Sufis and the Process of Islamisation in the Pre-Colonial North-East India

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Inquiries into the Sufi traditions in medieval north east India have been undertaken along two basic lines. One group of historians project the Sufis as "political agents", the other sees them as "Saviours of Islamic dominance" in the region (including some parts now in Bangladesh). Scholars have taken their clue and interpreted the contemporary medieval sources to serve their ideological purposes. The seminal issue in this study is an analytical evaluation of the "Persian sources" and the dominant role played by the Sufis in the propagation of the message of Islam in the region. It also focuses on the assessment of the social impact of the role of the Sufis and its historical significance in the pre-colonial north east India.

The areas covered in the present study include lower Assam-North Bengal region, Brahmaputra Valley and Barak-Surma Valley. Geographically these areas formed an important and extensive part of India in the pre-colonial period.

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I

The Indian sub-continent witnessed the advent of Muslims in three distinct movements; first as traders and missionaries, then in the expanding wave of Umayyad conquest, and finally like the Greeks, the Sākās and the Huns, in a more organised conquest-cum immigration movement. The missionaries of Islam (the Sufis) in the second phase of their movement, after the foundation of Muslim rule in India started peaceful penetration into the regions outside direct Muslim control. In some areas or regions their penetration synchronised with the expansion of the Turkish arms and in some other regions they arrived earlier. Unlike Hinduism, Islam is a proselytising religion, however, the Quran discourages forcible conversion and lays emphasis on persuasion and preaching.[1] Hence the Sufis followed on the path of spreading the truth and the conversion of the unbelievers through persuasion and preaching. The Sufis were members of various spiritual orders (*silsilahs*) of Sufism. The Sufi ideology in Islam developed from the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet.[2]

By the middle of the thirteenth century A.D., Sufi thought, both in prose and verse had reached its maturity. This development took place in Muslim lands in the same generation which saw the establishment of the Delhi Sultanat. Hence Sufi thought was imported into India in its developed form. Although the principles of the earlier founders were explained, illustrated, re-stated and summarised, no original contribution to Sufi thought was made. But in terms of practical application, India had much to contribute. Here the Sufi silsilahs developed to a degree probably unknown in other lands. India became a laboratory where abstract Sufi principles were applied to concrete conditions of society and transformed into space-time forces[3].

Before discussing the efforts of the Sufis in the process of Islamization in the north eastern region of the Indian sub-continent it is imperative to have at least a brief understanding of some basic philosophy and ideals of the Sufis, like the logic behind the establishment of Sufi hospice (*khānqāh*), their attitude towards the rulers, state, wealth, people and their pacifism which enabled them in carrying out their missionary efforts and was helpful in the steady growth of the ideology they propagated.

The Sufi hospices or *khānqāhs* were basically places of private worship, but they soon developed into a centre for the discipline of the corporate life of the Sufis and eventually into a nuclei for the expanding Sufi movement. The development grew out of the conviction that a life of solitary, self-sufficient contemplation was incompatible with the highest Sufi ideals because it made man egocentric, limited his sympathies and cut him off completely from the emrging currents of social life.[4]

However, Sufis of medieval period remained totally aloof from rulers, government service and politics as a whole. The attitude was based on various psychological, legal and religious considerations. They believed that government service distracted a Sufi from the single minded pursuit of his ideal which was 'living with the Lord alone', and if a Sufi associated himself with the governing class, he isolated himself from the masses. Their rejection of *dunya* (the world) meant giving up the materialistic approach towards life and its problem. In their encounter with the problems of the society and with people they adopted a pacific and non-violent approach. For them, all people were children of God. 'Do not give me a knife, give me a needle. The knife cuts but the needle is for sewing together', said a Sufi to a visitor.[5] They believed in the philosophy of union not separation, which in turn united men with the ultimate reality. In their missionary work in the Indian sub-continent whenever the Sufis arrived their, simple way of life, silent and self-effacing methods and the atmosphere of their humble dwellings free from the political hysteria of the period acted as a corrective to many of the 'ills' of the times, political, social and religious.

