but their main aim was to make both appear as parts of a

1 ShM, fol. 22a-b.
3 Ibid., 5.
4 Zain ud-Dīn : Rasūl-vijaya, fol. 11b.
single system of thought and belief, with a view to securing a congenial home for the Islamic figures in the land. For the achievement of this particular goal, which weighed heavily on their mind, they sensed the importance of establishing the structural identity of the alien figures of Muslim tradition in the local milieu, by drawing parallels from the Hindu tradition, though the characters of the latter were shown to be inferior or at best equal to their Muslim counterparts. Apart from individual beings, parallels were found and made use of also in respect of particular situations and events in the Muslim tradition.

Zain ud-Dīn in his account of the military exploits of the armies of Islam describes the heroic fight between 'Alī and Janā, the son of Jaikūm, king of Iraq and remarks that the gods and demons (Surāsūr) of the Hindu tradition were 'trembling' to watch the fight, that Indra, the Gandhāryas and other gods were 'astounded' to see them fighting; and that Kṛpācārya, Bīrāṭa and Abhimanyū of the Mahābhārata 'would have taken to their heels in the forest to face a war of this kind'. Similar comparisons are also made by Sābirīd Khān and Donā Ghāzī. Donā Ghāzī goes as far as calling the fight 'greater' than the one between Rāma and Rāvana and 'a hundred times' greater than 'the great war of Kurukṣetra'. Shāh Muhammad Šagīr compares Yūsuf, the monarch of Egypt ('Azīz Miṣr), with Rāma, the ideal type of paternalistic ruler in Hindu tradition, and notes:

1 Fols. 38, 42, 47.
2 Rasūl-vijaya, (DMs 377:sl.434), fol. 2 mc.
4 Ibid.
Even Ram was unable to rule the kingdom in his [Yūsuf's] manner. ¹

He compares Yūsuf in respect of his generosity to the proverbial donors of Hindu tradition - Karṇa and Bali, and finds them 'no match' for him. ² Amina, the wife of 'Abdullah and mother of Prophet Muhammad, is said by Saiyid Sulpāna to have excelled a Vidyādhara in beauty. ³ Śaci, the beautiful wife of Indra (Indrē Indrāṇī) is said to have been 'no equal' to 'Chāyā' (Ṣaiyād), the beloved of Amīr Ḫamza. ⁴ Badī' ul-Jamāl on her first encounter with Saif ul-Mulūk finds him a far greater beauty than Kēma-deva, the Hindu god of love. ⁵ Donā Ghāzī also refers to a white elephant excelling 'Indra's Aiyrābat'. ⁶ The Prophet during his 'ascent to the heaven' had to pass through many wiles and temptations to prove himself above all that. At one stage we find him 'turning his eyes away' from a damsel as beautiful as 'Rāi' (Rādhā). ⁷ On his journey back to earth Muhammad is greeted at successive stages by the Hindu presiding spirits of the solar system and 'worshipped'. ⁸ Finally, the Prophet comes down to meet Mount Sumeru, exchanges greetings, and proceeds for his own land. ⁹

The Prophet's daughter Fāṭima dons the highly popular symbolic robe of the mother in a land in which the cult of the mother-goddess, represented by scores of

¹ Fol. 75.
² Ibid.
³ ShM, fol. 10a.
⁴ 'Abd un-Nabī; Vijaya-Ḥamza; (DMs 342:s1.2), fol. 821b.
⁵ Donā Ghāzī, fol. 110.
⁶ Ibid., 1⁵2b.
⁷ Av, 182.
⁸ ShM, fol. 160a-b.
⁹ Ibid.
Sakti goddesses, constitutes the kernel of its religious life. Hayat Mahmud on commencing to write his Jangnama takes the feet of Fatima up on his head. Saiyid Murtaza addresses Fatima as 'the mother of the world' (jagat-janan), The association of Fatima with the concept of Sakti is more clearly brought out in some later compositions. Pagla Kanai, a Muslim poet in the nineteenth century, calls Fatima 'mother Tara' and also 'mother Tariq'. He prays to her for the deliverance of her father's community (ummat). He says:

Oh mother,...you remained manifest, and later became concealed....Pagla Kanai, who is of no consequence, cries for you with every breath; please cast a little of the shadow of your feet on me; oh mother, take me at your feet. Oh mother Tara, the redeemer of the world, oh mother Tariq, you shall appear as the benefactor of the Muslims at the time, when Israfil will blow his horn, when all will be reduced to water, and when your father's community will sink into the water without a boat.

Fatima is also brought into direct comparison with Kali and found to possess greater virtue, as we are told:

Your mother Kali is indeed virtuous: she placed her feet on her husband's chest. Did my gracious mother ever trample Ali with her feet?

In another work entitled Fatimar suratNama, the daughter of the Prophet is thoroughly recreated in the likeness of a Bengali beauty.

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1 Ed., Islam, M. in Kabi Heyat Mamud, 1.
2 Yoga-Qalandar, fol.1a.
3 Israfil, the angel, who is supposed to sound the last trumpet at the Resurrection.
5 According to Hindu tradition, Siva, the consort of Kali got himself trampled by the latter in order to stop her frenzied march of destruction.
6 Quoted in Bengali, Islam, M., ibid., 145.
7 DCBM, Introduction, xxv.
The most interesting attempt, however, is to bring the Prophet himself in line with the religious ideas and mythological traditions familiar in the country. The most important step in the direction is to make an equation between the Islamic concept of Nabi and the Hindu concept of Avatāra. The Qur‘ānic recognition of the Nabi being born in different countries at different times provided an apparent basis for this theological concord. These writers have to compromise much to reconcile the doctrine of the Avatāras with their own religious traditions. An Avatāra is an incarnation of God Himself, unlike the Islamic concept of the Nabi and Rasul. On the one hand the basic identity of the two concepts is asserted. Saiyid Sulṭān has no hesitation in writing: 'Nabi is one whom we call Abatār.' On the other hand, Muḥammad is said to be the incarnation of God’s own self (Mahammad rūp dhari niḥ Abatār), and is created out of God’s own self (niḥ āmsa pracārilā). During the Mi’rāj, as Muḥammad stands face to face with Allāh and is unable to get over his diffidence in God’s presence, Allāh comforts him, saying:

I have created you of My own body. You and I have ever remained a single form. Your body is not different from Mine.

Such assertions underlining the essential oneress of Allāh and His Prophet are intended to achieve their object of casting Muḥammad in an easily identifiable local mould.

1 The difference between the Nabi and Rasul lies in the fact that the former is a receiver of divine message alone, while the latter receives message as well as a book.
2 Nv, fol. 22 mc.
3 Haq, E.: 'Kabi Saiyad Sulṭān', SPP, ii, 1341 B.S., 50.
4 ShM. fols. 151b-2a mc.
Despite all this, the identification between the Nabī and the Avatāra could not proceed beyond a point without giving rise to a few theological problems to be confronted and answered. The myth and tradition of Kṛṣṇa presented a situation that is typical of the problem. Said Sultān, who fits Hari or Kṛṣṇa into his line of the Prophets, mentions the advent of the Prophets to redeem people from sins (pāp nistārite) and forbid the worship of images (murati pujite sab nisedh karite). The Hindu tradition of iconolatry involving Kṛṣṇa no less than other great divinities presents a formidable challenge to the very purpose set for the creation of the Prophets. Besides, the amorous activities of Kṛṣṇa adds to the complexities of the situation which, as a devoted Muslim, Sultān found hard to reconcile with his notion of the prophethood. He shows ingenuity in obviating some of his difficulties by resorting partly to the devise of creating new myths serving his purpose and partly through identifying symbols in the Hindu and Islamic traditions. His attempts become evident as we examine in its outline his treatment of the Kṛṣṇa legend.

The birth of Kṛṣṇa is preceded by the absence of any Prophet (Nabī) among men, the supremacy of the descendants of Qābil (Kābīl ārambha) and the consequent prevalence of vices like adultery (dāri/paradāri), drunkenness (surī) and other evil deeds (akarmma). In the circumstances, God decides to create among them (ārambha) one, who is capable of making his folks (jāti) adhere to his words and accept the supremacy of God alone (ek Nīrājan). Iblīs, the sinful (pāpiṣṭha), comes to

1 Ny., fol. 311b ff.
2 Ibid., fol. 313a.
3 Saiyid Sultān identifies Iblīs with Nārada and freely uses one for the other and sometimes even conjointly as 'Iblīs-Nārad'.
know of this, feels concerned about maintaining his evil supremacy (mohor Naradpanā ek nā rahiba) and remains apprehensive that people may eschew idolatry (murati pujite tabe ek nā rahila). He assumes the form of a sage and visits the king Kamsa, maternal uncle (matul) of Kṛṣṇa, who in the meanwhile grows up in the womb of his mother. Iblīs advises Kamsa to take the life of Kṛṣṇa, who is destined to pose a great threat to Kamsa's position and order. Kamsa tries various means to kill him, but in vain. Kṛṣṇa in the foetus comforts his mother that he is indestructible. He advises his mother to exchange him, as soon as he is born, with a girl born about the same time to a cowherd (goāla) couple. His instructions are followed after his birth. Iblīs reveals the whole matter to Kamsa, but all of Kamsa's attempts to destroy the boy prove abortive. Iblīs sends one of his servants named Mahakāla, but the boy kicked him to death. He gets Hari bitten by a huge pack of snakes with no better result. The young Hari grows into an enchanting beauty, with yellow garment, bells ringing around his waist, peacock feather (mayur puccha) on his head, jewel studded ear-rings (ratan kundal) in the ears and body besmeared with sandal-paste (candan) and perfumes (kasturi). The seductive beauty of Hari causes the women (kulabati) to give up their husbands (nijpati) and household duties (grhakārya tejila) and seek amorous pleasures with Hari (Hari same bhūjibāre sāhanta yubati). Hari makes dalliances with Radhā in different styles of erotic pleasures (bibidha prakār rase śringār bhūjila), and in the process her bangles are broken (tuṭiya balayākār), clothes dishevelled (khasila basan), the waters of perspiration form new marks of physical

1 Ibid., fols. 313b-18b.
2 Ibid.; fol. 320b.
decoration (śrama jale aṅga-rāg rachilek puni), the vermilion mark on the forehead gets mixed with the collyrium of her eyes (sindur milita haila kājal nayāne) and the sandal-paste and perfumes are washed away (śrame jale bhāsi gela kasturi candan). 1 Amidst this life of gay abandon, Hari receives a stern message from heaven condemning him for his profligate life and reminding him of his solemn responsibility for guiding the people in the way of the sole God. Hari withdraws himself from his amorous life. The cowherd women, unable to bear his loss, make his icons and adore it to the accompaniment of songs about his love-dalliances with themselves. Saiyid Sultan writes here:

The women folk continue to sing those songs. This despicable practice (kutsit acār) prevails in the land in which the virtues of adultery (paradār) are ever proclaimed (nirantar pracāre). What merit (pūnya) is there in this? Why is such practice preached at all? The young girls (yubati) are disturbed (bicalita) to hear about this. The young men and women take this lesson from the activities of Hari (Harir bebnar) that adultery is no sin and they will adopt such manner in the pretext of Hari (Hari upalakṣe). No good results accrue from such activities (e sakal karme phal nāhika niscay). 2

Hari himself feels sad (dukhṣita) to see all this evil life and also that his followers worship his idol (murati gariā sabe puje anukṣan) as the final end (paramārtha) instead of God. In the meanwhile, 'Yajun' (Arjuna) joins him, to whom Hari expresses his anxiety about his folks who are destined to end up in hell by worshipping him. Determined to cut himself off from this vicious life, Hari, accompanied by Arjuna makes a flight to heaven.

1 Ibid., fols. 321-3a.
2 Ibid., fol. 331a-b.
carried by his own vehicle, the mythical bird Garuḍa.  

At the end of his journey, they arrive at the threshold of the paradise. As Hari decides to enter into it, he is surrounded by the guards, beaten (cakra buha/byūha beriṇa māranta sarbajan) and turned back with abuse and insults (dur dur kari sabe boleta bacan). He is accused of violating God's instructions, allowing himself being treated as the ultimate truth (paramārtha) and worshipped, corrupting himself and letting others corrupt themselves (āpane majāiyā pāpe anek majāilā). Crest-fallen, Hari comes back to his people and advises them not to worship his image along with Radha and to worship God instead. He tells them that he is as human as anybody else among his people (tumi jei mata nar sei mata ami) and why should a man worship another of his kind (nara hai nara seba ki kārane tumi). Hari's words fail to carry much effect, as Iblīs-Narad reappears to lead the people astray. He asks people to consider how could they worship God without having seen Him (kirupe sebiba tumi nā dekhi nayan). Hari stands before your eyes and he is to be taken for God and worshipped. Thus, Iblīs, pledged to goad the people of Adam into wrong path, succeeds in winning the heart of the people and certifying what is bad as good (manda karma bhāla hae pracāriṇa dila).  

It is in this background of the notions of Nabī and Avatāra that the tradition of Muḥammad is introduced in these Muslim writings. The presentation of the theme of Muḥammad in the chronological framework of Hindu traditions was further intended to raise an air of local

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1 The concept itself in some essential respect and the details of the journey through different spheres of the celestial world are clear reminiscent of Muḥammad's ascent to heaven on the back of the heavenly horse, Borak.

2 Ibid., fols. 332a-9a.
familiarity. The Hindu concept of the four yugas—Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali finds ready acceptance among these writers. And Muhammad has been fitted into this chronological scheme with interesting theological consequences. The Arab Prophet appears on the Bengali scene as the Avatāra of the Kali-yuga. Hayāt Mahmód writes:

Mahammad Nabi, let it be known, is the Kali Abatār.  

He writes elsewhere:

Concealed in the empyrean (arş/’arsh), He became manifest in Kāli and was born in Abdūlā’s family.

Saiyid Sultān refers to a prophecy:

Mahammad shall become the Nabi in the Kali [age].

Elsewhere he puts in the mouth of Muḥammad:

In the end He made me Paigambar. This keeps me in constant anxiety and alarm. The ummat will commit sin in the Kali age and will perform neither justice nor virtue (dharma). ... How to keep the ummat committed to my charge, upright in the Kali age—this is what keeps me concerned all the time and my body is getting thin and burnt out.

In this general setting of Hindu ideas about Avatāras and the Kali-yuga, the story of Muḥammad’s birth and early life is told in a manner which, though not peculiar to the land of its audience, was certainly quite popular there, keeping in tune with its Purānic and Mangala-kāvya traditions. Heroism, supernatural marvels and romance formed important parts in the religious and mythological traditions of Bengal as elsewhere. In

1 ShM, fol. 257b; Nv, fol. 133b; Hv, 155.  
2 Hv, 33.  
3 Ibid., 3.  
4 Nv, fol. 133b.  
5 ShM, fol. 257b.
attempting to make Islam fit the local mythological pattern, the Muslim authors make obvious deviations from and distortions of history, and they do not seem to have been concerned very much with the notions of purity either religious or historical. They subordinate all other considerations to the primary object of securing a receptive audience in their co-religionists, for which they resort to whatever means they found necessary and ready at hand. Incidents and situations from the legends about other prophets, recognised in Islam, as well as figures of Hindu tradition are attributed to the life of Muḥammad. The prophecy about the birth of Muḥammad threatening the existing order and the vain attempts of the ruling authority to take his life before and after his birth are connected with some of the canonical prophets of Islam before Muḥammad as with Kṛṣṇa in Hindu tradition. Muḥammad is clothed with these myths to become a living part of this long heritage of popular notions.

Āmina, the mother of Muḥammad, who is represented as the daughter of the king of the Arabs (Arab rājār kanyā Āminā sundarī) or of Mecca is infatuated with love for 'Abdullāh at the first sight of him from the balcony of her palace. She sends for him and brings him into the privacy of her bolted room. She proposes to marry him and longs to possess the sweet fragrance arising out of the divine Nūr in 'Abdullāh's body, which he himself was unaware of. She offers to 'unite' their bodies and have 'amorous games' with him.¹ A secret

¹ See below.
² Av, 117.
³ ShM, fol. 14b.
⁴ Ibid., fols. 10b-11a.
marriage takes place in the Gandharva form, attended by 'four Muslims' brought from the town (ṣahar) and four hundred thousand Firishtas sent by God. Jibrā'il reads the nikāh, Mīkā'il serves as the pleader (wakāl) and Iṣrā'il and 'Izrā'il as sāksī (witness). Seven months later, Āmina's pregnancy is brought to light, which leads to a fight between Āmina's father and 'Abdullāh, in which the former is killed. On the death of this 'king' (narapati), 'the right' of Mecca passes to Abū Jahl. About this time an astrologer named Ichup (Yūsuf) predicts that Āmina will give birth to Muhammad, who is to put an end to traditional life and order. Alarmed at the prospect of losing his throne, Abū Jahl desperately tries various means to kill the foetus in Āmina's womb. A midwife is sent to force an abortion for Āmina by administering drugs, but with no effect. The midwife later tries to take the foetus out with her hands. The unborn baby cries out, warning the 'impure' woman against 'touching' him. He grabs the persistent midwife's hands with his teeth and releases her only after she pronounces the kalima. Undaunted, Abū Jahl tries gentle persuasion with 'Abdullāh to get rid of his wife and child. In return he offers 'Abdullāh as many women as he likes, who are 'exquisitely beautiful as a Bidyādhārī'. Unsuccessful in all his attempts, Abū Jahl remains watchful for the occasion of the birth, making arrangements for the baby to be handed over to him. He decides to send 'four Muslims' in Āmina's presence to induce Muhammad to come out of the womb. Allāh sends four Firishtas in the guise

1 ShM, fol. 11b; Av, 118. A Hindu style of marriage being effected by mere exchange of garlands between the bride and the bridegroom.
2 ShM, fols. 11b-12a.
3 Ibid., fol. 14a.
4 Ibid., fol. 16a-b; Av, 121.
5 Nv, fols. 14b-17b; Av, 122.
of Muslims to comfort Muhammed. Jibrāʾīl assures the baby in the womb and asks him to come out. Muhammad decides to come out in the night. After his birth the midwife, entrusted with the charge of bringing him to Abū Jahl, decides to save Muhammad by substituting her own newly born son for him. Muhammad is passed on to the safe custody of Ḥalīma, while his substitute, assured by jibrāʾīl that he will become the first martyr (shahīd) to be received in heaven, is brought to the presence of Abū Jahl, who is repeatedly told about the oneness of God by the boy. The boy baffles all Abū Jahl’s attempts to humiliate and kill him until he himself desires his death and goes straight to heaven.¹

The birth of Muhammad is followed by the visit to Amina and the new born of all the heavenly beings – the previous prophets and their families such as Ādam and Ḥauwa, Shīsh and his wife, Nūh, Ibrāhīm, accompanied by his two wives – Sarah and Hajira, Shukra, the beautiful wife of Musā and Maryam, ‘the mother of Ichup’ (Yūsuf).² The celestial virgins (yūrs) come to greet the last of the Prophets with ‘pitchers full of water’.³ They give him a bath, dress him in the choicest garments and offer prayers. Ādam and Ḥauwa⁴ take Muhammad on their lap with great affection.⁵

On the other hand, Hayāt Maḥmūd tells us that Indra Rāj and other gods become startled at the birth of Muhammad. It is also followed by the breaking of Indra’s canopy and the shaking of his throne. The gate to Indra’s

¹ Ny, fols. 18a-24b.
² An obvious confusion with Ḥusān.
³ Ibid., fol. 28b; Av: 123.
⁴ A Hindu practice in Bengal accompanying almost all auspicious occasions.
⁵ Ny, fol. 29b.
heaven is closed; the gods are flabbergasted and none is able to reach heaven.  

The subsequent development of the story of the life of Muhammad proceeds neatly in the framework of the literary type of the *Qiṣṣaṣ al-ʿAmbiyaʾ*. The broad outline of his historical life is expanded with a great variety of legends and myths, emphasizing his divine and supernatural nature.

During his upbringing at the home of his uncle Abū ʿTālib, Muhammad goes with other boys to graze goats and hits an intransigent goat with a stick. God, disapproving of this expression of anger in the Prophet, sends Jibrāʾīl, who rips open Muḥammad’s body to take his heart out and purge it of ‘desire, anger, greed, attachment, etc.’  

According to the *Ambiyaʾ-vanī*, two ‘white birds’ come to carry Muḥammad on their wings and perform this purge by taking out the heart and washing it of its impurities.

The eyes of Ṭalib, the son of Abū ʿTālib, are said to have remained closed since his birth and to have opened only either when ‘placed on the lap’ of Muḥammad or when Muḥammad called Ṭalib by his name.

Khadija is attracted to Muḥammad when she sees ‘clouds forming an umbrella over the head of the Rasūl’ and ‘trees prostrating on the ground touching his feet’.

ʿUmar comes to realize the divine nature of Muḥammad, while he is chasing a fugitive cow. The cow

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1 *Av*, 123; *Hv*, 3.
2 *Nv*, fol. 41a.
3 *Av*, 129.
4 *Nv*, fol. 43a.
5 *Av*, 131.
6 *Nv*, fol. 45b.
calls herself the servant of Muḥammad and tells him about the futility of turning against the master while 'Umar was unable to cope with the servant.¹

A blind Arab, opposed to Islam, gets back his vision by application of 'the dust of the Nabi's feet' without his knowing about it. As soon as he comes to know, he makes successive attempts to damage his eyes again but with no success. He comes to see the divine nature of Muḥammad and is converted to Islam.²

Muḥammad is kept as a hostage for a deer captured by a kāfir for the time the deer requires to go to the forest to feed her starving yearlings and come back. The little ones of the deer refuse milk from their mother because she has kept the Prophet as a hostage for them. They all come back to the kāfir just when he has almost decided to take the life of the hostage, and thus save the Prophet's life.³

Muḥammad is credited with great miraculous feats to prove his religion and prophethood to his opponents, especially to Abū Jahl and his followers. They all approach him asking proofs of his dīn and paighambar.⁴ They ask him to convert a stone into a tree with two long branches, one spreading eastward and the other westward, with flowers and birds, and kalam written on every leaf and being read by the birds. Muḥammad, encouraged by Jibrā'īl, performed exactly what was required of him.⁵

Abū Jahl invites people to his palace to listen to the anti-Muslim utterances of an idol. Muḥammad, determined to undo his scheme, comes to the palace and

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¹ Ibid., fol. 68a-69a; Av, 147-8.
² Nv, fol. 84a-b; Av, 160.
³ Nv, fol. 84b-89a; Av, 161-3.
⁴ Av, 156.
⁵ Ibid.
meets on the way a group of Gandharvas, riding horses, or fairies (par). 2 They inform him that there are Hindus among the fairies and that a Hindu fairy lives inside the idol who is responsible for all this. 3 According to Hayāt Māmūd, Iblīs, stationed inside the idol, performs such things. 4 The Muslim spirits do away with the evil spirit inside the idol and substitute one of themselves to glorify God and Muhammad, so that when Abū Jahl approaches the idol before the august gathering, the spirit inside condemns Abū Jahl and idolatry. In utter disgust Abū Jahl throws the idol into the garbage heap. This is followed by a large number of conversions to Islam. 5

On another occasion Muhammad, challenged by Abū Jahl, breaks the moon into two parts with a stroke of his finger, and make one part of it enter his right sleeve and the other his left, and then takes the two parts respectively from his left and right sleeves. The moon speaks in his presence, giving pious advice, and finally the Prophet replaces the two parts in the sky and makes them unite. 6

The Prophet’s ascent to the heaven is disbelieved by Abū Jahl and others. Abū Jahl sarcastically asks Muhammad if he even knows the direction in which the Bait ul-Maqaddas lies. Jibrā’īl instantly brings the Bait ul-Maqaddas itself on the spot for Muhammad and puts the disbelievers to shame. 7

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1 Nv, fol. 89a-91a.  
2 Av, 163.  
3 Nv, fol. 91b.  
4 Av, 163.  
5 Ibid., 163-4; Nv, fol. 92a-3a.  
6 Nv, fol. 100b-2b; Av, 168-70.  
7 Av, 208-9.
During his flight to Medina the cave in which Muḥammad and Abū Bakr take shelter for the night is concealed by the command of Khudā from their pursuers by a spider, which weaves a net at the entrance, as well as by two pigeons, who remain hatching their eggs at the threshold. A snake in a hole inside the cave tries to come out in order to pay its respects to the Rasūl, finds Abū Bakr blocking its way, and bites him. The Rasūl curses the snake, but cures Abū Bakr by applying his own saliva. During the war between the Muslims and the Meccans 'Alī is also cured of his eye trouble by the application of the Prophet's saliva. Surāq, son of Jasim, pursuing Muḥammad on a fast running horse, finds the hoofs of his horses stuck in the rock without any trace of water.

Iblīs joins the Meccan army against Muḥammad and God sends Jibrā'īl, Isrāfīl and Mīkā'īl with 3000 fighters to reinforce the Muslim army, leaving no other alternative for Iblīs than deserting the field of battle. To create difficulties for the Muslim soldiers Iblīs plays another trick. He appears to the Muslim soldiers in dream in the guise of a beautiful woman, causing them to ejaculate. The Kāfīrs had already cut off their water-supply, and the lack of water renders them unable to bathe and purify their bodies. The matter is reported to the Prophet, who prays to God for rain with success.

1 Av, 213,
2 Ibid., 213; Ny, fol. 169a-b.
3 Ny, fol. 223b.
4 Ibid., fol. 169b; Av, 214.
5 Ny, fols. 184b-5a.
6 Ibid., fols. 179a-180a; Av, 217.
In his war against the Jews, Jibrā'il, instructed by God, gives Muhammad the secret of success in the engagement. Advised by Jibrā'il, he throws a handful of dust at the enemy, which multiplies one hundred thousand times and blinds the enemy to give a victory to the Muslims.¹

Finally, Jibrā'il, accompanied by Izrā'il, comes to tell Muḥammad about his ensuing death. While Muḥammad bids farewell to his kith and kin and other believers, both angels disappear. As the actual moment of the Prophet's death draws near, Izrā'il reappears to take his life. Muḥammad requests him to wait till Jibrā'il returns. Jibrā'il appears with all the Firishtas and Izrā'il takes his soul (ātma) out of his body. The corpse of the Prophet being bathed, Jibrā'il himself starts applying sweet scent to the body. The funeral prayer (jānāja/janāza) of the Prophet is performed by God Himself in heaven.²

The simplest course for making the figures of Muslim traditions known to the local people was merely to find their parallels in the traditions already known to those people. Iblīs of Muslim tradition is identified rather inappropriately, as noted above, with the mischief making sage Nārada of the Hindus.³ Both of them are crafty and malicious, but while Iblīs is pledged to goad the believers away from the path of God, Nārada merely amuses himself by playing off one Hindu god against another.

'Alī is invested with great talent in archery, and his skill in this is said to be of the order of the

¹ Nv, fols. 251a-3a.
² S. Sultan: Wafat-i Rasūl(DMs 138:sl.41), fols.1a-23b.
³ Nv, fol.135 mc; ShM, fols.29b, 35a; Av,34.
celebrated archers of Hindu traditions like Bhīṣma, Dronācārya and Āsvatthāman. The war between the Muslims led by 'Alī and the infidel king of Iraq is compared to those of Rāma on the one hand and those of the Pāṇḍavas on the other. 2 Jonā or Janā, the son of 'Jaikūm Rāj' is called 'an archer equal to Pārtha (Arjuna)'. 3 He is also said to be like Brahmā in splendour (tej), 4 Karṇa in making gifts and in righteousness (dāne dharma), 5 and like the veritable exterminator Yama, the Hindu god of death. 6 Saiyid Sultān finds one of the warriors resembling Bhīma and Arjuna in valour. 7 Another great warrior is described as massive and frightful as Kumbhakarṇa of the Rāmāyana fame. 8 Amīr Ḥamza, the uncle of Muḥammad and one of the most popular fighters in the Muslim tradition, sits among his warriors 'like Indra amidst the gods'. 9 Saiyād, 'the beloved' of Amīr Ḥamza is an exquisite beauty like Tilottama. 10 Amīr Ḥamza and 'Rūpa-bānū' are 'matched like Śāmkara and Pārbatī'. 11 At the marriage festival of Saif ul-Mulūk

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1 Zain ud-Dīn, fol. 36.
2 Ibid., fol. 48.
3 Ibid., fol. 51.
4 Ibid., fol. 9.
5 Ibid., fol. 13b.
6 Ibid., fol. 53b.
7 ShīM, fol. 213b.
8 Zain ud-Dīn, fol. 44.
9 'Abd un-Nabī, fol. 819b.
10 Ibid., fol. 821b.
11 Ibid., fol. 836b.
and Badī' ul-Jamāl, king 'Ṣāḥībān', the father of the latter, invites Devas, Gandharvas, Rākṣasas, Dānavas, Yakṣas and Daityas, as well as Indra, Yama, Varuṇa and Kuvera. ¹  Saif ul-Mulūk comes out of the palace on the morning after his marriage, meets a number of Hindu divinities such as Śiva, Brahmā, Indra, Yama and Varuṇa, and pays his respect to them. In return he receives boons (bar) from them. Śiva makes all evil spirits (apadebgaṇ) available to him. Indra grants him 'new youth' and the protective guidance of the nine planets. Brahmā promises to remove the danger of fire from him. Varuṇa puts water, cloud and thunderbolt at his beck and call. Yama promises to eliminate the chances of unnatural death and diseases from him. The other gods also bestow different boons for the 'improvement of his memory, ability for action and knowledge'.²

The process of localisation of the Muslim traditions was further stimulated by an attempt to set the characters, situations and stories in the natural geographical, social and cultural descriptions of the country. The entire atmosphere of these traditions is saturated with local colour and complexion. The local landscape, the flora and fauna, the foods and dresses, the music and amusements, the customs and values—all conjure up the image of Bengal and impart an air of congruity and reality to the stories.

The river Nile in Egypt is introduced as the Ganges.³ Zulaikha sends her beguiling mates to 'Brndāban' in order to seduce Yūsuf.⁴ Amir Ḥamza, in the course of his

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¹ Donā Ghāzi, fol.140a-b.
² Ibid., fol.145a.
³ Shah Muhammad Saghir, fol.24.
⁴ Ibid., fol.32.
victorious march, is said to have fought against 'the king of Gauḍa', and converted him to Islam. We find him marching also against 'the king of Rosāng' and converting him also to Islam. There is also reference to the peak of Kailās (Kailāser cūṭā).

The landscape of Egypt is recreated with natural phenomena typical of the Bengali scene. Thus we read about the blossomed mango (ām) and blackberry (jām) trees, spreading the fragrance all around, and the bees (brahmar) flying about with passion. Flowers such as campā (Michelia campaka), jūni (Jūthikā/Jasminum auriculatum) and gola (rose) dominate the landscape. We also read about the advent of the month of Agraḥayana, the sweet aroma of the new sāli (a variety of paddy) spreading far and near, the varying shades of the blossoming spikelets of the rice plants all around, and the chirping of the parrots (ṣuk-sārī). Among birds, we find the khaṅjan, doyel and pāpiyā enlivening the air.

The food is no more strange to the local tastes. Muḥammad and Khadija have a grand meal consisting of clarified butter (ghṛta), rice (ānā), meat (māṁsa) and sweet yoghurt (dadhi). Khāqān, the heroic son of Jaikūm Rāj has had a similar meal, consisting of rice and various curries (bibidha byaṅjan), ending up with camphor (karpūr), betel-leaf (tambūl) and betel-nut (sūrpa).

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1 'Abd un-Nabī, fol. 945a.
2 Ibid., fols. 1067b-74a.
3 Ibid., fol. 804b. The Mount Kailās is known to be the abode of the Hindu god, Siva.
4 ShM, fol. 147b; 'Abd un-Nabī, fol. 827b; Donā Ghāzī, fol. 167mc.
5 Ibid., fol. 50.
6 Ibid., fols. 18, 52-3.
7 ShM, fol. 147b; 'Abd un-Nabī, fol. 827b; Donā Ghāzī, fol. 167mc.
8 Ibid., fol. 53b.
9 Sabīrīd Khān, fol. 16 mc.
At the end of his meal he performs a ceremonial ablution (ācman). To the question put to Muḥammad by a Jewish leader as regards what a believer is expected to eat first on going to paradise, the Prophet replies:

All will have fish dishes first - the brains of fish and then other things.¹

In regard to cosmetics, dresses and other social customs also the pictures portrayed in these Muslim writings do not offend local eyes. Zulaikha and her companions use for their beautifications sandal-paste and perfumes (aguru).² Their hairs are done with a knot called kabari-khonpā. They also have vermillion (sindur) mark on the head.³ Bādī' ul-Jamāl decorates herself with marks of sandal-paste on the forehead as well as with collyrium (kājal) and vermillion.⁴ While making love to his wife Bīḍhu-prabha, Ibn Amīn, the youngest brother of Yūsuf, has had his body marked by the vermillion and his face by the collyrium used by her.⁵ The presents made by the Abyssinian king to Muḥammad include candana, āgara and sindura.⁶ On Saif ul-Mulūk's desertion of the royal palace, his father gives up food (anna jal) and puts on the garment of a Yogi as a token of his mental afflictions.⁷

The modes of greeting often follow the local custom. 'Alī offers his respect to the Prophet by prostrating himself straight on the ground (danḍabate prapāmilā pariā

¹ ShM, fols. 171-2a.
² Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, fol. 17.
³ Ibid., fol. 50.
⁴ Donā Ghāzī, fols. 11mc, 29mc, 92mc.
⁵ Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, fol. 74.
⁶ ShM, fol. 173a.
⁷ Donā Ghāzī, fol. 310.
bhūmitā). 1 Muhammad greets 'Alī by kissing and embracing him. 2 As 'Umar comes to recognise the divine mission of Muhammad, he prostrates himself at the feet of the Prophet and bows down in āstānga (a Hindu mode of paying respect). 3 Saif ul-Mulūk pays his respect to his father-in-law by prostrating himself on the ground and kissing his shoes. 4 Sāḥībān, father of Bādī' ul-Jamāl blesses her by touching her forehead. 5

Social ceremonies like marriage are cast on the locally familiar moulds. The marriage between Ibn Amin and Bidhu-prabha takes place in a svayamvara gathering, in which the bride chooses her husband from the assembled people and accepts him by garlanding him. 6 'Azīz, the king of Egypt rides a palanquin (ṣibīkā-caudul) on his way to the place of Zulaikha for their marriage. 7 The band playing on the occasion comprises instruments such as dhāka, dhola, dandi, kaśī, mandirā, mādala and tabalā. 8 The marriage of Bādī' ul-Jamāl is preceded by the despatch of letters of invitation by her father with due humility asking for 'good wishes or blessings as appropriate for the person concerned'. 9 Her companions have fun at the svayambara-sabha, like throwing āvira (coloured powder) at one another or putting betel leaves into one another's mouth. 10 The celebration of the

1 Sāhibīrīd Kaḥān, fol. 4 mc.
2 Ibid., 21 mc.
3 ShiM, fol. 75b.
4 Donā Ghāzī, fol. 139.
5 Ibid., fol. 7 mc.
6 Shiḥ Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, fol. 74.
7 Ibid., fol. 52.
8 Ibid., fol. 51.
9 Donā Ghāzī, fol. 140a.
10 Ibid., fols. 140-1a.
marriage itself starts at the auspicious time (ṣubhakṣan) with women making the ceremonially auspicious sound (ṣubhādhwani). Young lascivious women carrying clay lamps in their hands and gold pitchers on their heads add lustre to the occasion. Some throw water at one another, some chew betel-leaves and some sing 'dhamāli', while some soak one another with rose-water. The bride is carried out by her maids and given a bath with water, brought in the pitchers amidst singing and mirth. After her bath she is dressed in gorgeous apparel, with glittering jewels and sweet scents and cosmetics. Her hand is coloured red, collyrium is put in the eyes, and vermilion and sandal-paste on the forehead. In the marriage celebration of Ibn Amīn and Bidhu-prabhā, women throw various kinds of flowers, delightfully scented water and also a wisp of grass (dūrbā) and paddy (dhānya). Zulaikha after her marriage is accompanied by her midwife to the place of her husband - a practice common in Bengal as well as some other parts of India.

A significant element in these Muslim writings is the glorification of the military exploits of their heroes. Here they are represented as fighting with weapons famous in Hindu mythological tradition. In one of the wars of the Prophet the Gandīva, Arjuna's famous bow in the Mahābhārata is said to have been used. The Brahmāstra (the divine missile of Brahma) is also used.

1 A type of erotic song in Bengal.
2 Ibid., fol. 141a.
3 Ibid., fols. 141b-2a.
4 Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, fol. 75. Dūrbā and dhānya or dhān constitute two of the most essential ingredients in the observance of any socio-religious rite in Bengal.
5 Ibid., fol. 13.
6 Zain ud-Dīn, fol. 17.
7 Ibid.
Umiya hurls the Brahmāstra against the army of Noshirvān, causing a fire which consumes even the tusks of elephants. In the same war the Muslim army shoot 'the arrow of Dadhici' (Dadhicīr bāq). At the battle of Uḥud, one of the leaders of the Meccan army named 'Ākūc' shoots the Ardha-candra-vāṇa (the crescent arrow) of Hindu mythology at Saiyād Maʿāz, who intercepts and cuts it into two. Abū Sufyān, the leader of the Meccan unbelievers, in a battle against the Muslims, shoots at Amīr Hamza a 'Fire Arrow' (Agni-bān), but the latter foil’s it before it reaches its mark. Against the army of the king of Iraq the Muslims use among other weapons, Divya-vāṇa (Divine Arrow), chel (šela), gadā (club) and khadga (scimitar). There are also references to the use of elephants (gaja) and chariots (raḥ) in these wars. 'Azīz, the king of Egypt has a caturāṅga army consisting of four sections - infantry, cavalry, elephantry and chariots. Among the war-bands and other musical instruments we hear of jaya­dhola, dhāka, mrdaṅga, ghāghari, śaṅkha and sānāī. References are also made to musical instruments like dandī, kāśi, dundubhi, mandirā, mādala and tabalā.

