



UNVEILING SUFI LEGACIES IN DHAKA OF BANGLADESH: A Chronological Discourse on Islamic Heritage

Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury

Bartin University, Bartin, Turkey

Email: schowdury@bartin.edu.tr

Abstract: This study explores the historical and contemporary role of Sufism in the propagation of Islam and the socio-cultural development of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Genuine Sufi practitioners have profoundly influenced the region through their exemplary character, the establishment of social institutions like khanqahs and dargahs, and peaceful engagement with Hindu and Buddhist communities. These efforts not only facilitated the spread of Islam but also fostered a harmonious social order, shaping the religious and cultural fabric of the region over centuries. Since the 18th century, however, pseudo-Sufi groups have emerged, driven by economic, political, and social motives, distorting the principles of Islam and authentic Sufi traditions. This study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing primary sources such as biographical records and archival materials alongside secondary sources like historical texts and scholarly analyses. The findings reveal a stark contrast between genuine Sufis' transformative contributions and pseudo-Sufi groups' detrimental impact. The research highlights the challenges of preserving authentic Sufi practices amid ideological distortions. It recommends increased scholarly attention and public awareness to safeguard the legacy of authentic Sufism. This study contributes to the broader discourse on Sufism's historical significance and implications for contemporary religious practices in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Keywords: Sufism, Dhaka, Islamization, Sufi Khanqahs and Dargahs, Socio-Religious Dynamics, Cultural Impact, Interfaith Harmony, Modern Challenges to Sufism.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v28i2.873>

Introduction

SUFISM IS A LIBERAL, tolerant, and universal doctrine. The moral and spiritual teachings of Sufism are of immense importance in

keeping individual life pure and untainted, upholding oneself above all forms of greed and selfishness, maintaining peaceful family relationships, and fostering orderly and beautiful social interactions. Sufism transforms people into genuine human beings. Sufism instills within the human heart a genuine capacity for love. This Sufism uniquely contributes to Bangladesh's social fabric and civilizational development, especially the Dhaka region, Bangladesh's capital. The spread of Islam in Dhaka was primarily facilitated by those known in Bangladesh as Wali, Sufi, Pir, Fakir, Dervesh, Gaus, and Qutb. Sufism has inspired millions of people in Bengal. A significant number of Arab, Iranian, and Turkish Muslims and Sufi dervishes arrived in the country to propagate Islam. They extensively settled in the country and actively promoted Islam. Many Bangladeshi thinkers have established a remarkable legacy by embracing the Sufi ideology of liberal, tolerant, and non-sectarian Islam.

The Turkish general Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji defeated Lakshman Sen in 1204, establishing Muslim rule in Bengal.¹ Following this conquest, a wave of Sufi saints and scholars, known as Pir-Auliyas, arrived in Bengal from various regions, including Turkey, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Arabia, and India. While Sufi's presence in Bengal predates Khilji's conquest, his victory undoubtedly facilitated the spread of Sufism and Islamic teachings. The arrival of Pir-Auliyas played a significant role in empowering Bengal's marginalized and neglected communities. Their teachings instilled a sense of self-worth and encouraged individuals to take ownership of their lives and strive for personal growth and transformation. The Sufis' active engagement with social issues fostered a new social order, contributing to the region's predominant Muslim identity in Dhaka. However, this research sheds light on Islam's unique character in Bangladesh, the complex interplay between religious

¹ Muhammad Mojum Khan, *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal* (UK: Kube Publishing, 2013), 13.

beliefs and social transformation, and the historical processes that shaped Dhaka's religious landscape.

Throughout the thousand-year history of Bengal, Sufism has played a pivotal role in Bangladesh's spiritual and socio-cultural development. Genuine Sufi practitioners significantly contributed to the propagation of Islam and the establishment of social harmony, leaving a lasting impact on the region. However, from the 18th century to the present, the emergence of pseudo-Sufi groups such as Dewanbaghi, Sureshwari, Enayetpuri, Atroshi, Chandrapuri, Rajarbaghi, and various Baul communities has tarnished the essence of true Sufism. These groups often exploit religious sentiments for economic, political, and social gains, distorting the core teachings of Islam and genuine Sufi practices, thereby misleading the general populace.

This article explores the activities and contributions of authentic Sufi practitioners in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital, while critically analyzing the influence of pseudo-Sufi groups. By examining their practices and ideological deviations, the study highlights the challenges of preserving true Sufism and its role in contemporary society. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of Sufism's historical significance and the socio-religious implications of pseudo-Sufi movements in Bangladesh.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the historical role of Sufis in propagating Islam in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The research design incorporates primary and secondary data collection methods to understand the subject comprehensively.