II

Barring some eminent members of the Indo-Islamic Sufis, the biographies of majority of them were compiled centuries after their life and times. Most of the biographies or hagiographies were authored by people who lacked objectivity, hence a mass of literature was produced about the life and exploits of the Sufis which are replete with fabrications, legends, pious-fables and alleged miracles,[6] which have been elaborated in the course of centuries. But the continuity of the tradition and their inclusion in

the Sufi hagiographies created doubts about the missionary activities of the Sufis as it significantly confused fact with fiction. Hence, one of the major problems facing a modern scholar is lack of reliable and accurate information. Even authentic Sufi records are unsatisfactory as history of missionary efforts. In certain cases contemporary political historians yield some information about the life and activity of some of the Sufis in eastern and north eastern India.

Muslim penetration into north and north east India started under the leadership of an adventurist soldier Malik 'Izzal-Dīn Muhammad Bakhteyār Khaljī. His expedition, though short lived left a permanent mark on the geo-political set up of the region. The earliest reference of the conversion of a Mech chief 'Alī and may be later his kinsman by Muhammad Bakhteyār, we get during his march through North Bengal. Its failure could also be ascribed to these geo-political factors. Nevertheless, Muslim inroads into the region continued till the seventeenth century and even beyond.[7] In the pre-colonial period phase two beginning from thirteenth century, this region because of its peculiar socio-religious development was outside the main stream of Indian life. It was largely inhabited by Mongoloid races who still practiced spirit worship, magic and sorcery, in certain remote parts human sacrifice was in vogue.[8] Among the earliest visitor to this region we find the name of Shaykh Jalāl-al Dīn Tabrezī, a famous saint of Suhrawardī order.[9]

Shaykh Jalāl-al Dīn Tabrezī, who pioneered the process of Islamisation in the region was originally a disciple of Shaykh Abū Sa'īd Tabrezī, after the death of latter attracted himself to the spiritual circle of Shaykh Shīhab-al Dīn Suhrawardī.[10] Shaykh Jalāl-al Dīn Tabrezī, was a widely travelled person and before setting out for India had already travelled through the Islamic world.[11] After a brief sojourn in Delhi and Badaūn, Tabrezī left for Bengal. The Shaykh's magnificent *khānqāh* at Pandwah in Maldah District of Bengal reminds one of its part glory.[12]

In Bengal, Shaykh Tabrezī is reported to have attracted a large number of people to the fold of Islam. Presumably, his *khānqāh* served as a nerve centre of his missionary activities in Bengal. Later, it appears he moved to neighbouring Assam, where the famous Moroccan traveller Ibn Batūtah met him at Kamrupa.[13]

Details of Shaykh Tabrezī's life and achievements have been under dispute. Critics allege that his personal prestige and influence apart, the Shaykh could not develop his *khānqāh* into a centre for the extension of the Suhrawardī Sufi Silsilah. The critics, however, totally miss the point. What distinguished Shaykh Tabrezī from the rest of the Sufis is the fact that he lived and worked for more than half a century in very inhospitable area and among people who were almost beyond the pale of civilisation. He stayed with them, patiently worked and was instrumental in awakening among them the light of culture, humanity and the moral life. This in essence is the mission of Islam. This achievement gains in significance once we realise that by temperament and habit the Shaykh was a peripetic man, always on the move if he had a choice.[15]

An interesting feature of the spiritual history of pre-colonial north east India is the presence of what later writers have termed *Ghāzī Awliya* (warrior saints) whose real interest lay in witnessing the 'ultimate' through hard spiritual penitences but sometimes under certain compulsion they also took up arms and participated in military operations. These military operations were the result of the struggle for supremacy between Muslim rulers who established themselves in some parts of the region and the independent chiefs. Occasionally, as the hagiographers claim these conflicts resulted due to the restrictions imposed on the small Muslim pockets within the territory of a Hindu Raja. But the question arises, as to why the Sufis took up arms which in fact was contradictory to their teachings of pacifism and non-interference in the political matters.