The similes and metaphors used to describe physical beauty are thoroughly indigenous and modelled on the forms in Sanskrit literature. The pūrs in bihisht are compared to sesame flowers (til phul) in respect of the beauty of

1 'Abd un-Nabī, fol. 1087b.
2 Ibid., fol. 943a.
3 ShM, fol. 199b.
4 Ibid., fol. 182b.
5 Sabirid Khān, fols. 3, 9, 26.
6 Zain ud-Dīn, fol. 19.
7 Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, fol. 12.
8 Zain ud-Dīn, fols. 19-20.
9 Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, fol. 51.
their nose, and their eyes are said to be such as to put the bird khaŋjana to shame. 1 'Abd un-Nabī too draws comparison between the beautiful eyes of a woman and those of the bird khaŋjana and compares her nose to that of a bird (khaga). 2 The delicate and beautiful arms of Badī' ul-Jamāl are found better than the stalks of lotus. 3 Donā Ghāzī compares the thigh of a woman to a banana tree. 4 The black mole on the beautiful face of Badī' ul-Jamāl is said to look like 'a bee in a lotus'. 5 Local idioms are used with considerable effect. The idea of intensification of a feeling is conveyed by the metaphor of adding clarified butter (ghee) to the fire (anāl). 6 Saïyād's pangs of separation from his lady love are comparable to those of 'Lorāk Rājā' separated from Candārānī. 7

The stories sometimes use the motifs of the local traditions. The Muslim hero on the eve of a great battle is equipped with the coats of mail and weapons previously used by earlier prophets and warriors exactly in the same manner as figures in Hindu traditions are armed by Hindu divinities with their respective weapons. 8 Amīr Ḥamza puts on before his battle with Noshirwān, the

1 ShM, fol. 147b.
2 Fol. 827b.
3 Donā Ghāzī, fol. 18.
4 Ibid., fol. 37 mc.
5 Ibid., fol. 120.
6 Ibid., fol. 117.
7 'Abd un-Nabī, fol. 822a.
8 Cf. the tradition of Candā on the eve of her battle with Mahīṣāsura.
garment of Khalīl, fastens the bracelet of Ādam around his arm, the belt of the Prophet Ḥsāq around his waist, the whip of the Prophet Ismā'īl around the small finger of the hand and finally takes the bow of Rustam in his hand.¹

Even motifs popular in local legends and fairy-tales are sometimes made use of. A beautiful girl lies captive by a demon, whose life is carefully and secretly preserved inside a casket placed in a jar, the jar being kept on the bed of the sea. The girl may be recovered from the clutch of the demon by breaking the jar and thereby killing the demon.²

A similar motif of a pair of wise birds, named Byāŋgāmā and Byāŋgāmī,sounding some prophetic notes or notes of warning to the hero or heroine of the story is introduced in Yusuf-Zulaikha, in which Zulaikha is advised by these birds.³

¹ 'Abd un-Nabī, fol. 851b.
² Dona Ghāzi, fol. 166 mc.
³ Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, fol. 3-4.
CHAPTER IV

THE LITTLE TRADITIONS

The response of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia to the religious questions confronting them could easily be distinguished from that of the simpler Muslim folks. Quite distinct from the literature contributed by the former, as examined in the preceding chapter, there exists a type of folk-literature containing religious traditions, as formulated and reconstructed at the cultural level of the Muslim masses. A mere casual glance at these classes of literatures reveals striking difference in respect of literary refinement, diction and quality. The literary sophistications of the one, as the product of the higher intellectual discipline, stand in sharp contrast with the coarse and simple character of the other, produced by the rustic folk with little formal training in their discipline. But what constitute the most fundamental points of difference between the two are their contents, and the attitudes of the writers to the questions concerning the thematic substance of their respective literatures. The object underlying both of the literary types is held in common - vindication of Islam. But the concept of Islam conjures rather dissimilar images in the minds of these two categories of writers. The concern of the intelligentsia primarily centres around the fundamental tenets and observances of Islam, its mystic subtleties, its cosmological and ontological speculations and its religious-historical traditions built around the activities of the Prophet and other well-known figures of Muslim history and legend. The literature of the other category reflects little concern for the theological, metaphysical, mystical or historical-legendary traditions of Islam. Their literature revolves around objects,
which are most dear to their hearts and of direct consequences to their day to day spiritual and material sustenance. The great impersonal Allah and the traditional Muslim figures of universal renown are too remote for application in their daily trials and tribulations. Instead the Pir, who are almost taken for the guardian spirits of the localities, successfully cater to their needs. No wonder that the heroic and supernatural exploits of these popular heroes—historical, legendary or even fictitious—are so lavishly extolled in this popular literature, the raison d'être of such works being the vindication of the greatness of these subjects of popular veneration.¹

The attitudes that these writers bring to bear in their attempt to glorify their heroes, again set them apart from their co-religionists of the higher social and cultural echelon. This is most clearly reflected in the treatment that the Hindu religious traditions receive in their respective works. The presence of elements of Hindu religious traditions is as evident and numerous in the literature of the new Muslim intelligentsia as in that of the masses. In both, the impact of the cultural environment is manifest. But the impact produces different results on the different cultural segments of the same religious fraternity. The response of the intelligentsia to the cultural environment is conscious, discriminatory, purposive and rational. If Hindu religious traditions and symbols find their place in their writings, this is motivated by

¹ An adequate appreciation of this literature presupposes an understanding of what may be characterized as the cult of Pirs in all its ramifications. We have, as such, chosen to divide this discussion into two sections. The first deals with the cult of Pirs and the second is a study of the folk literary traditions regarding them.
the need of popularising Islamic traditions with the local Muslim masses. The Hindu religious ideas and symbols are made use of by the intelligentsia in the task of presenting Islam in familiar garb rather than setting up a simple pattern of discrediting the former in favour of the latter. In so far as this is a subtle and calculated process, their writings are generally marked by the absence of any attempt to bring the two religious systems or the heroes of the two traditions into direct conflict. The literature of the masses, however, offers a strikingly different picture, the most impressive of its features being its spontaneity, naivety and absence of subtle motivation and of rational understanding. There is neither need nor training for these writers to have been cautious and calculating about their pronounced object of glorifying their respective heroes at all expense. There is no complexity about their mission and no impediment besetting their way. Their heroes can turn against a Hindu divinity with as much ease and success as they can form a filial and kinship relation with him or her. The figures of Hindu religious, mythological, legendary and even historical traditions are constantly met with in Muslim literary works of this type as in the other. But unlike in the other, they do not present themselves as incidental to the mainstream of this literature. Be they friendly or inimical to each other, the presence of the Hindu elements is as natural and essential as that of their Muslim counterparts in the cultural world of these writers, as reflected in their works. The Muslim and Hindu religious figures in this literature are cast by these simple folk-writers in the pattern of their own social existence based on a common economic structure, where concord and conflict, co-operation and alienation, trust and jealousy, happiness and bitterness, were as common and natural as among the members in a family living under the same roof.
The following extract from the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* is a measure of the range of folk religious beliefs in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Bengal:

The late deeply-regretted and able Missionary, Lacroix, relates an affecting incident which occurred on one of his tours. Advancing by the Teesta, they reached on its weekly market-day the village of Kamarjani...not less than 3000 persons being present. They gathered around the Missionaries...Who were these strangers? — that was the inquiry, for the Christian Missionaries have never been there before. The Hindus said they were Kanoj Brahmins, the oldest and the most revered Brahminical race,...'Look at them', they said, 'how resplendent their countenances are, and what fire proceeds from their mouth when they speak, the marks of the real, original Brahminical race'. Again the Mohammedans declared that they were holy men from Mecca, who had come to reform abuses among them.

The Hindu religious notions and values were often so thickly woven into the texture of folk-culture that a headman of a Muslim village in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century believed that Muhammad was 'a Bengali born in the house of a Brahmin'.

The Muslim folk-literature reveals indeed an altogether new dimension of religious beliefs at the level of the masses. The Muslim religious and legendary heroes find an effortless, natural and full recognition as a part of the religious and cultural milieu of the local masses. The process of this integration is abundantly reflected in the detailed working out of the plots conceived in this literature woven around the names of these popular idols. An adequate understanding of the full range of folk religious beliefs in this regard

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1 March, 1862, XIII, 71.
2 Wylie, M.: *Bengal as a Field of Missions*, 318.
demands a rather elaborate knowledge of these popular traditions which speak for themselves. Before we take up a few of them, including those briefly noted in the foregoing pages, it may be deemed necessary to look into the nature and content of popular faith in some heterogenous religious or non-religious elements, apparently homogenised in a generic nomenclature. This is at least what is understood and meant in the popular application of the term Pir. It is truism that the respect and veneration for a Muslim saint, invariably some eminent Sufi, dead or alive, was quite usual in the higher cultural strata than that of the common run of people. Nonetheless, the peculiar connotation of the cult of Pir far outstretched this narrow delimitation and transmuted itself into distinct religious phenomena appropriate to the folk-society.

A. The Cult of Pir:

The faith in, and the extreme veneration for, saints (auliyā', sing. wali) as well as their shrines, though widely popular among the Muslims of Bengal, was not peculiar to this land or even to India as a whole. The belief in the Muslim saints, which the Bengali Muslims held in common with co-religionists elsewhere, may be traced directly to Sufi teachings. The Sufis, in view of their distinctive mystic relation with God, are looked upon as elect of the Muslims, and the saints, by virtue of being God's friends, are regarded as the elect of the Sufis. 'Ali ul-Hujwiri holds that God has marked out the saints to manifest His actions, and that the visible proof of the religion of Islam was to be found in them.1

But a study of the actual beliefs about the Muslim saints and the attitudes of the people towards them in

India and, for that matter, in Bengal reveals that their
believers had developed a cult of the saints themselves,
hardly conforming to the theological demands of Islam.
This particular development underlined the mutation of
abstract theological and metaphysical concepts and ideas,
confronted by the practical and material needs of human
existence. From the theological and theoretical stand-
point, recourse to the saint could mean, as already pointed
out, no more than securing his intercession with God, made
possible by his occupying an intermediate position as a
companion (wali) of God on the one hand and a friend and
companion of man on the other. In actual practice this
special role of the saints remained almost conspicuous by
its absence in the minds of their votaries. An individual
believer, moved by a deep personal need for a closer and
direct object of supplication, approached a tomb in the
belief that the spirit of the saint was ever present there,
that he heard his petitioner and would fulfill his desire.
In the earnestness of his belief and in the anxiety for
his cause, he did not show much concern for what lay
beyond the saint and his grave. In the great trials,
tribulations and emergencies of his life, the theological
basis sustaining the structure of the faith in the
intercessory role of the saint, in the framework of
orthodox Islam, tended to crumble. By the inevitable
logic of the practical demands of the people, the shrines
of the saints became the most immediate and tangible
resort of those in distress and need. From the
intercessory role to his actual adoration proved a small
step. The worship of the foot-print of the Prophet (Qadam-i
Rasul) was common enough in Bengal as outside the land.¹

¹ There are three such buildings containing the Prophet's
foot-prints in Bengal. The one at Gaur is built by Sultan
Nagrat Shāh. (Dani: Bibliography...72; Khan, A.A., 61 ff).
The one at Nabiganj in Dacca is mentioned by Mirzā Nathan
(op.cit., II, 710). Another is attached to a mosque called
Qadam Mubarak Masjid in Chittagong. (Karim, A: Social..., 174 n).
The worship of the foot-print of the saint found its way in. The impressions of the foot-print of Shah Langar at Muazzampur in Dacca 'drew crowds of pilgrims'. Shaikh Hamid, when deputed to Bengal by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī, carried back to Mangalkot, his native place in Bengal, a shoe of his spiritual master in his mouth and turban, and placed it in a separate enclosure. The shoe ever remained an object of veneration for him and others,... After Shaikh Hamid's death a niche was prepared by the side of his grave and the shoe was kept in it. This accounted for a large assembly of the needy and the sick round the grave. Mirzā Nathan admits:

I came to Malatipur [in Tanda] to my Pirzāda (son of the spiritual guide) Miyan Saiyid Mizamuddin and obtained the honour of kissing his feet.

The Muslim Bengali literature is saturated, as discussed above, with references to the respective Pīrs or Gurus of the poets in terms of veneration and worship.

But this is not all. The cult of the Pīrs or Pīrīsm as it developed in India, especially in Bengal, had wider implications than what is suggested by the notion of a mere aberration of the faith in saints. The Muslim saints were certainly covered by the term Pīr, as understood in its regular and conventional sense. But Pīrīsm, with

1 JASB, 1873, XLII, pt.1, no.iii, 236.
2 Zubdat ul-Maqāmāt, 353, and Hāqrat ul-Quds, II; fol.119a, cited, Rizvi, op.cit., 279-80.
3 Mirzā Nathan, op.cit., II, 786.
4 Pīr, etymologically 'elder' is a term 'denoting a spiritual director or guide among the Sūfīs,...The functionary described by the title is known also under the names, šāikh, murshid, and ustādh. Pīr is a Persian word, but is applied to a spiritual guide more commonly in India and Turkey than in its native home; šāikh, in our special sense, is in general use throughout Islam; murshid is also widespread but in Turkish or Arabic or Arabic speaking countries rather than in India....' (ERE, X, 40). It should be pointed out that the term murshid was quite (contd.)
reference to the beliefs of the Bengali masses, meant much more than veneration of Muslim saints or of religious preceptors, for we shall presently see that the Pirs, resorted to by the people, were not all saints, nor all religious instructors, nor all Muslims and nor even all human personalities.

The Pirs in Bengal were as ubiquitous as their numbers were legion. Their shrines were found in every nook and corner of Bengal — in desolate country lanes, in the fields and groves, in forests, and in the mountains. There were historical and legendary Pirs, real and fictitious Pirs, universal and local Pirs and ancient and contemporary ones. The process of popular canonization went on through the centuries. The veneration showed to them in their life time persisted with greater ardour after their death. Visitation or pilgrimages (ziyārat) to their shrines (called either mazar, place of visitation or dargah) was a common feature of Muslim religious life in the land.

The shrine associated with a Pir was not necessarily his tomb. It might be a memorial shrine having some association with the person concerned. In some cases a shrine might have no connexion with the Pir concerned, except that it was dedicated to him, for it was thought possible to erect a memorial to a saint anywhere, and to call it by his name, and prayer and offerings made at the shrine were believed to be quite as effective as a visit to his actual resting place.\(^1\) There were several such popular in medieval Bengali literature in this special sense, and a particular type of poetical composition, permeated by mystical thought, known as 'murshidī' was developed and became very popular as songs.

\(^1\) Titus, M.: *Islam in India and Pakistan*, 139.
\(^2\) We have consistently used past tense with reference to the existence of the shrines without being able to ascertain the continued existence of such shrines even to this day.
shrines in Bengal. In Chittagong, there was a tomb ascribed to Bāyazīd of Bisṭāmī. Another shrine in Chittagong was dedicated to Bāba Farīd Ganj-i Shakar and is known as 'the stream of the eye' (Nahr-i Chashm). The legend goes that Bāba Farīd suspended himself at this spot, upside down, from a tree for thirty years. He took no food, but shed copious tears, and for this reason the place came to be called by the said name. In none of the Ṣūfīc sources is Bāba Farīd associated with Chittagong, much less Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī. To the east of Madaripur in Faridpur a dargāh existed in the name of Shāh Madār, who in all probability did not set foot in Bengal. Two banyan trees were also claimed to have sprung up from the twigs of one, under which the saint used to meditate.

One significant feature of the cult of Pīrs is that the attitudes of veneration for them cut across the social and cultural barriers of the Muslim community and even the religious divisions of the people. For recourse to them was not always confined to the simpler folk among the believers nor the Muslims alone. The members of the ruling aristocracy, including a number of sultāns, patronised some of the Muslim saints in the form of construction of khānqāhs and granting land-endowments in favour of shrines associated with the names of those saints. Muhammad Bakhtyār Khaljī, the first Muslim ruler in Bengal, is credited with building khānqāhs. Sultan Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn 'Iwāz Khaljī granted liberal pensions to the Ṣūfī teachers.

1 Haq, E.: Banga..., 147.
4 Ibid.
5 Supra, Ch. I, A; see below.
6 Minhāj, op.cit., 151.
7 Ibid., 161-2.
The construction of the building at Gangarampur near Old Malda, which in all probability was a part of the shrine of Šahīkh Jalāl ud-Dīn Tabrizī was renovated by Jalāl ud-Dīn Mas'ūd Jānī, the governor of Lakhnauti under Sultān Naṣīr ud-Dīn Mahmūd, son of Sultān Iltutmīsh.1 Sultān Mughīṣ ud-Dīn Tughral made a gift of 'three maunds of gold' to some Qalandars.2 Sultān Shams ud-Dīn Ilyās Šāh built a mosque in honour of Šahīkh 'Alā' ul-Ḥaq.3 He was also strongly devoted to another Šūfī, Raja' Biyābānī.4 For the maintenance of the dargāhs of Šāh Jalāl Tabrizī and Šah Quṭb in modern Rajshahi, there were rent-free endowments of 22,000 bīghās (bāīṣ hazārī) and 6,000 bīghās (chay hazārī) of lands respectively.5 The tomb of Mullā 'Aṭā Wahīd ud-Dīn in Dinajpur had attached to it a land-grant of 200 bīghās.6

The reverential attitudes of the ruling aristocracy towards the saints, involving an implicit belief in their thaumaturgic capabilities, were also revealed in their personal visits to the shrines. Every year Sultān Ḥusain Šāh visited the shrine of Šahīkh Nūr Quṭb 'Alam at Pandua.7 Šāh Jahān, on his arrival in Bengal, paid a visit to the same shrine, during which 'four thousand rupees were given as offering to the khādīms of that sublime monastery'.8 Mirzā Nathan performed his 'pilgrimage' at the shrine of Šahīkh 'Alā' ul-Ḥaq, and appointed 'some of his men to arrange for the celebration of the annual feast of the Prophet and of Šāh 'Alā'...'.9

1 Khan, A.A., 163-4.
2 Z. Barānī, op.cit., 91.
3 Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica, 1938-40, Plate IV(a), 7-9.
4 G.H. Salīm, 97.
5 Martin, M., II, 645.
6 Ibid., 660.
7 Nizām ud-Dīn Ahmad, III, 270-1.
8 Mirzā Nathan, II, 707.
9 Ibid., I, 146.
The attitudes of the rulers should, however, be set in perspective. Should political and personal interests demand it, they did not scruple to bury their veneration for the saints and go to the extent of driving a saint out of his place, if his presence was deemed undesirable.  

Besides, the attitudes of the members of the ruling class, forming a section of the elite, should never be confounded with those aspects of Pīrism which could only develop at the level of simple folks. While the association of the former was exclusively confined to some eminent Muslim Sūfīs, the latter extended its sphere to include a motley variety of persons and spirits.

a. The Categories of Pīrs:

The number of Pīrs, exercising potent influence in the mind of the Muslims in Bengal, was legion, as were the ramifications of belief in them. It is very hard to determine a principle of classification of this heterogeneous group of either apotheosized individuals or spirits and beliefs personified. The beliefs centering round them are indeed so intermixed, overlapping and irregular that no systematic classification of the Pīrs even on that basis seems feasible. An inquiry into the historicity of these Pīrs suggests a possible line of classification. While most of them, viewed from this angle, appears to be historical figures attaining the position of Pīrs by virtue of their piety, miracles or other heroic exploits, a good number of them may be taken as legendary figures in a special sense. The existence of the former is a fact of history, regardless of what people thought and believed about them. The legendary figures on the other hand existed in popular

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1 Cf. Sikander Ilyās's steps against 'Ala‘ul-Haq (supra, 112). Sultan Fakhr ud-Dīn Mubārak Shāh (1338-49), who is known to be a great patron of the Fauīrs, entrusted one of them named Shāhidā with a high political charge. The latter proved treacherous, and was executed by the sultan (Ibn Batṭūṭa, 237).
beliefs and traditions alone. There is nothing else to vindicate their position. There were of course tombs and memorial shrines attached to their names. But in view of the rather dubious nature of the shrines, either built on pre-existing sacred sites or connected with the names of the Pīrs concerned, who could hardly have set their foot in the place, these alone cannot be taken to establish their historicity. But because a large number of Pīrs are recorded only in the minds of the people, their historicity is not necessarily disproved either. It must be understood that a large number of Pīrs are included in the legendary group only for want of adequate historical knowledge about them. A third category of Pīrs are entirely fictitious entities, neither historical nor legendary, but animistic spirits receiving anthropomorphised characters at the hands of their believers. Some of the Pīrs, commanding the respect of the people in Bengal, were entirely local in their popularity, while others were equally respected in other parts of India, and in certain cases even outside the limit of India.

In the following pages, we propose to categorise the Pīrs in accordance with our principle of classification. What follows is not meant to be an exhaustive list of Pīrs in Bengal. It is neither possible nor necessary to prepare such an exhaustive account. And yet, a fairly large number of names find mention in this list. In preparing this list, we have accorded larger space and greater emphasis to the legendary and fictitious figures, if only because they have, generally speaking, received less attention than the historical ones. The following discussion may be deemed sufficient to bring out the motley variety of elements that contributed to the making of the cult of Pīrs.
i. The Historical **Pīrs**:

The **Pīrs** of this category are not merely known through popular traditions which are often so inadequate from the historical point of view. Their existence is further evidenced by historical sources—epigraphic references, royal *sanads* granting or confirming lands for the maintenance of their respective shrines, and finally, hagiological literature. Among **Pīrs** of this category some names do not find mention in our list since they are more alive in the pages of hagiological literature than in the minds of the people of Bengal. Our treatment of these **Pīrs** is confined to the bare mention of their names, places of activity and burial places, for the simple reason that they have already been discussed in some detail by others.

Among eminent **Sūfīs** forming part of this category, we may mention Shaikh Jalāl ud-Dīn Tabrizī, 2 who was associated with Pandua and Deotala, the latter containing his mazar; Shaikh Jalāl bin Muḥammad, popularly known as *Shāh Jalāl*, 3 who is traditionally associated with the conquest of Sylhet, that contained his shrine; Shaikh Akbīr Sirāj ud-Dīn *ʿUsmān*, 4 whose activities were centred in Gaur and Pandua, was buried in Gaur; Shaikh *ʿAlāʾ ul-Ḥaq, 5 a spiritual disciple and successor of Shaikh Akbīr Sirāj lying buried at Pandua; Shaikh Nūr Quṭb ʿAlām, 6 the son and spiritual successor of Shaikh *ʿAlāʾ ul-Ḥaq, was

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2 A.H. Dehlawi, 44-5; Abūl Faẓl: *Āʾīn...,* III, 170; for inscriptive reference, Dani, 103-4.
4 A.H. Dehlawi, 86; inscriptive reference, Dani, 104.
5 A.H. Dehlawi, 143; inscriptive reference, ibid.
6 A.H. Dehlawi, 152ff; Mirzā Nathan, I, 42.
buried beside his father at Choṭī-dargāh in Pandua; Mullā or Maulānā 'Atā Waḥīd ud-Dīn, buried at Gangarampur in Dinajpur; Shāh Jalāl Dakhīnī, whose popularity is supposed to have earned royal displeasure and his execution, is believed to be buried in Dacca; Badī'ud-Dīn, popular as Shāh Madār, who is associated with several shrines in Bengal, though it seems unlikely that he ever set foot there.

The historicity of some of the Pīrs is established by official documents, conferring or confirming land-grants to the shrines associated with their respective names. Shāh Sultān Rūmī, whose tomb existed at Madanpur in the district of Mymensingh, and Shāh Sultān Muḥammad Mahīsawar are two of them.

Some historical figures, who in their lives played only political roles, came to receive religious veneration from the people as Pīrs and Ghāzīs in course of time. Some of the Pīrs are traditionally known to have taken part in battles against the local Hindu chiefs. But despite their involvement in such battles, that were as much political as religious in character, they remained essentially religious personalities. We have a type of Warrior-Pīrs, who waged war against infidel chiefs by virtue of their official and administrative assignments, and passed through centuries into the level of Pīrs by a queer process of historical mutation.

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1 Inscriptional reference, Dani, 105.
2 A.H. Dehlawi, 173.
3 Ibid., 64. There is a full biography of this popular Pīr entitled Mir'āt-i Madārī, written by 'Abd ur-Raḥmān Chiṣṭī.
4 In 1829 the Government failed to confiscate the extensive property attached to this dargāh, on account of the khādam producing a Persian document of 1671 A.D. (Haq, E.: Bange..., 138).
5 A sanad of Aurangzeb of 1685 A.D. confirmed the lands granted to his shrine by some earlier sanad. A 17th century Bengali Muslim poet, Muḥammad Ḵān mentions him among his forefathers. (DCBM, 360).
Among Pir of this category an important name is Zafar Khan Ghāzī, whose tomb existed at Triveni in the district of Hugli alongside those of his sons Ugwān Khan and Burhān or Burkhan. There are three inscriptions between 1297 and 1313 A.D. which refer to him as a mighty conqueror and a 'destroyer of the obdurate among infidels'. According to its record, Zafar Khan was killed in action against Rājā Bhūdeva of Hugli. His son Ugwān Khan, however, defeated the rājā and married his daughter.

Shāh Ismā'īl Ghāzī, who was a military commander in the reign of Sultān Rukn ud-Dīn Barbak Shāh (1459-74 A.D.), was another Pir of this type. There is a short 17th century biography of him, named Risālat ugh-Shuhdā, written by Pir Muhammad Shāṭṭārī. According to the Risālat, Ismā'īl was born at Mecca in the family of the Prophet, left Mecca and arrived at Lakhnauti at the court of Sultān Rukn ud-Dīn Barbak Shāh. He recommended himself strongly to the favour of the sultān by his ingenious and successful advice and assistance in the matter of controlling the periodical inundations of Gaur. Shāh Ismā'īl was subsequently entrusted with the charge of some of the important campaigns of the reign. The climax of this career of fruitful service to the cause of the sultānate in Bengal appears to have been rather tragic and intriguing. Shāh Ismā'īl is said to have been beheaded (878/1474 A.D.) at the instance of the sultān, who acted on the advice of a Hindu commandant of Ghoraghat that Ghāzī was in collusion with the rājā of Kamrup.

The death of Ghāzī remains as confusing as the cremation of his body, and it is believed that his severed head

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1 Dani, ins. nos. 6, 7, and 11.
2 Quoted, JASB, 1847, 394.
3 Risālat ugh-Shuhdā, Eng. tr., Damant, G.H., JASB, 1874, 215ff.
4 Ibid.
lies buried in Kantaduar in Rangpur and his body at Mandaman in Hugli. The strangeness surrounding his death itself may have contributed to the popularity of this knight-errant of Islam in medieval Bengal. In Rangpur itself three more shrines are associated with his name.¹

Khān Jahān 'Alī also known as Khān Jahān Khān, was in all probability a reclaimer of the marshy waste land in the region of Khulna, who attained influence enough to recommend himself to popular veneration as a Pir.² His tomb at Bagerhat is one of the few most popular shrines in east Bengal. He finds mention in an inscription of 863 A.H./1458 A.D.³ The 'urs of Khān Jahān on the full-moon day of the last month of the Bengali calendar is observed with great enthusiasm and devotion.⁴

ii. Legendary Piṛs :

For a large number of Piṛs, whose shrines remained quite popular in Bengal, no better authority can be found than the beliefs and the traditions persisting about them in the minds of the people. It is only for this reason that quite a few Piṛs, about whose existence there is no reasonable doubt, find in our classification place among legendary figures. A large number of shrines and sites associated with the names of such figures lay scattered all over Bengal. In the following pages they are grouped under regional heads.

¹ Ibid.; JASB, 1870, 117.
² JASB, 1867, 118.
³ Dani, ins. no. 28.
⁴ JASB, 1867, 118.
The Dacca district:

Babā Adam Shahīd, who is buried at Rampal, off Ballal-bari in the Munshiganj sub-division of the Dacca district, was involved, according to a local tradition, in a battle against a Hindu chief Vallāla-sena in which the former was killed. The latter with his entire family also lost their lives subsequently in curious circumstances. 1

Shāh Langar is believed to be a prince of Baghdad, who eschewed his life of enjoyment and comfort and chose that of a wandering mendicant. He traversed a large number of countries and finally came to settle down at Muazzampur near Dacca. His grave stood at Muazzampur. 2

Besides these, there were quite a few other Pirs and shrines known in the Sonargaon region such as the tomb of Munna Shāh Darwesh at the market place of Magrapara, those of Shaikh Kuyandkār Muḥammad Yūsuf and his son, in the same locality, that of Shāh 'Abd ul-'Alā at Gohattamahalla in the north of Magrapara and the shrines of Pagal Sāhib, one at Kumradi and the other at the south of Habibpur in the north of Sonargaon pargana. 3

The Mymensingh district:

In the Mymensingh region the tombs of Miskin Shāh at Mukhi near Mashakhali in the Gafargaon thana, of Shahenshāh at Atia, of Qūb Sāhib at Astagram in Joanshahi, of Madan Pīr at Netrakona, of Shāh Kamāl at Durmut and also at Madarganj in Jamalpur and finally, of Shāh Afzal Maḥmūd at Sirajganj were quite popular. 4 At Baniara in

1 JASB, 1889, 12ff. Vallāla-sena, here mentioned, is to be distinguished from his famous namesake of the Sena dynasty. The former appears to be a local Hindu chief of Bikrampur towards the end of the 14th century. (JASB, 1896, 36-7).
2 Dani, A.H.: Dacca, 158.
4 Mymensingh, DGERA, 38.
the Atia pargana the dargāh of 'Alī Sabr Shah existed.¹

The Sylhet district:

Sylhet region also contained a good number of saints and shrines. Shah 'Arifīn, said to be one of the close associates of Shah Jalāl Mujarrad, lies buried at Laur. The dargāh of Ghiyāṣ ud-Dīn Sāhib is at Ghiyasnagar.² The area of Taraf was quite noted for its Pir, who are said to be twelve in number. But their names include a few belonging to regions even outside Sylhet.³ Among those who seem to belong to the region of Sylhet mention may be made of Shah Ghāzī of Bisgram, Shah Majlis Amin of Uchail, Shah Fateh Ghāzī of Fatehpur, Saiyid Shah Saif Minnat ud-Dīn and Shah Tāj ud-Dīn Qureshī of Chauki pargana, and Shah Maḥmūd of Laskarpur. Besides, the dargāhs of Shah Ilyās Quddūs, also called Qutb ul-Auliyyā' at Murarband, of Makhdūm Rahīm ud-Dīn in Jalalpur pargana, of Śamīr ud-Dīn at Dewadi or Dowadi, of Saiyid Śāliḥ or Sulaimān Shah and of his grandson popular as Lāuyā Pir near Raghunandan hill, and finally of Shah Dāwud at Daudnagar were quite important.⁴

The Faridpur district:

In this region Sāji of Pansha-Madhabpur,⁵ Manu Miyan and Sanu Miyan, two brothers of the village Dakshinbari in Baliakandi thana, Shah Pahlawan of Shekhar, Shah Kamāl of Kamarpara in the Rajbari thana and Shah Qarīb of Baraijuri in the Pansa thana attained good reputation.⁶

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¹ Maulik, A.K.: Aṭīyā Pargarānār Itihās, 84.
² Chaudhuri, A.C., op.cit., I, ii, 141.
³ Ibid., 98-100.
⁴ Ibid., 108, 122, 457, 464.
⁵ Ray, A.N., op.cit., I, 14.
⁶ Ibid., II, 170-2.
The Bakarganj district:

At Kalisuri existed the tomb of Saiyid ul-'Arifin. ¹

The Noakhali district:

The tomb of Ambar or 'Umar Shāh is found at Ambarabad or Umarabad lying north-east of Bhulua. He appears to be a reclamer of wastelands and the founder of Ambarabad, which is said to have been carved out of the old principality of Bhulua in the beginning of the eighteenth century when it was still an uninhabited waste. Ambar or 'Umar Shāh, a Persian, who lived in a boat is credited with slow reclamation of the waste and giving his name to the pargana.²

The Khulna-Jessore district:

The village Labsa in the Satkhira sub-division contains the dargah of a female Pir, Cāmpā Bībī, also called Mai Cāmpā.³

The district of 24-Parganas:

Ekdīl Shāh of Barasat and Mubārak Ghāzī, rather popular as Mobrā Gājī, of Bansra were the two quite favourite Pirās of the region.⁴ The village of Taragunia in Basirhat contains the tomb of the lady Pir Raushan 'Arā.⁵ Another influential Pir in this region appears to be Saiyid 'Abbās 'Alī, alias Pir Goračānd, alias Gorāi Gājī. He is known to be the elder brother of Raushan 'Arā and lies buried at Haroa in Balanda pargana in Basirhat sub-division.⁶

¹ Bakarganj, BDG, 148.
² Noakhali, BDG, 101.
³ Khulna, BDG, 182.
⁵ Siddiqi, A. 'Raušan Ārā, SPP, 1323 B.S., iii, 223.
⁶ Ibid.
The Midnapur district:

On the Rasulpur river at Hijli in the Contai subdivision the tomb of Taj Khan Masnad-i 'Ala', who was a military adventurer, was a great resort of the people. It is said about him that when Husain Shah moved as far as the frontiers of Orissa to bring the rebellious rājās to submission, Taj Khan, accompanied by his brother Sikandar Pahlawan conquered Hijli and founded a Muslim settlement at the mouth of the Rasulpur river.¹

The Hugli district:

Shāh Shafi ud-Dīn, according to a prevailing tradition about him, was the son of Barkhurdār, a courtier at Delhi and brother-in-law of Sultan Fīrūz Shāh (most probably Sultan Shams ud-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh of Bengal).² He came to Chota-Pandua in Hugli and was involved in a conflict with the local Hindu chief (Pāṇḍava-rājā). He sought the intervention of his uncle Sultan Fīrūz Shāh, who despatched a large army, and won the battle. The tradition is rather confused in juxtaposing two other names with him - the one Ḫafar Khan Ghazi, the conqueror of Triveni region³ and Bahram Saqqa. While Ḫafar Khan might very well have been contemporaneous with Shāh Shafi', being a commandant under Sultan Rukn ud-Dīn Kaikaus and Shams ud-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh,⁴ Bahram Saqqa belongs to a much later period and is a contemporary of Akbar.⁵ The grave of Shāh Shafi' at Chota-Pandua was resorted to by a large number of people.

Shāh Anwār Quli Ḥalwālī alias Muḥammad Kabīr, who belonged to Aleppo, came to Mulla Simla, Phurphura in the

¹ Midnapur, BDG, 182-3.
² Proceedings, ASB, 1870, 123-5; Hooghly, BDG, 297ff.
³ Supra, 337.
⁴ DHB II, 77ff.
⁵ Burdwan, BDG, 190.
Hugli district, where his tomb existed beside a mosque built in 777/1375 A.D. According to the tradition current about him, he confronted and defeated a local king of the Bagdi caste, but finally the Pir and his companion Karam ud-Din were killed by the enemy. One peculiarity with the Pir was the importance of looking-glass as an object of votive offering to his shrine. It is curious to note that Aleppo, the birth-place of Shāh Anwār, was noted in olden times for its glass ware. 

Alman Sāhib's tomb near Bainchi was also a quite popular shrine in Hugli. 

The Burdwan district:

Several Pir of wide popularity had their shrines in Burdwan.

Makhdūm Shāh Maḥmūd Ghaznavī, popular as Rāhā Pir, is buried at Mangalkot in Burdwan district. Tradition involves him also in a struggle against the local Hindu Rājā Vikrama-kešārī, in which the Pir sought and obtained help from the sultan of Delhi. The defeated king fled to east Bengal.

Shāh Sulṭān Anṣārī lies buried at Mangalkot in Burdwan district. He is believed to have come to India from Medina around the close of the fifteenth century. After some wanderings in other parts of India, he finally settled down at Mangalkot.