Data Collection

Primary data were gathered through archival research, utilizing historical records, manuscripts, and biographical accounts of prominent Sufi figures in Dhaka. These materials were accessed from repositories such as the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, and university libraries across the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh.

Secondary data were sourced through an extensive review of scholarly literature, including books, journal articles, and academic theses. Key themes investigated include Sufi orders, the history of Dhaka, and the methods of Islamic propagation in the region.

Search Strategy

Systematic searches were conducted using relevant keywords such as *Sufi Orders*, *History of Dhaka*, and *Islamic Propagation in Dhaka*. Efforts were made to locate region-specific studies to contextualize the findings within Dhaka's unique historical and socio-religious landscape.

Analytical Framework

The collected data were analyzed thematically, focusing on identifying patterns in the contributions of Sufis to the spread of Islam and their socio-cultural impact. Comparative analyses were conducted between primary and secondary sources to verify the accuracy and consistency of findings.

Literature Review

The history and influence of Sufism in Bangladesh still need to be explored compared to the broader narrative of Islam's arrival in the region. The available literature highlights the significant contributions of Sufis to spreading Islam, particularly in Dhaka, while also addressing gaps in the documentation of their lives and work.

Enamul Haque's *Sufi Influence in Bengal* offers foundational insights into the historical spread of Sufism and biographical details of prominent Sufis, mainly through its chapter *Bangakendra*, which discusses Sufi figures such as Baba Adam Shahid and Shāh 'Alī al-Baghdādī.² However, its limited focus on Dhaka leaves room for further research on the region's diverse Sufi contributions. Similarly, Bazlur Rashid's *Amader Sufi Sadhak* discusses the arrival of Sufis like Baba Adam and their

² Muhammad Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufiism in Bengal*, 'Spread of Islam in Bengal' (Dhaka: Remon Publishers, 2011), 94-98.

establishment of khanqahs. Still, it needs to extensively analyze their role in propagating Islam within Dhaka.³

Ahmed Sharif's *Banglar Sufi Shahitto* situates the advent of Sufism in 11th-century Bengal, emphasizing its role in conversions, yet lacks specific details on Dhaka's Sufis.⁴ Meanwhile, Sayeed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi's *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas* focuses on the Chishtiyya Tariqa,⁵ mainly the work of Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri, but provides limited coverage of Dhaka's Sufi history.⁶ Muhammad Zakaria's PhD thesis contributes to understanding Pir-Mashaikh's role in spreading Islam and maintaining social order, but it too offers only a partial account of Dhaka.⁷

In contrast, Muhammad Hemayet Uddin's *Islami Aqeedah O Vrant Matabad* critiques pseudo-Sufi groups in Bangladesh, such as Dewanbaghi, Sureshwari, Enayetpuri, Atroshi, Chandrapuri, Rajarbaghi, and several Baul communities, identifying their deviations from Actual Islam.⁸ His work underscores the need for discernment between genuine Sufi teachings and misguided practices to avoid misleading the general populace.

This review highlights the foundational yet fragmented nature of existing scholarship on Sufism in Dhaka, pointing to the need for a more detailed exploration of the genuine Sufi contributions

³ A.N.M. Bazlur Rashid, *Amader Sufi Sadhak: The Saints of Ours* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1984), 5.

⁴ Ahmed Sharif, *Banglar Sufi Shahitto* (Dhaka: Time Publications, 2011), 7.

⁵ Vahit Göktaş, and Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "An Evaluation of Mu'in al-Din Chishti's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent: The Case of Chishti Tariqa", *Şırnak University Journal of Divinity Faculty* / 31 (June 2023): 47 - 76,

⁶ Sayeed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas: (History of the Savior of Islamic Spirit)*, trans. A.S.M. Omr Ali (Dhaka: Muhammad Brothers, 2015), 10-15.

⁷ Muhammad Zakaria, *Contribution of Peer-Mashayekh Towards the Spreading and Propagation of Islam and Maintaining Social Discipline in Bangladesh: A Discussion* (Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 2019), 1-7.

⁸ Muhammad Hemayet Uddin, *Islami Aqeedah O Vrant Matabad* (Islamic Creed and Misguided Beliefs) (Dhaka: Maktabatul Abrar, 2014), 461-524.

and the socio-religious implications of pseudo-Sufi practices in the region.

Results and Discussion

Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital, has long been one of the most important ancient cities in the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, various politicians and religious personalities have been interested in conquering this city since ancient times. Thousands of Islamic personalities, especially Sufis from Anatolia, Iran, Afghanistan, Arabia, Pakistan, and India, came to this city to spread Islam.