There lies a serious problem concerning the life and activity of warrior saints in the region in view of massive confusion of fiction with facts in most hagiographical works. As a result many wrong hypotheses have been drawn. This is more confounding in case of the most venerated Sufi saint of this category Shaykh Jalāl-al Dīn popularly known as Shāh Jalāl of Sylhet. He was a celibate (*Mujarrad*) or confirmed bachelor of Turkish origin born in Bengal and was spiritual successor of Sultan Syed Ahmad.[15] He is reported to have sought permission from his spiritual master to participate in the conquest of a war territory in order to become a victor (*ghāzī*) or martyr (*shahīd*). The master granted his request and despatched

a group of seven hundred disciples along with him. They became victorious everywhere, mostly lived on war booties and led a lavish life. Whatever valley of cattle they own, Shāh Jalāl distributed it among his fellow-beings and requested them to work for the progress of Islam. Among the parganas of Bengal, there is a town called Sirihat (Sylhet) when he reached there only three hundred and thirteen persons remained with him. After defeating the ruler of that area all the region fell into the hands of the conquerors of the spiritual and material worlds. Shāh Jalāl, making a portion for everybody, made it their allowance and permitted them to get married.[16]

Shāh Jalāl died in 1340 and the above account was compiled in 1613 a pretty long period after the actual events. It led Richard M. Eaton to conclude that the account has a certain paradigmatic quality. Like Shaykh Jalāl-al Dīn Tabrezī, Shāh Jalāl is presented as having brought about a break between Bengal's Hindu past and its Muslim future.[17] While using medieval Persian accounts to reconstruct the history of Sufism one must keep in mind that paradigmatic quality is essential to most medieval literature including history and hagiography. Eaton has also tried to make a parallel between the nomadic Ottoman free-booters and Shāh Jalāl and his followers.[18] The Ottomans were at that time passing from pastoral to a sedentary life in their own home-land, whereas Shāh Jalāl and his followers came with a definite message to propagate Islam like many others. They married local women and gradually integrated with local society.

The life and activities of Shāh Isma'īl Ghāzī appears to be of historical legendary character. He was supposed to be the Commander of Sultan Rukn al-Dīn Barbak Shāh (1459–1474) of Bengal. His hagiographical account, *Risalat al-Shuhadā*, was compiled nearly two centuries after his death. It was discovered at his shrine at Kantāduar.[19] According to the hagiographer, Shāh Isma'īl was a Qureshite Arab of Mecca, who came to Gaur and earned fame. He led an expedition to effect the recovery of the cis-Karatoya regions lately overrun by the Kamrupa forces. The Kamtapur kingdom was then in its most flourishing state and Shāh Isma'īl's progress was severely contested. In a battle fought near Mahisantosh in Dinajpur, he sustained severe defeat. The hagiographer, however, claims that the saintly character of Shāh Isma'īl succeeded where military measures failed. Kameswar or

Kamteswar, the Raja was so powerfully impressed that he surrendered himself and embraced Islam. The Shāh gave him the title of "Larwa Raja", i.e. the spittle Raja from Hindi 'lar' (spittle, salvia) as he asked for pān (beetle) from the mouth of Shāh Isma'īl.[20]

The fame and resources of Shāh Isma'īl provoked the jealousy of Bhondsi Rai, the commandant of the frontier fort of Ghoraghat who by malicious reports against his loyalty instigated Barbak Shah to order his execution. Shāh Isma'īl submitted to the decree and was executed in January 1474.[21] The fame and contribution of Shāh Isma'īl could be gauged from the fact that as late as 1874 G.H. Damant identified four shrines *(dargahs)*, in Rangpur erected to the memory of the saint soldier. They are all situated informs Damant a few miles north east of Ghoraghat in Thana Pirgunj. The principal one is at Kanta Duar. It is said to have been erected over his body. About three miles west is another at a place called Jalā Maqām. The *dargāh* is in a jungle on a piece of land surrounded by ditches. It seems to have been originally a fort or entrenched camp. These two *dargahs* are under the care of the *faqir (saint)*, who has a large Jagir and claims to be descendants of one of the servants of Shāh Isma'īl, who came with him from Arabia. The head of the saint is said to be buried at Kanta Duar, and his body at Madāran, west of Hugli. There is another *dargah* about 18 miles south of Rangpur, on the Bogra road, said to be erected over his stall, and a fourth or rather a sacred place (for Mr. Damant could see no building) on an island in the middle of a large *jhīl* (lake) called Borobhilla.[22]