Makhdūm Shāh ‘Abdullāh Gujrātī hailed from Gujrat and settled down at Mangalkot, where his tomb remained

1 JASB, 1870, 291-2.
2 Ibid.
3 Ga.: it, op.cit., 1970
4 Haq, E.: Bange..., 129.
5 Ibid., 134.
highly popular.¹

At Kalna the shrines of two brothers, Majlis Sahib and Badar Sahib, were very popular.²

The Bankura district:

Bankura contains shrines of a number of Muslim PirS, of which those of Bandegi Shah Mustafa at Chichinga, of Saiyid Muhammad Husain and of Shah Kabir at Karisunda, of Buqta Pir at Chak-sukur, of Shah Ismail Jalil Ganji Laskar at Lakhipur and also at Patharchati (Kotalpur thana), and finally of Shah Kauban 'Ali at Bishnupur town were quite popular.³

The Birbhum district:

The village Makhdumnagar in the Rampurhat subdivision drew large number of votaries to the shrine of Makhdum Saiyid Shah Zahir ud-Din, who is said to have flourished in the sixteenth century and married in some royal family of Gaur. At the village Khustigri in the Suri sub-division existed the tomb of Saiyid Shah 'Abdullah Kirmani. He is known to have left his native place Kirman, in Persia, when very young and met Shah Arzani, who asked him to go to Bengal. At Patharchapuri, another village in the Suri sub-division, the dargah of Shah Mahbub alias Datta Sahib was extremely popular.⁴

The Rajshahi district:

Maulana Shah Daula alias Maulana Shah Mu'azzam Danishmand's dargah existed at Bagha. By tradition a descendant of Khalifat Harun ur-Rashid, he came to Bagha

¹ Ibid., 135.
² Burdwan, BDG, 198.
³ Bankura, BDG, 50.
⁴ Birbhum, BDG, 120-1.
and married the daughter of an influential noble 'Alā' Bakhsh Barkhudār Lashkari of Makhdumpur. It is also said that he declined the offer of rent-free lands from the sultan of Gaur, but the offer was subsequently accepted by his son Ḥamid Dānishmand.¹

The Bagura district:

The district of Bagura contained the shrines of several Pir, such as Fateh 'Alī Shāh of the Bagura town, Pir Shawā Kālā of Kashba, Baba Adam of Adamdighi and Dīwān Sāhib of Shahapur.² At Sherpur the shrines of Turkān Shahīd or Turkān Sāhib were widely popular. The town itself contained one of his shrines called 'Sir Mokām.' It is said that Turkān Shahīd was defeated and beheaded in an engagement with Rājā Vallaḷa-sēna. 'Sir Mokām' is supposed to be on the spot where his head fell, and his body is said to be buried at Dhad Mokām.³ At Pathuriaghata in Kashba Uchai was the dargah of Nimāi Pir on the west bank of the river Tulsiganga.⁴

The Pabna district:

Makhdum Shāh Daula Shahīd's body was enshrined at Shahzadpur in Pabna. Tradition directly connects him with two persons separated by a few centuries. He is said to be the son of the Prophet's companion Mu'aẓ bin Jabal (d. 17/18 A.H.) and to have met Jalāl ud-Dīn Bukhārī of Multan, the grandfather of his namesake, popular as Makhdum Jahānīyān, who flourished in the thirteenth century. He left Yemen with his followers and arrived

¹ JASB, 1904, ii, 112.
² Bogra, BDG, 36.
⁴ Sen, P.C., ibid., 79, 137.
at Shahzadpur where he was offered opposition by the Hindu rāja. The Pir and his followers were killed in the engagement. Shah Daula's sister drowned herself to save her honour and the spot came to be known as Sati-bibir Ghat. The head of the Pir was reportedly taken to Bihar and buried there, while the body was laid in the grave at Shahzadpur. A mosque built subsequently in the vicinity of his dargah was endowed with 722 bighās of rent-free lands.

iii. Fictitious:

The range of popular beliefs was too wide to contain itself within the bound of the legion of Pir of the above two categories. Such Pir, dead or alive, with historical associations in a particular place, were often found either inadequate or too well-defined for particular needs or too great for petty complaints and trifling requests. This set going on the one hand the process of attributing animistic powers to entities, who at best could only be taken as pseudo-historical, and on the other for a

1 JASB, 1904, I, iii, 262-71; Pabna, BDG, 121-6. It is rather interesting to note a parallelism between the fate of the Pir's sister and that of the sister of the defeated Hindu Rāja Pāraśurāma of Bagura. In the latter case the Hindu raja was defeated and killed, and his sister Sītā-devī drowned herself similarly in the Karatoya. The particular spot came to be called Sītā-devīr Ghat.

2 JASB, ibid., 267.

3 We do not include them in our group of legendary figures for the simple reason that the latter in our classification are possibly real personalities, whose lives and works cannot be established through adequate historical documents. Some of the Pir, who may appear to have been real and not entirely fictitious, have been included in the group of the fictitious entities, for if historical at all, they are entirely shrouded in obscurity, and next to nothing is known about them of a historical character.
large-scale concoction of thoroughly fictitious entities into the spacious fold of the Āirs.

Among those indefinite and doubtful historical personages, associated with animistic forces in the people's mind, Gājī (Ghāzī) or Gājī Sāheb occupies an important place. It may be noted that there is a Gājī Miṅā (Mīyān) identified with Sālār Mas'ūd Ghāzī, popular all over northern India and in some parts of Bengal too. But the present Gājī is to be distinguished from the other one. Sālār Mas'ūd is almost invariably associated with marriage and fertility from the standpoint of popular beliefs; Gājī Sāheb, as known in southern Bengal, was vested with the authority over tigers. Besides, we have, in some parts of Bengal, clear reference to marriage and fertility beliefs associated with the name of Gājī Miṅā or Sālār Cīnula, who was no other than Sālār Mas'ūd. Above all, the details known about Gājī through popular traditions leave no room for his identification with the other. We shall presently examine two literary folk traditions associated with the activities of Gājī, culminating in his marriage with a Hindu princess, to which the king opposed and caused a great battle. There are basic similarities in these two traditions suggesting a possible historical basis. It is extremely difficult, however, to explore the historical identity of this popular Āir. Several points in the folk-traditions, mentioned above, deserve attention. In both, the Hindu raja is named Maṭuk (Mukūṭa) and is placed in Khāniā or Brāhmaṇa-nagara. Khāniā also finds mention in Kṛṣṇarāma's Rāya-maṅgala as the seat of Dākṣiṇa-rāya, who was involved in a struggle with Gājī. In the south of the 24-Parganas district, there still exists a place called Khāniā containing ruins of old

1 See below.
buildings and three tanks, one of these being known as the tank of Maţuk (Maţuker dîghi). In the vicinity of Khaniā relics of two tombs are still associated with Bada-khān Gājī and Cāmpā-bibi. We have earlier hinted at the possibility of Gājī being associated with the reclamation of lands in the active delta, which drew him into conflict with local Hindu chiefs. On the other hand the outline of Gājī's life bears some analogy to that of Shāh Muhammad Mahisawār, as known from the writings of a Bengali poet, Muhammad Khān, who claims his descent from him. According to Muhammad Khān, Mahisawār, an Arab of the Siddīq family, arrived with his friend Khalīl at Chittagong, riding on the back of a fish. There he was attracted to a Brahmana girl, whom he wanted to marry. On the refusal of her father to his proposal, the suitor arrived at the Brahmana's house on a tiger and threatened him into submission. The points of similarity between this account and that of Gājī cannot fail to draw attention. But a straightforward identification of the two may not be warranted. An examination of popular traditions concerning the Pīrs shows that the practice of wanton interchange of some motifs is quite common. The desire to marry a Brahmana virgin is one of them. Forsaking the pleasures of a princely life in favour of the life of a Faqīr is another, which has been characterized by Zaehner in a different context as the 'renunciation motif'. This is the case with Gājī in the ballad Kalu-Gājī o Campavatī as also with some other Pīrs.

2 Ibid., 19.
3 Supra, 169-70.
4 Maqtal Husain (DMs 380:sl.353), fols.2b-3a.
5 Zaehner, R.C., op.cit., 20ff.
6 See below.
in Bengal such as Śah Langar and Maulānā Śah Daula. It is indeed hazardous to reach any conclusion on the basis of a similar motif grafted on to the story of different Pirs, facilitated by the eclectic tendencies of popular belief.

Gājī, as known in southern Bengal, underwent some modifications in course of his movement towards eastern Bengal, which had few villages 'without a shrine dedicated to Gājī Sahib'. In eastern Bengal, the sphere of Gājī's influence was extended to include his protective power over cattle. They prepared shīrī out of rice and milk at the cowshed, and offered it to Gājī. In Hindu houses a Muslim was invited to prepare the sweet. They also donated rice or money to the Faqirs, who sang about Gājī's influence over cattle. Along the banks of the river Lakhyā, on the outskirts of villages, mounds of earth smeared with cowdung stood beneath grass thatches. A mound contained two knobs on the top, said to represent the tombs of Gājī and Kalu. On the 22nd day after a cow had calved, the first milk drawn was poured over the mound as libation, and in times of sickness rice, banana and sweetmeat were offered.

Mobārak (Mubārak) or Mobra Gājī was another Pīr associated with the tiger-spirit, especially with the people of Barasat and Basirhat area in west Bengal as well as in the Sundarban area.

Sahi, g Badshah was another name recalled as the guardian-spirit in a tiger-infested forest in the Pratapgarh pargana to the south of Karimganj in Sylhet.

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1 Supra, 339.
2 Supra, 344-5.
3 Wise, JASB, op.cit., 43.
5 Wise, JASB, 43.
6 De Tassy, op.cit., 355.
There were several abodes (muqām) in the area said to have been founded by Sahiḫa Barshāh. Timber traders, both Muslim and Hindu, worshipped at the places; it is said that 'tigers in former days used to visit these shrines on Thursday nights and eat any food left for them, without molesting the persons stopping in the Mukām'.

Gāji Miṅa (Ḡāzī Miyān), as we have already noted, is different from Gājī, Gājī Sāheb and Baqar-khan Gājī. The former, often called Gajnā Dulhā and Sālar Cinulā was rather popular in north Bengal. Ḟāzī Miyān, identified with Ṣālār Mas'ūd, the nephew of Maḥmūd of Ghazni, is known to have died in a battle against some Hindu chiefs at Bahraich in Oudh. The beliefs and practices regarding his festival in Bengal are clear indications of his association with marriage and fertility. It is believed that he died on the day set for his marriage. Every year on the second Sunday in the Bengali month of Jyaistha the festival was held with great enthusiasm. A day was generally fixed for the wedding festival, a month previously. Eight days before the occasion a bamboo pole representing Ḟāzī Miyān, decorated with red and white pieces of cloth and a fan (cīmand), was erected on this particular site. On the second Friday of Jyaistha the pole, also called 'the flag of Miṅa', was taken to the jungle of Mirganj in the neighbourhood of Sherpur with the accompaniment of music. On that occasion a large number of Muslims and Hindus also performed a ceremony of exchanging garlands with Ḟāzī Miyān. On the next Sunday it was brought to the 'fair of Kella Kuṣī' (Kella-kuṣir-melā). The festivities continued

1 Sylhet, ADG, 83; Chaudhuri, A.C., op.cit., 1, 141.  
2 Wise has taken them as one, and has introduced traditions known about Gājī into the life of Ḟāzī Miyān. (JASH, op.cit., 45).  
4 Kundu, ibid., 34.
for Sunday and Monday, at the end of which the flagstaff was taken back on Tuesday to its original position, marking the end of the celebration. A girl born with the blessing of Ghazi was usually married to the pole representing Ghazi Miyan. Such girls were not generally accepted as brides afterwards, for it was believed that one of the spouses of such a marriage was destined to die soon afterwards.  

Khwaja Khizr, a highly controversial character often identified with the Prophet Ilyas, is a mythological figure widely respected in the Islamic world. He was believed to reside in the seas and rivers. He was also believed to ride upon a fish. He was resorted to by people at the first shaving of a boy, at marriages, and during the rainy seasons, by the launching in rivers and tanks of beras or small paper boats, decorated with flowers and lit up with candles.

Besides Khwaja Khizr, Bengal believed in a greater animistic power connected with water in Pir Badar, who shared with the former the dominion of waters. His spirit was invoked by every sailor and fisherman, when starting on a cruise, or when overtaken by a squall or storm. The inclusion of Pir Badar in the category of fictitious Pir is likely to result in some confusion, owing to the fact that Pir Badar is identified by many with Shaikh Badar ud-Din Badar-i Alam (d. 1440 A.D.). For many years a resident of Chittagong, he is said to be buried in Bihar. If this

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1 Ibid., 33-4; Sen, P.C., 107-8.
2 Kundu, 34-5.
3 The sultans of Oudh, as such, adopted the fish as a crest. (EI, II, 865).
5 Wise, ibid., 41; EI, II, 559 (this is in every detail a mere reproduction of Wise without acknowledgement).
identification is beyond question, Pir Badar should naturally find his legitimate place among historical Pirs in our classification. But this identification is not fully convincing. The association of Pir Badar so strongly with a water-spirit in preference to Khwaja Khizr, and the universal veneration that the Pir drew from the local people, irrespective of religious affiliations — the Muslims, Hindus and the Buddhist Maghs — are not adequately explained by the temporary stay at Chittagong of an itinerant Pir such as Badar 'Alam, whose tomb is even located in Bihar and not in Chittagong. Moreover, the myths surrounding the name of Pir Badar do not lend themselves to cogent explanations with reference to a religious personage like Badar-i 'Alam. It is believed that Pir Badar arrived at Chittagong 'floating on a rock', and informed the terror-stricken inhabitants that he had come all the way from Akyab on his novel craft. The neighbourhood of Chittagong being then invested by Jinns, or evil spirits, he exterminated them and took possession of the whole country. The rituals performed at the shrine associated with the name of Pir Badar claim some distinction too. Situated on a hillock, the place is reputed to be the spot where Pir Badar lit his lamp, and candles were burnt there nightly, the cost being met by contributions from people of different religious denominations. The points of doubt raised by the question of the true identity of Pir Badar have been expressed in attempts to relate him to some other figure than Badar-i 'Alam.

R.G. Hamilton is disposed to identify him with Khwaja Khizr. According to another account, he was a shipwrecked Portuguese sailor, named Pas Gual Peeris Bothello,

1 JASB, 1873, 302.
2 Wise, JASB, op. cit., 41.
3 Gait, op. cit., 178.
4 Ibid.
who reached the shore by clinging to a raft. D.C. Sen points out a possible corruption of Buddhist 'Bajra' to 'Badar'. We do not hazard any ready conclusion regarding a complex phenomenon of this nature until a thorough investigation is made into the question. We can only express strong doubt about the facile equation of Pir Badar and Badar-i 'Alam. Even if their identity is established beyond doubt, the wide popularity of the name of the Pir among all sections of the indigenous people, as well as the peculiarity of the beliefs and rituals concerning him, should demand a more convincing explanation.

Apart from these doubtful historical and legendary figures associated with animistic beliefs, the people created thoroughly fictitious entities clothed in the robes of Pirs and vested with command over particular ills, evils and sufferings. A large number among all categories of Pirs, that we have noted, were also sometimes invested with such powers. But with these fictitious elements such association was congenital and original rather than a later acquisition or arrogation as is generally the case with such historical and legendary Pirs of our classification. The former were called into existence to perform the particular functions associated with them right from the beginning, while the latter came to acquire such associations only in course of time. The origin of the fictitious Pirs does not always lend itself to clear explanation. On close analysis of their characteristic features, it appears that most of them are creatures of

1 Wise, JASB, op. cit., 41.
2 He cites the case of the word 'Budur' forming part of the name of the famous temple of Bara Budur, which he derives from 'Bajra', and that of a place in Bikrampur sub-division of the Dacca district named Bajrayogini, which is often pronounced as Badaryogini. The attachment of the Buddhist Maghs to the shrine of Pir Badar has been noted above.
animistic belief, and some of them are merely Hindu gods and goddesses metamorphosed; while a few offer interesting problems concerning their origin. Of the purely animistic spirits we choose to make note of the following.

Āthkā Pir was taken recourse to by the people for quick recovery from illness or for warding-off some trouble without delay. ¹ It is interesting to note that the term āthkā means 'sudden'.

Hajir Pir was one of a few supernatural agents whose favour the people solicited for getting back the lost cattle. A supplicant observed a fast, took a bath and prepared 'sinni' which he offered to the Pir. ²

Ṭhankā Pir was believed to be capable of restoring things lost. ³ The ritual concerning propitiation of the Pir bears strikingly close resemblance to the vrata rites, observed by the Hindus in Bengal with a view to getting some particular desire fulfilled. Tuesday and Saturday were generally considered rather auspicious for applying to Ṭhankā Pir. On the particular day a part of the courtyard of the house was ceremonially cleaned and any number of wooden seats (pindi) and an equal number of the banana leaf-tips (kalār āg pata) were placed there. Each of these contained at least four whole betel leaves and betel nuts. The ceremony began with making salutation (salam), and thereafter in the usual fashion of a vrata festival, a story was told before the gathering proclaiming the greatness of Ṭhankā Pir and the absolute merit of seeking his favour. ⁴ The ceremony was concluded with the

² Ibid., 229.
³ Ibid., 227.
⁴ Ibid. The story goes about a Brāhmaṇa boy, who became blind for not having shown due regard to the ritualistic propitiation of Ṭhankā Pir. He got back his vision, as soon as his mother made arrangements for the ceremony in honour of the Pir.
distribution of betel leaves and nuts among the people present at the occasion.

Norā Pir was another name in this category. His favour was sought to ensure that a particular mission was fulfilled. Usually some big banyan tree (Ficus bengalensis) were associated with his name. People kept vows in the name of the Pir and tied a knot called nora on a wisp of grass or a hay and put it under the tree. Such Pirṣ appear to be no more than anthropomorphised tree-spirits, often representing the genius loci, the local godling. Tree-worship is a widely prevalent practice, and in Bengal itself, besides the cult of Bana-durga, tree-worship was frequently represented by the cults of such Pirṣ, often named differently in different places. In the village of Girisgangasagar in the Contai sub-division of the district of Midnapur, a banyan tree was regarded sacred by reason of its being the supposed abode of Nekursani Pir.² Situated on the way to the local court of justice, it was adored and resorted to by litigants on the belief that the Pir would bless them with success in their lawsuits. The offerings to the tree-shrine consisted of; quite appropriately for a tree, lumps of clay and, curiously enough, of red-rags tied to its branches, and in some cases clay images of horses. At Balya-govindapur in the same sub-division, was another tree, botanically a hybrid of banyan and pipal (Ficus religiosa) and popularly known as the 'Makdum tree', believed to be the abode of one 'Makdum [Makhdūm] Pir'.³ Whenever any person fell into some worldly trouble, he took a vow to offer shirni or a dishful of sugar-

¹ Ibid., 223.
³ Ibid., 242-3.
wafers (būtāsā) to the Pir. Occasionally clay horses were offered to him also. According to the local popular tradition and belief, the tree had grown out of a twig used by the Pir for cleansing his teeth.¹

Another category of fictitious Pir were local divinities metamorphosed into Pir. In the Mymensingh district the fame of Manāi Pir was extensive.² The rites and ceremonies concerning the adoration of the Pir were almost identical with those of Kartika-vrata, as performed in the same region. Manāi Pir was adored by unmarried girls to obtain bridegrooms, while the married women sought him for the sake of fertility. The 20th day of Phālguna in the west of the Brahmaputra and the 19th in its east were generally chosen for the ceremony known as the shirni of Manāi Pir. The initiative was taken in rotation by one or two families in the village by sending betel leaves and betel nuts to other families. The acceptance of the same was a token of acceptance of the invitation. On the particular day a high structure was built in the courtyard of the house with a high altar of clay in the middle, having twigs of bamboo in each of the four corners of the altar, supporting a canopy. The altar contained as many water pitchers (pūral) as promised under the vow. Both married women and unmarried girls were entrusted with the filling of the pitchers with water from a pond or river. While fetching water, they tied the edges of their sāris one to another, each carrying on the head a ceremonial tray (kulā) containing vermilion, a lamp, paddy-grains and a wisp of grass (dūrvā). All the pitchers were placed on the altar with a small lamp of mustard oil burning on the top of the pitcher all through the night. On both sides of the altar were placed eight decorated

¹ Ibid., 244.
² Ray, K.K., SPP, op.cit., 212.
and painted clay pots full of sweets. Fowls were also ceremonially sacrificed. One, who offered shirni for the first time in expectation of child, kept standing after making salutation to the Pir with a lamp on the head until it fell by itself. The whole night the womenfolk continued singing about the Pir. In the end it was for the Mullā to read the fatiḥa. In the early hours of the morning the assembled women enjoyed the sweets. With the rise of the sun they all returned back to their respective houses, taking their own pitchers.

Another Pir of this category was Tinnāth Pir, who appears to have been no other than a Muslim version of the Natha trinity called Trinātha, Ādi-nātha (Siva), Matsyendra-nātha or Mīna-nātha and Gorakṣa-nātha. The Hindus would often refer to this trinity as Tinnāth-thakur. The Muslims of the Alapsingh pargana resorted to Tinnāth Pir in the event of losing cattle or of illness.¹ A vow was taken, in the name of the Pir, for three, five or seven courses or rounds (kalki) of hemp promised to the Pir, should the wish be fulfilled, in which case the promised hemp or its equivalent in money was handed over to some addict of hemp, who was required to organize a ceremony for Tinnāth.²

But by far the greatest figure in this category of Pirs was Mājīk Pir, whose wide renown as a patron Pir of rural households promoting the fertility of cattle, agricultural prosperity, health and family happiness, endeared him to the heart of both Muslims and Hindus, and turned him into one of the most popular idols in medieval Bengal. There was no formal religious shrine associated with his name but he was enshrined in the living faith of

¹ Ibid., 229.
² Ibid.
the people, who performed ceremonies in his honour and gave donations to the Faqirs cherishing his name and singers singing ballads about his greatness and super-natural powers.¹ Such songs were known as Ḍālik-pīr-e-gī.² The identity of Ḍālik Pīr is not amenable to easy explanation. While in some respect he appears to partake of the character of Śiva, he may also be taken as a counterpart of Gorakh-nātha. A tradition, in fact, connects him with Gorakh-nātha of whom he is represented as a disciple.³ The tradition is connected with a ceremony which consists in offering sweetmeats made of milk to Gorakh-nātha and Ḍālik. A song is sung in this connection in which we find that Ḍālik Pīr comes to the house of Kālu-ghos with the cry of vam vam, a common practice among Śaivite mendicants. Kālu-ghos’s mother offers the Faqir five small coins in the name of Pānc Pīr. Ḍālik refuses to accept cash and asks for milk and curds. Kālu’s mother tries to dispose of him through trickery, as a result of which all their cattle and even the milk-maid die. She then realises her folly and begs for the mercy of the Pīr. Ḍālik takes pity on her, strikes his staff (āṣā) against the ground, and everything is restored to its original state.⁴ In west Mymensingh, the first birth of a calf to a cow was followed by the preparation, inside the cowshed, of a sweet composed of sugar, rice and molasses and offering a portion of it to the name of the Pīr on the banana leaf-tip. The rest of the sweet was served on banana leaves and shared by all the people. At the end of the meal, the leaves were tucked on the fences of the cowshed.⁵

² Ibid. We shall consider a ballad on Ḍālik Pīr in the second section of this discussion.
³ Dasgupta, S.B., op.cit., 371.
⁴ Bāṅglār Sakti, III, iii, cited, ibid.
⁵ Ray, K.K., SPP, 228.
The cult of Pānc Pir offers an interesting anthropological riddle. Its inclusion in this particular category of Pirs implies an attempt on our part to relate it to an indigenous cult. The cult was as popular in Bengal as in other parts of India and as much so with Hindus as Muslims. The place of worship was usually a small tomb with five domes, or a simple mound at the foot of a pipal or banyan tree. Offerings of goats, cocks, sweetmeats, etc. were made in order to obtain children or get rid of some incurable disease, or to ensure success in business etc. In the forest that overgrew the old city of Sonargaon was a very holy shrine of Pānc Pir containing five unfinished tombs.¹

All this is clear enough. But the identity of the Pānc Pir remains shrouded in obscurity, and hence controversial. The controversy is rooted in the fact that the popular beliefs concerning this quintet of divinities have left no common list of names for them. The list varies widely from place to place and occasionally stretches even to include Amina Satī, a faithful widow, who died along with her husband, or Bhairon, a minor Hindu godling.² Sometimes it is taken as referring to Panjitanī Pāk or five holy persons, who according to the Shi'ī are Muhammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Hasan and Ḥusain, while many Sunnīs interpret the same expression as meaning Muḥammad and the first four Khalīfās.³ Some have traced the cult to the five Pāndava brothers of the Mahābhārata.⁴ Wise points out that the number five has been a lucky number and that the word 'five' may also have been used

1 Wise, JASB, op.cit., 44; Ray, S.C., op.cit., 34.
2 The Imperial Gazetteer of India, op.cit., I, 435.
3 Gait, op.cit., 180.
4 The Imperial Gazetteer of India, loc. cit.
vaguely, as indicating an indefinite number, in the same way as half-a-dozen is sometimes used in English. But if so, it is not clear why there should be a collective tomb for these Pīrs in addition to their individual shrines, nor why there should invariably be a representation of exactly five separate tombs.

The wide distribution of the cult of Pānc Pīr in India as well as its equal popularity among the lower caste orders among the Hindus may be taken to point to an earlier indigenous source. Hence among the various suggestions we are disposed towards a view which traces the origin of the cult to one of the earliest objects of worship in India, namely the Yakṣas. The wide popularity of the worship of the Yakṣas, especially some of the stalwarts in this cadre, such as Mani-bhadra, Vaiṣravana, Pūrṇa-bhadra, etc., has received the attention of scholars.

Agrawala relates the later Bīra or Baram or Baramha worship at the popular level to the ancient Yakṣa worship. He further refers to the concept of Pañca-bīra and suggests its transformation into that of Pañca-pīr or Pānc Pīr. H.P. Dwivedi and S.L. Sanghavi lend support to this contention by pointing out that in Cūlikā, Pañca or Panjābī dialects, the pronunciation Pīra of the word Bīra is highly probable, and that while coming through Panjab, 'the Muslims brought this pronunciation with them to the east'.

1 JASB, op. cit., 44-5.
2 Ibid., 45.
4 Ibid., 2-3, 118-43.
5 Ibid., 135-6.
6 Ibid.
Among the entirely fictitious entities, there are a few whose character is rather difficult to determine. If they are thought as of animistic origin, there is nothing very clear about their animistic implications.

A typical instance is the Bára Auliya/Auliya* (Twelve Saints). At the village of Nandapara in Bakharganj there existed a shrine called 'the shrine of Bára Auliya', where it was locally believed that twelve saints engaged themselves in religious activities. The people there believed that some twelve Pírs were coming from Baghdad to Chittagong riding on fish. On the way, the time for offering prayers (namaz) struck, and while they were looking for some suitable spot for that purpose, they found an island in the sea where they landed and offered namaz. They named the island 'Súnya-dvāpa' or 'Sandvīpa'. The actual spot where they are believed to have offered their prayers was thought to be the place containing the shrine.

Satya Pīr occupies a similar position. His popularity in Bengal was as much with the Hindus as with the Muslims, and the extent of his popularity may be gauged from the large volume of literature on the Pīr, contributed by the Muslims as well as the Hindus in medieval Bengal. The overwhelming majority of the Satya Pīr poets are Hindus, while only two Muslims are known to have written on the theme - one is Shaikh Faizullāh of the village Padina in west Bengal and the other is 'Arif of the village Tajpur in west Bengal too. But while Hindus formed the majority

2 Chakravarti, R.: Sandvīper Itihās, 11.
3 HBBL, 396-7; BSI, I, ii, 452-66.
4 BSI, ibid., 462.
5 Ibid., 456-62.
of the writers on Satya Pir, the Muslims monopolised the singing of these ballads.

The central theme of Satya Pir was interwoven by different writers with other popular romantic strains. But the most usual type of Satya-pir-panchali is characterized by the inclusion of the following two themes. The first is a very simple one of a Brahma, acquiring great fortune by following the advice of God, who appears in the guise of a Faqir, asking him to worship Satya Pir or Satya Narayana with shirinī. The second follows closely on the model of the merchant episode, rather typical of Mahāgaṇa-kavya literature — especially the Dhanapati-Khullana episode of the Candī-maṅgala. According to this, a sadāgar or sadhu (merchant) is blessed with a daughter by the kind favour of Satya Pir. After the marriage of his daughter, the sadāgar sets out on a commercial mission accompanied by his son-in-law. But he suffers immense afflictions through having failed to worship the Pir. They return safely, however, thanks to the devotion of the merchant's wife to the Pir. But on the approach of the merchant's boat to the shore, the daughter of the merchant rushes to meet her husband, showing some disrespect to the Pir's offering, as a result of which the boat capsizes near the shore. The boat, along with everything on board, is restored only when Satya Pir is duly worshipped.

The origin of the Satya Pir cult is shrouded in obscurity. What stands beyond all disputation is the fact that Satya Pir is not a historical personality. It is, however, interesting to note that a few shrines connected with his name existed. There was a shrine

1 Ibid., 451.
2 Ibid., 452.
of Satya Pîr in a field south of Hayatnagar, in Bankura. Another site called Satya Pîrer Bhîtâ (the abode of Satya Pîr) existed on the ruins of the Buddhist monastery at Paharpur in Rajshahi. But the existence of these shrines alone does not establish the historicity of a person of this name, which otherwise also does not seem probable. It appears to be a simple cult without reference to any historical being.

Some believe that Husain Shâh of Bengal was responsible for the introduction of the cult. Some late 18th century punthi literature of fictional type also connects Husain Shâh with Satya Pîr. No attempt has been made anywhere in the work to establish this connexion, and there is nothing of historical worth in mere conjectural assertions of this nature. It is a common presumption again that the Satya Pîr cult is a syncretic one - a remarkable product of the fusion and coalescence of Hindu and Muslim beliefs and practices. The different versions of the Satya Pîr tradition lend some support to the syncretic view. We have already noted the tradition that God appears before a Brâhmaṇa in the guise of a Faqîr to advise him to worship Satya Pîr or Satya Narayâna. On the refusal of the Brâhmaṇa, God reappears in the form of Hindu god Hari or Krsna. The Brâhmaṇa comes to realise the essential oneness of the two, and offers him shirnî as a token of his respectful

1 Bankura, BDG, 50.
2 Dikshit, K.N.: Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 55, 80.
3 HBLL, 797.
4 'Arif: Lâlmoner Kecchā, quoted, SPP, 1310 B.S., 147.
submission. From the work of a young outcaste Brahmana, named Kaṅka, referred to earlier, we come to know that he was instructed by his Muslim spiritual master to compose on the theme of Vidya-sundara proclaiming the glorification of Satya Pīr.  

In the absence of any other historical evidence, the literature of the cult could only be used to throw some light in the matter. The Satya Pīr literature, read and interpreted carefully, might suggest some lines of enquiry. It is noted earlier that a typical literature of the cult contains two interesting episodes - the one about the Brahmana and the other about the merchant. Taken them together, it serves to focus attention on the process of acceptance of the cult of Pīr by the upper section of the Hindu community. It is brought out very clearly in these two integral themes that the Brahmana and the merchant, reluctant in the beginning, are made to see the merit of worshipping Satya Pīr, to whom they owe their prosperity and safety. The process is not dissimilar to the way many of the laukika deities of Bengal found recognition in the higher pantheon. Initially worshipped by the peasants and the fishermen, Manasā, the serpent-goddess forced her way to the upper section of the community, symbolised by her acceptance

1 Bhārata-candra, op.cit.; BSF, I, ii, 452.
3 Supra, 362.
4 Supra, 81 and also 77.
on the part of the sāvite merchant Cāndo or Cānd. The 
latter agreed to worship the goddess of 'low origin' 
making offering in his left hand, only after he was made 
to see the essential identity between Manasā and the 
great goddess Bhagavatī, and saw Durgā and Manasā, seated 
on a chariot, offering total resemblance to each other.¹

It is a quite rational conjecture that the Hindu 
masses were more vulnerable than the upper classes to the 
impact of the Muslim Pīrs - a vulnerability that might go 
a long way to explain the process of conversion in Bengal.²

The upper section of the Hindu social order could not long 
remain indifferent to the growing influence of the Pīrs in 
the level of the local masses. Rather, its hieratic 
vanguard - the Brahmanas - might have found this a source 
of anxiety and alarm. It did not take them long to find 
a clever answer to the challenge, and transform adoration 
for individual Muslim Pīrs into an abstraction of a cultus, 
incorporating all that the Pīrs stood for in the mind of 
the masses. What emerged was not exclusive to the Muslims, 
for the Brahmana received instruction for the worship of 
Satya Pīr from God Himself, who appears first as a Faqīr 
and later on as Hari.³ Vidyāpati in his Pāncalī on the 
Pīr makes Satya Pīr an incarnation in the Kali-yuga, 
appearing 'in the guise of a Fakīr'.⁴ Nothing was there 
now even in the way of a Brahmana officiating at the Pīr's 
worship. The threat was turned into an advantage. The 
orthodox section of the Brahmanas did not attempt any 
intelligent compromise and went for outright appropriation 
of the cult, stripping it thoroughly of its Muslim 
associations. The sacred Sanskrit text of Skanda-purāṇa 
was interpolated, and in the section called Revā-khanḍa

¹ Vijaya-gupta, op.cit., 228-9. 
² Supra, Ch. II, D. 
³ Supra, 362-3. 
⁴ Quoted, BSI, I, ii, 455.
Satya Narayana disposed of Satya Pir, and the Faqir was completely overshadowed by the omnipresence of the Brähmana.1 The orthodox Brähmanical reaction was positively hostile to the cult of Satya Pir. This is again evidenced by the life of Kanka, the author of the Satya-pirer-katha, as referred to earlier.2 A Brähmana of Mymensingh, Kanka was brought up by a Cándala couple, both of whom died while he was a boy of five. He was picked up from the śmaśāna by a kindly and scholarly Brähmana, Garga, in whose care he grew up into an intelligent young man, well-versed in all learning. He had already earned a good reputation as a poet, when he met a great Pir and accepted his discipleship. The Pir left the place, leaving instruction to Kanka to write a Satya-pirer-pāṇcālī. Kanka earned immense popularity as the poet of the Pāṇcālī, which was 'well received by both Hindus and Muslims devoted to Satya Pir'. But when Garga proposed to restore Kanka to his Brähmana caste at a meeting of the Brähmanas, assembled at his own place, the orthodox Brähmanas led by Nandu offered vehement opposition and made capital not only out of the fact that he was brought up in the house of a Cándala, but also of his being spiritually instructed by a Muslim. They accused Kanka of being a Muslim, and copies of his popular work 'Satyer Pāṇcālī' were 'torn' and 'burnt' by them.3

If the orthodox object was to make the cult their own, they fell far short of their goal, for Satya Pir and Satya Narayana remained one and the same to the people.

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1 The Bangabasi edition of the text retains the name of Satya Pir, while the Venkatesvara Press edition does not mention him at all. (Kane, P.V.: History of Dharmaśāstra, V, i, 437).
3 Kanka o Līlā in Pbg, I, ii, 265-6.
'Arif combines the names into Satya Pir Nārāyaṇa. In another place he mentions Gājī Satya Nārāyaṇa. In some other we find Pir Nārāyaṇa sitting in Mecca. Faizullāh addresses Satya Pir as Gājī and says:

Thou art Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Nārāyaṇa.

b. The Beliefs about the Pīrś:

The widespread beliefs about the saints and Pīrś, with reference to their potencies and capabilities of working wonders, are the most fascinating parts of the study of their cult. The belief in the capacity of saints to heal, help and perform other miraculous feats extends over almost the whole range of human need and imagination. The graves of saints were visited by the farmer who had lost his cow, by the woman who desired a child, or sought cure for her sick one, by the merchant who desired prosperity in business, by the ruler who wished victory against the enemy and so on.

Popular belief endowed the Pīrś with distinct as well as common attributes and powers. It is quite difficult to reduce these beliefs into the framework of a consistent and clear-cut systematic classification but an attempt in the direction is worth its while. These beliefs may be broadly grouped under two categories: one set of beliefs shows that the saints and Pīrś were considered not subject to the laws of physical nature applying to the rest of the mankind, and the other, flowing from the first itself, reveals that they were even thought to possess command over the forces of nature.

1 BSI, 547.
2 Ibid., 458.
3 Ibid., 462.
4 Ibid.
As a concrete expression of beliefs of the first category our attention is drawn to those about the physical inviolability of the saints and Pīrs. Daulat Wazir Bahrām Khān traces his descent to one miracle-working Pīr, Ḥamīd Khān, who was allegedly involved in a conflict with the king, and subjected to various situations fraught with danger to life. He was thrown before a tiger, drowned in the sea, placed before an elephant bound hand and foot, consigned to flames, struck with a scimitar, shot with arrows and finally poisoned, but he came out unimpaired. Shah 'Abd ul-'Alā', whose shrine existed at Gohattā-mahalla, to the north of Magrapara in Sonargaon, is said to have remained 'immersed in his meditation' in a forest continuously for twelve years, as a result of which he was 'buried upto his neck by the sand raised by ants (balmīk)'. This earned him a popular name, Pokāi Dīwar. It is said of Shah Maḥbūb, alias Dātā Sāhib of Patharchapuri, Suri sub-division, Birbhum, that he could 'remain under water throughout the year'. Saiyid ul-'Arifīn, whose tomb existed at the foot of a very old banyan tree at Kalisuri in Bakarganj, was known to be capable of floating on the water on his magic carpet. Jairaddi represents Pīr Bādar as walking across the Gaṅgā on his wooden sandals (khaḍām). Shah Sulṭān Māhisawār was believed to have come to Bengal riding on a fish. The same was believed about Shah Jalāl Bukhārī - a fact which was associated with the name of a place called Mahiganj in Rangpur, where there was a tomb.

1 Ray, S.C., op.cit., 83. 'Pokā' in Bengali means 'insects'.
2 Birbhum, BDG, 125.
3 Bakarganj, BDG, 148.
5 Muhammad Khān: Maqtal Husain, DMs, op.cit., fols.2b-3a.
believed to be his. Pir Badar was believed to have reached Chittagong on a floating rock.

Some of the saints were credited with travelling great distance at a short space of time. Shah Jalal of Sylhet was believed by his followers to perform his 'morning prayer everyday at Mecca' and also his annual Hajj 'in as much as he vanished from the people's sight on the days of the 'Arfa and 'Id, and nobody knew whither he had gone'. The same kind of belief was cherished about Baba Farid of Chittagong, who went to Mecca to offer his homage to the Lord, and 'came back instantly to Catigram'. Shaikh 'Ala' ul-Haq left instruction with his disciples, on the eve of his death, not to perform his funeral prayers by themselves and leave it for Makhdum Jahaniyan. The disciples were perplexed as Makhdum was at Usch in Sind at the time. While they were still worrying about this after the Shaikh's death, Makhdum Jahaniyan arrived and led the funeral prayers.