A review of the history of Dhaka shows that since the 7th century, people have been living in urban areas in the Dhaka region. The city area was ruled by the Hindu Gauda kingdom, Buddhist, and Shaiva Pala kingdoms before coming under the control of the Hindu Sena dynasty in the 10th century. By the end of the 13th century AD, the Muslims had conquered Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Famous Sufis made unique contributions in this field. They propagated the noble ideals of Islam among Hindus and Buddhists during this time. Then, many people started accepting Islam. The Mughal Emperor Jahangir declared Dhaka as the capital of Suba Bengal on July 16, 1610, AD. There is wide disagreement about the exact history of the naming of Dhaka. According to many historians, when Mughal Emperor Jahangir declared Dhaka as the capital of Suba Bengal, Subadar Islam Khan ordered the 'Dhak' to be played in the city as an expression of joy. The story of playing this 'Dhak' became a folk legend, hence the city's name, Dhaka. It should be noted here that Dhaka was known as Jahangirnagar in honor of Emperor Jahangir for some time during the Mughal Empire.⁹

Although Dhaka was the capital of Suba Bengal in 1610 AD, the capital of Suba Bengal has changed many times. In 1650 AD, Subedar Shah Shuja shifted the capital again to Rajmahal. After the fall of Shah Shuja, Subedar Mir Jumla shifted the capital to Dhaka

⁹AKM Golam Rabbani, and Roxana Hafiz, *400 Years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond: Urbanization and Urban Development* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2011), 7-15.

in 1660 AD. After being Dhaka's capital for some time, Subedar Murshid Quli Khan moved the capital to Murshidabad again in 1717 AD.¹⁰

Later, the Nayeb Nazims ruled Dhaka during Mughal rule. After the British occupied the Indian subcontinent in 1757, when Calcutta was chosen as the capital, the importance of Dhaka began to decline again. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, Dhaka was made the capital of Assam and Bengal. In the face of Congress resistance, the British royal family moved the capital back to Calcutta in 1911. After Bangladesh became independent in 1971, Dhaka was chosen as the new country's capital.

The Identity of The Major Sufis of The Dhaka Region of Bangladesh

The legacy of Sufism in the Dhaka region of Bangladesh is deeply interwoven with the area's spiritual, cultural, and historical fabric. The contributions of various Sufi figures in Dhaka, dating back to the official 12th century, played a pivotal role in the spread of Islam and the establishment of a unique religious and cultural identity that persists today. These figures not only propagated the tenets of Islam but also influenced the social and political landscapes of Bengal, highlighting the intersection of spirituality with regional developments.

One of the earliest and most influential figures was Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah (d. 1300), who established a khanqah and madrasah in Sonargaon, which became a focal point for Islamic scholarship, particularly in Hadith and Sufism teaching. His establishment of these institutions in the 13th century marked a critical point in the institutionalization of Islamic learning in Bengal. The development of such learning centers enhanced the spread of Islamic knowledge and contributed to the intellectual

¹⁰ Syed Muhammed Taifoor, *Glimpses of Old Dhaka: A Short Historical Narration of East Bengal and Assam with Special Treatment of Dhaka* (Dhaka: S. M. Pervez, 1956), 27-32.

and spiritual development of the local Muslim population.¹¹ His influence can be traced through his disciples, including Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri (d. 1380), whose contributions to Islamic reform and scholarship in Bengal further deepened the intellectual roots of Sufism in the region.¹²

Another crucial figure was Baba Adam Shahid (14th century), whose dedication to the spread of Islam in the Munshiganj-Bikrampur region is still remembered today. His legacy is manifested through the mosque and shrine, enduring symbols of his commitment to religious propagation.¹³ Baba Adam Shahid's origins in Arabia and his educational journey across Khorasan and Baghdad reflect the broader intellectual currents of the time. His association with the Nizamia Madrasah, a learning center in Baghdad, signifies the importance of formal education in his spiritual mission, influencing future generations of scholars in the region.

The figure of Shāh ‘Alī al-Baghdādī (d. 1480), who traveled from Baghdad with a group of companions, represents the broader trend of Sufi preachers who traversed vast distances to spread the message of Islam.¹⁴ His arrival in Dhaka and establishment of a mausoleum stand as a testament to the lasting impact of such journeys on Bengal's spiritual and cultural transformation.

In the modern period, Syed Mir Nisar Ali Titumir (d. 1831) emerged as a nationalist leader who combined Sufism with social and political activism. His resistance against British colonial rule and advocacy for the oppressed masses showcases the role of

¹¹ Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 93.