Of all the Sufis of pre-colonial north east India the most popular, highly venerated but most enigmatic personality is that of Shaykh Badr al-Dīn Badr-i 'Ālam popularly known as Pīr Badr. He is considered to be the guardian spirit of water, his name was invoked by the sailor while putting to the sea. The invocation, the sailors and fishermen utter goes as:

Allāh, Nabī, Pānch Pīr, Badr, Badr.[23]

There are a number of shrines in the region, popular as *Badr-Muqām* or abode of Badr. In Chittagong the shrine associated with his name was visited by the local folk — Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. James Wise writes that the popular belief about Pīr Badr was that he arrived in Chittagong 'floating on a rock', exterminated

the *Jinns* or evil-spirits infesting Chittagong and its neighbourhood, and took possession of the whole country.[24] E.A. Gaits adds that, the rituals performed at Chittagong shrine of the *Pīr* possessed some distinction. Situated on a hillock, the place as thought to be the spot where Pir Badr lighted a lamp. Candles were offered and burnt there nightly, the cost being met by contributions from people of different religious denominations.[25] Gait further adds that, the strong association of Pīr Badr with sea-faring and waters led some to identify him with Khwaja Khidr.[26].

There is also a great deal of controversy among scholars regarding the Pīr Badr phenomenon, one view regards him as a pīrified Portuguese sailor, named Pas Gaul Boteilho,[27] possibly a corruption of Pascual Perez Botelho.[28] Others attribute a Hindu origin and yet another view strongly advocates Buddhist origin of the Pīr.[29] The shrine associated with Pīr Badr in Badarpur of Barak valley is undoubtedly a Muslim shrine and so is that of Chittagong. Such controversies arose as a result of centuries old syncretic transformation in the region. Badr Muqams (local/ regional corruption Buddarmokāns) have also been regarded as universal shrines.[30] The popularity of Pīr Badr and his association with lower strata of the society which is clear from invocation of his name by the sailors and fishermen is clear indication that he lived and worked with them and played an important role in the process of Islamization in the region.

Islamization proper in the Brahmaputra Valley on a larger scale set in only in the seventeenth century. It seems that in consolidation of Assamese Islam, Shāh Milan, known as Azān Faqīr played a decisive role. Seventeenth century is a very crucial period in the history of Assam as it witnessed the most aggressive Mughal onslaught, temporary occupation by the Mughals and its subsequent reversal by the Ahoms. Shāh Milan alias Azān Faqīr is reported to have been of West Asian origin.[31] Information about his life and activities are scant.[32] It is highly probable that Azān became his popular name as he use to give prayer call (azān) to attract people towards prayer and the suffix Faqīr because of his adoption of self-effacing title of Bhikārī (beggar, faqīr) or saint in his poetry, which has survived in the length and breadth of Assam in the form of *zikirs* and *zaris*. While zikr means liturgical repetition of divine-names, *zarī* seems to be an Assamese local innovation.

Reliable tradition traces the use of native language for Sufi poetry in Assam backs to the seventeenth century by Azān Faqīr.

He composed short poems/verses and appears to be the most outstanding master of popular Sufi poetry in Assam. These short poems could be easily remembered. It is unpolished and has a rustic, colloquial quality but it is essentially a poetry of the people for there is scarcely a verse that does not reflect, in some way, the religious background of Islamic culture. This imagery in the poetry is taken from the daily life of an ordinary Muslim.

Kalima haqīqat Kalima Sharī'at
Kalima taribar upay
gate āsmān gate zamīn
Akale malila puli
ridoir bhitrat ulad saudo sakhī
olaise ei buli buli
Sunnate faraze hale akemat
Duijanak manichu gurū
ajana haqīqat ajana sharīāat
madhyat jire amru
amru jeuew fure dhar salai
duikhan duwarak pai.

Translation

Kalima (the article of faith) is the truth from which the *sharī'at* (law) emanates; the article of faith is the means of salvation. The earth and the heavens are within the senses and are sprouting forth. Now within the mind are the fourteen witnesses (the senses) vouchsafing the Unity of the Law and word of Allāh, both of which commands equal observance. The Law and the Truth merge into one abiding Reality, wherein man grows into eternal life moving from one stage to another in its spaciousness.[33]

Azān Faqīr preaches moral precepts enshrined in the Qur'ān in the following way:

mara baper hukumat chaliba
ustadar hukumat dhar
apunar badsar hokum maniba
khudalai kariba dar
akhertak lagi ei dukh khalo
halal haramak jan
micha beshiya antar kariba
tebehe musalman.