It is said about Machandali Saif, whose tomb was near Ganga-sagar, 24-Parganas, that while a barber was shaving the saint one day, the saint suddenly disappeared. He returned shortly afterwards dripping with perspiration, and on being questioned explained that a ship had run aground, and as the crew had appealed to him, he had gone to pull it into deep water. The barber laughed incredulously; whereupon he and all his family died forthwith.

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1 Rangpur, DGEPA, 146.
2 Supra, 352.
3 Ibn Ba'ttuta, 241.
4 Muhammad Khan: Maqtaul Husain, fols. 1b-2a.
5 'Abd ur-Rahman Chishti: Mir'at ul-Asrar, ASB Ms 264, fol. 462a.
6 Gait, 177.
The saints were thought of as not being subject to the consequences of death like ordinary mortals. Ahmad 'Ali, popularly known as Zinda Faqir, who is buried near the shrine of Khān Jahan at Bagerhat, is said to have risen, while being buried, and asked the mourners to bring his Koran. ¹ The severed head of a martyred saint could talk. It is said about Shāh Ahmad Gesu Daraz, whose dargāh lay at Kharampur near Akhaura in Tripura, that he was killed fighting on the side of Shāh Jalāl of Sylhet against the Hindu king Gauḍ-govinda. His severed head and one of his wooden shoes (khadām, hence the name of the place became Kharampur) were found by a Kaibartta, while fishing in the river, and to the latter's great astonishment the head began to speak. The Kaibartta embraced Islam and erected a tomb to the saint.² The decapitated body of Shāh Ismā'īl Ghāzī, the warrior-saint, who was executed at the order of Sultān Husain Shāh, mounted on a horse and rode forth to Mandaran, where his body is believed to be buried.³ A tomb was built at Mandaran on the site by the rāja of Bardah in fulfilment of his vow that he would build a dargāh for Shāh Ismā'īl, should he become successful against the rāja of Burdwan.⁴

The person of the saint possessed great sanctity in the eyes of the people. Any attempt to do harm to a saint might result in dire consequences. Aurangzeb is said to have sent Dilīr Khān to execute Ni'matullāh, known to be the religious guide of Shāh Shuja'ū. On his arrival at Gaur the Mughul commander lost his son Fateh yār Khān, who died

¹ Khulna, BDG, 167.
² Gaıt, 178.
³ Hooghly, BDG, 290-1.
⁴ Ibid.
'after vomiting blood'. Sultan İbrahim Sharqī of Jaunpur and his qāẓī, during the former's invasion of Bengal for the suppression of Rāja Gānēśa, earned the displeasure of Shaikh Nur Qūṭb 'Ālam, as a result of which the sultan and the qāẓī were believed to have died on their return to Jaunpur. Shaikh Anwār, son of Nur Qūṭb 'Ālam, was banished by Rāja Gānēśa from Pandua to Sonargaon, where he was allegedly tortured to death by royal officials. It is said that Gānēśa himself expired exactly at the moment the 'sacred blood' of Shaikh Anwār dropped on the earth.

The beliefs concerning the special and supernatural position of the saints not only placed them above the application of the universal laws of nature, but even invested them with powers to assume control over the forces of nature and often override them.

The saints were believed to be endowed with unusual powers of anticipation, prophetic vision and ability to make infallible and irrevocable statements. We have already noted in a different context Makhduμ Jahanīyān's knowledge, while staying at Ucch, of Shaikh 'Alā' ul-Ḥaq's death in Bengal and the latter's desire to have his funeral prayer led by Jahanīyān. Sultan Ghiyās ud-Dīn 'Iwāż Khaljī is said to have served two saints with respect

1 Gupta, R.K., II, Appendix, 16. A shrine called Ni'matullāh's Bāra-duārī existed at Firozepur near Gaur. The tomb of Fateh yar Kān also was there near the Qadam Rasūl Building in Gaur. (Ibid., 16-7).
2 G.H. Salīm, 112-4. It is conclusively established on numismatic and other evidence that İbrahim Sharqī continued to live long after his return to Jaunpur from Bengal. (Wright, H.N., II, 211).
3 G.H. Salīm, 115-6.
4 Supra, 369.
and humility before he came to Bengal. The pleased saints asked him to proceed immediately to India, 'where there was a kingdom allotted for him'.

According to Ibn Battūta, Shaikh Jalāl of Sylhet summoned his disciples before his death and said, 'I shall leave you tomorrow, God willing....' He expired the following day, and a grave was discovered by the side of his grave. Ibn Battūta was received by four of the Shaikh's disciples at a distance of two days' journey from the khanqah, on the instructions of the Shaikh himself, saying: 'A traveller from the west has come to you, go to receive him'. Battūta found the Shaikh wearing a mantle made of goat's wool, which he wished to possess himself as a gift from the Shaikh. Shah Jalāl read his mind and presented him with the mantle along with a cap on Ibn Battūta's departure. The Shaikh told his disciples that Ibn Battūta would be dispossessed of the mantle, which should finally find its way to a particular Sufi. The course of events narrated by Ibn Battūta proved the prophecy come true in every detail.

Shaikh Anwar is said to have disturbed his father Nur Quṭb 'Alam in his prayers, when the former came to complain against the 'tyranny' of Rāja Ganesa. The enraged father cursed his son, saying: 'this tyranny shall cease only when thy blood shall be shed on the earth'. It is said that Shaikh Anwar was tortured to death by royal officials at Sonargaon.

'Abd ul-Latif during his visit to Bengal found in the region of Ghoraghat mangoes containing 'black worms as large as the gad-fly'. No hole appeared in the fruit

1 Stewart, C., 56.
3 Ibid., 240.
4 G.H. Salim, 115-6.
5 Ibid.
from outside. He was told that that particular evil was
due to a curse pronounced by the saint Nur Qutb 'Alam on
a village headman of the region. 1

Shah Pahlawan of Shekhara in Faridpur is known to
have left instructions before his death to make his grave
oriented east and west. But on his death, his instruction
was disregarded, as inconsistent with Islamic rites, and he
was laid on a grave dug as required by Islamic law. Next
morning it was discovered that the grave had turned in
the direction of his choice. 2

Shah Karim 'Ali of Jagannathpur in Tripura was
considered able to 'raise from the dead'. 3 The same power
was attributed to Shah Gharib, whose tomb existed at
Baraijuri near Pansa in the Faridpur district. 4

The ability to cure diseases and ailments is a power
commonly attributed to the Firs. Their shrines were
visited by the people largely with this object. Shah
Mahbub of Birbhum was known being able to 'cure dangerous
diseases by applying ashes or grass'. 5 Makhdum Saiyid
Shah Zahir ud-Din of Birbhum was also credited with the
possession of the miraculous power of curing all sorts of
diseases, and his tomb was frequented by votaries, who
came for relief from their ailments. 6 The tombs of
Khwandkar Muhammad Yusuf and his father at Magrapara in
Sonargaon were resorted to by people, who took vows in
their names for the sake of relief from diseases. 7

1 'Abd ul-Latif's Account, 146.
3 wise, J.: 'Notes on Sunargaon', JASB, 1874, XLIII, pt.1,
5 Birbhum, BDG, 125.
6 Ibid.; 121.
7 Ray, S.C., 80.
The shrine of Shah Jalal in Sylhet preserved a sword called 'Zulfiqar' said to have been used by him, a deer-skin for prayers, a pair of wooden-sandals, two copper cups and the egg of an ostrich, believed to have been brought by him to this country. Those objects were held in the utmost veneration by the people, and water used in washing them was drunk for recovery from illness.\(^1\) Shaikh Hamid used to dip in water an edge of the shoe used by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindî and the water was believed to possess the potency of curing people of their ailments.\(^2\)

Some Pirs were supposed to have control over particular ailments. The dust from the shrine of Alman Saheb near Bainchi in Hugli, if rubbed on the body, was believed to remove all kinds of rheumatic pains.\(^3\) A dargah in Noakhali made similar specialization in the cure of rheumatism.\(^4\) In Burdwan the people bathed in the tank called 'Maine-pukur' and rolled on the ground of the adjoining dargah of Maulana Hamid Danishmand - an act supposed to be conducive to the cure of all kinds of skin disease.\(^5\) The dargah of Pagal Saheb at Habibpur in Sonargaon was resorted to by parents seeking remedy against dangerous diseases for their children.\(^6\)

Quite a large number of Pirs and shrines were associated with animals, both domestic and wild, as well as reptiles and even birds, and invested with controlling authority over them. We have already noted that Manik Pir,

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\(^1\) Chaudhuri, A.C., I, ii, 37.
\(^2\) Rizvi, 279-80.
\(^3\) Gait, 197.
\(^6\) Ray, S.C., 84.
Gaji and Hajir Pir were entrusted, among other responsibilities, with the care and well-being of the cattle. Khan Jahan of Bagerhat was also offered the milk by the local people whenever a cow was first milked. At Astagram, in Mymensingh, no cultivator would yoke cows to a plough without remembering Quṭb Saheb.  

We have also noted that Gaji, Kalu, Mobra Gaji and even Gaji Mina and Pir Badar were regarded as commanding tigers.

Gaji and Kalu also exercised authority over crocodiles. Majlis Saheb and Badar Saheb were, according to tradition, two brothers who were buried in Kalna, Burdwan district. It was believed that between the two tombs, which are almost a mile apart on the river bank, a man was safe from any accident, and even crocodiles would not attack him. South of Khan Jahan's mausoleum in Bagerhat, Khulna, there was a large tank believed to be constructed by Khan Jahan, but rather surprisingly called Thakur-dighi. This contained a large number of crocodiles, which received the people's veneration and were supposed to be descendants of two crocodiles – Kalā-pād (pāhād?) and Dhala-pād, kept by Khan Jahan. There was a similar crocodile named Kalā-khan in a 'sacred' tank called Pir-pukur, attached to the shrine of Shah Shafi' Sultan.

1 Mitra, S.C., I, 292.
2 Mymensingh, BDG, 38.
3 Ibid.
4 See below.
5 See below.
6 Burdwan, BDG, 198.
7 Khulna, BDG, 166-7; Mitra, S.C., I, 331-2.
8 This appears to be a pre-existing tank, only renamed Pir-pukur, for it is longer on the north-south direction as required by the Hindu Sastrakars and common practice among the Hindus. (Gupta, A.C.: Hugli bā Daksīn Rādh, I, 65-0).
at Pandua. To this also people made votive offerings.① Womenfolk propitiated the crocodiles attached to the shrines of Bagerhat and Pandua 'in the belief that this offering will procure them offspring'.②

Some Firs were believed to possess powers over snakes. Saiyid Ṣahā Ḥādīlā Ḥākīmī of the village Khustigri, Suri sub-division in the district of Birbhum, was 'especially renowned for the power which he had over serpents', and his name was repeated in formulas of enchantment against snakes.③ Another Fir of this category is Ṣāḥib Kāmil whose dargāh exists at Bhūinyananya in Sirajganj. People poured milk and rice ④ on the shrine.

Even birds were believed to respect some Firs. Madan Fir had a famous shrine at Netrakona in Mymensingh district, and birds were believed never to fly over it.⑤

There are traditions about several Firs, whose shrines were closely associated with certain trees thought to have grown miraculously for the benefit of the particular Fir. It is likely that such association of a locally worshipped tree and a Fir is artificial and contrived - the result of the local tree-cult being grafted on the myths about the Fir. To the south of Salāmī-darwāza in Pandua, said to be the place where Ṣāḥib Jalāl Tabrīzī took his first seat on his arrival, was a margosa (nim) tree highly respected by people. It was believed that the tree originated from the tooth-pick

① Hooghly, BDG, 109.
② Khulna, BDG, 167; ibid.
③ Birbhum, BDG, 120.
④ Milk and rice are the most popular offerings to the snakes.
⑤ Mymensingh, BDG, 38.
of Shah Jalal. 1 Makhdum Rahim ud-Din, said to be one of the companions of Shah Jalal of Sylhet, was believed to have placed his staff at Jalalpur, out of which grew a banyan tree. The custodians of his dargah at Jalalpur distributed the leaves of the tree among people in different places and those were received with great respect, veneration and faith.2 Similar belief existed about Saiyid Shah 'Abdullah Kirmani of Birbhum. It is noted about him that he left Kirman in Persia, when very young, and met Shah Arzani who directed him to go to Bengal. Shah Arzani gave him a tooth-pick of Chambeli wood, telling him to remain at that place where he found the tooth-pick fresh and green. Shah 'Abdullah arrived at Birbhum and stayed at Bargaon near Bhodia. But as the tooth-pick remained dry, he went to Khustigri. While in that village, one night he put the tooth-pick under his pillow, and on awakening found it was fresh and green. He planted it immediately at the place and it soon became a large tree.3

The Pirs were also thought to have command over the water-spirits. The name of Khwaja Khizr was almost universally known in the Muslim world as the guardian-spirit of water.4 Pir Badar was another highly popular name in this regard in Bengal.5 At the village of Firozepur on the bank of the river Bhairab in Meherpur, Nadia district, the dargah of Buda Dīwān was quite popular. It was told about him that he threw into the river Bhairab everything that people offered him, and

2 Chaudhuri, A.C., II, 122.
3 Birbhum, BDG, 120. For similar traditions about the growth of tree from the tooth-pick used by a Pir, Man In India, 1922, II, ii, 240-61.
4 Supra, 351.
5 Supra, 351-3.
had anybody sought anything from him, he asked Bhairab to get the desire of the supplicant fulfilled.  

The beliefs concerning the Pīrs holding command over the forces of nature are also reflected in other spheres.  

Shāh Karīm 'Allī of Jagannathpur in Tripura was believed capable of causing rain, when and where he pleased.  

'Allī Sabr Shāh was also connected with rain-making. People resorted to his shrine at Bagiara in Atiya, Mymensingh district, in the time of drought and poured 125 pitchers of water on the shrine in expectation of rain.

Shāh Ismā'īl Ghāzī after his victory against the king of Assam, came to a spot subsequently called Jala Muqām - 'a piece of land completely covered with water'. It is noted that he prayed for a piece of land to rise from the water in order to say his prayers and so it came to pass.

It is said about Shāh Gharīb of Pansa in Faridpur district that he approached one belonging to the Caudhuri family of Belgachi for alms. The former was advised to earn his livelihood by using his labour and was asked to plant a banana in the latter's garden. Shāh Gharīb cut the plant right through the middle and planted it upside down, for which he was rebuked by the owner. But to everybody's surprise, the plant was found on the next morning shooting from the roots placed upwards.

Saiyid ul-'Arifin of Kalisuri in Bakharganj saw a Hindu girl coming down to a river to wash rice. He asked her to cook some rice for him. On her refusal, he

1 Mallik, K.N., 365.  
2 Wise, J., JASB, 1874, XLIII, pt. 1, no. i, 96.  
3 Maulik, A.K., 84.  
4 Pir M. Shaṭṭūrī, 219.  
bade her look into her vessel containing the rice for washing. She was staggered to find that the rice was already cooked. This miracle 'made her at once become a convert', and she besought him to grant her a boon. She was told that the spot should become the site of a great annual gathering and that it should be called after her name. As the girl's name was Kālī, and she belonged to the Sunū di caste, the village and the annual fair held there came to be called Kalīsuri.¹

It is believed about 'Alā'ul-Haq that once a number of Qalandars visited his khānqah, bringing a cat with them. The cat got lost, and the Qalandars asked 'Alā'ul-Haq to find it. With a view to testing his miraculous power, one of them asked him to bring the cat out from the horns of a deer, and another from the testicles. The one, who talked about the deer, was gored by a cow, and the other died of inflammation of his testicles.²

¹ Bakarganj, BDG, 148.
² A.R. Chishti: Mi'rat ul-Asrār, fol. 484a.
B. The Folk Literary Traditions on the Pirs:

It is only natural that the Pirs were accorded a dominant place in the Muslim folk literary traditions.¹ We have such traditions about quite a few widely popular Pirs in Bengal. We shall confine ourselves to the most popular of them, such as Gājī, Pir Badar, and Maṅik Pir.

The Traditions of Gājī:

The immense popularity of traditions concerning a Muslim figure called either Gājī or Bāda-khan Gājī in the new deltaic region of southern Bengal, has already been referred to. The combined strength of Hindu and Muslim traditions points to the possibility of a historical kernel in these widely popular traditions. We discuss here two Muslim folk-literary works dealing with the life and activities of Gājī and his associate Kalū, focusing attention on Gājī's love for a beautiful Brahmanā princess, the stout opposition of the Hindu rāja to marrying his daughter to Gājī, leading to a struggle between them, and the ultimate success of Gājī in battle as well as in his cherished object of marrying his beloved. The two works present outward characteristics suggesting difference. While the hero is simply called Gājī in one,² represented as a royal scion, he is Bāda-khan Gājī in the other.³

¹ The use of the term 'folk' with reference to a religious community should be read in its proper context. This is only to set this apart from the higher literary traditions of the same community. In point of fact, the former is a folk literature in the true sense of the term. For these ballads were actually meant for singing in rural gatherings comprising both Muslims and Hindus with the specific object of seeking the favour of the Pir concerned, who was offered ghirni on the occasion. The ballad on Bāda-khan Gājī ends with the following couplet: The ghirni of Gājī is over, let the Hindus invoke Hari and the Mu'mins Allah (Gājī Miṅār hājat śān na sampurna haila / Hindu gane bala Hari Nomine Allah bala). Zain ud-Dīn Bāda-khan Gājī Gān, JMs, ed., Datta, K. in Bharatiya Loka-yāna, op.cit., 50.
² 'Abd ul-Karīm, op.cit.
³ Zain ud-Dīn, JMs, op.cit.
The Brāhmaṇa princess, whom Gājī intends to marry, is called Gāmpā-batī in the former and Subhadrā in the latter. Besides, there are differences in detail as well as in respect of omissions and additions.

i. Gājī or Gājī Saheb

King Sekendar (Sikandar) and Queen Ojufā of Bairātnāgar are distressed for their son lost in the woods. The queen goes to the riverside of Ganga for solace, where she finds a little child in a box floating in the water. She brings the child home and names him Kalu. One night the queen dreams that the moon has entered her body, and later on she finds herself pregnant. On the sixth month of pregnancy 'the fate of the child is written on its forehead by the divine agency', on the seventh month the ceremony of feeding the expectant mother (sād/sādh) is performed. The child born subsequently is no other than Gājī - a name destined to become 'celebrated in the world'.

Gājī and Kalu grow up together to become inseparable companions. They become firmly devoted to God from their childhood, and are endowed with great supernatural powers. In Gaji's tenth year Sikandar offers the throne to him, but he declines it on the ground that his mission is to 'become a Fakir in the way of God'. The offended and enraged king tries various means to put his disobedient son to death, but in vain. Gaji proves himself above the executioner's sword, the elephant used to trample him, the fire and the deep sea to which he is consigned. He removes the last doubt from his father's mind about the Providential favour on himself by picking up a needle thrown into the sea with the help of crocodiles.

1 'Abd ul-Karim.
2 Ibid., 5.
3 Ibid., 6-7.
One night Gāji and Kalu secretly leave the comforts of the royal palace to live the active life of the Faqir. They arrive at Sundarban, where not only the tigers and other ferocious animals offer allegiance to the Gāji, but Śiva, Durgā, Gaṅgā and Sati too treat him as their son. Once Gāji and Kalu stray in search of food into a place called Chāfāinagar inhabited only by Hindus and ruled by Śrīrāma. They are maltreated by the king and the people there, for being Muslims. Kilu prays to Allah to burn down the kingdom, convert all the people to Islam and get the queen kidnapped. Allah responds to his prayer and fulfils all his wishes through the medium of Khwāj (Khwaja) Khizr. The rājā offers his submission to Gāji, honours both Gāji and Kalu profusely and builds a mosque at Chāfāinagar, while the queen is restored to him.2

In course of their wanderings, tired and hungry, Gāji and Kalu receive kind hospitality and shelter from seven wood-cutters. Gāji repays them with 'seven maunds of gold' obtained through Gaṅgā whom he addresses as his maternal aunt (māsī).3 This is how the place comes to be known as Sonāpur (the city of gold).

Thereafter, Gāji get himself involved in the most crucial phase of his life and activity. One night while the two friends are fast asleep in a mosque, he is carried by a group of fairies (parī), attracted by his beauty, to the bed-chamber of Cāmpāvatī, the daughter of Maṭuk (Mukuta) Rājā of Brāhmaṇaragar, a place occupied by Brāhmaṇas, who are so orthodox that they perform penance at the mere sight of a believer (Mumin). Gāji and Cāmpāvatī fall in love and marry each other secretly in

1 Ibid., 10.
2 Ibid., 11-4.
3 Ibid., 16.
Gandharva style. They are again separated in their sleep, Gājī being carried back to his mosque by the fairies. The separation tells heavily on them. Cāmpavatī resorts to the worship of Hara-Gaurī at the instance of her mother. Gaurī blesses her saying, 'Gājī Pīr is my sister's son and he shall be your husband'.

Stricken by the pangs of love and separation, Gājī accompanied by Kalu sets out for Brāhmaṇanagar. On his way Gājī notices a number of good omens such as a snake on his right, a lizard calling over his head, a pregnant woman feeding her child, a rider (māhut) on an elephant, a flower-girl carrying a basket of flowers, a milkmaid with milk, women carrying water pots and a cow with her calf. But Kalu appears quite sceptical and asks, 'How will a Hindu and Muslim marry'? Gājī puts his absolute trust in Allāh.

On arrival at Brāhmaṇanagar Gājī sends Kalu to the rājā with the proposal of marriage. The latter receives contempt and insult from the rājā and is placed behind the bars. Gājī returns to Sundarban to muster a pack of tigers and attack the rājā. The frightened rājā resorts to Dakhinārāy (Dakṣiṇā-rāya), the tiger-god, who proves diffident against such a mighty array of fearsome beasts. The tiger-god seeks the help of the goddess Gaṅgā for a contingent of crocodiles. Gaṅgā reminds him of the great affection that Gaurī as well as she herself entertain for Gājī, and advises him to persuade Matuk Rājā to marry Cāmpā to Gājī — a marriage which is destined to come about 'despite the whole world standing against Gājī'. Dakṣiṇā-rāya manages to get a contingent of 52,000 crocodiles from Gaṅgā only after he threatens to commit suicide. Gaṅgā expresses her anxiety not to displease Gājī and makes Dakṣiṇā-rāya promise not to bring the news to Gājī's ears. But this proves abortive.

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., 34-6.
3 Ibid., 58.
and Dakṣiṇa-rāya next asks Gaurī for a contingent of ghosts and goblins. The same situation as with Gaṅga is re-enacted in every detail. The attack of the invisible spirits throws the tiger-force into initial confusion until Gaṇḍi turns the scale in his favour with the help of his mendicant's stick (āśā) and wooden sandal (khaḍām). Dakṣiṇa-rāya is thoroughly defeated and is bound hand and foot until he promises to see that the marriage takes place. Maṭuk Rājā is now left with no other course than taking the field himself and meets a crushing defeat. The vanquished rājā agrees to solemnise the marriage of Gaṇḍi and Cāmpāvatī. He embraces Islam himself and finds himself restored to his position with full dignity and honour.2

ii. Bāda-khān Gaṇḍi3:

Bāda-khān Gaṇḍi, son of Sāhā Sekendār (Shāh Sikandar) is seated in the company of his closest friend Kāle Khān or Kālu, reading the Qur'ān under the shadow of a tree beside the river Gaṅga. The day is one of an important Hindu festival - Mahā-bārnā - and streams of people come for a ceremonial bath at the river. Princess Subhadra, daughter of Mukuṭa Rājā, is one of them. Gaṇḍi is attracted by her beauty, as she takes a dip in the water. Shot by the cupid's arrow, Gaṇḍi sends Kālu to enquire about her. Kālu gathers all information from her attendant and reports back to Gaṇḍi.4 Kālu appears reluctant about Gaṇḍi's subsequent instruction to him to carry the proposal of marriage to Maṭuk Rājā. He wonders 'who has ever heard of marriage between a Bamun and a Mochalman?' Gaṇḍi prevails on him, and Kālu is quite apprehensive of his life.

1 Ibid., 60-1.
2 Ibid., 70.
3 Zain ud-Dīn, JMs.
4 Ibid., 22.
He buys a sacred thread, disguises himself as a Brāhmaṇa and appears at the royal palace at Khānīnagar. He makes the proposal to the rāja, introducing the suitor as a prince. Questioned about the suitor's name, Kālu becomes terribly frightened. He gains courage and discloses his real name. Kālu tries to impress upon the rāja that Gājī is a Brāhmaṇa. When he provokes suspicion, Kālu finds prudence the better part of the valour, and slips away quietly. Then Gājī assumes the form of a bee (bhoomar) and goes to Khānīnagar, where he writes in all holy books words to the effect that Gājī belongs to the Brāhmaṇa caste. Next day Kālu reappears before the rāja, and his proposal is accepted on the strength of the apocryphal sanction contained in the holy books. All the Fāqīrs forming part of the bridegroom's party put on sacred threads and pose as Brāhmaṇas on the occasion of the marriage. But the whole party is exposed as the royal attendants discover two fowls concealed in Kālu's baggage. All of them are chased out. Smarting under a sense of humiliation, Gājī collects his retinue of tigers and launches an attack on the rāja. Māṭuk rāja is constrained to submit. He accepts Islam and marries Subhadra to Gājī. The Brāhmaṇas of Khānīnagar decide to boycott the marriage celebrations and ostracize the royal family socially for the marriage of Subhadra with 'a jaban heretic' (pāsanda jaban). Gājī scares them away by letting loose his tigers on them. The marriage is performed with great éclat, at the end of which Gājī goes back to Candīpur accompanied by his wife and entourage.

1 Ibid., 23.
2 Ibid., 24.
3 Ibid., 25.
4 Ibid., 27-8.
5 Ibid., 29.
6 Ibid., 29-30.
Allāh sitting in the company of twelve auliya's discusses the person who is capable of spreading His name in the world. He wants to entrust him with the 'charge of the world' and introduce him as Mānik being 'the Abatār in the Kali jug'. 'Hāji', 'Gāji', 'Mahāmad', 'Rahim', 'Karim', 'Racul' (Rasūl), 'Pakāmbar' (Paīghambar), 'Hajjat' (Haḍrat), 2 'Madar' (Sāh Madār) were all present there. 3 Meanwhile, Badar appears and bows down his head before God. He agrees to shoulder the burden for God and decides to come down to the earth 'in the garb of a Fakir-Muršid'. He first appears in Dilli (Delhi) and thence goes to Lāhur (Lahore). 4 Therefrom he comes via Sāntipur in west Bengal to Sābājār (Shahbazār?), where he tells Golāmālī Sāheb (Ghulām 'Alī, a local Pīr) of his mission to go town of Cātigā (Chittagong). Badar is next found at Saptagrām, 'where the goddess Gaṅgā descended'. 5 At the ghāt of Tribeni, Badar finds Hindu sages and hermits (risī/Rāsi munigan),

1 Jairaddi, VMs, op. cit., 305-16. In this particular tradition, Mānik Pīr is represented as the son born to Pīr Badar and the princess Dudbibī (Dudhbibī), conceived as a result of the union between the two in a dream at the will of Allāh.
2 Reference to Haḍrat 'Alī, as evident from subsequent references.
3 The list of the names shows utter confusion in the mind of the simple folks about the characters of Muslim tradition. Hāji and Ghāzi do not have individual and personal reference. Rahim and Karim are only different names of Allāh. Rasūl and Paīghambar are synonyms for the Prophet. Haḍrat does not refer to any particular person. It is also interesting that a Pīr like Sāh Madār is sitting in the company of God.
4 One is led to wonder if the start of Badar's journey from Delhi and Lahore had any bearing on the fact of Islam coming to Bengal from its west. The geographical sense of such writers are often quite muddled up, as becomes evident in course of Badar's further progress in the journey.
5 According to mythological tradition, Gaṅgā descended to the earth at Tribeni, induced by the austerities of Bhagiratha. This earned Gaṅgā the name of Bhagirathī— a name still used with reference to her course in west Bengal.
meditating on the goddess Gaṅgā, without being graced by her sight due to their 'fickleness of mind'. Badar advises them to pray 'with a pure heart'. The intrusion of the shaven-headed Faqir (nādiya Fakir) is very much resented by the Hindu sages, who abuse him by saying:

What the hell has your father to do with our worship of Gaṅgā?...where do you come from? We are here meditating for the last twelve years; weeds have grown all over our body, and yet the mother of Brahmā has not appeared before us. How dare you make all this tall talk?

Badar feels offended and decides to show his power. He performs ablutions, sits on a tiger-skin and asks Gaṅgā to appear in response to the call of her 'elder brother'. Gaṅgā appears, and at her sight all the sages pass into heaven (Brahmālok). She, however, declines to present herself before Badar, who is a yavana and puts him to a series of tests. Badar gets through them all with the help of Kartār. He then retaliates by tying her up in a sack, but later releases her as she accepts him as her elder brother. Gaṅgā is also made to bring stones from Rāmeśvara Setubandha at the instruction of Badar, who intends to build a mosque at Tribeni. He sends for Viśvakarmā, the divine architect in Hindu mythology, and gives him betel and flower as a token of agreement to the contract for building the mosque in a single day and night. Bisāi (Viśvakarmā) imposes the condition that there should not be a day-break, and Badar instructs Niśī (the guardian deity of night) to see to it. While two days pass, Allah feels concerned that Viśvakarmā's work may put Mecca and Medina and even paradise (bhest) to shame. So Hajjat Āli (Haḍrat 'Alī) is sent by Him as a white crow, who heralds the day-break by cawing. God Himself marks the

1 The place situated in the southern most part of India is closely associated with a Rāmāyaṇa tradition in which Rāma is said to have constructed a bridge during his march against Raṇa.
rise of the morning sun. Viṣvakarma is forced to run away, leaving behind his axe\(^1\) and the incomplete structure. Badar thereafter leaves the care of Tribeni with Dafarga Gaji,\(^2\) starts for Chittagong, and crosses the river Ganga using his wooden sandal as a raft. Next we find Badar in the presence of the badśā (badshāh) of Delhi asking for the hand of Dudhbibi, the daughter of the badshāh in marriage. The badshāh is enraged and drives him out of the palace, pouring insult on him. Badar manages to kidnap Dudhbibi in the dead of night with the help of a company of tigers that he summons at his service. Dudhbibi agrees to marry Badar on certain conditions. She says:

...I have taken a vow. In the Treta yuga (yuga) I worshipped Rām Nārāyan; thereafter, I was a cow-girl (gopini) in Gokul feeding the son of Nanda (Krṣṇa) with butter (nani). I should only marry one, who is able to assume the four-armed form (of Viṣṇu) in my presence.

Badar asks her to close her eyes and transforms himself to Rāma with bow in the left hand and arrow in the right and Thākur Lakṣaṇ (Lakṣmaṇa) holding umbrella on his head. Then he assumes the form of Kānāi Abatār (the Krṣṇa incarnation) with conch shell (sankha), wheel (cakra), mace (gada), lotus (padma) and a garland of wild flowers, playing the flute in the company of Balarāma (brother of Krṣṇa). He stands underneath the kadamba tree in the form of Kālā (Krṣṇa). Dudhbibi is highly delighted and accepts him, putting a garland around his neck. They perform a Gandharva marriage. Next morning, Dudhbibi's absence is noticed at the palace. People are sent in all directions.

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\(^1\) To the famous mosque at Tribeni is attached an interesting piece of stone, which is often called 'the axe of Viṣva-karmā'. Some call it as 'the axe of Gaji' (Gājīr kugul).

\(^2\) The mosque at Tribeni is associated with the name of Zafar Khan Ghazi and Dafarga appears to be a popular corruption of his name.
Badar and Dudhbibi retire to a forest. On the approach of the people hunting for them, the couple play a trick against the searchers by turning themselves into Rāma and Sītā. However, they reveal their identity later on, and are taken back and received in the capital with 'as much jubilation as followed the return of Rām and Sītā to Ajodhā [Ayodhya]'. The badshāh arranges a pompous marriage ceremony for them. He sends for 'Kāji' and 'Mollā', while Allah, having come to know of all this from 'bhest', sends 'Hāji', 'Kāji', 'Mahāmad', 'Rahim', 'Karim', 'Sekh', 'Fakorān' (Faqirs) to Delhi to attend the occasion.

Badar enjoys himself for a considerable period in the company of his wife and then starts for Chittagong leaving Dudhbibi in tears. In the meanwhile, the latter conceives as a result of a union with Badar in a dream as desired by God. Dudhbibi eventually gives birth to a boy, who is none else than Mānīk. The fear of social scandal leads Dudhbibi to put the baby into a copper chamber (tāmra khupuri) and consign it to the water. A gardener named Madu (Madhu) recovers it and takes the boy to his home, where Mānīk is brought up with good care of the gardener and his wife. After twelve years have elapsed, Badar suddenly recollects his wife, and sets out for her home.¹

¹ The manuscript ends here abruptly, being torn.
The Tradition of Mānik Pīr¹:

Mānik or Jindā (Zinda) Mānik suggests to Ḣisā (Hazā) Malik that they should go out together in order to reveal (jahīr/zhāhir) their power. Ḣisā Malik declines to accompany him until Mānik can prove his power over diseases (bedīr/byādhīr kerāmat). Mānik is obviously hesitant to try his power on Ḣisā, but finding the latter insistent, he begs forgiveness of Allah for the consequences likely to result from Ḣisā’s insistence. Mānik calls for the great affliction, Jarāsur (māhā bedi Jarāsur), who obeys his order and lays Ḣisā down on the road heavily stricken with fever.

Early next morning forty Firishtas while, going along the road to perform namāz at the congregation (jāme/jāmi‘) find the body of Ḣisā, lying decomposed (pacā). The Firishtas are caught in a dilemma, for they cannot afford to miss (kācā) the namāz; nor can they leave the Faqīr like that. They pray to Allah Parwardigar (Parwardagar) to make a physician (bāidda/vaidya) available to them. Right at this moment Mānik appears to them and states that he has in his possession the medicine for this. He regrets, however, not having one ingredient (anupān) for the medicine, which is but the liver of the only surviving son of a couple who have lost seven children. The Firishtas are taken aback at the horrifying suggestion, but find no alternative. They visit many lands such as 'Erān', 'Torān', 'Kārbāla', 'Mokkā' and 'Modinā', but find none to suit their requirements. They feel rather concerned (bicalita) and come to the 'city of Ārabba'. They find their way into the house of a poor lady, who

¹ Sek (Shaikh) Hābīl: Mānik Pīr: Rān (The Ballad of Mānik Pīr), JMS, fols. 1a-9a. The identity of Mānik Pīr is rather obscure as noted above. He is associated sometimes with the guardianship of diseases. This particular tradition does connect him with the control of diseases.
gives them information about a millionaire merchant (lakpati sadāgar) having a son answering their description. In a moment the Firishtas arrive at the merchant's house. The merchant receives them well, and is made to promise that he should give whatever is asked of him. When the Firishtas disclose their mind, the merchant breaks down. He goes inside the house in tears to tell his wife about all this. His wife agrees to part with all their wealth and even her life, but refuses to part with Sadullyā (Sa'dullāh), her five year old son. The merchant painfully reminds her of the fearfu consequences of not keeping the promise made to the Faqīrs. When the son himself comes to know about this, he firmly sets aside all other considerations in favour of keeping his father's word. The son is killed with a knife, and the liver is taken out. The Firishtas bless the merchant, saying that there is no greater believer on earth than he. The liver of Sa'dullāh is taken to Zinda Mānik. He reads 'four kālemā' and touches the body of 'Īsā Malik with his hand. 'Īsā at once stands up. The Firishtas cannot but admit that they have never before seen anything like this.

Mānik, however, feels that his work should remain incomplete, if the dead son is not restored alive to the lap of the lamenting mother. The waves of her agony and anguish are like 'a river, breaking through its banks and reaching up to the sky', and her 'lamentations are comparable to Kauśulle's [Kauśalyā] in the absence of Rām'. Mānik and 'Īsā, therefore, decide to visit the home of the merchant. The merchant is filled with alarm to see the new pair of Faqīrs. 'Īsā asks for some food. The merchant tells them about their mental sufferings, while Mānik tries to console him by reminding that Horicandra (Hariścandra) worshipped Dharma by killing his own son; that Karna, the great donor, killed his own son. Mānik also asks the merchant to think as to 'how could
Soci[Śacī]-ṭhākurāṇī sustain her life, when Gorā[Gaurāṅga or Caitanya] renounced the world? and also 'what did Jasoda[Yaśodā] do, when Hori[Hari] left Golok[Gokul] for Matura[Mathurā]? ' Māṇik proposes to the merchant that they should all work together for the cremation of his son, after they have had some refreshment(nāstā pāni). The Arabian merchant humbly questions the propriety of having refreshments in a house undergoing a period of ceremonial impurity (asuc/asauca). Māṇik replies that 'there is nothing in the Korān like ceremonial impurity following upon death'.