¹² Nadvi, *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas (History of the Savior of Islamic Spirit)*, 169.

¹³ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, “Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century.” (Master’s thesis, Ankara University, 2019. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global), 79-82.

¹⁴ Muhammad Abul Hashem Miah, and Nizamuddin Ahmed, *Archaeological Survey Report of Greater Faridpur District* (Dhaka: Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Govt. of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2000) 26-27.

Sufism not only in spiritual guidance but also in social reform.¹⁵ Similarly, figures such as Hafiz Ahmad Jaunpuri (d. 1899)¹⁶ and Shamsul Haque Faridpuri (d. 1969) continued to engage in social reform, emphasizing education and disseminating Islamic knowledge, thus shaping the religious and intellectual discourse in 19th and 20th-century Bengal.¹⁷

The scholarship of Mufti Syed Muhammad Ameel Ihsan Barkati (d. 1974) and the leadership of Shah Ahsanullah (d. 1926) further illustrate the intersection of Sufism with religious authority and social movements.¹⁸ Barkati's prolific writings and teaching, especially his role in shaping religious curricula, reflect the enduring influence of Sufism in educational institutions across the subcontinent. Meanwhile, Shah Ahsanullah's active participation in the Sepoy Revolution of 1857 and his work in Islamic reform demonstrate the political dimensions of Sufism in the Dhaka region, contributing to the broader movement for social justice and resistance against colonial oppression.¹⁹

The later figures, such as Abdul Hai Siddiqui (d. 1977), Son of Pir Muhammad Abu Bakr Siddiqui of India's famous Furfura Darbar Sharif, and Mohammad Azharul Islam Siddiquee, continued the legacy of Sufism in Dhaka, not only in spiritual guidance but also through their involvement in social activism and education.²⁰ Siddiqui's establishment of khanqahs and his leadership in the political movements of the time highlight the

¹⁵ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Preserving Inner Peace in Islam in the Context of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict in the Indian Subcontinent" (Ph.D diss., Ankara University, Ankara, 2019), 239, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁶ Muhammad Ismail, *Hagiology of Sufi Saints and the Spread of Islam in South Asia* (Delhi: Jnanada Prakashan, 2010), 172.

¹⁷ Muhammad Ismail, *Development of Sufism in Bengal* (Uttar Pradesh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1989), 282–283.

¹⁸ Chowdury, "Preserving Inner Peace in Islam in the Context of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict in the Indian Subcontinent," 154.

¹⁹ "Shah Ahsanullah," Banglapedia, accessed July 12, 2024. <https://bn.banglapedia.org>.

²⁰ "Abdul Hai Siddiqui," Banglapedia, accessed July 14, 2024. <https://bn.banglapedia.org>.

continued relevance of Sufi teachings in addressing the Muslim community's socio-political issues in Bengal.²¹

Moreover, the history of Sufism in Dhaka profoundly and deeply influences Bangladesh's cultural, intellectual, and social development. The Sufis discussed above exemplify Sufism's multifaceted role as a religious movement and a catalyst for education, social reform, and political activism. Their legacy continues to shape Dhaka and Bangladesh's spiritual and socio-political landscape, illustrating the profound impact of Sufism on the region's identity.

The Period of Arrival in Dhaka, Bangladesh

The arrival of Sufis', Pirs, and Mashaikhs in Dhaka, Bangladesh, marks a significant period in the historical spread of Islam in the region, especially before the establishment of formal Muslim rule. The role of Sufis in propagating Islam cannot be overstated, as they were not only spiritual leaders but also instrumental in bridging cultural and religious divides, fostering social cohesion, and spreading the teachings of Islam throughout Bengal. This spiritual movement was characterized by the active involvement of Sufis, whose piety, wisdom, and miracles attracted local populations and gradually transformed the region's religious landscape.

One of the earliest and most notable figures in the propagation of Islam in Dhaka was Shah Syed Sultan Mahmud Balkhi Mahiswar. Arriving in Bengal in 1047 AD (439 Hijri), his journey from Sandwip to Harirampur and beyond symbolizes the broad reach of Sufism across the region.²² His military victories over local rulers, particularly the Hindu king Balaram, are intertwined with his religious mission, reflecting the complex interplay between spirituality and political power during the

²¹ Chowdury, ““Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century,” 179-180.