Translation

Obey your parents, obey your teachers. Behest and obey the authority of your ruler but fear God alone. Learn to differentiate between what is allowed and what is prohibited and above all avoid prostitutes and falsehood, if you hope to be a Muslim.[34].

Why did he adopt such *modus operandi* for the propagation of Islaṃ? If we believe Mughal writer Shihab al-Dīn Tālish's observation during this period, Azān Faqīr's message carries meaning. Tālish unequivocally mentions that, Muslims who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendants are exactly in the manner of the Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name, their hearts are inclined more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims. The Muslims who had come here from Islamic lands engaged in performance of prayer and fasting, but were forbidden to chant the call to prayer (azān) or publicly recite the words of God (Qur'ān).[35] The similarity of manners and customs observed among people alike in physical particular added force for the consolidation of Islamic beliefs and practices through the efforts of Azān Faqīr.

III

Assam had, indeed been known as the country of magical practices and Sufism went there to learn magic. Sufi hagiography in India describe magic working contests between Sufi saints and the yogis or mysterious conversion of Indian yogis by Sufis.[36] The Muslim saints and the theologians discussed the question of the extent to which the experience of the yogis were real or whether they relied upon a satanic or at least a magical basis. They would usually admit the possibility of certain miracles performed by the yogis but would maintain the importance of following the Islamic path for the performance of true miracles. References to yogic practices (*Sutuk-i Jogīyah*) are found in the works of Sufism and Muslim saints are reported to have travelled upto Kamrupa to learn yogic practices. The most significant impact of yogic spiritual exercises came from a treatise *Amrita-Kunda*, taught and transmitted to a Muslim saint by a yogi from Kamrupa. The Sufi interest with apprehending transcendent reality unmediated by priest and other

worldly institutions motivated and attracted them to the yogic tradition of Kamrupa. According to the translated versions, the Sanskrit text was composed by a Brahmin yogi of Kamrupa who had converted to Islam.[37] The author then presented it to the Chief Qādī of Lakhnauti, Rukn al-Dīn Samarquandī.[38] Qādī is said to have made the first translation into Arabic and Persian and since then, there is no doubt that the *Amrita Kunda* through its repeated translations circulated widely among the Sufis of India and even outside. Although the original Sanskrit text of the work has not survived, the translations are available in Arabic and Persian, entitled *Hawd al*-Hayāt and *Bahr al*-Hayāt both meaning Pool of Nectar.[39]

Rukn al-Dīn Samarqundī (d. 1218) was the first to be initiated to the knowledge of *Amrita Kunda* and within decades its Arabic and Persian translations started appearing. Among the early known north Indian Sufi who absorbed the knowledge of *Amrita Kunda* was Shaykh Abd-Al Quddūs of Gangoh (d. 1537), who taught to his disciples.[40] A seventeenth century author of comparative religion records a Persian translation.[41] An Anatolian Sufi of the same century records the significance of *Amrita Kunda* for the study of yogic practices and declares unequivocally that in India such practices have been integrated into Sufi exercises.[42] The work lays special emphasis on the human body as the microcosm of the macrocosm and prescribes exercises by which one could achieve the *Nath Yogic* goal of transubstantiation of the body into a state of *Samādhī*. Its main emphasis is on the discipline of the body, the senses and the mind, and it prescribes methods for the continued suppression of respiration, which involves inhaling and exhaling the breath in a specialised manner, and fixed the eyes on the tip of the nose in order to effect a union between parts of the vital spirit residing in the body and that which pervades all nature. A pre-requisite for the *yogic* discipline is the control of the semen, particularly in the initial stages of ascetic exercises, and an accurate knowledge of the organs and their functions. The goal of the *yogi* is to transmute the physical body into a subtle body, enabling it to obtain the state of *Jiwam-Muktī*.

Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliori (d. 1663), a saint affiliated to the Shattārī order of Sufism incorporated the yogic exercises in several of his works on Sufi practices. He is also credited to have translated *Amrita Kunda* as *Bahr al-Hayāt*. In the

prologue to the translated version, a disciple of the Shaykh who worked as scribe records:

The reason for the appearance of this book among the Muslims is, as to when Sultān 'Alā al-Dīn ('Ali Mardān Khalji, 1210–13) conquered Bengal and established Muslim rule, the news of these events reached the ears of a gentleman of the esteemed learned class in Kamrupa. His name was Makama[43] and he was a master of the science of *Yoga*.

In order to debate with the Muslim scholars, he arrived in the city of Lakhnawtī, and on a Friday reached the congregational Mosque. Ultimately he was taken to the assembly of Qādī Rukn al-Dīn Samarqandī. He asked the Qādī, 'whom do you worship?', the Qādī replied, 'we worship the faultlers God'. To his question, 'who is your leader?' The Qādī replied, 'Muhammad, the Massenger of God'. He asked, 'What your leader said about the spirit?' The Qādī replied, 'God the all nourishing has commanded (that there be) the spirit'. He said, 'in truth, I too have found this same thing in books that are subtle and committed to memory'.

Then that man converted to Islam and busied himself in acquiring religious knowledge. After that he wrote and presented this book to Qādī Rukn al-Dīn. The latter translated it from the Indian language into Arabic in a book of thirty chapters.... And when Hadrat Ghawth al-Dīn (Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth Gwaliori) himself went to Kamrupa, he necessarily spent several years in studying this science... the name of the book is *Bahr al-Hayāt*.[44]

Bahr al-Hayāt is a work of religious syncretism and a true fusion of *yogic* and Sufi ideas. In a passage of *Bahr al-Hayāt*, where proper breathing technique is compared with the way a foetus breathes in its mother's womb, the foetus is identified with *Khidr*, a popular saint in Islamic lore, associated with water and eternal life. Again, where such techniques are compared with the way a fish breathes in water without swallowing it, the fish is identified with the one that swallowed Prophet *Jonah* (Yunus). The seven sanskrit mantras associated with the seven spinal nerve centres are all identified with Arabic names of God, so that, for example, *hum* is translated as *yā rabb* ('O Lord) and *Om* is translated *yā Qadīm* ('O Ancient one), there were attempts at finding functional equivalents between *yogic* words of spiritual power and the names of God as used by the Sufi saints.[45]

The Sufi fascination with the esoteric practices of Kamrupa brought them in close contact with the learned men of pre-colonial north east ushering in an era of mutual understanding and appreciation. Sometimes it also resulted in voluntary conversion. Makama yogī is the classical example, we are also told of the conversion of another religious personality of Kamrupa, Ambabhnāth, who like the former was thouroughly impressed by Islam.[46] Sufis travelled to Kamrupa to learn the yogic sciences and from sixteenth to eighteenth centuries we have definite information of them coming to this part of the country.[47] A question which comes to our mind is what used to be their abode at Kamrupa? In all probability they used the site of a stream on the foot of the south-eastern slope of the Nilachal Hills also known as Kamakhya Hills. For an inscription in Persian inscribed on a rock reading;

Āb-e Hayāt wa-Chashma-e Khidr

Have been found there. If rendered in English it means water of life (Nectar) and stream of *Khidr*, the popular saint in Islamic lore, associated with water and eternal life but no living or dead saint as have been misunderstood by some modern scholars.[48] There is also a popular belief in the Sufi circles of north India and also in south east Asia that Kamrupa had a secret place of worship used by medieval Muslim saints who travelled to that place. The location of this place, secluded as it is (and was) with availability of water necessary for rituals before prayer, this place could be easily identified as their abode.

IV

The response to the efforts of the Sufis in the pre-colonial north east in the beginning was rather accidental, later necessitated and aggravated by the conditions of institutional inadequacies in social and cultural terms, focussed on the dire need of some bending force of authority, stability and assurance. The phenomenon of conversion seems evident in the region with large cluster of Muslim population. The huge masses despised and neglected by the educated Aryan priesthood, with no resident Brahmin clergy to look after their religious instruction or conduct their rites properly remained a sheep without a spiritual shepherded, just like their Mongoloid Buddhist brethren of Kamrupa and Arakan. Hence

when Shāh Jalāl and other missionaries of crescent arrived to preach Islam to them, no worthy priest of Himduism came forth to accept the challenge and the masses of east Bengal were easily converted to Islam *en masse* from spiritual worship.