Thereupon the food is cooked and served to them. But they refuse to touch it until the host (ghāsta) shares it with them. The merchant, reluctant at first to eat while his son still lies dead in the house, is persuaded by his wife to keep company with their refreshments. At this stage Māṇik and Ḫiṣa ask for the fourth person to have a meal with them. The merchant agrees to his wife joining them, but they refuse to dine with a woman. Māṇik asks the helpless merchant to call his dead son by name. The dead son comes back to life as soon as his father obeys the instruction. The boy rushes into the eager hands of his mother. The merchant and his wife are overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, and prostrate themselves at the feet of Māṇik. They enquire about his true identity. Ḫiṣa discloses the identity of Zinda Māṇik as being the son of Bādsā Karamdīn (Karīm ud-Dīn) and Suratbī (Ṣūratbībī). On their departure, Ḫiṣa advises the couple to have constant faith in them.
CHAPTER V

THE MUSLIMS AND THE NON-ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

Quite different from the modes of recognition of indigenous elements in the thought of the Bengali Muslims, as delineated above, there is a significant trend of Muslim thought and practice based on total recognition, acceptance and patronage of the non-Islamic religious traditions in Bengal. In course of our preceding discussions we have noted the wide prevalence of non-Islamic ideas and idioms in their mind as reflected in their writings. But we have also cared to note the overt or covert design underlying their thought, calculated to popularise Islamic traditions among the masses of its votaries. And where the recognition is not purposive, it is presented as an integral part of the Islamic tradition. On the other hand, the particular trend we propose to discuss here is a direct and straightforward resort by the Muslims to the local non-Muslim religious traditions, and thus forms a distinct category. The association of the Bengali Muslims with the local non-Muslim traditions is a measure of the force of environmental factors in the shaping of the medieval Bengali Muslim mind.

A. Vaishnavism:

One of the most striking features of medieval Bengali literature is a large number of padas (couplets) composed by the Muslims in the Vaishnava style. These are spread over a few centuries beginning from the 16th, if not earlier, down to the early part of the present century. The compositions, belonging to modern times from the chronological standpoint, remain very much an integral
part of their medieval tradition in form as well as spirit.  

The nature of these Muslim pada compositions is an important question. A mere casual glance at them suggests the unmistakable impact of Vaisnava traditions on their form and content. The entire atmosphere of these compositions is saturated with Vaisnava styles, images and symbols. The chief features of these poems are: the love dalliances of Radha (also referred to as Radhika and Rai) and Krsna (also mentioned to as Kanai, Kanu, Kal, Syama, Nanda-lala, and Nanda-duilala); the gopinis (cowgirls); Lalita and Bisakh, the two closest companions of Radha; the sisters-in-law (nanadini) of Radha; the bemusing flute, indispensably associated with Krsna; places like Mathura, Vrndavana, Madhupura, Gokula and Braja - all important.

1 Y.M. Bhattacharyya in his Bnlgar Baisnab-bhabapanna Musalmn Kabi (henceforward, BBMK) has added 78 of such Muslim poets to the 43 already known through several anthologies compiled and published from time to time. We have been able to trace two more Muslim composers of padas (padakara), not included in the list of 121 poets mentioned by Bhattacharyya. One of them is Shaikh Faizullah (Raga-mala, DMS545; sl. 403), who is known for his other works like Gorakshavijaya, and the other is Alam (SPR, 1314 B.S., 11). Bhattacharyya's compilation contains the names and works of Mir Faizullah and Mirza Faizullah, (BBMK, 81-3). Some would prefer to accept all the three as the same person (BBMK, 123). While subscribing to the reasonable identification of Mir Faizullah with Mirza Faizullah, we refuse to extend the sweep of identification to Shaikh Faizullah, because the last named in his pada compositions as well as in his other works like Gorakshavijaya has used the title of 'Shaikh', and not 'Mir' or 'Mirza', with unbroken consistency.

2 Shaikh Faizullah: Raga-mala, fols. 7a, 8a, 13b; BBMK, 39, 46, 53, 102 and 103.

3 Shaikh Faizullah, ibid., fols. 8a, 9b, 10a-b, 11b, 12b, 13b, 16a; BBMK, 39, 46, 53, 59, 101 and 103.

4 BBMK, 80, 81, 88 and 98.

5 S.Faizullah: Raga..., fols. 7a, 10a; BBMK, 53, 73.

6 BBMK, 44, 52, 89 and 95.

7 S. Faizullah: Raga..., fol. 10a; BBMK, 47, 48, 59 and 67.
places in the Radha-Krsna tradition; rivers, such as the Yamuna or Kalindi or Kaliyaa, occupying significant place in the Radha-Krsna legend; the kadamba tree, the favourite spot for the amorous activities of Radha and Krsna; and phagu or phag, the gay festival on which Krsna, Radha and her friends (sakhis) play with coloured powders.

The Vaishnava influence is so marked on these lyrics that their composers have been taken for Vaishnavas themselves. On the other hand, some are only inclined to read allegorical meanings of Sufic import behind the facade of Radha-Krsna lore. Haq has gone to the extent of considering the entire literature created by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas as 'essentially Sufic in spirit' under 'a veneer of Hindu ideas'. In his opinion Radha and Krsna as expressed in the Vaishnava padavali literature are but 'conceptual and formal representations' of 'ashiq and ma'shâq, or sâqi and bat, or shama' and parwana. He also finds close parallels between Vaishnava padavali and Sufi ghaziyat in respect of their 'thought and style of composition' as well as between biraha (separation) and milana (union) in the Vaishnava literature and hijran and bishal in that of the Sufis. Haq's view in this regard

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1 BBMK, 39, 45, 48, and 53.
2 S. Faizullah: Raga...; BBMK, 44, 47, 53, 59 and 103.
3 BBMK, 53 and 77.
4 Ibid., 53 and 69.
6 MBS, 53-4; Dasgupta, S.B.: 'Bânglâr Musalmân Baisnâb-kabi', ViśvaBharati, Mâgha-Caitra, 1363 B.S.
7 MBS, 53.
8 Ibid., 51.
is quite in keeping with his broader theme that Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism, as popularised by Caitanya and his followers, owed its basic features to Śūfism. He refers to the idea of 'compassion for living beings' and 'the keenness for reciting names (of the Lord)' as being 'the cardinal tenets of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism', and traces their origin respectively to the Śūfī notions of khidmat and zikr. Similarly, he identifies the Vaiṣṇava kirtana with sama' of the Śūfīs and dasa or the 'state' of the Vaiṣṇavas at the end of continuous nāma-saṅkīrtana (recitation of God's name) with ḥāl as known among the Śūfīs.

While not making a total discount of the possibility of Śūfic influence on the faith, movement and literature of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism, we prefer to adopt a cautious attitude in the matter of exploring their sources and measuring the depth of their interactions. This is firstly because of our knowledge that the fundamental tenets of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism grew out of the general course of development of the Vaiṣṇava faith in India. The two most fundamental elements forming 'the texture of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism' are 'derived more or less from Vaiṣṇavism in general', the first and foremost being 'the general doctrine of Bhakti, or emotional service of love and devotion as a means of spiritual realisation'. The other, no less important, is 'the Kṛṣṇa cult, intimately connected with it, as forming the ground of this devotional attitude'. Some of the practices of the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas, which led Haq to trace their sources to Śūfism, are traceable in the much earlier Vaiṣṇava tradition of India. The Bengal Vaiṣṇava practice of kīrtana, for the origin of which Haq leans on the Śūfic sama', had a clear precedent

1 De, S.K.: Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal, 2.
2 Ibid.
in the singing and dancing of the southern Vaisnava Alvars.
In the middle of the ninth century A.D. Nammalvar writes:

We have seen the devotees of the sea-hued Krishna enter the world in rich abundance, sing His glory, dance in ecstasy and prosper.¹

Further,

Come, all ye lovers of God, let us shout and dance for joy with oft made surrenderings. Wide do they roam on earth singing songs and dancing, the hosts of Krishna who wears the cool and beautiful Tulsi, the desire of the Bees...These hosts of the Lord of Discus...And sweet are their songs, as they leap and dance, extending wide over earth.²

Besides, clear reference to communal hymn singing (sāmkirtana) is obtained as early as the Bhagavata-purāṇa.³

A study of the interactions between Indian and Šūfic thought is by its very nature quite problematic, as we have already noted. Haq may be right in finding similarities between the Vaiṣṇava practice of reciting names of the Lord and zikr, as practised by the Šūfīs. But he may be quite wide of the mark in tracing the source of the former to the latter. For, directly opposed to his contention, others such as Gardet and Eliade are prepared to read Indian influence on at least certain essential features of the practice of zikr itself.⁴

Whether or not Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was indebted to Šūfic ideas and practices, and the entire literature of the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas was 'essentially Šūfic in spirit', we are rather concerned with the nature of the Muslim compositions in the style of Vaiṣṇava padas. We have already noted the tendency on the one extreme to dub the

¹ Quoted, Pillai, J.M.S.; (ed.): Two Thousand Years of Tamil Literature (An Anthology), 335.
² Ibid.
³ (11:5:32), Baṅgabāṣī edn.
⁴ Supra, 210.
composers as **Vaisnava**s themselves, and on the other to treat the whole range of such literature as symbolic and **Sufic**. Our reading of these lyrical compositions do not allow us to fall in line entirely with one or the other view.

Even if these Muslim compositions are taken to be in strict conformity with the **Vaisnava** *padas* in form and content, there is hardly any justification in treating their authors as **Vaisnava**s by faith. Some of the greatest Hindu *padakartas* themselves were not formal votaries of the **Vaisnava** faith. Vidyāpati of Mithila was not professedly a **Vaisnava**, but a **Śrāvaka** **Pañcopāsaka**, who composed verses in Maithili on Śiva and Gaurī as well as on Radha and Kṛṣṇa.¹ Besides, there were other Muslim writers who, as we have noted earlier, wrote on other Hindu religious traditions like **Śaktism**, **Śaivism**, **Nāthism** and so on.² One is far from warranted in thinking that these Muslim writers abjured their own faith to accept that of the particular tradition which he pursued from the literary point of view, or for which he might even have some emotional leanings. There were even single Muslim writers, who wrote on several Hindu traditions. Shaikh Faiqullah, already mentioned as the composer of several **Vaisnava** *padas*, is more widely known for his significant contribution to the **Nātha** tradition.

On the contrary, there is a large number among the Muslim *pada* compositions that appear to be only symbolic and allegorical, though set in the framework of a **Vaisnava** motif. This brings us to the crux of the problem. The

¹ De, S.K., *In.
² Cf. Shaikh Cand: *Hara-Gaurī-saṅvāda*, *DMs*, op.cit.; Shaikh Faiqullāh: *Gorakṣa-vijaya*, op.cit.; Shukur Maḥmūd's *Pāneīli* on Maṇīk-candra-Maynamati legend of the **Nātha** tradition. (See below). Also see below for Muslim compositions on the goddess Kāli and other Hindu religious traditions.
presence of the incontrovertible elements of Vaisnava tradition in these writings tends to create a natural tendency to incorporate them in the corpus of the Bengali Vaisnava literature. On the other hand, the mystical contents of their writings are equally open to symbolic interpretations with the result that a composition genuinely inspired by the Vaisnava spirit may, without much difficulty, be dissociated from its proper context and evaluated in allegorical terms. This is particularly true of the compositions with mystical leanings.

Y.M. Bhattacharyya classifies the Muslim pada compositions into six categories—a classification that has been recently made use of in a paper by Dimock. The six categories are as follows:

1. Pure Vaisnava poetry, in which the quality of devotion and poetic style make the poem indistinguishable from one written by a Hindu Vaisnava.

2. Philosophical poetry, in which ideas neither specifically Hindu nor specifically Muslim are expressed with the help of imagery drawn from the Radha-Krsna story.

3. Poetry which employs the names Radhā and Kṛṣṇa to designate not the Radhā and Kṛṣṇa of Vaiṣṇava text and belief, but an abstract God.

4. A purely secular poetry of love.

5. Poetry on Caitanya.

6. Poetry using subsidiary Vaiṣṇava themes, but without clear mention of Radhā, Kṛṣṇa, or Caitanya.

In the final analysis any classification of this literature, if possible at all, is reduced to three categories—

primarily Vaiṣṇava, primarily Ṣūfī and the remainder forming the third group. The classification, which, on close analysis, does not present quite systematic and convincing lines of division, is an appropriate commentary on the inherent complexities of the task. The whole point may be illustrated with a few concrete instances. A piece of composition attributed to Cāṇḍ Qāżī runs:

You do not know how to play the flute. You play it at the wrong times. You care nothing for me. When I am sitting with my elders, you call me with your flute. I could die of shame. You play it on the farther bank. I hear it here. I am an unlucky girl; I don't know how to swim.

If you find the bamboo clump from which this flute was made, tear it up by the roots and throw it into the river Cāṇḍ Qāżī says, I hear the flute, my life ebbs from me - I shall not live, unless I see my Hari.  

While Bhattacharyya and Dimock cite this composition as an instance of 'pure Vaiṣṇava poetry' of their first category, Enamul Haq\(^2\) has chosen it as one of the most singular instances of Ṣūfī symbolism. Again, Dimock reads the following composition by Arkum (Arqam?) in the context of the Vaiṣṇava requirement 'for the unitary God to become two, in order to express his nature which is love':

The water of the sea blows in the strong wind; it whirs as spray, it fills the wind, it falls again on the land, and finally once more flows to the sea. Kind mingles with kind in the waves' play: you are I, and I am you - I know this in my heart. The tree is born in the seed; how can the seed contain the tree? From one, two come, because of love.  

We have already discussed at some length that this is a quite popular Ṣūfī concept according to which the

\(^{1}\) BBMK, no. 40, tr., Dimock, MVPB, 27.
\(^{2}\) MBS, 52.
\(^{3}\) Haqīqat-i Sitāra, 12, quoted, BBMK, 21, tr., Dimock, MVPB, 27-8.
Absolute God (‘Aḥad) unable to realise Himself in aloneness calls into being Aḥmad and Muḥammad (Nūr-i Muḥammad) and binds them in love. The following is a composition by Irpān (Irfān) the fourth category of 'a purely secular poetry of love':

Day and night it draws my life away; I cannot live without him. Tell me, friend, what shall I do? My friend, without him there is no help for this body of mine - I need him - and, thus dependent, I drift upon a sea of sorrow. If I find him I shall keep him captive, holding his feet. The youthful Irpān says, He holds a flute; and with its charm he has stolen my tender life.

This categorisation does not stand beyond disputation. We do not feel quite sure about its secular note - at least any more than that of many others not included in this category. On the other hand the Vaisānava motif appears here to be less obscure than many others of its kind. The beloved is represented as holding a flute and the lover as pouring out the pangs of separation from the beloved to her friend. It is difficult not to see how the poet's mind seeks a covert identification with the soul of Rādha. And yet the whole craving should seem but the longing of the mystic's soul for God. If it is secular in inspiration, there is very little force of that secular tradition in this set of literature.

A precise categorisation of this literature is thus rendered virtually impossible by the presence of the elements of mystical love, the ramifications of which often throw up rather similar patterns. To render it difficult further their mystical ideas are often marked by an eclectic spirit. Given this situation, an important criterion in the evaluation of this literature should be

1 Supra, Ch. III, B.
2 Quoted in MK, no. 20; tr., Dimock, MVPB, 30.
sought in the fact of their authors being Muslims. And unless some positive factors are found to the contrary, a mystical representation of the longing of the soul for God, in this Muslim literature, should be studied from their own religious angle. The Islamic element is sometimes clearly betrayed in a Muslim pada, otherwise thoroughly permeated by the Vaisnava tradition. A good instance of this kind is found in Musa's composition, of which, notes Dimock, 'the terminology, the setting, the condition of the speaker are all Vaisnava', but 'the expression could be that of any human, separated from his God'. Although 'a condition common to all mankind', we cannot afford to ignore that the particular idea flows from the pen of a Muslim mystic - a fact which is made clear by the writer himself in the final line:

If one knows a rasika, one has to love him. If one gives her life to other than a rasika she dies while still alive. I know my friend to be a rasika, and I a woman indifferent to the world. My heart burns in the fire of prema, and there is nothing left for me but death. My heart burns in the fire of prema for my cruel friend. The day has passed in hope and longing, night has turned into dawn not knowing him, not drowning in this cruel love; if one loves a man, she searches for a more-than-human love. Who creates this love is drowned in it. The lowly Mucha says, My body burns in the fire of this love; but at the Day of Judgment He will be known. 2

It is not this kind of composition that presents problem of identity. The large number of these compositions do not reveal any trace of Islamic elements and yet are only symbolical. In regard to this latter type of composition, we suggest a possible line of demarcation between what may be treated as inspired primarily by Vaisnava ideas and that by Sufic symbolism.

1 BBMK, no. 76; tr., Dimock, MVPE, 29.  
2 Ibid.
The most significant feature of the pada compositions in general is the element of love that is abundantly reflected in them. This is something which both the Hindu and Muslim compositions have in common. But the attitudes of love in relation to the Godhead set a large range of Muslim and Hindu compositions apart from each other. The concept of love (prema), as enunciated in the school of Bengal Vaishnavism, is not quite akin to that of the Sufis. With the former, the theory of love is based on a principle of duality, theological, if not metaphysical. Theologically the Vaishnavas have conceived some kind of duality between God (Krṣṇa) and the individual (jīva), and this principle of duality brings in the question of devotion, which gradually culminates in the conception of passionate love.¹ The Supreme Soul is boundless and is full of intelligence itself. The individual soul is an atom having intelligence. They are necessarily connected together, and this connection can never be destroyed. Krṣṇa is the support (āśraya), and jīva rests on him (āśrita). The relation between the two is identity as well as difference. As the bee is distinct from the honey and hovers about it, and when it drinks it, is full of it and is at one with it, so the individual soul is at first distinct from the Supreme Soul. It seeks the Supreme Soul consistently and continuously, and when through love it is full of the Supreme Soul, it becomes unconscious of its individual existence and is absorbed, as it were, in God. This is the ecstatic condition in which the individual soul becomes one with God, though they are really distinct.² This relation between the Absolute and the individual has been metaphysically described as incomprehensible (acintya); it is a relation of non-dualism, and yet of dualism, and

¹ Dasgupta, S.B.: Obscure..., 175.
this principle of dualism in non-dualism (advaita-dvaita bhāva) is said to transcend intellectual comprehension. The theological concept of dualism, however, prevails, and all poetical and metaphorical descriptions of love seem to be based on this theological speculation. The position of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās is still more different. With them love exists between individual beings such as Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, but not between the individual and the Absolute; it is the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa that ultimately leads to the realisation of the Absolute. ¹ In contrast to this theory of love in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, the Šūfī concept of love is ultimately based on a non-dualistic belief, and is a direct relationship between the Absolute on the one hand, and the individual on the other.

This difference in the theological and metaphysical conception of love between Bengal Vaiṣṇavism and Šūfism imparted distinct characters to the padas composed on the one hand by poets inspired by the strict ideal of Vaiṣṇava love, and on the other by those who were permeated by Šūfī notions. With the former, theologically man (jīva) has no part to play in the eternal and cosmic love-process (prema-līlā) between Kṛṣṇa and His cosmic partner of feminine energy in the form of Rādhā. The jīva has no more to do in this than remain a spectator with all love and faith, enjoy its bliss, and proclaim (kirtana) this līlā in words and music. There is no room, at least in accordance with the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava theory, for a desire on his part to participate in the prema-līlā of the two, or to long for union with Kṛṣṇa. The Vaiṣṇava lyrics of Bengal, in consequence, are conspicuous by the absence of a human

¹ Dasgupta, S.B.: Obscure..., 175.
longing to take part in the Vṛndāvana-līlā or for union with Kṛṣṇa, unlike the old Vaiṣṇava community of Alvars or individual devotees like Mīrā Bai. On the other hand, the lyric-writers, inspired by Sūfīc ideals of love, and unrestricted by any theological inhibition, discovered in Rādhā's longing for Kṛṣṇa, which was exquisitely expressed in stirring erotic emotionalism in the Vaiṣṇava lyrics of Jaya-deva, Vidyāpati, Cāndī-dāsa and later Vaiṣṇava lyricists, a channel in which to direct the strong currents of their own anxiety, anguish and quest for their Beloved. Their writings tended to become allegorical and assumed symbolic character.

It is quite significant to note that the Bengali Muslim writers with Sūfīc predispositions chose for their purpose a theme, which, being so highly popular in contemporary Bengal, was best suited for popularising Sūfīc ideas. The Bengali Muslim writers characteristically abstained from drawing upon any theme of non-Indian extraction, such as Yūsuf-Zulaikha, Laila-Majnūn, Shīrīn-Farhād, Saīf ul-Mulūk-Badī' ul-Jamāl, Gūl-i Bakāwālī, Haft-Paikar, etc. with a view to creating an allegorical mystic literature. The Sūfī poets outside India and in other parts of India utilised these and other thematic materials to build up a rich heritage of mystical literature. It is highly interesting that the Bengali Muslim poets made use of almost all these stories, but divested them of their mystical connotations, and recreated them with humanistic ideas into a literary tradition of romantic narrative poems, which the Bengali Muslims had the proud distinction of introducing into Bengali literature.

The two types of attitude reflected in the pada compositions, as noted earlier, cut across the religious divisions among the lyricists. There are quite a number of lyrical compositions by Muslims in conformity with the traditions of Vaiśṇava lyrical literature, and without any shadow of Ṣūfī symbolism in the texture of their thought-content. Similarly, some Hindu pada writers broke away from the Vaiśṇava theological tradition and wrote on the ideal of Ṣūfī transcendental love. This may account for Haq’s observation that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the Vaiśṇava padas are often given allegorical interpretations. But we should beware against exaggerating this trend among the Vaiśṇava padakartās, for the Vṛndāvana-līlā was to them as much a ‘divine allegory’ as a ‘literal fact of religious history’.1

Whatever might have been the symbolical implications of some Hindu compositions, there is no room for such disputations in respect of a good number of them written by the Muslims. The symbolic import of the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa underlying these compositions is indeed subtle and rather concealed. But a critical study of the compositions of this particular category reveals their inner character. The most significant clue to the determination of the intrinsic nature of these two types of composition is often provided in their colophons. In so far as a Vaiśṇava poet is unable, for reasons noted earlier, to ‘identify’ himself with, or ‘participate’ in the divine dalliances of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the colophon assumes a neutral and passive tone of an observer creating an image of the love of his God.2 In contradistinction to this, the poet with Ṣūfī leanings is often found in the

1 MBS, 52.
2 De, S.K., 223.
3 This subtle metaphysical and doctrinal line of distinction occasionally gave in under emotional pressure in individual poets. (Cf. Dimock, E.C.: The Place of the Hidden Moon, 23-4). But the fact remains that the Vaiṣṇava theological stance in this regard, contained the development of this attitude in them.
colophon to substitute himself for Radha in her quest for the Beloved. Akbar 'Ali writes:

My heart aches for my dear Syäm. He has pierced me with his new love. I cannot stay back in the house, for the love of Syäm-kālā and my own [love for Him] burn my body out. I sleep alone in the room, and see him in dream. It is the fault of my karma that I do not see him as I wake up. Akbar 'Ali, who is a mere child, says, 'My limbs are burnt in love. Oh! the adorable one appearing in dream has nearly taken my life.'

Saiyid Murtażā echoes the same feeling:

Syäm-bandhu (friend), you are my life. I cannot forget the great day we met each other. I cannot suffer to be patient as I behold that face like the moon....Oh, Kānu, my heart, have mercy on me; give me shelter under the shadow of your feet....Saiyad Martuza says at the feet of Kānu, 'I forsake everything and remain at your feet in all my life and death.'

Burhānī wants to 'surrender' himself 'at the feet of Syäm', whom it was his 'good fortune' to 'see'. He entreats his 'merciful friend' to give him shelter 'at his feet' taking him for 'a suffering lover'. He advocates making 'voluntary offering of one's youth' to Syäm-bandhu. Bādī' ud-Dīn says:

You come before me and soothe my mind....The music of my friend's flute makes his lady-love impatient and restless. Your flute has made me your maid and I become devoted to your feet....You are the Lord of my life, who else is there in the world, and from whom else can I expect compassion?.....Why do you not show yourself to your Radhā?'

Faqīl ul-Ḥaq says that he loves Kālacand and has suffered 'immense afflictions for having kept the name of Kālā alone ever in his mind'. He asks, 'Why are you so

1 Quoted, BBMK, 39.
3 BBMK, 77.
4 Quoted, ibid., 76.
hard on me, my love?... You make me cry and amuse yourself as much as you like'. 1 The poet finds himself 'burnt to ashes in the fire of love'. He cannot bear the 'pangs of separation'. Šyām 'remains hidden after making love'. He expresses his doubt to Bīšākhā about 'meeting' his beloved even 'in death', while he could not meet him 'in life'.

Naẓir complains that his 'heart burns constantly for the sake of Šyām' and confesses that he is 'drowned day and night in sins (gunah)'. 3 Kālā Shāh addresses Lalita to tell her that his 'friend' has turned him 'mad' and that 'he has left' at the end of 'making love with him'.

Arkum writes:

Whom do you spend this night with, oh Šyām, forsaking me? The candles burn the night through over the head of my bed; be kind and do please come to the lap of Rādhā... Mad Arkum says that the sweetheart does not come in the night unless there is love since childhood.

The poets sometimes went to the extent of striking an attitude of love to the beloved Šyām independent of the personality of Rādhā. 'Abd ul-Bārī poses as a fellow-traveller in the way of Rādhā. He says:

I beseech you, touch your feet, oh Rā[i] [Rādhā], tell me where can I get the treasure of my heart. What shall I do, where can I go? I have lost Kānāi; I ask the birds and animals, trees and creepers about Kānāi, none tells me what my mind longs to know, where can I assuage my heart?... Why blame the Providence, it is all my fate and karma that Abdul Bārī spends his days in tears. 6

1 Ibid., 73.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 66.
4 Ibid., 54.
5 Ibid., 44.
6 Quoted, ibid., 41.
Irkan (Arkān) takes a similar stance:

What should I win the heart of Śyām with, Rai; I do not have that treasure with me.¹

With some, Radhā replaces Kṛṣṇa as the object of love. ‘Alī Miyan finds Śyām devoid of ‘kindness’ in him for having sent ‘Rādhikā’ alone to fetch water from the Yamunā. The poets adds:

If I had got her, I would take care of her and pass the nights in enjoyment. I would send friends to accompany her and treat her with respect and the days would have passed in all merriments. Oh, you darling, listen to the proposal of ‘Alī Miya, whether you are ready to leave the river bank in his company.²

In certain cases the Sufic ideas are rather clearly expressed, regardless of the symbolic device. Rahīm ud-Dīn writes:

Oh, my dear friend, do you know what name does the flute of Śyām play?...If you could trace the name that the flute repeats, the lock of Lāhut³ would be opened, and darkness would be turned into light. If the name is forgotten, it spells instantaneous death....Śyām-cānd plays the flute day and night; the world is made of two letters – kaf and nun.⁴ I make a union of the breath (dam) and the utterances of the name (nam), and meditate on the flute. And lo, the blue jewel (nilmani or Śyām) is occupying the la mokām [makan]. Fakir Rahim ud-Dīn says, ‘You have had life and you have not made a gift of it. The one who has fallen a victim of love has alone got hold of Śyām, who is full of all virtues’.⁵

Sufic ideas in clear terms are also expressed in the composition of Badī’ ul-Jamāl:

¹ Ibid., 48.
² Ibid., 46-7.
³ Supra, Ch. III, A.
⁴ The other name of Śyām, that is Kānu, consists in Persian of the same two letters – kaf and nun.
⁵ Quoted, BBMK, 88-9.
There are only two birds – one black the other white – flying in this world. None knows about them and there are petty strifes everywhere. The Lord was a Unity as He created mim. He created the three worlds (tribhuban) in the quivering of his power (kudrat/gudra). Everyone calls Kālā Kālā, only I call him syām. Kālā conceals in himself the name of Maulā [Lord, God] Himself. The sky is black, black is the earth and so are air and water. The moon is black, the sun is black and so is Maulā Rabbānī. Badī ul-Jamāl says, 'Oh, what darkness is all around. Save us by uniting mim and āyen ['ain'].

Saiyid Ni'mat cannot go further in spelling out his Sufic impulse in terms and references of Viśnava tradition, as he warns his mind against getting 'caught in the web of illusion (maya)' and recalls his 'Murshid syāmray' as 'the redeemer from crisis'.

But the Muslim pada compositions were not all Sufic in spirit and symbolical in form. Quite a large number of such lyrics reveal no trace of allegorical significance and show little difference from the vast body of Viśnava lyrics in respect of their contents and style of composition. They pursued almost all the different thematic divisions of the Viśnava lyrical literature – such as rūpa, purvāraṇa, anurāga, mana, abhisāra, viraha, milana, vamsi, mathur, balya-īlā, dāna-īlā, naukā-vilāsa, goṣṭha-īlā and holi-īlā. Even in the matter of the crucial test of a Viśnava lyric regarding its attitudes towards the cosmic īlā involving Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, these Muslim compositions are to be taken as nothing but Viśnava in nature. There is not the least suggestion in them about their authors' individualistic objects of seeking union with the Absolute personified in Kṛṣṇa. The colophons of

1 Ibid., 76.
2 Ibid., 100-1. We need not multiply illustrations of this type of compositions with Sufic orientation. It is quite evident that some of the compositions quoted before, such as Cānd Qāzī's, belong to this type in accordance with the test of our categorisation.
such Muslim poets reflect the passivity and impersonality of an onlooking devotee inspired with awe and supreme veneration at the 'sight' of the Lord revealing Himself in myriad ways. It is quite probable that the Muslim poet was often attracted to this form of Vaisnava composition by its lyrical qualities and its possibilities for playing with feelings, emotions and moods of varying nature. The whole gamut of the Vaisnava lyrical literature is minutely and systematically classified, as briefly noted above, on the basis of the different stages, situations and emotive contents in the life of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa's childhood (bālya-līlā), his pastoral activities (goṣṭha-līlā), his beauty (rūpa), the dawn of love in Rādhā, its fruition, the different moods and feelings flowing from their love (pūrvarāga, anurāga, abhisāra, māna, milana and virāha), their amorous activities (dāna-līlā, kuṇja-līlā, naukā-vilāsa, holi-līlā), all opened up new vistas for lyrical compositions in Bengali literature. The Muslim poet took as much advantage of its limitless possibilities as his Hindu counterpart. Ḥabīb writes on the theme of the beauty (rūpa) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

Lo, mother, what a beauty is Nandagopāl [Kṛṣṇa]. He has a sandal-paste mark on his forehead...garland of bakul on the neck...and rings hanging from his ears. The world is seduced by his glance. His face has no parallel. He holds his flute in his hand...has a yellow-cloth around his waist...standing beneath the kadamba tree...Fakir Ḥabīb says, 'Looking at Kānu is like having a full-moon rise on the forehead. My heart longs to keep him before my eyes and look at him all the time'.

The theme of goṣṭha-līlā is taken up by Nāṣir Māhūd:

With cattle in the field are playing Rāma [Balaraṁa, the brother of Kṛṣṇa] and handsome Śyām...along with Śrīdām and Sudām [two companions of Kṛṣṇa]...he plays with young girls on the bank of the river...Nāṣir Māhūd wishes to find shelter at his feet.

1 Ibid., 103-4.
2 Ibid., 67.
Quite a few poets have chosen the theme of milana, kūñja-lilā and viraha. Šaikh Faiżullāh writes on the amorous union of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā:

With passion they remain awake very late at night... (Kānu) puts on a charming dress, Bīnodiṇī [Rādhā] lies down with him. Rāi loses her consciousness in the enjoyment of sleep. With Kānu in her lap, lips on each other, Rādhā is not awake... 1

or,

Let us go back home, oh, charming Rādhā. She is neither asleep nor awake, you have sandal-paste marks on your body, and people may see you at the end of the night and tease you... on a bed of flowers how fast she is sleeping on the lap of Śyām Cīkāp Kālā. 2

Mīr Faiżullāh writes on the amorous play of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs:

Rādhāmadhab [Kṛṣṇa] is in the garden. Hari Nārāyaṇ, who is supplicated by Brahma with his four faces, is seen here physically. The gopīs rush with flowers and sandal-wood paste and throw them at Govinda. Stricken by flowers and sandal-wood paste, Mūrārī [Kṛṣṇa] hides himself behind the creepers (mādhava-lāta)... The gopīs [not finding him] begin crying, calling the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Mīr Faiżullāh says, 'How beautiful is the līlā! Even a stone melts at the sight (darsan) of the rūp of Śyām.' 3

Nāṣir has chosen to write on viraha. His work is of some importance to illustrate the point that the attitude of the poet to the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa līlā is the determining factor in a Vaiṣṇava composition. Until we come to the colophon, the anguish and longing for Kṛṣṇa in Nāṣir's work can very well be taken as Nāṣir's own longing for God symbolised by Kṛṣṇa. In the colophon Nāṣir clearly dissociates himself from personal representation. His pada runs as follows:

1 Raśa-malā, fol. 8a.
2 Ibid., fol. 13b.
3 Quoted, BBMK, 81-2.
Whither should I go, sajani, for my friend? Kālā has whetted my love and added to my suffering, and now remains concealed. I spend all the four prahars (watches) of the night sitting on the bed. My youth plays heavy on me. I cannot keep it in bound. How can I assuage my mind? Nāsir, who is unillumined, says, 'Go, you darling (dhani), under the kadam tree if you are looking for beautiful Kānāi'.

'Alā'wal's poetic versatility picks up a pure Vaishnava theme for one of his lyrics. He writes on Rādhā's abhisāra - her going out early in the morning and return at nightfall, for which she is taken to task by her sisters-in-law. Rādhā concocts stories to get over the difficulty. Kabīr and Nāsir Muhammad write on holi-līlā involving Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and her companions. Nāsir's colophon is marked by his devotion to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. It runs:

Nāsir Muhammad says, 'Worship the feet of Rādhā and Śyām and no delay is to be excused'.

To Masan 'Alī is attributed a pada on the theme of naukā-vilāsa. Rādhā, on her way to the market of Mathura with pots of curd on her head, is stopped by the ferryman, Kānāi. Rādhā asks what she can offer to satisfy him. Kānāi replies:

You are the lotus and I am a bee. Let's go to the garden and let me satisfy myself.

Sher Cānd chooses almost a similar theme - called dāna-līlā. 'Shameless (nilāj) Kānāi' accosted 'the wife of the milkman' (Rādhā) half-way down the road to the market. Some arguments follow between them, in course of which Rādhā threatens him with punishment by king Kaṃśāsura. In his colophon, Sher Cānd requests Rādhe ṭhākurānī to worship

1 Ibid., 68.
2 Ibid., 44-5.
3 Ibid., 53.
4 Ibid., 69.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 83-4.
Kānu, 'the essence of all virtues', without whom 'there is no way out'.

Qamar 'Alī,2 'Alīm ud-Dīn3 and Sahīkā

(Saḥifā?) Bānū4 all draw upon the same theme, known as māthur in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava religious system. This type of āhur deals with the extreme sadness and suffering of both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa at their separation following upon Kṛṣṇa's departure from Vṛndāvana for Māthura, where he becomes king. Qamar 'Alī asks 'beloved Rādhā' not to 'worry in her mind', for Hari is certainly to come, and she will see him to the fullest content of her pair of eyes.5 'Alīm ud-Dīn's colophon runs in the same spirit:

Sūrī 'Alīmu d dīn says, 'Listen, oh Rādhā, you will certainly meet Kṛṣṇa'.6

B. Nathism:

Among the popular religious movements in medieval Bengal, the Muslim connexion appears to have been rather close to the cult of the Nāthas, which was as popular in Bengal as in other parts of India. The large mass of traditional literature on the cult in both Sanskrit and vernacular languages reveals not so much its origin and development as its wide popularity. Diverse theories have been put forward in regard to the origin and the nature of the cult. Whatever might have been the sources contributing to the development of Nathism, the association of the cult with Yogic ideas and practices as well as the general framework of Saivism, in which its legends and traditions have developed, seem quite evident.

1 Ibid., 98.
2 Ibid., 53-4.
3 Ibid., 45-6.
4 Ibid., 61.
5 Ibid., 54.
6 Ibid., 46.
The Natha literature of Bengal comprises longer narrative poems and isolated songs. The narrative type is based thematically either on the legend of King Manikacandra, his wife Maynāmatī and their son Gopi-candra or Govinda-candra, or on the most popular Natha Siddhā Gorakh-nātha. The former, called Manikacandra Rajār Gān, Maynāmatīr Gān or Govinda-candra or Gopi-candra Gīt, while narrating the central theme of the royal family, describes the supernatural power attained by some of the Natha Siddhās. The latter deals with the story of the downfall of the great Yogi Matsyendra-nātha or Mīna-nātha as a result of the curse of Pārvatī, the consort of Śiva, and his redemption by his worthy disciple Gorakṣa-nātha by virtue of the latter's supreme Yogic attainment.

Aside from the strong impact of the kindred Yogico-Tantrico-Nāthic ideas in the formulation of the mystic principles of the medieval Bengali Muslims, as discussed earlier,1 they were found in the direct line of the Natha traditions. They have left valuable contributions to the Natha literature of both the categories mentioned above.

The Gorakṣa-nātha-Mīna-nātha legend was taken up by a large number of medieval Bengali poets. Many versions of the song, which in spite of the difference in details are substantially the same, have been discovered in various parts of the Chittagong district in east Bengal. One of the versions contains the name of Shaikh Faižullāh.2 In some of the manuscripts the colophons refer to other names like Kavindra-dāsa, Bhīma-dāsa and Śyāma-dāsa along

1 Supra, Ch. III, A.
2 This version entitled Gorakṣa-vijaya has been edited by Munshi A. Karim and published by the Bangiya Sāhitya Parishad, Sāhitya Parishad Granthāvalī, no. 64, 1324 B.S. The text has been re-edited by Panchanan Mandal under the title Gorkhasa-vijaya, published by Viśva Bharati.
along with Shaikh Faizullah. But the name of the Muslim author occurs most frequently, and, more important still, some of the older manuscripts contain his name alone.  

While ascribing the authorship of this work to Shaikh Faizullah, we should point out that the authors on these legends drew largely on the pre-existing traditions transmitted through the folk-singers, which might account for the similarities in the different versions. The eclectic spirit of the popular religious forces is further illustrated by the fact that all the manuscripts of this work, attributed to Shaikh Faizullah, were recovered from the possession of Hindus, one of them being copied by a Muslim and another by a Buddhist.  