²² Mohammad Bahauddin, “Bangladesh of Sufi Saints,” *Daily Samakal*, July 5, 2024.

time.²³ Mahiswar's ability to convert local elites, such as Balaram's minister, to Islam through his moral authority and miraculous feats underscores the Sufi approach to Islamic propagation, which often involved personal charisma, respect for local traditions, and the establishment of solid spiritual networks.²⁴

Similarly, Baba Adam Shahid's arrival in Dhaka in 1178, accompanied by a small group of Arab companions, exemplifies the preacher zeal of early Sufi saints in the region. Baba Adam Shahid's martyrdom at the hands of Hindu King Ballal Sen, while tragic, further solidified his legacy as a martyr for Islam in the region, emphasizing the enduring theme of sacrifice that often accompanied the efforts of Sufis. His story, as recorded by historian Mujibur Rahman Makan, not only highlights the personal dedication of early Islamic preachers but also reflects the more significant dynamics of religious conflict and cultural exchange that shaped the historical narrative of Dhaka.²⁵

The contributions of Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri, who arrived in Dhaka in the 13th century, further enriched the spiritual and intellectual fabric of the region. As a disciple of Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah, he was part of a broader tradition of Sufi scholarship that sought to establish Islamic institutions such as khanqahs and madrasahs, fostering religious education and community development. His role as a spiritual leader and establishing kinship ties through marriage to Abu Tawwamah's daughter further cemented his influence within the Sufi network in Bengal. His arrival in Sonargaon in Dhaka, the capital of medieval Bengal, aligns with the broader trend of Sufi scholars contributing to the intellectual and spiritual life of the region.²⁶

The arrival of Shah Niamatullah Butshikan in Dhaka during the 14th century further highlights the significant impact of Sufis

²³ Ghulam Saklayen, *Bangladeshher Sufi Sadhak* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh. 2003).

²⁴ Haq, *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, 99.

²⁵ Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)* (Chittagong: Baitush Sharaf Islamic Research Institute, 1985), 85-89.

²⁶ Nadvi, *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas (History of the Savior of Islamic Spirit)*, 170.

in the region, even before the consolidation of Muslim rule under Ikhtiaruddin in the early 13th century. Niamatullah's establishment of khanqahs in Dhaka served as centers of religious learning and social welfare, reinforcing the Sufi tradition of integrating spiritual practices with the community's needs. His work in Dhaka underscores the persistence and resilience of Sufis who spread Islam peacefully, fostering religious pluralism and cultural exchange in a predominantly Hindu region.²⁷

Therefore, the period of arrival of Sufis, Pirs, and Mashaikhs in Dhaka signifies a pivotal chapter in the history of Islamic expansion in Bengal. These early Sufi saints played an instrumental role in shaping the region's religious, cultural, and social dynamics. Their contributions were not limited to the spread of Islam; they also laid the foundations for developing institutions that nurtured religious learning and social welfare. Through their acts of piety, self-sacrifice, and community service, these Sufi figures left a legacy that resonates in Dhaka and Bangladesh's spiritual and cultural identity today. The interplay of religious devotion and political engagement in their missions highlights the multifaceted nature of Sufism as a force for both spiritual transformation and social change.

Educational Background: A Journey of Continuous Learning and Personal Growth

Sufis who came to Dhaka from abroad were all highly educated. They learned about various aspects of Islam, including Sufism, from great scholars and dedicated themselves to spreading Islam by building religious institutions in different parts of Dhaka. They freed people from foreign rule, exploitation, and oppression, established a harmonious and balanced social system based on the noble ideals of Islam, and propagated Islam through various Islamic educational institutions.²⁸ Mawlana Sharf al-Din Abu

²⁷ Zakaria, *Contribution of peer-mashayekh Towards the Spreading and Propagation of Islam and Maintaining Social Discipline in Bangladesh: A Discussion*, 53-54.

²⁸ Nadvi, *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas (History of the Savior of Islamic Spirit)*, 171.

Tawwamah established a Madrasah and a khanqah at Sonargaon, and Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri studied under him there and received training in spiritual mysteries. He was keenly interested in learning and was well versed in Tafsir or interpreting the Qur'an, Hadith, Sufism, Fiqh, Theology, Logic, Philosophy, and Arithmetic. He was also initiated into Sufi doctrine and spent most of his time in meditation and spiritual pursuits.

Shamsul Haque Faridpuri was actively involved in the anti-British movement and pursued higher education at Darul Uloom Deoband, India. Faridpuri studied hadith under esteemed scholars such as Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Hussain Ahmad Madani, and Ejaz Ali.²⁹

Azharul Islam Siddiquee, known for his exceptional talent and sharp memory, excelled in Islamic scholarship and teaching.³⁰ He served as Chairman of the Economics Department at Manikganj Debendra College for 16 years. He was a senior examiner for the University of Dhaka, combining academic excellence with a passion for education.