This is the underlying meaning of the legends still current about the early missionaries of Islam in Sylhet and their success in defeating the local Hindu priests (called Jogis) by superior miracle-working power.[49]

The similarity of physical particulars, customs and manners among the Muslims and non-Muslims of the region add force to the assumption of local response to Islam and success of Sufi efforts.

END NOTES

1. Al -Qur'ān, 16: 126; 10:9; 11:146. For the historical role of the Sufīs in this respect see T.W. Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, Delhi (reprint), 1984.
2. The Sufīs say that the Prophet had an esoteric teaching contained in the Book and cite the following verse in their support; 'As we have sent a Prophet to you from among yourselves who reads our verses to you, purifies you, teaches you the Book and the Wisdom and teaches you what you did not know before'. Quran, 11: 146.
3. K.A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, Delhi (reprint), 1978, pp. 56–57.
4. Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Awarif al-Ma'arif* (Urdu translation), Lucknow, 1926, pp. 126–127 and *Misbah al-Hidayah*, Lucknow, 1322 A.H., pp. 118–119.
5. Amīr Hasan Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fuād*, Lucknow, 1302 A.H., p. 363.
6. Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period (collected works of Professor Muhammad Habib), Vol. 1, p. 401, edited by K.A. Nizami, Delhi, 1974.
7. All medieval Muslim Chronicles contain accounts of the numerous military campaigns carried by Muslim adventures in the north east India. Details can be gleaned from *Tabaqāt-i Nāsirī*, *Akbar Nama*, *Alamgīr Nama*, *Baharistān-i Ghaybi*, *Fathiyah Ibriyah*, *Riyaz al-Salātīn*, etc.
8. Medieval Persian accounts are replete with the amazing description of magic, sorcery and witch-craft in the region. These are glowing description of the flora and fauna of the land but the climatic and environmental hazards made penetration difficult. Ibn Batūtah described Bengal in which parts of Assam also included then, as a hell full of bloom.
   The alleged conversion of Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā supposed compiled by Amīr Khusro refers to the spiritual territory (*wilayat*) of Shaykh Tabrezī where human sacrifice was offered to a demon and the saint is credited for relieving people from such sacrifices by doing away with the demon. *Afdal al-Fu'cad*, Delhi, 1305 A.H., p. 132. Shaykh Gesudarāz of Gulbarga also supposed to have remarked that Shaykh Tabrezī was never molested by witches and demons and he saved people from human sacrifice offered to the demons. Syed Muhammad Hussain, *Jawami' al-Kalim*, (MS) British Library, London, BM O2. MS. 252, f 24a.