In north Bengal Shuqu Mahmod is credited with the composition of a Pancali on the Natha legend of Maynmati-Maika-candra.

These narrative poems on the legends of Gopi-candra and Gorakh-natha were very popular among the Muslims of north and east Bengal, who shared with the Jugis (Yogis) a complete monopoly of professional singing of these ballads.

Quite different from this narrative type, long or short, stray songs about the Natha Siddhas, 'emphasizing the vanity of life and the pernicious effect of worldly enjoyment, and stressing side by side the importance of Yoga as the only path for escaping death and decay and for

1 Sen, D.C.: Banga Bhasha o Sahitya, 60.
2 Goraksha-vijaya, op.cit., Introduction, 19.
3 Shuqu Mahmoder Pancali, published by Rasul, Ghulam.
4 Goraksha-vijaya, Introduction. S.B. Dasgupta informs us: 'In the United Provinces the Yogi singers are generally called Bhartharitis or Bhartharhis. They sing the song of Gopi-cand and Maigan-nath and the teachings of Bhartarhi. No Hindu domestic festival is complete unless these Bhartharitis come and sing their songs. They use ochre coloured clothes of the Sannyasins. But they are by religion Mahomedans'. (Obscure..., 369n).
attaining liberation', were also quite popular among the Muslims of north and east Bengal.1 Such songs are invariably couched in an unintelligible enigmatic style, which generally characterises Yogic songs in all the vernaculars of India'.2 In Chittagong songs like 'Remember Tinnath' at the end of the day' were very popular with the local Muslims.3 Munshi A. Karim has quoted one such enigmatic song.4

The popularity of the Natha traditions among the Muslims and their active pursuit of its literary forms appear more meaningful in the background of a strong disapproval of the Natha Yogis and their lay followers by the Brahmanical orthodoxy. The Natha songs were not considered 'elegant enough for the upper classes'.5 The gradual ascendancy of the Sanskritic and Purānic traditions prior to the advent of Islam in Bengal relegated popular religious traditions like Nathism to the level of the masses, as a result of which the Natha religious traditions were subsequently preserved by the Hindu masses as well as the Muslims, who remained less vulnerable to the impact of Brahmanical ideas and traditions.

1 Gorakṣa-vijaya, ibid.; Dasgupta, ibid., 370.
2 Dasgupta, ibid., 371. Dasgupta is said to have heard himself 'such songs in the interior of the district of Bakergunge' in east Bengal. (Ibid.).
3 Triṁātha, i.e. Ādi-nātha or Śiva, Mina-nātha and Gorakh-nātha, the trinity of the Natha cult.
4 Gorakṣa-vijaya, Introduction.
5 Ibid.; also, Dasgupta, ibid., 420-1.
6 HBL, 49.
C. Dharma:

The impact of Islam on the development of certain features of the Dharma cult has received considerable attention. The legends and rituals concerning the cult of Dharma are as complex as they are controversial, and appear to be a queer synthesis of Vedic and pre-Vedic traditions with various non-Aryan cults and myths. The subsequent development of the cult has drawn upon other sources as well. One of such influences in its much later stage of development, as reflected in the Dharma-māṅgala literature belonging to the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, was Islam. The Dharma-māṅgala literature reveals an unmistakable anti-Brahmanical undertone, as also contains incidental references to Islam, which are rather appreciative and respectful. The followers of the Dharma cult, with their monotheistic belief in the formless God, could easily have come to friendly terms with the Muslims. Shahidullah has drawn our attention to a description of Dharma in the image of a Muslim ruler of Gaur. The story of 'The Wrath of Niraṅjana' (Niraṅjaner Ṛṣmā), which is now taken for a later interpolation into the Śūnya-purāṇa as well as in the Dharma-pūjā-vidhāna shows that the Muslim conquest of Bengal and the persecution of the Brāhmaṇas by the Muslims were regarded by Dharmists as the gracious device of the Lord Himself to save them from the hands of the persecuting Brāhmaṇas. It is said there that the Vedic Brāhmaṇas of Jajura and Maldaha started taxing,

3 HBL, 34.
persecuting and killing the Saddharmīs. This provoked the wrath of Nīrāṇājana in Vaikuṇṭha, whom the victims of persecution appealed to. He appeared in Jājpura in the guise of a yavana, and turned himself into 'Khodā with a black hat and with a bow and arrow in his hands, seated on a horse.'

The implication of the word Saddharmī is not quite self-evident, and this has provided scope for some historical misconceptions. Taking the cue from H.P. Sastrī, who identified the cult of Dharma as a relic of Buddhism on grounds rendered extremely doubtful by subsequent researches, D.C. Sen took the Saddharmīs mentioned in the Dharmist literature, for the Buddhists, and gave a wrong direction to some significant historical conclusions. For, this particular reference in Śānya-purāṇa has been extensively used in drawing a picture of total enmity and hostility between the Hindus and the Buddhists in Bengal.

We do not find convincing reasons to interpret the Saddharmīs in the Dharma texts as Buddhists, since the obvious intention of the work was to depict the sufferings of the followers of Dharma in the hands of the orthodox Brāhmaṇas. Aside from the question that Rāmālī himself might have possibly belonged to a non-Brāhmaṇa caste (cf. HBLL, 31), that the Dharmists were for a long time not looked upon with favour by the caste Hindus is evident from the fact that some of the poets of Dharma-mañgalas refuse at first to comply with the request of Dharma to compose any poem in his honour the fear of social persecution. Even as late as 1640 A.D. Mañikrāma-gāngulī, a Brāhmaṇa, was urged by Dharma in a dream to write a Dharma-mañgala, but he fell prostrate before the Lord saying: 'I shall be an outcaste if I sing a song in your praise'. (Dharma-mañgala, 9; HBLL, 28). For the religious tension reflected in the Dharma literature, we need not look beyond the people for whom the literature was meant and bring in the Buddhists. It is also important to note that Jājpura, mentioned in the above incident, is described in the Dharma-mañgala literature as a very important place for the Dharmists, and there is also the tradition in later Dharma-mañgalas that Dharma revealed himself there as a Muslim. (Dharmar Bardanā, Ms. no. 2470, Calcutta University, Fol. 76).
All the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon converted themselves into Muslim soldiers in the company of the Lord. Brahmā incarnated himself as Muḥammad, Viṣṇu as Paighambar and Śiva became Ādām. Gaṇeśa became a ṣāzi, Kartika a ṣāzi, Nārada a shaikh and Indra a maulānā. Ćaṇḍī made herself Hauwā-bibī and Padmāvatī became Bibī Nur. They stormed Jājpura and broke all its temples, and the Dharmists were saved.¹ In some later Dharma-māṅgala literature also, Dharma is said to have revealed himself as a Muslim (Yaban-ābatār).² The Dharma-ṣūja-vidhāna further contains in its interpolated section many corrupt Urdu verses eulogising Islam, condemning the Brāhmaṇical practices and showing approval of the former. Certain Dharmist practices were essentially Islamic. The practice of sacrificing animals or birds by cutting their throat in a particular manner called zabh is unmistakably Islamic. The considerable importance attached to the direction of the west in the traditions and rituals of the cult of Dharma smacks of Islamic influence. The sacrificial animals and birds in Dharmist rituals are made to face westwards before their slaughter. The description of the 'gates' invariably begins with the description of the western gate. The moon is supposed in the Dharmist tradition as the guardian (kotāl) of the western direction. One of the cardinal episodes in the Dharma-māṅgala tradition is the rise of sun in the west at the instance of Dharma. Again, Friday is quite as important for the Dharmists as the Muslims.³

The influence of Islam on the cult of Dharma is clear enough and is fully recognised. But it is not so well-known that the traditions of Dharma found their way into that of Islam in Bengal.

² Dharmer Bandana, loc. cit.
³ Dasgupta, S.B.: Obscure..., 266-7.
The Muslim literature of Bengal contains innumerable references to God, using terminology characteristic of the Dharmists and the Nāthists. The most common of such terms are Niranjana and Kartār, as we have so often noted above. While some made exclusive use of such expressions in their works, others made indiscriminate use of them alongside Islamic terms like Allāh, Khudā and 'Ilāhī, and some even went to the extent of binding them together in expressions like 'Āllā Kartā Elāhī'. There are direct references to Dharma in respectful reverence. According to Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, Zulaikha once finds an ogre (rākṣas) 'in the guise of Dharma', and she 'prostrates herself in the name of Dharma'. He also compares Zulaikha's father with 'the incarnation of Dharma (Dharmabātār) among men'.

D. Śiva:

The literature of the medieval Bengali Muslims attests to their respect for the popular Hindu god, Śiva.

Zain ud-Dīn considers his Pir 'as great as Śankar [Śiva] in meditation' (dhyāneta Śankar samān). According to Shāh Muḥammad Ṣaghīr, Yūsuf as the king of Egypt once wanders, thirsty and fatigued, deep into a dense forest, and is amazed to discover a charming lake, a magnificent abode and an exquisite virgin who came to greet her guest at the end of the performance of her 'worship (pujā) of Maheś [Śiva]'. Subsequently, Yūsuf comes to know that she is the daughter of the king of the Gandharvas named Sāhābān. He is further told by her that she has received

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1 Jairaddi, VMs, 320.
3 Ibid., fol. 17.
a divine command in her dream, saying:

Build a nicely decorated house on this spot and worship Siva in it with faith. Then only you should get a husband to your liking. ¹

Accordingly the house is built in which she lives on fruits and vegetables in contemplation of Siva.² In a work entitled Yaminī-vahāl (1780) by Karīmullāh of Sitakundu in Chittagong, the Muslim heroine is represented as praying to Siva.³

The concept of the god Siva has evolved through the interaction of pre-Vedic, Vedic, Purānic and folk elements. This is quite evident in the medieval Bengali Sivāyana or Siva-maṅgala literature.⁴ There we find the great Vedic lord of destruction (Rudra) and the great Purānic meditator and ascetic, roaming in the crematorium (āmaśān) and being reduced to the position of an incompetent house-holder, an idle bhāṅg-eater, admonished by his wives for his indifference to the farming duties of the family and for his apathy to the economic situation of his impoverished family. The Purānic god is pushed behind a popular image marked by its domesticity and humanity. Songs composed in lighter vein on different aspects of Siva's life remained, consequently, very popular in the Bengali literature. Their popularity grew to such an extent that Siva songs were sung almost on all religious and social occasions, and singing Siva songs while husking rice (dhan bhānte Siver git) became a trite Bengali proverb to emphasize the anomalous character of a situation. Songs about Siva's marriage constituted a great source of popular enjoyment in Bengal. The Muslims

¹ Ibid., fol.71. It is interesting to note that Hindu maidens in Bengal still worship Siva in the hope of getting a suitable match.
² Ibid.
³ HBLL, 798.
⁴ Clark , T.W., loc.cit.
of the land did not fall behind in this respect. They went so far as to compose such songs. We quote below an extract from a song relating to Śiva's marriage, composed by a Muslim of Barishal named 'Ālam, which gained considerable local popularity:

He [Śiva] has smeared ashes all over his body, put a garland of snakes around his neck, a tiger's skin round the loin, and has a load of matted hair on the head. He has passed a hundred years of his age, he breaks down if he tries to walk, and so rides a bull. He has lean hands and legs, decrepit body so as to look like having an inflamed spleen. The bridegroom indeed makes one sad with all misgivings in one's mind about him. 'Ālam, who is a yaban, says: what should you worry about, all must suffer their fate.¹

B. Mother Goddesses:

The popularity of the Mother goddesses in Bengal is a striking feature of the religious developments in the land. The Muslims in Bengal bore witness to its force.

a. Manasa:

Bengal is a land of rivers and thick bushes in a background of characteristically low and marshy landscape. The advent of the rainy season turns at least quite a large area of east and southern Bengal into a vast sea interspersed by small clusters of houses in scattered and sprawling villages. This is the time when the people are inhibited by the fear of poisonous snakes in bewildering variety, seeking shelter in every possible corner of a house. In utter helplessness, the people resort to the propitiation of the snake goddess as the only means of allaying their fears and gaining mental comfort. It has been observed:

¹ Majumdar, R. : 'Barisāler Grāmya-gīti, SPP, 1314 B.S., ii, 126.
There is hardly any house in east Bengal which does not perform the worship (pujā) or brata of Manasa... There is hardly any locality which does not have an ojhā [the snake-priest], and of the ojhās, ninety per cent are Muslims.¹

The Muslim association with the goddess Manasa in medieval Bengal is known through various sources. The story of Manasa itself involves the Muslims directly, as is known through the compositions of Vijaya-gupta and Vipra-dāsa, who flourished respectively in east and west Bengal in the last quarter of the fifteenth century A.D.² According to Vipra-dāsa, some cowherds worshipping Manasa are assaulted by certain Muslim farmers. They receive due punishment from Manasa, who next turns against their chiefs Hasan and Husain. She sends her snakes, who kill all the Muslim troopers including Husain. This leaves no other alternative for Hasan but to submit to the malignant goddess, who thereafter appears personally before Hasan and restores his men and property. Hasan arranges the worship of the goddess with the officiation of the Brahmāna priests.³

Vijaya-gupta's version varies in details. According to him, a Mullā on a stormy day takes shelter in a mandapa meant for the worship of Manasa in a forest, and finds some cowherds worshipping the pot symbolising the goddess. He takes it for 'ghost worship' and is about to break the pot, when the cowherds in a body stand against him and humiliate him in various ways. The matter comes to the notice of Hasan and Husain. The subsequent developments throw the difference between the western and the eastern versions into sharper relief. According to the latter, Husain is not killed in the fight that follows. Again, in the former Manasa personally appears before Hasan and asks him to

² Vijaya-gupta's version is partially noted in a different context. (Supra, 144).
³ Manasa-vijaya, op.cit., 63-86.
worship her in order to restore the lives of his people, while in the latter the sage Nārada advises them to worship the goddess in the form of a pot so that the lost lives and property are restored. The brothers yield. Both versions agree that the goddess is worshipped by them in the form of a pot with the officiation of the Brāhmaṇa priests.\footnote{Manasā-mangala, \textit{op.cit.}, 54-62.}

Aside from this textual evidence, the Muslim association with Manasā is established by the fact that some of the works on the theme were written by Muslim poets\footnote{\textit{Pbh}, III, ii, 24.} and that the literature of the ballads of the Manasā cult and of folklore generally was 'almost entirely in the hands of the Mahomedans in Eastern Bengal'.\footnote{Sen, D.C. (ed.): \textit{Eastern Bengal Ballads}, IV, i, \textit{Introduction}, xxx.} Besides, the Bengali Muslims were no less enthusiastic than Hindus in copying the old manuscripts of the Manasā-maṅgala literature.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, III, i, 4; \textit{Petavel and Sen; Behula, the Indian Pilgrim's Progress}, \textit{Introduction}, iv.}

In east Bengal and Assam down to the first quarter of the present century, there were professional Muslim singers of the ballad of Manasā.\footnote{\textit{E.B. Ballads}, \textit{ibid.}} The Muslims of Rajshahi were known to have almost a 'monopoly of Bhāsān songs (on Manasā)'.\footnote{\textit{HBLL}, 796.} In east Mymensingh and Sylhet the day of Manasā-pūjā was a gala occasion for song, music and boat-races, in which Hindus and Muslims took equal interest and played equally active parts. The first day of the Bengali month of Bhādra was such a day at Nikhildampara in the sub-division of Kishoreganj, district of Mymensingh, and in north-east Netrakona in the same district, when the Muslims used to take part in mirth and songs and almost
exclusively displayed great feats in boat-race (nau-bāic), so that 'the Muslims claimed the right to the day more than the Hindus'.

The Bengali Muslims sometimes directly worshipped the goddess. We have already referred to the textual evidence of this practice. This was also reported from Sherpur in east Bengal. As late as the last decade it is known that 'the Muslims of West Bengal still directly or indirectly participate in the worship of Manasā'.

b. Sarasvatī:

The medieval Bengali literature contributed by the Muslims contains clear reference to their veneration for Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning, music and art.

Shaikh Faizullah maintains that the singer, whose voice is blessed by Sarasvatī and Vṛhaspati, 'attains for ever a poise like a mountain'. Muhammad Khan offers homage (bandi) to 'the mother Sarasvatī', who makes the voice as sweet as that of a cuckoo (kokiler svar). The Muslim author of Imam Yatrār Puthi has a hymn addressed to Sarasvatī whom he addresses as his mother:

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1 Ray, K.K., SPP, op.cit., 220.
2 Kundu, H.D., 39.
3 Maity, P.K., 185. Maity's observation is based on a questionnaire sent out in the early part of the last decade in different areas of present West Bengal, such as west Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Koch-bihar, Maldaha, Bankura, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Nadia, Howrah, Hooghly, 24-Parganas and Midnapur. (Ibid.).
4 The preceptor of the Hindu gods (Deva-guru).
5 Rāga-mālā, fol. 1a.
6 Maqtal Husain, fol. 1a mc.
Hail, oh Sarasvatī, thou art my mother. Thy helpless child invokes thee; will thou not hear?  

Donā Ghāzi also refers to Sarasvatī with the swan as her vehicle (hamsa-bāhini). In a manuscript containing some ethical and religious sayings the following finds place:

O, Sarasvati [Sarasvati], thou art the giver of blessings. Thy words (jirbyā/jihvā or tongue) are those of the Vēt [Veda]. Thy words (jirbyā) are like pearls in a chain; oh, Mother, give me the burden of your learning.

It was reported about the Muslims of the Karimpur sub-division in the district of Nadia that they followed their Hindu neighbours in offering reading and writing materials at the feet of the goddess on the day of the Sarasvatī-pūjā. We have already noted in a different context that the Muslim boys in some localities of Calcutta joined enthusiastically in the celebration of the 'Shree Panchami day' (the day of Sarasvatī-pūjā) 'carrying small flags and chanting heathen ditties in praise of Ma Saraswati'.

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1 Quoted, HBLL, 798.
3 The Ms. dated 15 Bhādra, 1177 Maghī/1815 A.D., is anonymous, but it begins with the invocation 'Bismillāher Rahamānir Rahim'. Further, the sayings contained in the Ms. are followed by fragments of some other works based on Muslim themes, such as Jaiguner Bāramās, Sākinār Bāramās, etc.
4 Quoted, SPP, Additional no., 1312 B.S. Either the author or the copyist needs the blessings of the goddess of learning very badly indeed. The extract, as it is quoted in SPP, does not in places make any sense unless quite liberally interpreted.
6 Moslem Chronicle, 25 April, 1895, 177; supra, 38.
c. Lakṣmī:

The Muslim population, especially in the villages in Bengal, were drawn towards the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity, Lakṣmī. According to 'Ala'wal, conjugal unhappiness drives Lakṣmī out of the house (ग्रहा हाते लक्ष्मी दुरे जाये). Mujammil writes:

He, who conducts his activities according to religious principles prospers ever in his wealth (धने धनैँये) and in Lakṣmī (Lakṣmīte).

In the district of Mymensingh, offering of širni to Lakṣmī by the Muslim folk was made. The širni, which consisted of rice, banana, sindūr and dūrva was offered after harvest on a Thursday (Lakṣmībār, the day sacred to the goddess), the rice being of the aus variety in the month of Śrāvara and Phālguna, āman in the month of Agrahāyaṇa and also Phālguna, and bura or boro in Bāśākha.

Shaikh Šamīr ud-Dīn mentions a practice among Muslims in Bengal of not giving or accepting loans 'on the Lakṣmībār', because of the 'superstition to the effect that to do so would displease the goddess and result in financial loss'.

In the Bengal villages Muslim groups were found, who had 'for their sole occupation, the reciting of hymns in Bengali in honour of Lakṣmī-devī'. This function is said

1 Mitra, S.K.: Huchhlī Jelār Itihās, I, 222; Putatunda, B.C.: Natun Bangār Purānaṇ Kāhinī, 128; also, his Candradevīpīm Itihās, 123.
2 Tuṭā, op. cit., text 187 also 186.
3 Mitra-sastra-varta, (BMS 214:sl.237); fol. 3 mc; also text, ed., Sharīf, A., 27. 'Lakṣmī' here represents wealth, peace and happiness in life.
4 Ray, K.K., SPP, 221.
5 Ibid. The varieties of rice referred to are harvested at the respective months mentioned.
6 Bīdār ul-Ghāfolīn, op. cit., 191.
7 HBLL, 368.
to have belonged to them 'exclusively'.

In the first quarter of the present century a puthi on Lakṣmī written by a Muslim was published from Calcutta.

d. Kālī:

Kālī, who is considered the most important of the Śakti deities in eastern India and one of the most popular divinities worshipped in Bengal, has also received the veneration of the Bengali Muslims.

The corpus of medieval Bengali literature includes compositions on the theme of Śaktism and the goddess Kālī. The theme of Vidyā-sundara in Bengali literature was integrally related to the glorification of Kālī. It is extremely significant that one of the earliest poets of the Vidyā-sundara-kāvyā was Sābirid Khān, a Muslim belonging to a very respectable family in Noakhali. Sābirid was well conversant with Sanskrit, and his work is interspersed with Sanskrit couplets. In the introductory verses written in chaste Sanskrit, we read about the virtuous (nītīdharma-parāyanāḥ) king of Ratnāvalī, his gifted (gunaśālinī) wife Kalāvatī, and their erudite son Sundara, who was blessed 'by the grace of Kālikā [Kālī]' (Kalikāya prasādataḥ).

Saīyid Ja'far, Mirzā Ḥusain 'Alī and Saīyid Khān were some of the well-known Muslim composers of songs on

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1 Ibid. In Java the local Muslims used to worship Lakṣmī. (Ibid.).
3 Chakrabarti, C.H.: The Tantras - Studies on Their Religion and Literature, 86, 89.
5 (DMs 381:s1.320), fol. 1 mc.
Kālī. 1 Gol Māmud (Gūl Mājmūd) of Tripura was another highly popular composer and singer of Kālī songs. One of his songs, beginning with 'To whom does she belong - this frenzied woman with severed head?' (unmatta chinnamastā e ramaṇī kār?), became extremely popular. 2 'Allī Rājā' alias Kāmu Faqīr left two songs on Kālī, in which he calls himself 'the servant of Śyāmā-kālikā' (Śyāmā-kālikā dās). 3

The Muslim respect for this particular deity was also reflected in the ballad, called Nizām Ḍakāter Pāla (The Ballad of Nizām, the Robber). 4 The Muslim author of the ballad paid his respect to 'the mother Ichāmatī in the village of Rāunya (Rānguniyā)'. 5 The Muslim author of another ballad named Nurannehā (Nūr un-Nihān) o Qabarer Kathā also paid his homage to Ichāmatī. 6

In a Muslim folk-song of east Bengal, one 'Tomejaddī' (Tamīz ud-Dīn) takes 'a vow of a great sacrifice to Kālī' for the sake of his beloved Lālmatī. 7

At the temple of Kālī at Chachurtala, Bikrampur, Dacca district, the Muslims sacrificed pigeons and goats in fulfillment of vows (mānas) taken in the name of the goddess. 8 The same was the case with the goddess Digambarī at Maiysar, Bikrampur. 9

2 Pbg, ibid.
4 Pbg, II, ii, 324.
5 There exists a famous temple of Kālī in the same village on the bank of the river Ichāmatī. (Ibid.).
6 Pbg, IV, ii, 94.
7 Quoted Majumdar, R.K., SPP, op.cit., 125.
9 Ibid. Digambarī is another name for Kālī, who is 'worshipped on different occasions under different names and forms...' (Chakrabarti, C.H., op.cit., 89).
e. Durga:

The Muslims of Bengal held the goddess Durga, a very popular Sakti deity, in veneration. Some of the Bengali manuscripts written on popular Muslim traditions in Bengal begin with the invocation of the name of the goddess along with Allah, such as 'Śrī Śrī Durga:Allā Kartā Elāhī (Ilāhī)', or simply the goddess alone, as 'Śrī Śrī Durga'. In a Muslim work entitled Mañjur Mā (The Mother of Mañju), the author compares his heroine with 'sākṣat Daśabhuja' (The Ten-armed Incarnate i.e. Durga).

The Saiyids of Nalchira in Chandradvip observed annually the festival of Durgā-puñā with great enthusiasm and expenditure. The neighbouring Hindus celebrated the festival with the subscriptions made by the Saiyid family, even in the first quarter of the present century.

Finally, the custom of wearing new dresses on the occasion of Durgā-puñā prevailed among the Muslims of Bengal too.

f. Čandī:

In north Bengal a small manuscript was found entitled Bhagavatīr Sata-nām, which on scrutiny appeared to be a part of Kavi-kankana Čandī. This was meant for singing by a band of folk musicians in village gatherings comprising both Hindus and Muslims. The manuscript contains among the names of some Hindu gītalas (leading singers) that of a Muslim named Śrī Hosenuddi (Husain ud-Dīn) Sarkār.

1 Jairaddi, VMg, op.cit., 320.
2 Ibid., 318.
3 Fbg, III, ii, 8.
4 Putatunda, B.C.: Candra-dvīper..., 123.
5 Ibid.
7 Biswas, K.K.: 'Pracin Punthir Bibaran', SPP (Rangpur), ii, 1314 B.S.
F. Local Divinities:

Besides the Muslim connexion with the principal Hindu deities, we have references to their regard for the local divinities. The local goddesses were, however, often but local names for an essentially Sakti deity.

In the ballad entitled Nur am-Nihan o Qabarer Katha\(^1\) the Muslim author offers his homage to the local deities - Mā (Mother) Buṣa Chirmāi\(^2\) of the village Cāṣkholā (Cakrasālā) and Śilak-ṭhākur\(^3\) of Raganyā (Rāṅguniyā).\(^4\)

In the semi-historical ballad on Shamsheer Ghāzi it is related that Shamsheer, on the eve of his war against the king of Tripura, was visited thrice in his dream by Tripureśvarī (the goddess of Tripura), urging him to worship the goddess. He wondered if he could do 'an act which a Hindu should perform'. The goddess said:

Everything is providential. The God dooms whomsoever and whenever He wills. You should know all are equal before Him and He does not discriminate between the Hindu and the Muslim. If you cannot worship yourself call for a Brāhmaṇa; otherwise you are destined not to win the battle.\(^5\)

In obedience to her behest, Shamsheer arranged for her worship next morning with the help of a Brāhmaṇa and won the eventual battle.\(^6\)

The Muslims of Sherpur took vows in the name of the local deities of Bhabanipur, Kaushalyatala and Buritala.\(^7\)

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1 Pbh, IV, 11, 94.
2 The guardian-deity of the river Śrimati.
3 The guardian-deity of the river Śilak.
4 Shamsheer Ghāzi, originally a robber, is said to have grown so powerful as to dethrone a king of Tripura and proclaim himself its chief for a time. He was killed in 1159 B.S. (Sen, D.C.: Banga Sāhitya Paricay, ii, 1860).
5 Ibid., 1851.
6 Ibid., 1851-2.
Nawāb Mīr Ja'far on his death-bed is said to have drunk a few drops of water poured in libation over the idol of Kiriteśvarī. So writes G.H. Ṭabāṭabāī:

Several persons of credit have affirmed that some moments before his demise, he [Mīr Ja'far] had, on Nanda-kumār's persuasion, ordered to be brought to him some water that had been poured in libation over the idol at Kyirut-Conah—a famous temple of the Hindus in the neighbourhood of Murshidābād—and that some drops of it were poured down to the dying man's throat.¹

G. The Godlings of Disease:

The masses of the rural population of the country were ever haunted by the spectre of disease and were often the helpless victims of the ravages of epidemics. Fatal epidemics, arising out of uncontrolled outbreak of small-pox and cholera, became a part of the people's life in the back-waters of the villages, and people were left at the complete mercy of the diseases and their guardian-deities. Like all other natural phenomena beyond their control, such diseases merely represented 'the divine will'.² The collective awareness took the form of communal propitiation of the guardian-deity of the disease concerned, and other ritualistic and magical manoeuvrings.

The Muslims of the locality were not excluded from these corporate ventures, while the disease did not discriminate on religious ground. In a predominantly Hindu village, visited by an epidemic, the panic-stricken Muslim villagers collected rice and other ingredients necessary for the propitiation of the deity presiding over the particular occasion, and handed those over to their

² Even now in the Bengal villages, the name of the disease basanta (small-pox) is often substituted by the expression māyer dayā (the grace of the mother).
Hindu neighbours as their contributions to the collective enterprise. In east Mymensingh old Muslim women folk were seen collecting such contributions. In a predominantly Muslim village, the villagers offered sharīf, and the village mulla read the Fatiha, at the end of which every one present shared the food. At the outbreak of cholera, Faqirs maintained night vigils, performing zikr. On such occasions people were not allowed entry into the village with their shoes and umbrellas, for those were considered chosen vehicles of the evil spirit of the disease. A few of such godlings of disease were Śītalā, Basanā, Aṭīsār, Jvarajvarī, Pāncuṭhākur, etc. We discuss below the most dreaded one of them, namely Śītalā.

Śītalā:

Of the various godlings of disease Śītalā-devī, the goddess presiding over small-pox and similar diseases drew most respect from the Muslims. According to a report from Bikrampur in Dacca, Muslim women joined their Hindu counterparts in the collections of contribution (magan) for the celebration of Śītalā-puja. Goats were sacrificed by the Muslims during the celebration.

A Muslim zamindar of Dacca, Gharīb Husain Chaudhuri, living in the late 18th century was known to be a devout worshipper of Śītalā. It is said that once he chanced to see a clay image of Śītalā on a hunting trip in the jungle on the river Buri-ganga. Taking her for a witch, he fired a shot and disfigured the image. That very night he was afflicted by the disease. The goddess appeared to him in a dream and said that she would spare his life at the cost of one of his eyes, as he had done hers. Gharīb Husain recovered with the loss of an eye, and since then turned to her faith.

1 Ray, K.K., SPP, op. cit., 219.
2 Ibid.
3 Shaikh Šamīr ud-Ḍīn, 190; Chattopadhyay, H.: Bikrampur, 31; Putatunda : Candradvipier...., 123; Gait, 192. Hindus and Muslims often refused vaccination lest they antagonized her. (Gait, 193)
4 Chattopadhyay, ibid.; Putatunda, ibid.
5 HIWL, 793; Pbg, III, ii, 3.
CHAPTER VI

THE MUSLIMS AND THEIR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND BELIEFS

We intend to discuss this topic broadly under the following two heads:
A. Festivals and Observances
B. Beliefs and Practices

Festivals and Observances:

The Muslim festivals and observances as practised in Bengal may be studied under the following sub-titles:

a. Traditional Islamic Festivals:

Islam is characteristically simple, austere and unostentatious. The religious festivals in Islam sanctioned by tradition were neither many nor colourful. In fact 'the atmosphere of these religious gatherings is too sombre and austere to call them social festivals'.\(^1\) It was left to the Muslims of different geographical and cultural backgrounds, to effect, in response to local needs, necessary modifications in the traditional framework, and also to invent new festivals, ceremonies and practices. India presented a very interesting spectacle for Islam in this regard. The traditional Islamic festivals proved 'not numerous enough for countries accustomed to the multiplicity of Hindu festivals' as de Tassy puts it.\(^2\) Besides, the formal and austere nature of the traditional observances appeared quite bizarre in the festive landscape of India. It is not a question of why or whether but of how and to

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1 Ashraf, 300.
2 De Tassy, VI, 353.
what extent Muslim festivals in India were to multiply and assume their own character and complexion. As early as the fourteenth century, Ibn-Batūta, the famous Moorish traveller, observed the peculiarities of Indian Muslim life. Mandelslo, a widely travelled visitor in India proposed to 'treat of the manner of life of the Mahumetans of the Indies, which is much different from that of the Turks and Persians'.1 Garcin de Tassy sets himself the task of describing 'the festivals peculiar to Mussulman India, as well as the solemnities practised in Persia, and even throughout the Mussulman world, which are distinguished in India by peculiar ceremonies'.2 He adds:

The first thing which strikes us, in the external worship of the Mahomedans of India, is the alteration, which it has undergone in order to adapt itself to the native indigenous physiognomy. The change is manifested in certain rites and customs, which are but little conformable to, and even at variance with the spirit of the Koran, but which have insensibly grown up through the contact of the Mahomedans with the Hindus.3

Referring to the Muslim festivals in India, Ashraf observes:

Indian tradition and environment were bound to react in course of time on this rigidity of Muslim ritual. As a result, although the form of the orthodox religious congregations remained, their nature and purpose underwent a great deal of modification in the environment of Hindustan. Other new festivals were super-imposed on the Muslim Calendar which were predominantly social and indigenous.4

An analysis of the Muslim religious and social practices in India, barring a few relating to the fundamentals of the faith, reveals so numerous and complex

1 The Voyages and Travels of J. Albert de Mandelslo...into the East Indies, Eng. tr. Davies, John, 62.
2 De Tassy, VI, 352.
3 Ibid.
4 Ashraf, 300.
variations that nothing short of thorough scientific investigation along the lines of social and cultural anthropology would seem adequate for determining their inter-relation, and source.\(^1\) What emerges, however, very clear out of all these varieties is the fact that the Muslim religious and social observances in question were marked by a spirit of gaudy and flamboyant festivity. Not to talk of the hosts of minor local innovations, the traditional Islamic festivals shed their austere appearance and assumed liveliness and vivacity in tune with their cultural surroundings in India.

Nowhere else in India are these phenomena more apparent than Bengal - a land the festive exuberance of which is epitomized in a common saying that there are in the land 'thirteen festivals in twelve months' (bārā māsē tērā pārbān). The traditional Muslim festivals were celebrated in the land with all the warmth, splendour and rejoicing characteristic of the local festivals. The observance of the festival of Muḥarram alone in Bengal should serve to illustrate the point.

\(^1\) Leaving aside the incidental and casual references to Muslim practices scattered in the diverse sources of medieval Indian history, we have three important works written in the early part of the 19th century dealing almost exclusively with such practices of the Indian Muslims - Ja'far Sharīf's Qanūn-i Islām (1832), Mrs. Ali's Observations on the Mussalmans of India (1832), being the 'home-letters' of Mrs. Ali, an English woman marrying into a rich Shī'a family of Lucknow, and Garcin de Tassy's Mémoire etc., as already noted. While Sharīf's work represented the Muslims in the Deccan, Mrs. Ali's observations were based on her personal experiences in and around Lucknow. A work of similar nature about the Muslims of east Bengal was left by Dr. James Wise as cited before.
Muharram:

The festival of Muharram instituted in commemoration of the martyrdom of Husain, the younger grandson of the Prophet Muhammad was 'celebrated with more pomp and splendour than any other Musulman solemnity in India'.

The representation of the tomb of Husain or rather the chapel, which enclosed the tomb, has the metaphorical name of ta'ziya (mourning) or, tabūt (bier). In parts of Bengal it was also called by some local names, such as goānra in Midnapur, dāha in Koc-bihar and tabuj, a corruption of tabūt in Sylhet. The ta'ziya was often richly decorated in which great artistic skill was exhibited. The preparation of ta'ziyas was carried on in every Muslim village, and each strove to make a more gaudy model than its neighbour. The Hindu landlords subscribed towards its expense as the Muslim landlords did for the Durgā-pūjā.

For ten days the ta'ziyas were exhibited in the houses and shops. Every evening sweetmeats were put in front of the ta'ziyas, and were subsequently distributed among the poor and needy. Special lighting arrangements were also made near the ta'ziyas. Women broke off 'their bangles', put on 'black dresses' and went into 'complete mourning'. During this period marṣiya songs, based on the theme of tragic incidents of Karbalā, are sung accompanied by wailing and crying. Marṣiya is a poem in Arabic and other

1 De Tassy, op.cit., VII, 53.
2 Pati, Radhanath: Kesīvāri, 14.
4 Chaudhuri, A.C., op.cit., 92.
5 Bandopadhyay, B.C., loc. cit.; De Tassy, VII, 54; also Ahmad, Zarina: A Study of Islamic Social and Religious Institutions in India, Thesis, London University, 23.
6 Wise, JASH, op.cit., 35.
7 Ahmad, Zarina, 23.
languages following Arabic tradition, in memory of a deceased person. In Bengali literature the tradition of marṣiya is, however, confined to the tragic death of Hasan and Husain. The theme in Bengali literature was first introduced by a Muslim poet in the 16th century, and was taken up by many poets and writers in the subsequent centuries. The imāmbāra occupied a significant position in this particular celebration. Here the ta'ziyas were placed facing Mecca, with the banners, the sword, the shield, and the bow and arrows supposed to have been used in the battle of Kraaiballah (Karbala'). The most magnificent ta'ziyas remained in the imāmbāra, and 'the less costly, which are used in the processions on the tenth day', were buried with funeral rites. In the absence of the imāmbāra, the local 'īdgah was substituted for it, and on the tenth and final day of the Muharram festival, known as 'aḥurā, all the ta'ziyas were assembled at the place. The attraction of the occasion was enhanced by a fair (melā), organised on the 'īdgah by the people of the surrounding villages, and some sportive demonstrations like playing with sticks (lāṭhi-khela) and playing with sticks, having burning bundles of rags on both sides of it (bāmūṭi-khela) added colour to the occasion. From the place of general assembly, the ta'ziyas were taken to the burial grounds, often called Karbala' itself. Ta'ziyas from every locality were taken into a procession with professional marṣiya singers, who, as they sing, 'beat their chests and pull their hair to show their desperation and

1 EL, III, 306.
3 Ibid.
4 Pati, R., 14; also Chaudhuri, A.C., 92.
5 Ibid.
grief at the death of Husain and his followers'. ¹ The procession was accompanied by musicians, singers and dancers, and the whole ceremony in Bengal appeared to observers, like Buchanan, as being performed 'with much gaudy pomp, tumult and musical parade, remarkably alike in magnificence of show and in intolerable din'. ² At the end of the journey the ta'ziyās were buried or 'deposited in the earth' ³ with the rituals 'performed at human burial'.⁴ Fanny Parkes noticed that on the ta'ziya was placed 'a small portion of corn, rice, bread, fruits, flowers and cups of water'.⁵ The ta'ziyās were more often 'thrown into a river, or tank in rural Bengal'.⁶

There are several interesting points to be noted about the festival of Muḥarram in Bengal. De Tassy has traced the influence of the Durga-pūjā to the celebration of Muḥarram. Both lasted ten days, and on the tenth day of the Muḥarram and on the corresponding day of the Durga-pūjā, called Vijayā-daśamī, the ta'ziyās and the images of Durgā were thrown into a river or tank 'in sight of a vast crowd, forming a grand procession, amid the sound of musical instruments'.⁷ Wise finds further resemblance 'in some respects' between 'the procession of taziyas' and 'the Rath Jātrā of the Hindus'. 'At both', he points out, 'the greatest merit is attributed to the persons dragging the car'.⁸ Wise goes on to illustrate his point with reference to the ta'ziya called Turbat Ḥaidari, taken out from the cenotaph in Dacca built by one Nīl Bahr.