Reasons for Arrival in Bangladesh

Reunion with the Lord is the goal of Sufi pursuit, for which a Sufi must travel along The Journey (Seyr-u Suluk) path. As a part of that, famous Sufis came to Bangladesh, especially Dhaka, and tried to get close to Allah by spreading Islam. As the number of Hindus and Buddhists in Bangladesh was enormous at that time, the Sufis came to Bangladesh through India and started preaching the mystical initiation of Sufism. Many Hindus and Buddhists embraced Islam after being impressed by the Sufis' extraordinary behavior and sincerity.

Baba Adam Shahid, a revered Sufi saint, resided in Mecca. In a nearby village called Kan-chang, situated near Rampal in present-day Bangladesh, a Muslim ruler sought Baba Adam Shahid's intervention to address the oppression inflicted upon him by the

²⁹ Ismail, *Development of Sufism in Bengal*, 282-283.

³⁰ Chowdury, "Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century," 180.

Hindu king, Balal Sen. The Muslim ruler had performed a cow sacrifice in celebration of his son's birth. This act drew the ire of King Balal Sen, leading to his persecution. Driven out of his homeland, the Muslim ruler sought refuge in Mecca, where he recounted his plight to Baba Adam Shahid. Moved by the ruler's tale, Baba Adam Shahid set out to aid him, accompanied by a sizable group of followers.³¹

In 1178, during the reign of Shashan, Mir Kadim, a prominent figure from Munshiganj, arrived in the region. At the time, Bikrampur was under the control of King Ballal Sen of Munshiganj. Faced with the arrival of Baba Adam Shahid and his followers, King Ballal Sen dispatched his army to quell the perceived threat. However, the army's efforts proved futile, prompting King Ballal Sen to take to the battlefield personally. In a desperate act, King Ballal Sen and his family embraced the Muslim faith, seeking to appease Baba Adam Shahid and his followers. However, their desperate attempt proved unsuccessful, and they were tragically killed.³² Baba Adam Shahid, a beacon of peace and understanding, also met his demise during this tumultuous period.

Shāh ‘Alī al-Baghdādī was born on the banks of the Euphrates. Shāh ‘Alī traced his lineage through Hazrat Ali and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). His family's migration to Baghdad originated with Shah Syed Sultan Ali, younger brother of Imam Ali Naqi. Drawn to the Delhi Sultanate, Shāh ‘Alī's father, Syed Fakhruddin Raji, held the title of “king of Baghdad” before religious conflicts spurred their departure. Seeking refuge from political turmoil, Shāh ‘Alī ultimately found sanctuary in Bangladesh.³³ In 1489, he traveled from Delhi to Geddai in Faridpur, embarking on his mission to share his faith. Dhaka became his permanent home, where he settled in Mirpur.

Shah Ahsanullah, the famous Sufi of Dhaka, was involved in the Sepoy Revolution (1857) and, at that time, hid in Narsingdi to

³¹ Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 86.

³² Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 87.

³³ Haq, *A History of Sufiism in Bengal*, 96.

protect himself from government persecution. Later, he got close to Shah Karamat Ali Jaunpuri (d. 1873) and joined Syed Ahmad Barelvi's (d. 1831) Barelvi Jehadi movement, which the Shah Waliullah Dehlawi inspired in the Indian Subcontinent.³⁴ Ahsanullah had a lot of debates with the Farajis about this issue; the Farajis considered the Indian subcontinent as 'Darul Harab' and did not offer Eid and Friday prayers.³⁵

Personal Involvement in Sufi Tariqa

The Sufis of Bangladesh, especially Dhaka, propagated Islam mainly as followers of the Qaderia, Suhrawardia, Naqshbandia, Mujaddidiya, and Chishtia sects.³⁶ Sufis used to teach various spiritual functions to the ordinary people of Dhaka by establishing various khankas and dargahs. Seeking spiritual enlightenment, Baba Adam Shahid traveled to Baghdad to seek guidance from the esteemed Sufi master Abdul Qadir Jilani. Under Jilani's tutelage, he delved into Tasawwuf, the Islamic mystical tradition. His dedication to spiritual growth led him to attain the highest levels of Sufi realization.

Mawlana Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah's expertise extended far beyond Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence. He was a polymath, adept in botany, mathematics, geography, and chemistry.³⁷ This diverse erudition fueled his ability to connect with people from various backgrounds and disciplines. Furthermore, his profound understanding of Tasawwuf and the Hadith scriptures earned him

³⁴ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi and the Conclusive Argument from God," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 4, no. 3 (2024).

³⁵ Banglapedia, "Shah Ahsanullah."