9. F.A. Qadri, "Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn Tabrezī: Is He the Saint of Hajo", *Proceedings*, North East India History Association, XXII Session, Shillong, 2002, pp. 186–194.
10. 'Abd al-Rahman Jamī, *Nafahāt al-Uns*, Bombay, 1284 A.H., p. 420. Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn is reported to have said, 'I have many disciples in India', Shaykh 'Abd al-Haq Muhaddith, *Akhbār al-Akhyār*, Delhi, 1309 A.H., p. 36. Notable among Shaykh's disciples in India besides Shaykh Tabrezī, were Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyā of Multan and Qādī Hamīd al-Dīn Nagorī.
11. For Shaykh's travels see Shaykh 'Abd al-Haq Muhaddith, op. cit., p. 44.
12. Early hagiographers, though, mention his Bengal visit but do not give any specific date for that. If modern writers are to be believed he came to Bengal sometimes between A.D. 1195 and 1200 prior to the conquest of Bengal by the Turks. Emanuel Haq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*, Karachi, 1957, p. 157.
13. Ibn Batūtah's translators maintain that the saint whom the traveller met was Shāh Jalāl of Sylhet and not Shaykh Tabrezī. But the year mentioned by Ibn Batūtah is 746 A.H./A.D. 1345 whereas Shah Jalal of Sylhet died in the year 1340. Other details provided by Ibn Batūtah such as travels of the saint, his longevity and his dwelling atop a hill, all support that it was Shaykh Tabrezī. *Rehtā*, Eng. Trans. By H.A.R. Gibb, London, 1929, pp. 239–240.
14. F.A. Qadri, op. cit.
15. Some mistook him as Khwaja Ahmad Atā Yasawi of Silsilah-i Khwājigān. But he is a difficult saint whose spiritual affiliation is not known.
16. The term used in is *Katkhada*, meaning married. R.M. Eaton, however, maintains that it meant house-holder with property in the form of land etc. *The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier* 1204–1760, Delhi, 1994, p. 75.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. G.H. Damant, "Notes on Shah Isma'īl Ghāzī", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, No. 111, 1874, pp. 215–239.
20. Ibid., *Persian text*, p. 239.
21. Ibid., p. 236.
22. Notes on Shah Isma'īl Ghāzi, p. 215.
23. K.A. Nizami, "Pīr Badr", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* Vol. 1, Leiden, 1960, p. 868.
24. "The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, No. 1, part 3, 1894, pp. 28–61.
25. Report (on Bengal), *Census of India*, 1901, Vol. VI, part 1, Calcutta, 1902.
26. R.C. Hamilton, cited by E.A. Gait, *Census Report*, 1901, p. 178.
27. "The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal", op. cit., p. 41; The saint Pir Badr, *Journal of Royal Society*, July–October, 1894, pp. 839–840.
28. H. Beveridge, Ibid., pp. 840–841.
29. The Report of Col. Nelson Davies, the Deputy Commissioner of Akyab, cited by M.S. Khan, "Badr Maqams", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Vol. VII, No. 1, June 1962, pp. 19–20.
30. Col. Parrot, cited by R.C. Temple, "Buddhermokan", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol. XV, Part 1, 1925, p. 4.,
31. Maheshwar Neog, *Pavitra Assam*, Jorhat, 1960, p. 51.
32. Syed Abdul Malik collected the poems of Azan Faqīr and published under the title *Zikr aru Zari* with introduction. Muhibul Hasan collected the accounts of the saint's life mostly from traditions and published in Assamese, *Hazrat Azan Peer*, Sibsagar, 1972 (3rd edition).
33. Mohd. Yahya Tamizi, *Sufi Movement in Eastern India, Delhi, 1992, pp. 98–99.*
34. Ibid., p. 99.

35. *Fathiyah Ibriyah*, photo print of MS No. HL-127, Khuda Bakhsh O.P. Library, Patna, ff. 39b–40a.
36. Simon Digby, "Encounters with yogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography", Mimeographed, *SOAS*, London, 1970.
37. F.A. Qadri, "Medieval Muslim-Mystics: The Kamrup Connection", *Proceedings*, North East History Association, XVI Session, Shillong, 1995, p. 67.
38. Ibid., pp. 68–69.
39. Carl W. Ernst, *Pool of Nectar: Islamic Version of Yoga* (forthcoming).
40. *Maktubāt-i Quddusuyah*, Delhi, 1871.
41. Muhsin Fānī, *Dabistān-i Mazahib*, Nazir Ahmad and W.B. Bayley (eds.), Calcutta, 1809, p. 224.
42. Haud al-Hayāt: La Version arabe del' Amrita Kunda, *Journal Ashiatique*, Vol. 113, October-December 1928.
43. The name of this yogi appears differently in various manuscripts around the world. The Bahr al-Hayāt compiled by Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth mentions Kama and Makama. The India Office MS. reads Konama whereas the Paris and Dublin MSS read Bhojar or Bhujan Brahmin.44 *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, Vol. XXI, 1947.
45. *Journal Ashiatique*, op. cit.
46. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Karachi, 1967, p. 66.
47. Besides Shaykh Muhammad Ghowth Gwaliori, we know from the collection of epistles of Shaykh Abd al-Karim Manikpuri that he spent considerable period of time in Kamrupa. *Maktūbat* (MS) Khanqah-i Karimia, Salon, Bara Banki (U.P.).
48. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. IV.
49. *The History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Muslim Period 1200–1757, Patna, 1974 (reprint), p. 228.