¹ Ahmad, Z., 23.
² Martin, M., III, 516.
³ De Tassy, VII, 54.
⁴ Ahmad, Z., 24.
⁵ Parkes, F., loc. cit.
⁶ Wise, JASB, op. cit., 35.
⁷ De Tassy, VI, 353.
⁸ Wise, JASB, 35-6.
As the particular hour of taking out the ta'ziya approaches:

...crowds of Muhammadans assemble and struggle for the honourable post of carrier. When it has once started it must not be put down until the tank, where it is finally cast away, distant four miles, is reached. During the year the lower orders are in the habit of vowing that if their wishes are fulfilled, they will assist in carrying the Turbat....

Certain Muslim practices during the performance of the Muharram festival are significant. Ja'far Sharif mentions with reference to the Muslims in the Deccan, the practice of 'prostration' before the tabūts. The practice among some Muslims of inflicting self-punishment on the body also strikes attention. The practices of 'piercing cheeks' and 'padlocking mouths' among Muslims of Calcutta have been noted by Shir 'Alī Afsos. This is further corroborated by a Christian missionary source of 1830 in west Bengal:

In the Moharram they chastise their body as hard as a Hindu Devotee; and several of them have closed or shut their lips with a padlock chained to the ground.

De Tassy considers these 'mummeries' as 'copied from the pagan Hindus'. The wide prevalence of such practices among certain classes of Hindu Yogis all over India as well as among some Śaivites in Bengal known as gājan sannyāśī, who inflicted similar punishments on the body in accomplishment of a vow, on the occasion of the festival called either Śīver Gājan or simply Carak-utsava, lend substance to De Tassy's observation.

1 Ibid., 36.
5 De Tassy, VII, 55.
Muḥarram is primarily a Shi'a festival, and its celebration was often an occasion for Shi'a–Sunni clashes in different parts of India. But the participation of Sunnis and even Hindus in the festival in Bengal was quite usual. The Church Missionary Intelligencer, a monthly journal of missionary information, observed in 1852:

...the Muḥarram, which is only a Shi'a festival, is joined in...by most of the Sunnis also, and resembles much more a Hindu festival and procession ....

According to Maahal ul-Haque, the Hindus were found to shed as 'copious tears at the recital of the incidents of Karbala, as any pious Shia would do'. Although, this was not a development exclusive to Bengal, their participation was characterized by its regularity and spontaneity in this part of the sub-continent. There the Hindus not only took part in the procession, but had their own ta'ziyas made. Buchanan observed that the ta'ziyas in Patna and Bihar city, though they were not so large as in Bengal, were very numerous. Of the fourteen thousands annually exhibited, about six hundred were made by the Hindus. Fanny Parkes, with reference to the Hindu participation, mentions a personal experience involving her cook, a Hindu Magh, who 'used to expend sometimes as much as forty rupees on a Taziya of his own; and after having performed all the ceremonies like a good Mussulman, returned to his original Hinduism'.

1 III, 102.
2 Cited, HBLL, 795.
3 Mrs. H. Ali mentions Hindus taking part in the procession, showing profound respect to the ta'ziya and bowing their heads with solemn gravity. (Op.cit., 48).
4 Martin, M., I, 144; Parkes, F., 296; Mymensingh, BDG, 36.
5 Martin, M., ibid.
Besides Muharram a few other traditional Muslim festivals were observed in Bengal in common with other parts of India, such as 'Id ul-Azha, 'Id ul-Fitr, Shab-i Barat, Akhir-i Chahar Shamba and Maulid-i Sharif. Nothing is known in detail about these festivals, as practised in Bengal. But all that we know about them is sufficient to bring out the effusion of grandeur and mirth that characterized their celebration.

'Id ul-Azha:

'Id ul-Azha, popularly 'Id uz-Zuha, 'Id ul-Qurban or Baqar-'Id is also called 'Id ul-Kabir, the great festival, as distinguished from 'Id ul-Fitr. It is celebrated on the tenth day of Zu'l-Hijja.

Quite apart from its religious ceremonies, the festival was observed as a great time of rejoicings, and the holiday was kept for two or three days together. In the words of Mirza Nathan:

After the qurban, a great banquet was held throughout the whole day and night with pleasant entertainments of beautiful singers and dancers of lovely grace and story-tellers of pleasant disposition.

He also informs us that:

...on the day of the festival, friends, relations and officers went to the place of each other and offered their greetings for the 'Id. The Commander Sha'at-Khan held a social gathering to receive friends on this day of rejoicings.

It is interesting to note on the testimony of a much later source that the Muslims in some parts of the country scrupulously avoided sacrificing a cow on this

1 Mirza Nathan, I, 110, 168, 170, 190; II, 742; Mallik, K.N., 227; Hooghly, BDG, 109.


3 Mirza Nathan, II, 742.

4 Ibid.
occasion in order that the susceptibilities of their Hindu neighbours should not be offended. Instead, they often chose a goat or a sheep for the purpose.¹

'Id ul-Fītr:

'Id ul-Fītr or the festival of the breaking of the fast of Ramazān also known as 'Īd ur-Ramazān, 'Īd us-Sadaqa and 'Īd us-Saghīr, the minor festival, as contrasted with the greater one, 'Īd ul-Āzhā, commences as soon as the month's fast in Ramazān is over, on the first day of the month of Shauwal. The appearance of the new moon of the 'Īd was an occasion for exuberant merriment. On the level of the official aristocracy it could lead to great extravagance. Mirzā Nathan says:

At the end of the day when the new moon was seen at candle-light the imperial trumpet was blown and all fire arms in the artillery were continually fired. In the later part of the night, the firing of guns was stopped and its place was taken by the big cannon. It was simply an earthquake.²

Shab-i Barāt:

Shab-i Barāt is the Persian name for the fifteenth day of the month Sha'bān, which is called in Arabic 'the night of the middle of Sha'bān'. Muḥammad is believed to have said that on this night, God registers annually all the actions of mankind, which they are to perform during the year; and that all the children of men, who are to be born and to die in the year, are recorded. Muḥammad, it is said, enjoined his followers to keep awake the whole night, to repeat one hundred rak'at prayers, and to fast the next day.³ But in practice the festival in India

¹ Mallik, K.N., 227.
² Mirzā Nathan, I, 110.
³ DI, 570.
as well as Bengal was observed with great rejoicing and feasts, and large sums of money were spent in fireworks. Mirza Nathan observed this festival in Bengal. The Nawabs of Bengal were known to have observed it with great splendour.

Ashraf is inclined to trace some elements of this Muslim festival to the Hindu festival of Siva-ratri. Indeed, the night-vigil in the two festivals offers a striking resemblance. The indigenous influence was, however, unmistakable in the practice 'observed in Bengal for ages' of presenting food to 'the manes of ancestors' on that night.

Ākhir-i Chahār Shamba:

The festival was held on the last Wednesday of the month of Safar in the Muslim calendar. It is observed as a feast in commemoration of Muhammad's having experienced some mitigation of his last illness, and having bathed. The Muslims in Bengal celebrated the day by performing namaz in the morning, followed by making gifts to the poor and needy. An interesting feature of the celebration in some part of Bengal was that some seven selected verses from the Qur'an, known as the 'seven salams', was written in the early morning of this day on a piece of paper. The ink was later washed off and drunk as a charm against evil.

1 Sarkar's MSS, op.cit., Bengal: Past and Present, 1948, 11.
3 Sarkar's MSS, loc. cit.
4 He says: 'It is difficult to make a positive assertion, but the Shab-i Barāt festival is probably copied from the Hindu festival of Sivarātri'. (Op.cit., 301).
5 Wise, JASB, op.cit., 55.
6 DI, 12.
7 Mallik, K.N., op.cit., 227; also, ibid.
Maulid-i Sharif:

The nativity of Muhammad, which is also known as Maulid-i Sharif or Maulid un-Nabi, is celebrated on the twelfth day of Rabī' ul-Auwal in Bengal with great pageantry. Nothing is recorded in detail about this celebration until the time of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. For all the first twelve days of this month the people were entertained at the presence of the Nawab. Along with feasts, the whole city of Murshidabad remained gorgeously illuminated. Verses of the Qur'an and fine pictures of mosques, trees and flowers were displayed in illuminated places. As many as 100,000 of people under the supervision of Nazir Ahmad were engaged in the work of illumination. With the firing of cannons all lights on roads and river banks were simultaneously lighted, and the city and the Bhagirathi assumed a gay and majestic appearance.\footnote{Sen, K.P.: বাঙ্গলার ইতিহাস (Nababī Āmal), 70.}

b. Common Rites and Festivals:

Despite the elements of changes in the external observances of the traditional Muslim festivals, those as such were few and far between and quite inadequate for the total needs of a people in an environment, permeated throughout by a tradition of never-ending festivities. The great festivals could only cover a rather limited part of the life of an individual. The life of the people extended far beyond what a few religious festivals could hold for them. An individual's life, which began ritually before his very birth and did not cease with death or even cremation, ever remained a progression through various sets of semi-religious domestic and social rites and observances, corresponding to...
attainment of different stages in his roles in the family and community. For his Hindu neighbour, life was consecrated through a series of religious observances and rites, such as the ceremony of impregnation (garbhadhana), the ceremony to ensure the birth of male progeny (pumsa-vana), the ceremony of parting of the hair (simantonnayana), performance of a homa, which was meant for easy delivery on the part of the wife (soṣayantī-homa), the ceremony performed at the birth of a child (jāta-karman), the ceremony of taking out a child for the first time into open air (niskramana), the ceremony of naming the child (nama-karana), the ceremony of giving a new-born child solid food to eat for the first time (anna-prāsana), the ceremony of investing a boy with sacred thread as well as initiation into learning (upanayana) for people, entitled to wear sacred thread (there is a still continuing ceremony known as hāte-khadi for initiation into learning and education irrespective of the right to sacred thread), the ceremony on the student's return from his teacher's house (samāvartana), marriage (vivāha), the ceremony on the occasion of entrance into a newly built house (śālā-karman), funeral rites (antesti-kriya), the propitiation of the departed soul (śraddha) and so on. 1 Besides these scriptural Brahmanic rituals, there were countless rites and ceremonies known as vratas of the nature of feminine rites.

The Muslim practices in Bengal, as far as we can glean from the limited and sporadic sources of information, reveal traces of building up something of their own, basically outside the pale of traditional Islamic festivals and rites. It seems that the austere framework of orthodox Islam did not provide them much to satisfy their various needs, arising from the problems of individual and social existence.

1 DHB I, 594.
at different stages of development, and whatever was provided failed to prove adequate owing to the 'alien' character of the new symbols. Hence the Muslim masses tried to bring the new as close as possible to the old, and where the new had nothing to offer them, they created substitutes for the old in the body of the new. It was not surprising that indigenous beliefs and values should make their way into the domestic rites and ceremonies of the Muslim masses. A field-study as late as the fifth decade of the present century on the Muslim folk-beliefs and practices in Noakhali (in present East Pakistan), chosen for its distinction of being known as 'the most orthodox district of Bengal', where 'the influence of reforming priests has been most persistent', arrives at similar findings:

There are some rites observed by the Muslims which have no doubt been originated from the Islamic sources. But even in such cases, sometimes Hindu beliefs and rituals are mixed up with the Islamic rites. On the other hand, a purely Hindu ritual at times would bear an Islamic facade. The ceremonies, relating to the birth and life of a Muslim as well as his death, were brought nearer to the local situation, while hosts of rites and practices, offering in many cases striking resemblance to the indigenous vratas, came to prevail among the Muslim masses.

Birth:

Among rites relating to conception and birth, the Muslims observed the ceremony of impregnation on the sixth or eighth day after the first menstruation of a married girl. She took bath in the presence of the female members of the family, who sang extempore wishing her fertility. The first pregnancy was always a good occasion for mirth.

2 Ibid., 36.
and enjoyment in the girl's parental family, where some ceremonies were observed each month until the child was born.¹

Among the Muslims of India, the notion of ceremonial impurity (ṣotak) concerning birth gained ground.² The traditional Islamic practice of 'aqīqat, which consisted in leaving the hair on the infant's head until the seventh day of his birth when it was shaved, was itself not entirely devoid of this connotation.³ But some clearly innovated rites and practices inspired by local ideas were resorted to by the Bengali Muslims. The practice of confining an expectant mother in an isolated chamber (antur ghar) for quite a few weeks, preceding the birth and forty days after it, came to prevail among them. Ceremonial impurity attached to the mother for those forty days, during which she was debarred from her daily prayers and the fast of Ramaḍān.⁴ There were among the Muslims of Mymensingh some special observances relating to birth. The ceremony was called śāthyārā or śāthiyārā or śaīt-tolā. On the sixth day of the birth of the baby, the isolated labour-room was ceremonially cleaned, and the new-born was given a bath. The same night the mother and other members of the family had to remain awake and keep singing all the night through, because it was believed that the fate of the child would be written on his forehead on that particular night. On the day the mother broke her confinement, she stood with the child in her arms on the courtyard of the house, inside a circle drawn with rice flour (piṭuli) and burnt husk of rice grains (tūs). She bowed in the name of a spirit, called Ekā-cora, fixed an iron-ring or thread round one of the legs of the child, and moved to her regular apartment. The

¹ Ibid., 37.
² Ashraf, K.M., 249.
³ DL, 17.
ceremony itself was known as \textit{Ekā-corā} beḍ	extit{i} (the bangle of \textit{Ekā-corā}).\textsuperscript{1}

The ceremony of naming the child (\textit{nām-rākhā}) on the seventh night of the birth was another important occasion. The \textit{aqīqat} ceremony was either performed on that occasion or deferred to a later date. The next important occasion was the time the child cut his first tooth. The celebration consisted in giving the child some rice to eat. The initiation of the child to learning, known as \textit{hāte khādi}, was also ceremonially observed.\textsuperscript{2} The circumcision of the boy, like \textit{aqīqat}, was a traditional Islamic ritual observed by the Bengali Muslims.

**Marriage:**

The celebration of the marriage contract is called \textit{nikāh}, and the festive rejoicings \textit{‘urs} or \textit{shādī}. By a queer process of popular confusion \textit{nikāh} in rural Bengal was taken for any marriage subsequent to the first, while \textit{shādī} or \textit{biya} (\textit{vivāha}) stood for the first.\textsuperscript{3} The usual form of a marriage contract required fulfilment of the following conditions - the assembly of the bridegroom, the bride's attorney (\textit{wakil}) with two witnesses, and the \textit{qāẓī} or \textit{mullā}, arrangement as to the amount of the marriage-portion (\textit{mabr}) promised by the bridegroom to the bride, and the consent of the parties, which was called \textit{ījāb} (declaration) and \textit{qabūl} (acceptance). Confined to this simple and short ceremony, marriage in Islam should have been reduced to a dull and drab occasion. But the singular importance of this occasion in the life of an individual,

\textsuperscript{1} Ray, K.K. in \textit{SPP}, op.cit., 214-5.
\textsuperscript{3} Mukundarama writes about a group of Muslims, of whom ‘some made \textit{nikā} and some made \textit{biya}’. (Op. cit., 344).
family and society, overwhelmed the formal and trite ceremony of the nikāh in every Muslim society with floods of innovated social rites, ceremonies, rejoicings and pageantries of local complexion. No wonder that the Muslim marriage in India became a gala occasion for celebration as splendid as the person concerned could afford, and often more than that. Ja'far Shārīf and Mrs. H. Ali have left vivid descriptions of Muslim marriage festivals in southern and northern India.

The pomp and extravagance displayed in the marriage of members of the affluent section of the community in late medieval Bengal are testified by the contemporary accounts of the marriage ceremonies of the grandsons of Nawāb Allāhwardi Khān, Sirāj ud-Daula and Akram ud-Daula. The marriage of Akram involved expenditure on scents, illumination and fireworks to the amount of twelve lakhs of rupees, apart from 'the cost of robes presented to the people, high and low'. It is further said that 'for full three months, day and night, one lakh of troopers, one lakh of infantry and one crore of ryots enjoyed the festivity and the music'. Its grandeur was, however, surpassed by that of the second marriage of his brother Sirāj, when 'throughout the entire rainy season in every house, every night was like the Night of Barāt (i.e. Shab-i Barāt) and every day like the New Years Day (i.e. Nau-roz)'.

People belonging to the lower sections of the society were no less affected by this festive spirit in the celebration of marriage. The didactive Bengali text, characterised by the Islamic reviverist tendencies of the 19th century, bitterly condemns and ridicules some of the practices relating to the celebration of marriage prevalent

1 Sarkar’s Ms., fols. 25b-6a, Bengal: Past and Present, 1948, 117.
among the common run of the Bengali Muslims. These, according to their authors, were not only 'irreligious', but involved people in financial expenditure much beyond their means. The practice of the bridegroom (nausa/nau-shāh) travelling on horse or by palanquin (palki), accompanied sometimes by professional fighters armed with sticks (lattibāj) and horsemen (ghorsawār), were particularly criticized. According to Taj ud-Dīn the bridegroom considers it disgraceful (āyeb/'aib) to go on foot for his marriage, since such a bridegroom is often 'an object of ridicule and amusement for the people of the village'. Taj ud-Dīn makes fun of such a cavalier bridegroom, saying that the latter deems it beneath his dignity not to ride a horse on this occasion, even though 'the house of the bride is only near by, he has never ridden a horse in his life, he is scared of riding, and is held by two persons on both sides to prevent him falling off'. Ghanī ridicules such a bridegroom that he 'walks on foot all his life', 'enjoys horse-riding once in his life-time', and that after this ride for two or three days, he picks up once again loads on his own head', and that his ride to-day ends up to-morrow in 'going to the field carrying on his back all his tools and equipment'. Ghanī turns his tirade next against the practice of squandering money on illuminations, even if 'the night be a clear moon-lit one' and also against the custom of entertaining people with feast (dawat khelān). He attacks such practices, also because people are constrained to take loan of money (karaj/qarz) with interest (ṣudi) in order to meet these

1 'Abd ul-Ghanī: Jauhar-i Makkānī, 110; Taj ud-Dīn Muhammad: Khulāṣat un-Nisā', 35.
2 'Abd ul-Ghanī, 108.
4 Ibid.
5 'Abd ul-Ghanī, 117-8.
6 Ibid., 116; Taj ud-Dīn, 34.
expenses. In the same vein he points to the hollowness of the commitment of 'nine hundred and fifty slaves' as the settlement of marriage portion (mahrt) by a bridegroom, when he does not even have a room to live in, as well as of taking ratification of matrimony by registration (kabin') from one who does not have 'money enough to buy salt'.

Another practice that comes for reformist condemnation is the one of decorating the room meant for the reception of the bridegroom on his arrival at the bride's home. The whole room or the wooden pillars in front of it were wrapped with decorative cloth, and a canopy (candwa) was fixed over the head of the bridegroom (dul/Dulha). Songs music, including the playing of the dhol (a kind of drum in Bengal), performance of folk-dramas (yatra) and kavi-gan were all parts of marriage festivities of the Muslims of rural Bengal.

Marriage in Bengal as well as in other parts of India reveals two aspects - the one scriptural or religious and the other social or popular (laukika). The hieratic authority performs as important a role in the former as the womenfolk in the latter. It is the latter that adds to the pageantries of a marriage festivity. In Bengal, the women introduced on the occasion endless rites, practices and amusements, known in the religious literature as stri-acakara (female rites). The most important of these were the marriage songs, which formed an integral part of

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1 'Abd ul-Qahanī, ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 108; Taj ud-Dīn, 34.
4 See below.
5 A duel of words between two poets and their respective entourage performed in the accompaniment of some instrumental music, kavi-gan is a typical mode of folk entertainment in Bengal.
6 Taj ud-Dīn, 34; 'Abd ul-Qahanī, 107, 165; 'Abbās 'Alī: Gulzār-i Islām, 69; Av, 143.
the festival in Bengal. The Muslim women introduced this element in their wedding celebrations. The marriage songs were no less popular with the Muslim womenfolk than their Hindu counterparts. These songs were known among them as hānlā and juluyā or jullā. D.C. Sen refers to an anthology of songs numbering about twenty called jubiyā, which 'used formerly to be sung on the occasion of Mahomedan marriages'. The ballad known as Bhaluyā, having for its theme the tragic life of a chaste Bengali Muslim woman, was sung at the marriage festival by Muslim women in east Bengal.

The Muslim bridegroom sometimes sat in the company of his relatives with the bride, sitting on his knee, and both of them ate milk and rice together, while the womenfolk sang 'vulgar songs'. Some married Muslim women adopted the Hindu practice of putting on vermillion (sindur) marks.

The auspicious time (subha-šān, lagan) for a Muslim marriage was determined on consultation of the texts (śastra) by the learned (pandit).

1 Islam, M.: Kabi Ḥeyāt Māmūd, 162, 158.
2 Possibly derived from sahāla, a name for the songs that the Bengali Hindu women used to sing in the marriage festival.
3 Karim, Munshi A.: Punthi-paricay, SPP, 1310 B.S., Add. no. IX, 153. It is said that this particular type of song is accompanied by dice-playing between the couple. (Ibid.).
4 HBLL, 800.
5 Pbg, 80. It is interesting to note that the Hindu women in Bengal sang at the marriage festival about the life of a devoted heroine of Bengali folklore Behula, who undertook a tenacious struggle to get back the life of her dead husband.
6 Shaiḳh Šamīr ud-Dīn, 192.
7 Nur un-Nān o Qabarer Kathā, Pbg, IV, ii, 104; HBLL, 795.
8 Daulat Wazīr Bahram Khān, 85.
The practice of playing dice between the newly wed couple, very common among the Hindus of Bengal, was also in vogue among the Muslims, as already noted. Feasts formed an important part of the marriage festival.¹

Aside from the rites and observances concerning the festival of marriage, the conceptual framework of the institution of Muslim marriage itself appears to have been affected by the environmental forces. The Muslim attitude towards the marriage of children and widows throw this aspect of the question into sharp relief.

Child Marriage:

The tradition of child-marriage was firmly entrenched in medieval India and it continued in the later period, though it progressively declined. The phenomenon attracted the attention of contemporary foreign travellers. Ralph Fitch in the last quarter of the 16th century, found marriages 'of boys of eight or ten years or girls of five or six years old' both 'in towns and villages'.² Scranton noticed the same situation:

They are married in their infancy, and consummate at 14 on the male side and 10 or 11 on the female, and it is common to see a woman of 12 with a child in her arms.³

The practice did not exclude the Muslims. Nawab Siraj ud-Daula and his brother Akram ud-Daula were married quite early in their age. Their descendants followed this practice almost consistently. Siraj's daughter left four daughters before she died at the age of twenty. The daughters themselves married quite early.⁴

¹ Islam, M.: Kabi Heyat Māmud, 158.
⁴ Banerjee, B.N.: Begams of Bengal, 36.
evidence also points to the prevalence of the notion among the Muslims. According to Daulat Wazīr Bahrām, Majnūn's father proposes the marriage of his son when he is a mere student of the primary school (pāṭhsālā) and Lailā's marriage takes place before she gets through her primary education. The census reports of Bengal give us a clear idea of the proportion of child-marriages among Muslims towards the close of the 19th century. 12 girls in 1,000 were married under 5 years of age, while between the ages of 5 and 10, 108 in 1,000 were married. Amongst males 4 boys in 1,000 were married under 5 and 19 between 5 and 10 years of age. The Report of 1901 adds:

There is a noticeable difference between the cultivating Muhammadans and those who belong to the functional groups. The latter are much more affected by the example of the Hindus around them, and they give their girls in marriage at a comparatively early age.

Widow Marriage:

The marriage of widows is enjoined by Muslim law, and the Prophet himself married several widows, including his first wife Khadija. But the Indian environment with its strong tradition against the institution of widow-marriage did not fail to work its effect on the Muslim society. The Urdu translator of the Khulasat ul-Ta'rikh lamented that the Hindu notions about widowhood have infected the Muslims, especially in the villages, and have led to their women remaining widows contrary to Islamic injunction. 'Abd ul-Ghani in his catalogue of innovations (bid'at) in Islam in Bengal gives prominence to the fact of refusing widow marriage following the Hindu custom:

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2. Gait, 261.
3. JRAS, 1894, 748.
According to the census of Bengal (1901), Muslim widows were 'comparatively fewer than amongst Hindus', but they 'still number more than a sixth of the total female population'. Even the actual cases of widow marriage reveal interesting patterns. The Report notes:

...it is seldom that a man takes a widow as his first wife. Widows who marry again usually become the wives of widowers or of men who have already got another wife. At the same time women, who lose their husbands while fairly young, find little difficulty in marrying a second time, and the proportion, who fail to do so, is not very large until after the age of 30, when it increases very rapidly. At the age period 10-15, only 1 woman in 50 is a widow, and at 15-20 only 1 in 25, compared with 1 in 33 and 1 in 15 respectively among the Hindus. In the case of women over 40, i.e. when the child-bearing age is past, the proportion of widows is higher amongst the Muhammadans than amongst the Hindus.

The Report rejoins:

It is said that the Farazis [Farai'īs] and other reformed sects strongly advocate widow-marriage, and that in consequence the practice is gradually coming into greater favour. The census statistics lend some support to this statement, and the proportion of widows appears to be steadily falling.
Death:

The phenomenon of death and the rituals concerning it are as important in Islam as in any other religious system. Muslim fiqh provides elaborate formalities to be observed regarding this, and Muslim practices everywhere conform more or less to those instructions. We have noted much earlier that the great bulk of Muslim Bengali literature, containing ritualistic instructions, lays down meticulously, among other things, the correct observances for the disposal of the corpse as provided for in the fiqh. The secular Muslim literature also contain incidental references to the actual practices in this regard. In an east Bengal ballad the poet describes the death of the heroine, Aiyrā, and the attendant observances—namely, reading of the kālemā ṣādat (kalimat ʿush-shahāda) by the Mulla, while Aiyrā was breathing her last, making her corpse lie on her back facing the keblā (qibla), performing wāzu' 'by putting water into her mouth', giving her ghusul with warm water, sprinkling perfume and rose-water on the body, putting on the shroud (kafan) containing a breast band (ṣinā-band) with 'powdered camphor spread over the kafan', offering of the funeral prayer (Jānāja namā), and finally, her being carried on the bier by friends and relatives to the burial ground. After the body was covered by earth, the grave was soaked with a pitcher-full of water for the peace of the soul. A stone slab used for grinding spices, a small scimitar (dao) and a water-jug (badnā), full of water and containing pieces of turmeric, tender mango leaves and grass, were left at the spot. It was believed that for 45 days after the death the soul of the dead visited the place, often assuming

1 Supra, Ch. I, A.
2 Kafan-cora, in Pbg, III, ii, 63-5.
the form of a butterfly. The family members remained particularly careful for those 45 days not to do anything offensive to the soul. At the end of the period a feast was held to ensure good in the after life.¹

The practice of taking a man from his bed and placing him on the ground before he breathed his last, came into vogue among the Muslims.² Some notions of impurity and harmfulness were occasionally attached to the water used in the bath of the corpse. A portion of the earth was dug to receive the water and prevent its spreading over a large surface as some considered it bad to tread on such water. Some women, who were particular in these matters, were afraid even to venture near the place where the body had been washed.³

Among other posthumous ceremonies for the dead, the Muslims gave special importance to the ceremony of the third day (ṣiyum), when friends and relatives gathered in large numbers to recite the Qur'ān for the benefit of the departed soul. On the death of Ihtimām Khan, father of Mīrzā Nathan, people assembled for prayer on the third day.⁴ With wealthy people, the post-mortem ceremonies tended to assume a sumptuous character.⁵

Feasts were arranged for the benefit of the departed soul. Mīrzā Nathan gave a feast on the sixth month of his father's death and brought 'the period of mourning to a happy conclusion' by another 'grand feast'.⁶ The Muslims often gave a feast on the fortieth day of a person's death, and such feasts draw comparison with the Hindu ceremony of

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² Mīrzā Nathan, II, 481.
³ DIY, 81.
⁴ Mīrzā Nathan, I, 215.
⁵ Ashraf, K.M., 255.
śrāddha observed for the benefit of the departed soul.¹

Terry during his visit (1616-19 A.D.) noted that a day of mourning for dead relatives was observed by the Muslims towards the end of the fast of Ramazān, which he called a 'Lent'.² He also noted outbursts of grief on the part of Muslim women at the graves of their deceased relatives, and to his Christian eyes such demonstrations appeared 'foolish' and appropriate for 'meaner sorts', as already observed. He writes:

...there are many foolish women who often in the yeere, so long as they survive, moyesten the graves of their husbands or children with affectionate teares.³

The Muslim Vratas:

The Muslim woman in rural Bengal was reared up in a non-Muslim atmosphere saturated with feminine rites and observances connected with the desire for early and suitable match, gaining the husband's affection, fertility, well-being of the children and health and prosperity of the family. The number of such feminine domestic rites are legion. We have already noted that a large number of domestic observances is recognised by the Brāhmaṇical system, but many more, independent of Brāhmaṇical officiation, remained part of the living faith and practice of the Hindu womenfolk. The Muslim woman, as keen and anxious about the individual and family interests mentioned above as her Hindu counterpart, was denied, unlike the latter, of anything so tangible in her own religious system. The only possible course left open to her was either to continue or introduce those practices in her own household

¹ Mymensingh, BDG, 36.
² Edward Terry's Account, ed. Foster, W. 318.
³ Ibid.
with but slightly different names. The result was an interesting set of domestic rites performed by a Muslim woman with the same object and in the same manner as her Hindu neighbour. This is at least what we could gather from their practices as reported from the east Mymensingh district. The transformation was often effected by the simple omission of the usual suffix of **brata** (vrata) from the name of the rite, as performed by the Hindus, and followed sometimes by the substitution of the term 'sinni' (shirni) for it, just as **Sasthi-vrata** was renamed **Sasthir shirni** and **Kartika-vrata** was called **Manai-pir shirni**.

It was reported about the Muslim maidens of east Mymensingh that they performed a rite called **Ghanta-bhat** or **Dai-bhat** with the hope of getting a desirable match without much difficulty and delay. The ritual consisted in cooking a particular dish by some maidens conjointly and sharing it together.

A neglected Muslim wife was found to observe **Eti-hoyagir bartha** (Etisohagir vrata) with a view to recoup herself in the husband's affection.

A Muslim woman in the seventh month of her pregnancy offered on the banana leaf-tip flattened rice (**ciga**) or cooked fowl on the bed of a kind of grass known as **binna**. Thursday and Saturday were generally supposed to be auspicious for this purpose, and the whole ceremony was aimed at the well-being of the expected child.

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1 We have already discussed **Manai-pir** in a different context. (Supra, Ch. IV, A).
2 Ray, K.K., SPP, op.cit., 222.
3 Ibid.
4 There are popular traditions containing the miraculous potency of **binna** grass. (Ibid., 211-2).
5 Ibid.
Sāṣṭhī is generally regarded by Hindus as the guardian-deity of the children and fertility. The deity is generally propitiated in a ceremony observed in the month of Jyāiśṭha, and ripe mangoes usually form an essential ingredient in her offerings. A Muslim householder was also found to avoid the eating of the fruit until the month of Jyāiśṭha, when mangoes were offered in a ceremony called Sāṣṭhīr-shirni in which the mulla was called upon to read the Sūra Fātiḥa.¹

A childless Muslim woman, in the hope of getting a child, resorted to a rite² hardly different from the one known as Barkumārer vrata among her Hindu neighbours. The rite, like its Hindu counterpart, was performed either by the woman herself or someone on her behalf. The rituals consisted of ceremonial cleaning of a part of the courtyard (uṭhān), offering of some quantity of flattened rice, bananas and milk on a banana leaf-tip, salutation (selām/salām) in the name of 'Barkar', narrating before all participants in the rite a story proclaiming the miraculous powers of Barkar, at the end of which the votive food was shared by the vow-takers. A portion of the offering was consigned to water. The vow-takers did not take any more food on that day. The ceremony was repeated once every month for one year. The story narrated on the occasion follows entirely in the line of similar stories, forming an essential part of the vrata rites in Bengal.

¹ Ibid., 222-3.
² Ibid., 209-11.
c. Indigenous Festivals and Cultural Recreations:

The modifications in the nature of traditional Islamic festivals, introduction of local elements into the festivals and observances pertaining to those stages in the life of a Muslim which he holds in common with a non-Muslim, such as birth, marriage and death, and finally, the complete innovation of domestic and feminine rites by the Muslims in the model of the vrata rites did not exhaust the multifarious needs, individual and collective, of the people. Direct participation in the local festivals and the straightforward adoption of local media of cultural expression contributed towards narrowing down the gap further. The process here in the sphere of domestic and social life is only parallel to what we have already noted in respect of direct recourse to non-Islamic traditions alongside attempts to cast Islamic traditions in the indigenous mould.

The festival of Holi, which is in essence the spring festival observed in the month of Phālguna (February-March), seems to have recommended itself strongly to the Muslims as far as it is evidenced by its popularity among the upper section of the community.¹

Prince 'Ażīm uṣh-Shāhī, son of Aurangzeb, on his arrival at Dacca as the governor of Bengal took part in this festival so readily and thoroughly that the emperor wrote a sarcastic letter, saying:

A saffran-coloured helmet on thy head; a red garment on thy shoulder; thy venerable age verging on forty-six years; hurrah on thy beard and moustache!²

² G.H. Salīm, ibid.
According to Qaram 'Ali, who was himself present on the occasion, Nawāb Allāhwārdi Khān’s nephews, Sahamat Jang and Saulat Jang enjoyed the Holī festival for seven days in the garden of Motijhil. On that occasion about two hundred reservoirs were filled with coloured-water, and heaps of abīr (red-powder) and saffron were used; and more than five hundred charming girls, dressed in costly robes and jewels, used to appear in a body every morning and evening mustering throughout the period of the festival from every part of the garden.¹

After the treaty of Alinagar (February 9, 1757) with the English, Nawāb Siraj ud-Daula proceeded to Murshidabad and enjoyed the Holī festival in his palace at Mansurganj.²

At Azimabad, Nawāb Mīr Ja'far once crossed the Ganges with all the gentry of the town and took part in Holī. The gentry of the city all joined in the festival.³ Not content with that, Mir Ja'far ordered a sandy spot in the river, through which ran a small stream, to be surrounded by cloth-walls and there he spent some days, in fulfilling the rites of that Hindu festival, the last of which consists in throwing handfuls of dust and coloured earth at each other and syringing coloured water on one another’s clothes.⁴

The Muslims used to take part also in the festival of Diwālī or Dipāvalī (Illumination), and put clay pitchers (mangala ghat) and flags at the doors of their houses on some festive occasions.⁵

¹ Karam ‘Alī, op.cit., fol. 86a-b, cited, Datta, K.K., op.cit., I, 94.
² Ibid., fol. 123b, cited, ibid., 95.
³ Ibid., 137a, cited, ibid.
⁴ G.H. Salīm, op.cit., II, 266.
⁵ Shaikh Samir ud-Dīn, op.cit., 190.
In a country, predominantly agricultural, harvest festivals have always occupied a significant position in the socio-religious life of rural Bengal. Apart from the minor variants of such festivals, as Muslims in some parts of Bengal evolved, they often directly participated in the festivals as those were observed by other members of the village community. They used to take part in the harvest festival called navānna and also observed the festival of the last day in the month of Pauṣa known as Pauṣa-saṅkrānti, which was also closely associated with the big harvest of the month.¹

The importance of cattle in the agrarian structure of the country led also the Muslims to join with the Hindus in the cow festival (Garu-parab).² Some of them positively shared the notion of veneration for the cow with their Hindu neighbours. They plastered their floors with cowdung.³ Saiyid Sultān raised his voice disapproving 'violence against the cow' (go-hīmsā).⁴ When a new cow was bought, the female members in the household received it with durvā, dhān and kula, as done by the Hindu womenfolk.⁵

The Bengal Muslims also observed the Hindu domestic festival as Bhāi-phontā when the sister wished the long life and prosperity for her brother.⁶

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¹ Shaikh Šamīr ud-Dīn, op.cit., 190.  
² Ibid.  
³ Ibid. 'Alā'wal condemned this practice. (Tuhfa, text, op.cit 176)  
⁴ Nv, fol.  
⁶ Shaikh Šamīr ud-Dīn, 190.
The Muslim folk, particularly those of east Bengal, were thoroughly conversant with the arts of the regional folk culture. The revivalist forces in the 19th century held utter contempt and condemnation for Muslim participation in such un-Islamic activities. Muslims would form widely popular musical bands, consisting of the leader called bayāti and his companions called pāli or dōhar or pāl-dōhar. The bayāti used to have little bells (nūpur) tied around his wrists and ankles and a small drum called khañjani or khañjurī made of lizard-skin, under his left arm. The troupe also carried drums (dhōl) and tabalā with them. The bayāti normally recited a particular ballad in quick rhythm and passed on the refrain (dhuya) to the pāl-dōharās, who repeated it in chorus. The recital was interspersed with occasional singing by the bayāti of the emotionally tense parts of the composition. The subject matter of the ballad could range from the tragic events of Karbalā' (in which case it is called Jārī song), other Islamic traditions, and popular stories about the supernatural activities of popular Muslim Pirās or Ghāzīs, to Hindu religious or mythological traditions. Such groups also took part in poetical duels against any other groups; these were popular, and known by the name of kavi-gān.