³⁶ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Prof. Dr. Hasan Kâmil Yılmaz, An Outline of Sufism and Sufi Orders (Ana Hatlarıyla Tasavvuf Ve Tarîkatlar) (Istanbul: Ensar Publication, 2019), 367 P," *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 11 (2):1-10.

³⁷ Chowdury, "Preserving Inner Peace in Islam in the Context of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict in the Indian Subcontinent," 136.

immense respect as a spiritual guide, and he is also a follower of Chishtia and Mujaddidiya tariqa.³⁸

Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri returned to his native Bihar in India in 1292. He left for Delhi in 691 Hijri. Later, he received Sufi bayat and Khilafat from Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi. Subedar of Bihar Majedul Mulak built a khanqah for him and paid all the hospitality expenses for the guests who came to the khanqah. It was during this period that he became famous in the Sufi world.³⁹ His maktubat (letters) have been found in various libraries and Madrasahs. These letters contain multiple pieces of advice regarding tasawwuf. The Sultans of Delhi used to take regular advice from him at that time.

Shāh ‘Alī al-Baghdādī’s journey also marked a spiritual transition. Initially aligned with the Qadariya order, he embraced the Chishtia Tariqa upon arrival in Dhaka, receiving initiation from Pir Shah Muhammad Bahar.⁴⁰

Haji Shariatullah, a distinguished scholar, spent two decades teaching in Mecca, earning respect for his profound knowledge. During his travels, he received Sufi bayat from Maulana Taher Chombal and studied at Jamiai al-Azhar, excelling in Hadith, Tafsir, Fiqh, and Philosophy.⁴¹ He also visited key Islamic sites, including Baghdad and Baitul Mukaddas, deepening his spiritual and academic journey.⁴²

Muhammad Ameel Ihsan (d. 1974) emphasized Sufism throughout his life. In his early years, he received ijazat of various tariqahs from his uncle, Muhammad Abdud Dayan Barakati, and his father-in-law, Muhammad Sufi Barakat Ali. Taking the bi’at of

³⁸ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, and Vahit Göktas, “A Critical Analysis of Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi’s Doctrines on Sufism,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 1 (2021).

³⁹ Nadvi, *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas (History of the Savior of Islamic Spirit)*, 175.

⁴⁰ Haq, *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, 97.

⁴¹ Khan, *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal*, 80-82.

⁴² Chowdury, “Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century,” 109-110.

Sufism from Syed Abdus Salam Ahmad in Dhaka, he dedicated himself to promoting Naqshbandi Barkatiya Tariqa.

Mohammad Azharul Islam Siddiquee became a devoted disciple of Abdul Gani, revered as the saint of Asham. He immersed himself in zikr, a spiritual practice, for several years. For nine years, he dedicated himself to spiritual pursuits in the hilly regions of Asham and Chittagong. His unwavering dedication led to his receiving the Qadiriyya tariqa certificate from his instructor, Chormonai Peer Ishaque. In 1963, he attained the Khilafat of Chistia Siberia Tarika and spent 13 years in the esteemed company of Mohammad Ishaque, deepening his spiritual knowledge and understanding.⁴³ Azharul Islam conferred full Khilafat of Chishti Siberia and Qadiriyya tariqas to his qualified elder son, Manjurul Islam, in 1999.

Enriching Dhaka's Islamic Tapestry: A Chronicle of Notable Contributions to Islamic Heritage

Bikrampur, a pivotal site in ancient Bangladesh's history, once served as the capital of Bengal. A revered Sufi saint, Baba Adam Shahid, embarked on a journey to Bangladesh to spread the teachings of Islam. Recognized as a spiritual guide, Baba Adam Shahid dedicated his life to the propagation of Islam in Bengal. Baba Adam Shahid established Khankay Qadiriyya in Mahasthangarh, beginning his Islamic preaching efforts. Alongside his twelve followers, he addressed the region's water scarcity by initiating the digging of ponds. His endeavors also extended to education and healthcare, ensuring the well-being of the local populace.

To establish justice in Mahasthangarh, Baba Adam Shahid formed a council of twelve justices tasked with upholding security and ensuring impartial judgment. Simultaneously, under his leadership, his followers spread the teachings of Islam across various regions. Their preaching efforts extended to diverse provinces in Bangladesh and India, including Bikrampur,

⁴³ Chowdury, "Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century," 181.