1 'Abbās 'Alī: Gulzār-i Islam, 60-3.
2 Ibid., 61; Islam, M.:Kabi Heyāt Māmud, 201.
3 Ibid.
4 'Abbās 'Alī, 61.
5 Bhattacharyya, A.: Bānglār Lok-sahitya, I, 287. The Jārī song, however, grew out of its original elegiac connotation and was extended to cover other themes. (Islam, M.:Kabi Heyāt Māmud, 200). That explains why Bhattacharyya found a difference between the Jārī songs of east Mymensingh, where its elegiac character was firmly retained, and those in other parts of east Bengal (Bānglār Lok-sahitya, I, 291).
The most interesting thing about such Muslim musical band is their identity with the particular mode of traditional folk-singing and entertainment in Bengal known as pańcāḷi. In pańcāḷi there is a leader or gayen and at least two palis or dohars. The gayen has a fan (camāq) in his left hand and a string musical instrument (mandira) on his right with bells (supur) tied around his ankles. There is sometimes a drum (mdaṅga) player in the company. The pańcāḷi too is not sung all through, the descriptive portions being read out in quick rhythm by the gayen. 1

In east Mymensingh and the adjoining regions of Sylhet and Tripura, the Muslims almost held the monopoly of another medium of regional folk-culture, known as ghāṭu-ghan. 2 A ghāṭu group was organised around the central figure of a handsome lad in his early teens, with a sweet voice and specially trained for music and dance. The boy wore long hair and was often dressed like a girl, with bangles (cudi) on his wrists, his hands dyed red with mehndī, a necklace (hānsla), a pair of ear-hangings (jhumkā) and a gorgeous sari called balucūr. 3 The usual seasons for ghāṭu-ghan were monsoon and autumn, and the occasion of the immersion of the goddess Manasa (Manasa-bhāṣān) on the first day of the month of Bhadra was a great day for ghāṭu-ghan. 4 Thematically these musical compositions expressed a tragic longing for eternal love personified in Radhā and Kṛṣṇa. To give some examples:

Lalitā and Bīṣākhā, my friends (sakhi), please make hurry to come; my sweetheart takes leave. Listen to the birds Suk and Sāri singing as the night passes. My love [Kṛṣṇa] goes back to Nanda's [Kṛṣṇa's foster father] house; my sweetheart takes leave. 5

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1 MyBB, 48.
3 'Abbās ʿAlī, 61-2.
4 Bhattacharyya, A.: Banglār..., 292.
5 Quoted in Bengali, ibid., 296.
How many times should I beseech you, my sakhi, not to dip your pitcher in the water; please do not stir the ripples up. The glowing Kālā [Krṣṇa] is here near the water with wild flowers around his neck for a garland and with the flute in the hand. The flute of Śyām turned me restless at home, I could not stay there. Now here I find his blue image in the water; Please do not stir the ripples up. 

And yet the words of ghaṭu songs are supposed to have been subordinated to the demands of the sad and melancholy tone of its music, built up in long flights. This has rendered rhyme unnecessary in such compositions. It is interesting to note that such tendencies have been noted in the primitive and tribal music. 

The Muslim masses avidly attended the most entertaining modes of folk recreation in Bengal, known as yātra and nāt. The popularity of these cultural media as early as the 15th and 16th centuries is attested by the Caitanya-bhagavata, in which reference is found to the actual death of an actor (natabar) playing the role of Rājā Daśaratha, on receipt of the news of Rāma's exile. That the Muslims identified themselves no less than the Hindus with the grief and agony of Rāma on the kidnapping of Śītā as early as the time of Vṛndāvana-dāsa has been noted before. In course of time the Muslims moved from the position of spectators to active performers of such popular traditions. With extreme contempt 'Abbās 'Ali ridicules his co-religionists, engaged in such performances as well as those who even watched them. He compares the latter to clowns, filled to the brim with 'fun and frolic'. The former, he says, put on 'diverse and funny dresses', some remain

1 Ibid., 297.
2 Ibid., 295.
3 MyBB, 47.
4 Ibid., 48; supra, '60-1.
5 Gulzar-i Islām, 62.
'bare to the skin', others assume the dresses of the Vaiṣṇava mendicants (bairāgīs), Brāhmaṇas and sannyāsīs. Some would again smear his body with white and black, assume a huge tail and turn himself into Hanumān, the devout monkey worshipper of Rāma. 'Abbās 'Alī wonders and regrets that people belonging to the community (ummat) of the Prophet should go astray, and advises them to 'eschew these practices' and 'ponder that they had to go to the grave (kabar/qabr)'.

Beliefs and Practices:

The range of popular beliefs and superstitions of the Bengali Muslims set them closer to the local complex. The ramifications of such beliefs were quite varied, and in course of our foregoing discussions, we have often touched upon matters bearing on their beliefs.

The patterns of popular belief often cut across regional and cultural frontiers of a society and reveal remarkable similarity in divergent settings, rendering thereby the task of determining the regional identity of a particular belief extremely difficult and hazardous. And yet, these beliefs have a tendency to assume a form of expression that may be located in the structure of values of a particular culture area. The importance of the beliefs held by the Bengali Muslims should be assessed from this angle.

The beliefs and the practices, flowing from such beliefs, of the Bengali Muslims, may be reduced to the following categories:

1

Ibid., 63.
i. Divination and Astrology: Auspicious and Inauspicious Time:

The spectre of the unknown has ever been a haunting experience for man. He has been led to read the future in almost every phenomenon of nature and life. Divination and astrology hold firm ground in the mind of the people. The faith of the Muslims in Bengal in divination, astrology and auspicious or inauspicious moments is attested by both historical as well as other literary evidences.

In Bahāristān-i Ghaybī, we read that Ihtimām Khān had under his employ a physicain (kavirāja), who was also 'very expert in the science of astrology'. He predicted that in the war between the imperial Mughul army and the refractory Afghan chiefs in Bengal, 'victory will be attained by the imperialists and 'Uṣmān will be killed'. 1 After the Mughuls suffered some initial reverses, the kavirāja was asked about the efficacy of his prophecy. He thought for a moment and said:

'Do not be dejected. Whatever loss was to be sustained has been sustained. Now... the enemy will take to flight when six gharis [hours] of the night still remain' .... It happened exactly as he predicted. 2

Ihtimām Khān, ordered by Jahāngīr to proceed to Bengal, made his arrangements 'at an auspicious astrological hour'. 3 Buzurg Ummed Khān, son of Śaista Khān started his march against the Firangs and the Maghs 'at a moment auspicious for making a beginning'. 4 About Mir Qāsim it

1 Mirzā Nathan, I, 167.
2 Ibid., 190.
3 Ibid., 6. Mirzā Nathan also writes of Shaikh Kamāl, who started for his work 'at an auspicious moment'. (Ibid., 18).
is said:

[he] understood a little astrology and believed in its maxims and predictions; he procured the child's horoscope to be accurately drawn by able astrologers. ¹

The Muslim Bengali literature attest to these prevailing beliefs. According to Saiyid Sultan, while Amina, mother of Muhammad, was at the ninth month of her pregnancy, Yusuf, who could read the future (bhút bhabiṣyat gani kahita sakal), consulted his almanac (pañji, sāstra) and made predictions about the impending birth of the Prophet Muhammad. ²

On the birth of Saif ul-Mulūk, his royal father summoned all sooth-sayers (daibajñā) of the realm, who predicted about the potential greatness of the new born and his forsaking of the royal life. ³ The prince subsequently set out for a sea voyage accompanied, among other people, by the astrologers (jyotis) and sooth-sayers (gaṇak). ⁴

Reference to the horoscope is also found in this literature. While 'Abd un-Nabi proposed to marry his son, 'Abd us-Sabīr to the daughter of his friend 'Abd ul-Ghani, the former sent his representative to the house of the latter in order that the horoscopes (kuṣṭi/kuṣṭhi-jora) of the prospective couple were compared. ⁵

The fear of the unknown led to highly exaggerated importance attached to human activities at any particular time - either of a month or a day or even part of a day.

¹ G.H. Ṭabaṭabāi, II, 387.
² ShM, fols. 14b, 31b.
³ Dōnā Ghāzi, fols. 6 mc, 9 mc.
⁴ Ibid., fol. 97 mc.
⁵ Mardān : Naṣīb Nāma, (DMs 44 : sl.238), fol. 1b.
Two particular days in every month of the Islamic calendar are set aside as inauspicious (nāhs), and no work (kārya karma) should be undertaken on these days. The fourth and the eleventh days in the month of Muharram, the first and the twentieth in the month of Safar, the eighth and the tenth of the month of Rabī' ul-Awwal, the first and the twelfth of Rabī' ul-Aakhir, the second and the twelfth of Jumādā ul-Awbal, the second and the fourth of Jumādā ul-Aakhir, the eleventh and the twelfth of Rajab, the fourth and the sixth of Shā'ban, the second and the eighth of Ramazān, the sixth and the twentieth of Shauwal, the second and the third of Zu'l Qa'd and the eighth and the twentieth of Zu'l Hijja are all inauspicious. One only invites trouble (jañjal) to undertake any activity on these days.

a. Bath (Ghusal):

There are special merits and demerits accruing to a Muslim taking ceremonial bath on particular days of the week. A bath on Sunday should result in illness (byāḍhi) and suffering (dukh), while on Monday it enhances the longevity. The bather on Tuesday is destined to die shortly. A bath on Wednesday is rewarded by God with great wealth (bahu dhan), all-round happiness (sarbatre kuśal) and immense religious merits (puṇya). From a bath on Thursday flows the consequence of being reduced to a pauper and beggar. A regular bather on Friday is to attain the heaven (svarga basati). On Saturday a bath leads to various afflictions.

b. New Garments:

Wearing of new garments on Sunday gives birth to mental anguish (manodupkha), while on Monday it brings all happiness. A new cloth, worn on Tuesday, gets either burnt

2 The text contains 'āśurār das din Rabiul Awāle', while our Ms (DMs214:sl.237) reads 'aśtam aśam din Rabiul Awāle'. We accept the latter reading for its straightforwardness and clarity.
3 Mujammil, text, 29-30.
(ānale dahi) or stolen (hariba taskare) or lost in water (jaleta marjība). On Wednesday it increases wealth, on Thursday makes a great man (mahājan) and on Friday confers wealth and longevity, while on Saturday brings endless afflictions. The use of the new garment should be preceded by the uttering of ‘Inna āljalna’¹ ten times on a handful of water, at the end of which the apparel is soaked with the water.²

c. Shaving and Manicuring (Hajāmat):

Merits and demerits are attached to shaving on particular day and at particular time, and also in particular manner. Five days in a week, such as Monday, and from Wednesday to Saturday are supposed to be suitable for this purpose, which, if followed, earn piety (puqya), eliminate diseases and put an end to all sufferings. A correct form is prescribed for manicuring with a view to attaining greater merits. This involves treatment of the nails of the right hand first, followed by those of the left and the feet. The order in the right hand is the little finger at first, followed by the middle, thumb, ring and index. In the left, first is the thumb, next middle, little, index and the ring finger respectively. The order in the feet is like that of the hands.³

d. Menstruation:

Popular beliefs attach great importance to the particular month and day of the Bengali calendar registering the first menstruation of a girl as presaging her future life. If a girl menstruates (tubātā) for the first time in the month of Baisakha, it augurs well for her conjugal

¹ The beginning part of Sūra Qadr.
² Ibid., 31-2.
³ Ibid., 37-8.
life. If she attains puberty (padma bikaśīta haile) in Jyāśṭha, she proves rather loving to her husband. If in Āṣādha, she is assured of a happy and prosperous life and in Śrāvaṇa, initially she suffers only to enjoy a good life subsequently. Constant physical aches (ange byaṭha) follow a girl coming to age in the month of Bhādra. She outlives her husband and children if it is in Āsvina. On the contrary, she predeceases her husband, if it is in Kārtika. In Agrahāयaṇa, a girl attains good luck (bhāgyabanta) and becomes a devoted wife (patibrata satī). She suffers from illness and lack of grace for having attained puberty in Pauṣa, in Maṅga she becomes restless (caṭcal) and angry (krodha-bati), and is blessed with many children, if in Phālguna. The girl attaining age in Caitra possesses all the good virtues.¹

As regards days, she is turned a widow shortly after marriage, if her first menstrual course (rajaśvāla) starts on a Sunday. On Monday, it adds to the longevity of the couple. She dies during childbirth, if on a Tuesday. On Wednesday, the couple represent a model of conjugal happiness, and on Thursday, it adds to wealth and happiness. On Friday, it occasions birth of many children. On Saturday, it makes the girl barren.²

e. Sleep:

Dire consequences, good or bad, attach to sleep (nidra) at particular hours of the day. A sleep in the morning (prabhāṭeta) causes lethargy (gaflat ālasya) and should be considered a haram. A person sleeping till the eighth hour in the morning (aṣṭa-danda beli) is destined to be reduced to a pauper and beggar (bhikṣuk daridra). A nap after the luncheon is rewarded with increase in wealth and

¹ Ibid., 41-3.
² Ibid., 43-4.
property as well as health. After dinner in the evening one is advised to walk about forty steps (dui biś kāṁik), earning thereby great merits (bahu pūrya) and fulfilment of all objects (sarba siddhi). Anyone sleeping in the dusk (sandhyā kāleta) is afflicted by disease.¹

f. Dream:

Dreams are also connected with the calendar. The dreams of the first three lunar nights are reverse (ulṭā) in their application. On the fourth and the fifth days dreams are bad (bhāla nahe), and that of the fifth should never be discussed with anybody. On the sixth, seventh and eighth these are never false (kādaṁcit sei svapna mithyā nāhi hae). Same is true about dreams between the eleventh and the sixteenth days as well as the nineteenth, while those of the ninth, tenth and between twentieth and twenty-third are all false. That of twentieth should, however, be disclosed to none. The dreams of the twenty-fourth and the twenty-fifth are reverse in their effect. Those of twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh are true and good, while those of twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth and thirtieth are not very good (bhāla nahe ati).²

g. House:

Particular months and days in the Bengali calendar are recommended for the construction of houses. A house built at an auspicious time in the months of Kartika or Agrahāyana brings everlasting happiness to its dwellers. The house constructed in the months of Pausa or Māgha is consumed by fire. The months of Phālgunā and Caitra also bring happiness and festive joys for the house, constructed in these two months. One should be quite selective in finding a suitable day for the building of a house in the

¹ Ibid., 32-4.
² Ibid., 35-6.
month of Baisakh. One prospers in wealth, family and happiness \( (\text{dhane putre laksmi sab}) \) to build a house in the month of Madhabî. Death is sure to result shortly in the house constructed in Jyaistha. For the house made in the month of Asadha, increase in the cattle-stock \( (\text{godhan}) \) follows. The owner of the house \( (\text{grher Isvar}) \), built in Shravana, either dies or suffers from various diseases. Bhadra and Asvina are good months for the construction of house, as it adds to the store of food and wealth. ^1

As regards days, the house built on Sunday is destroyed either by fire or storm. If on Monday, the house will have all girls \( (\text{suta}) \) and no boys \( (\text{sut}) \) born in it. Built on Tuesday, the house reduces the longevity of the dwellers. Wednesday is chosen by the wise \( (\text{budhgan}) \) for this purpose, for it leads to prosperity. Thursday, Friday and Saturday are also propitious for building it. ^2

h. The Eclipse of the Moon and the Sun:

Popular beliefs extend to cover the causation of the lunar and solar eclipse. It is believed that Rahu is instructed by God to devour the sun and the moon in as much as they, in the beginning, received the veneration of the hypocrites \( (\text{munafek}) \) instead of God. The consequences of the lunar eclipse vary with the months of Muslim calendar. In the month of Muharram, it brings in troubles; in Safar, it causes less rain; in Rabî' ul-Auwal, famine; in Rabî' ul-Âkhîr, death of virtuous people; in Jumâdá ul-Auwal, abundant crops; in Rajab, makes people 'hungry like tigers'; in Jumâdá ul-Âkhîr, excessive rain and sudden death of people; in Sha'ban, all-round good; in Ramazan, large death due to pestilence; in Shawwal, great happiness; in Zu'l Qa'd, plenty of rain and wind, and in Zu'l Hijja, initial prosperity is followed by conflicts and oppression. ^3

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^1 Ibid., 25-6.
^2 Ibid., 26-7.
^3 Ibid., 52-4.
The solar eclipse in the month of Muharram causes the death of a great man in the west (paścim dike); in Rajab, good harvests accompanied by diseases; in Safar illness of the king, followed by better days; in Rabi' ul-Auwal the rich is reduced to a pauper and the Faqīrs and the Mishkins remain happy; but the people suffer from headache (śir byathā); in Rabi' ul-Ākhīr, it causes much rain; in Jumādā ul-Auwal, famine appears in the west, and in Jumādā ul-Ākhīr, it ensures augmentation in cattle-stock. In Rajab, it causes death among people of Arabia. In general, people suffer from eye-trouble (cakṣu byathā). In Sha'bān it leads to disease, wanton bloodshed, and suffering for the rich, and happiness for the poor. In Ramazān and Shauvāl, earthquake leads to flood, pestilential death and severe cold (ṣīt) in general, while it brings famine to Persia (Fārsi deg) and prosperity to Khurāsān.¹

Similar beliefs are also associated with the occurrence of earthquake (bhūmi kampa), which itself is believed to be a device of God to punish people (naragan), steeped in sins (pāpe magna).²

11 Presages and Signs:

The concern for the unknown ramifies also in the reading of future in almost every phenomenon of nature. Good or bad signs are thought inherent in the nature of things. We have had occasions before to see that Gājī, in Kalu-Gājī o Cāmpāvatī, on the eve of his journey to Brāhmaṇnagar in search of his beloved, reads a number of signs foreboding good for himself.³ Similar presages relate to other matters.

a. House:

A house built facing a particular direction presages a particular consequence. Faced to the east, it brings a

¹ Ibid., 54-7.
² Ibid., 46-9.
³ Supra, Chapter IV, B.
sudden influx of wealth (acambite bahu dhan); to the north, it results in destruction of the house, and sickness and suffering for the dwellers; to the south-east (agni-kone), it causes untimely death (akal mṛttu); to the south-west (nairrite) it brings happiness and well-being; to the north-west (bayabya-kone), it augurs initial gains followed by death in the family; and to the north-east (īsāner dike), the house is likely to get destroyed by fire.1

b. Sleep:

A believer (Mumin) must go to bed with his head covered by a piece of cloth and lie on his left to increase his longevity. The wife should lie on his left side, and particular care should be taken that his body is kept untouched by the respiratory air of the wife. For, the longevity of a man is cut down by such breath (ramani nisvāse nara āyū ses hae).2

c. Dream:

There are many other interesting beliefs associated with dreams. One is advised not to sleep again after having a good dream. The interpretation of a dream should be sought with an ‘alim. Dreams should never be disclosed to four categories of people, such as the insensible men, the womenfolk, the enemies and the minors. The dreams around dawn and noon materialise in no time.3 The dream of Tuesday forebodes good for one’s children, and that of Saturday night for one himself. One’s span of life widens to find himself eating rice in dream. Eating rice on the lotus-leaf in a dream makes one a royal companion (rajpatra).

1 Mujammil: DMs, fol. 49a-b. The reading of the consequences, relating to other directions is not quite clear in the Ms. The edited text, cited above, contains no reference to all this.

2 Mujammil, text, 32-4.

3 Mujammil, DMs, fol. 34-5.
A woman eating on the lotus-leaf becomes a queen. To see oneself severing human head is to become a king. To find oneself eating human flesh (manusyer māṃsa) results in his becoming master (adīkārī) of several kingdoms (rājya). To see gods and goddesses is to receive the blessings of Lakṣmī (bār Lakṣmī) i.e. prosperity. To see gold is to be blessed with five sons, and silver with five daughters, while iron brings ill-luck (ālakṣmī). To see a chaste woman (satī sādhyā) makes a woman virtuous like Lakṣmī.

A woman conceives if she takes fruit in the dream. Total ruin follows for the family, if sun is ever seen in a dream. Being bitten by a mosquito in a dream presages birth of a son, and bitten by a leech getting a heavenly damsel (ālbīyā nārī). Either riding an elephant (hastī) or crying make one rich. Seeing a Brāhmaṇa is to prosper in wealth and family, while seeing a lowly person (hīnajāti) entails various losses (nānā mate hānī). Coloured (rāng) or black (kāla) garments in a dream forbodes illness, and a red thread assures the presence of the deity around himself. An extinguishing lamp means the desertion of Lakṣmī. Worshipping a deity indicates mental worries. Applying oil to one’s body or seeing an elephant causes illness, and a boat breaking into pieces lead to sufferings.¹

The Prophet Muḥammad himself, on the eve of his death, is represented as interpreting several dreams in the light of his ensuing death.² Abū Bakr dreams of sitting with his back turned towards the company. Muḥammad interprets it as presaging the death of his son-in-law (duhitār jāmāi), who is Muhammad himself. ‘Āyisha, Muhammad’s wife, dreams of ‘being overwhelmed with grief’, Fāṭima dreams of a tall tree falling down, and Ḥasan and Ḥusain dream

¹ Ibid., fols. 34-41.
² Saiyid Sulṭān : Wafat-i Rasūl, fols. 3a-4b.
of sitting below a cot. Muhammad interprets all this as related to his death and identifies the cot with his funeral bier (jānājar khāj).

d. Snakes:

The snakes form an important part in the beliefs pertaining to presages. If a snake approaches the house from the east, the house gets destroyed in fire; if from the south-east, it brings good fortune and wealth; if from the south, it should be abandoned; if from the west, south-west and north-west, it ushers in prosperity; if from the north, it creates enmity; and if from the north-east, it stimulates reason (ākal/'aql).

e. Birds:

Similar beliefs are associated with some particular birds, like ḫaṅjan and 'hācan'. If a ḫaṅjan is observed in the month of Bhādra, the year proves a barren one for the observer. Seen in the western direction, the bird brings wealth for the viewer; in the eastern direction, it promises a gay and happy year; in the south, it presages illness and suffering; in the north, it holds the prospect for a good consort; in the south-west, it forebodes troubles, arising out of the daughter; in the south-east, it brings mixed fortune; and causes death by fire in north-east; in the north-west, it brings either money or clothes; and finally, if the bird is noticed flying above, it results in being rewarded with royal favour.

f. Fish:

The fish in particular circumstances augurs well. As the imperial fleet under the command of Mirzā Nathan entered the river Karatoya, 'on account of great tumult raised by the sailors, the sound of the victorious trumpets,

1 Mujammil, DMS, fol.43a-b.
2 Ibid., fols. 2b-3a. The bird 'hācan' (possibly a variety of kite) is also associated with such beliefs. (Ibid.fols.44a-b).
and the artillery, the fish of the river, jumping out of water, began to fall on the boats. This was taken to be a good omen for the conquest of Bhati, and the suppression of the rebels'.

iii. Supernatural Beings:

a. Jinn:

According to the field study of Muslim folk beliefs, the 'pervading influence of the belief in the jinn is an important phenomenon in the religious life of the Muslims of Bengal'. Many reported that 'they were slapped or struck on the head or in some other way roughly handled by the Jinn, while passing by a place haunted by the Jinn and as soon as they began to recite some verses of the Quran, they were saved from the Jinn's torture'. The favourite haunting places of the jinn were believed to be the graveyard, marshy land, deserted human habitation and some particular trees like the tamarind, banyan, palm etc. The jinn took 'particular delight in young ladies'. A woman possessed by a jinn was subjected to the magical treatment of the excorcist (ojha), who 'invoked all relevant Hindu gods and goddesses together with Pir's and Auliya's'.

b. Fairies:

The belief in fairies and nymphs were quite widely prevalent. We have on several occasions noted the fairies and nymphs freely introduced in the writings of the Bengali Muslims. Nawab Shuja ud-Daula built a 'magnificent garden' at Dehpara on the banks of the Bhagirathi. It is

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1 Mirzā Nathan, I, 53.
3 Ibid., 29-32.
said that 'the fairies used to come down there for picnics and walks, and to bathe in its tanks'. When the Nawab was informed of this, he 'dreading mischief' from them 'filled up the tanks with earth and discontinued his picnics in that garden'.

c. Ghosts:

Hindu ghosts also found their place in the world of popular Muslim belief. The ballad Manik-tara mentions a 'deo', residing in a banyan tree due to which nobody approaches the tree. Similar references to 'deo', 'apadeb' and 'jairkṣa' (yakṣa) are made by Saiyid Sultan, Donā Ghāzī and 'Abd un-Nabī.

Another category of spirits, good or bad, known as deo-āṅgī was believed to reside in lakes and ponds. Sometimes deo-āṅgīs were thought to assume the forms of small crocodiles, big fishes or tortoises, living in the tank. They were either propitiated or frightfully avoided.

iv. Magical Beliefs and Rites:

Magical rites were often the answers of the people to the tyranny of ill-fate and supernatural.

a. Necromancy and Charm:

The faith in necromancy and charm permeated all sections of the society. The people of Koc-bihar drew the attention of Shihāb ud-Dīn Tālish as 'enchanters', who

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1 G.H. Salīm, 291.
2 Pb̄g, II, ii, 241.
3 ShM, fols. 249b-50a.
'read formulas upon water, and give it the wounded to drink, who then recover'.¹ He also writes about the belief that the sickness of Mir Jumla, on his return from the conquest of Koch-bihar and Assam, which took his life, was the 'result of witchcraft practised by the Rajah of Assam'.²

Mirza Nathan takes us further. He tells about his experiences in Khuntaghāṭ (Ghantaghāṭ), which was 'notorious for magic and sorcery'. He writes that people there could make anyone 'produce the voice of a fowl from inside his stomach'. They could also convert mango leaves into fish by breathing 'words of magic and sorcery' on them, which, if eaten, resulted in death.³ He also mentions Muḥammad Zaman being 'bewitched by some person so that for two or three days he used to produce sounds of beasts, like dogs, cats and other animals of that class, and thus he died'.⁴ Mir Shams, who was 'an expert in the science of necromancy' and wanted to eliminate Shaikh Kamal from his own way, 'began to incant magic spells. The Shaykh was affected in such a way that lumps of blood began to come out of his stomach and throat... After a week he expired'.⁵ Mir Shams is said to have tried his power on Mirza Nathan himself to facilitate his personal ambition. Mirza Nathan was 'affected to such an extent that blood began to come out of his throat'. He wrote to a Darweesh named Miyan 'Aqil Muḥammad of Dacca, who prayed for his recovery and 'began to exercise his magical influence. By the favour of God

² Ibid., 96. Cf. also '...he [Mir Jumla] was overcome by the spells of Assam'. (Shihāb ud-Dīn Tālish, fol. 113a, cited, Sarkar, J.N.: Studies in Aurangzeb's Reign, 191).
⁴ Ibid., 274.
⁵ Ibid., II, 671.
he became so successful that at first the medium of the
two necromancers began to fight with each other and the
medium of Miān Āqil Muhammad overpowered the medium of Miār
Shams and drove it back to the Miār. After this the Miār
was attacked with such a serious disease that blood began
to flow out of his stomach and he was about to die'.

In his report on Rangpur in north Bengal, Buchanan-
Hamilton refers to 'a numerous class of practitioners
among the plebeians both Hindus and Muhammadans, who by
means of certain incantations pretend to cure diseases,
and the bites of serpents, and to cast out devils...Both
Muhammadans and Hindus acknowledge that these incantations
were first divulged by order of Kamakshya'. The principal
skill of these magicians or excorcists was supposed to
consist in being able to discover the deity or Piir,
responsible for the malady. They attributed the malady
to both sets of beings, without any partiality in
favour of their own objects of worship. True to the
principle of sympathetic magic, the failure of the magician
was never attributed to the inefficacy of the prayer, but
to the practitioners having been mistaken in the cause, and
that the particular trouble was owing to a different power
from what he supposed and another man was employed. In
Dinajpur 'a number of Muhammadans practise as experts in
these magical ceremonies' and were known as 'Mahats'.

In a Muslim ballad, the hero İshāq seeks the help
of a magician (gūnīn) to win over the heart of his
beloved, Amina. The magician knows all his arts and is

1 Ibid., 672.
2 Martin, M., 508.
3 Ibid., 510.
4 Sen, K.K.: 'Notes on Rural Customs of Dinajpur District',
JASB, 1937, III, 37.
5 Nazar Ma'lüm, Pbg, IV, ii, 11-2.
always very effective in the matter of getting an easy
delivery for an expectant mother, restoring a wayward
man or woman etc. On a new moon day coinciding either
with a Tuesday or a Saturday, he prepares his medicine
from the root of a tree. Išāq is asked to collect next
morning the first seven drops of mustard oil, prepared by
the oil-presser (kalu) of the locality. The gunin promises
to make a charm of the oil for Išāq on the following
Saturday.

b. Fertility:

The magical practices inducing fertility were favoured
among people. A part of the courtyard was ceremonially
cleaned, a quantity of paddy-grains was put there and a
jar containing water, hibiscus flowers (jabā phul) and
mango leaves was placed on the paddy grains. The women
seeking fertility was to take her position there. The
exorcist invoked 'the chief of the goddesses from Kailās'
and 'the chief of the fairies'. The invoked spirit spoke
with the exorcist through the medium of the woman
concerned. The exorcist was instructed to arrange for
giving a bath to the woman wearing a new garment, to make
a talisman (tālij) for the woman, and to sacrifice a goat
in the name of the goddess or spirit. All this was
designed to promote fertility in a barren woman.¹

At the village of Bhadreshwar in the Atia pargana
of Mymensingh, the barren women, in the hope of getting
offsprings, took bath in a pond called poyati-bil (the
pond of fertility).² Another practice performed 'both by
Hindus and Muhammadans' was to have a 'banana leaf tied
round fruit trees', especially on the day of Lakṣmi-puja.³

¹ ’Abbas ‘Alī: Mīshāh ul-Muslimūn, 70-1.
² Maulik, A.K., 89.
³ Sen, K., JASB, op.cit., 1937.
favoured and popular practice connected with fertility. A pillar of a mosque at Muazzampur in Sonargaon, one of the mosque forming parts of the mosque associated with the name of Babā Adam Shahīd at Rampal in Bikrampur, one of the mosque dug out at Masjidkur in Khulna, and those of the mosque at Ramsiddhi in Bakla in Bakharganj were resorted by the people for this purpose among other objects.

c. Agriculture:

The importance of agriculture in the life of these people led them, as already noted, to celebrate the harvest festivals. They also resorted to some agricultural beliefs and rites of magical character. The seeds were not measured by any scale or measuring cup so that the growth of the crop was not contained. In the Muslim folk-ballad, Ḍaínā-ḥībī, the paddy taken from the forepart of the winnowing tray (ḡkulār dhan) is offered to the Pir.

The supreme importance of rains in a predominantly agricultural land led the Bengali peasants, besides resorting to the Pirs occupying special position in popular beliefs in this regard, to induce rain by means akin to sympathetic magic. An extract from a Christian missionary report from Ballabhpur in Nadia throws some light on such practices:

At Bollobpore church my attention was particularly drawn to the font...while I was looking at this font, a circumstance was named to me that shows how readily native Christians, recently converted from Mohammedanism, may fall into superstitions or questionable practices. I observed that there was a little water

1 Ray, S.C., 80.
3 Khulna, BDG, 183.
6 Pbg, III, ii, 194.
in the font; and knowing that no baptism could have been solemnized recently, I inquired the reason. 'Oh', said one of the party, 'I suppose it is some water that has remained since we sprinkled the church'. 'And what', I inquired, 'can you mean by your sprinkling of the church?' In answer to this I was told that during the recent drought, the people had assembled to pray for rain, and their prayers were accompanied by a ceremony in which the woman brought pitchers of water and sprinkled the church all over, giving it a thorough drenching....'

The reporter cannot go further wide of the mark as he traces the source of this practice to 'an imitation of a custom of the Mohammedans'. Any such attempt to confine and interpret the life of a people in a religious framework tends to overlook that religion is not a straitjacket, into which their larger and more complex life can be fitted. There is much in people's life and practice that stems from sources anterior to higher religion and carried by them through vicissitudes of time.

1 Church Missionary Intelligencer, December, 1870, VI (N.S.), 362.
The picture of Islam presented in the foregoing pages forces recognition of its claim for distinction. The question is not so much about the nature of Islam in medieval Bengal as regards the process of this distinct development. Syncretism is a form of explanation, which is rather inadequate, if not inapt description of the phenomena. If syncretism bears a suggestion of the presence of conscious elements in the process of acculturation, such elements did not emerge quite clear from our findings. Neither at the level of the liberal intelligentsia, nor at the level of the common people was there a conscious attempt to build up new of the old. With the former the attempt to narrow down the differences was largely conditioned by the exigencies of the situation, that vitally concerned the individual as well as the collective interests of the community. With the latter the question itself should seem redundant. At their level this is to import notions which did not exist in their life and thought. The life at this plane of economic and cultural existence, despite its manifold denials and deprivations, presented a totality typical of the folk-life. The religion, for a man of this station, could not mean much outside the sphere of his own circumscribed world. It is not so much for him to be dictated by the terms of his religion as it is for the religion to become pliable enough to secure integration into the structure of his values and needs. This is the task that Islam, reared up in an environment of dry and rugged deserts, was called upon to perform in a fertile deltaic land.

There are others who are inclined to trace this 'folk Islam' to a process of 'degeneration', following upon the gradual decline of the Muslim political power.
Leaving aside the objection to an unwarranted historical presumption that Islam ever existed at this cultural level in its 'pristine purity', a logician of this category errs on the side of miscalculating the force of the human factor in the shaping of a religious pattern - of making an abject subordination of the material to the ideational forces in a life process. The failure to look at the problem from the standpoint of the people concerned, breeds a wrong perception and presents a vicious circle, which is poignantly reflected in the following report long after the reformist and revivalist movements of religious and political import have tried to force the hands of the clock:

The life of the average Hindu cultivator is not so colourless as of his Muslim counterpart....At every important festival they would arrange for drama (dramas which relate the stories of the Ramayana, Mahabharata or the life of some great Hindu saint, such as Shree Chaitanya, Nityananda etc.). Carnivals, singing, dancing, poetic fights, sports, exhibitions, shows and many such other amusements would be arranged. The Muslim cultivator is deprived of such amusements, because they are bida'ats (or innovations) according to the Mullah's opinion. But human nature craves for amusements, so some would steal to the neighbouring Hindu village when such amusements have been arranged. But soon the 'crime' would also be detected by the Mullah. The Mullah would call the meeting of the village elders and severely censure the offenders. The offenders would ask pardon and promise not to do so again, through [sic] it is almost certain that they would repeat the 'crime'.

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The bibliography, mostly listed according to the names of the authors, is arranged alphabetically. As noted in the beginning of the thesis, the names of the authors of secondary importance are listed with their surnames first. This may fill in what otherwise may be considered a gap in the conventional arrangement of sources in a classified form. For the names of authors of this category no recourse is made to Sanskritic or Persian systems of transliterations for the simple reason that such names are often the choice of the authors themselves, as is particularly evident from those who have written in English as well. The Perso-Arabic words in the titles of these writers are transliterated as they are written in Bengali, while the Bengali words are written as these are written as well as pronounced in Bengali.

For the sake of avoiding repetitions, the articles referred to in the thesis are not reproduced in the bibliography. We furnish below the place of publications of those journals. For convenience and economy we use abbreviations for some of these journals occurring several times in the bibliography. The abbreviated forms are mentioned against the journals concerned. In addition to them, we shall refer to a few additional journals in the bibliography, the particulars of which are given in their respective places.

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Asiatic Annual Register, London.
Asiatic Researches, Calcutta.
Bangaśr̥i, (in Bengali), Calcutta.
BPP Bengal:Past and Present, Calcutta Historical Society, Calcutta.
Bhārat-baṅga, (in Bengali), Calcutta.
The Calcutta Monthly, Calcutta.
The Calcutta Review, Calcutta.
Church Missionary Intelligencer, Church Missionary Society, London.
Church Missionary Record, Church Missionary Society, London.
The Eastern Anthropologist, Department of Anthropology, Lucknow University, Lucknow.
Friend of India, Serampore, (in present West Bengal).
History of Religions, Chicago.
IHQ Indian Historical Quarterly, Calcutta.
IC Islamic Culture, Hyderabad.
Journal of the Numismatic Society of India (formerly at Bombay, presently at Benares).
Journal of the U.P. Historical Society, Lucknow.
MII Man In India, Ranchi.
Muslim Chronicle, Calcutta.
MW Muslim World, New York, Leyden.
Nineteenth Century, London.
Pratibha, (in Bengali), Calcutta.
PPHC Proceedings of the Pakistan History Conference.
Sahitya, (in Bengali), Bengali Department, Dacca University.
Visva Bharati, (in Bengali), Calcutta.
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VBQ Visva Bharati Quarterly, Visva Bharati.
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