Mahasthangarh, Chittagong, Nangalkot, Bengal, Devkot, Indraprastha, Prayag, Patuliputra, Nagpur, and the Pu-Vardhan area. Historical records indicate that twelve justices served during Baba Adam Shahid's time, five hailing from Munshiganj.⁴⁴ These distinguished figures include Sheikh Makhdum Al Muayasis, whose shrine's Dargah house stands in Munshiganj, Az Jairah bin Saeed, who resided in Dhipur, Munshiganj, the shrine of Abraham ibn Mudakkik, Imamuddin Baghdadi Mazar is in Munshiganj, and Mashabrian Alsabari is also from Munshiganj. Additionally, some esteemed disciples of Baba Adam Shahid, including Kewar and Ram Gopalpur, carried out preacher work in Baburampur (Munshiganj) in 1152.

As seen in the ancient history of Dhaka, when Shah Niamatullah Butshikan, one of the famous Sufis of Dhaka city, preached Islam in Dhaka region, the present Khilgaon of Dhaka city was the main Hindu area. While he was in Dhaka, he faced obstacles while trying to spread Islam, especially the local influential Hindus who prevented and harassed him in various ways. He engaged in war with them and won and subdued them all, which a large section of Hindus converted to Islam. He used to highlight the beauty of Islam to Hindus and Buddhists in different parts of Dhaka and tried to eradicate the practice of idols among Hindus; hence, he was given the title of "Butshikan," or Destroyer of idols.

Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah's dedication to spreading Islam was exemplary.⁴⁵ He traveled extensively, from his birthplace in Bokhara to Khorasan, Delhi, and eventually Sonargaon. He engaged in house-to-house preaching, patiently sharing his knowledge and fostering understanding. This direct approach resonated deeply with the people of Bengal, contributing significantly to the spread of Islam in the region.

Hafiz Ahmad and Muhammad Ameel Ihsan Barkati significantly contributed to Dhaka's Islamic heritage. Hafiz

⁴⁴ Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 88.

⁴⁵ Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 116.

Ahmad, from a family of scholars, established a Madrasah and Eidgah in Bhola, earning government recognition.

Muhammad Ameel Ihsan Barkati, a prominent Sufi and religious leader, served as Kazi of Central Calcutta in 1937 and held roles as Imam and teacher at Nakhoda Mosque and Calcutta Aliya Madrasah. From 1956 to 1969, he was the Principal of Dhaka Aliya Madrasah and established the Naqshbandi Mosque in Dhaka in 1947, contributing significantly to the region's Islamic education and spiritual growth.⁴⁶

Social and Religious Reforms through Religious Movements

When the Sufis started spreading Islam in Bengal, the anti-Muslim powers like Jaths, Marathas, Sikhs, etc. started a massive revolt against the Muslims. The non-Muslim forces tortured and even killed many Sufis during this time. The Sufis continued to preach Islam despite enormous opposition from non-Muslims. The Sufis of Dhaka have made many significant contributions to guide and animate the lifestyle of the Muslims of Bengal in the light of their history and tradition, freed from the shackles of subjugation.

During the expansion of Islam, a conflict arose between Sultan Sheikh Makhdum al-Muhassis and the officials of King Ballal Sen. King Ballal Sen imprisoned him in Tongibari Dhirpur. Upon hearing this news, Adam Shahid traveled from Mahasthangarh to Bikrampur. During this period, Madhuri Sen, the sole nephew of King Vallail Sen, encountered Sheikh Makhdum while he was imprisoned and embraced Islam. Upon learning of this conversion, the king declared war against the Muslims. In 1174, the Battle of Kalichang Maidan in Bikrampur marked the commencement of hostilities between the Hindu and Muslim forces.⁴⁷ The Hindu king, alongside his father, Adam Shahid, spearheaded the liberation war. Baba Adam Shahid engaged in numerous land and naval battles against Ballal Sen throughout the conflict. It is

⁴⁶ S. M. Sakhawat Hussain, "Life and Work of Hadith Scholar Mufti Ameel Ihsan," *Daily Inqilab*, July 12, 2024.

⁴⁷ N. Hanif, "Shahid, Baba Adam (14th Century)". *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: South Asia* (New Delhi, Sarup & Sons. 2000), 356.

believed that a significant number of soldiers and Mujahid perished during a ten-day, fierce battle that took place in Kanyakang Maidan, Munshiganj in Dhaka region, from September 10 to September 20, 1178. Ballal Sen's army comprised 20,000 troops in this battle, while Adam and his volunteer forces numbered 7,000. Fearing defeat, Ballal Sen proposed a ceasefire on September 20, 1178.⁴⁸

Adam Shahid agreed to the ceasefire proposal. However, Ballal Sen treacherously violated the agreement that very night. Following the Isha (Night) Prayer at the Dargah house in Bikrampur, Ballal Sen entered Adam Shahid's residence in Muraqabah position and murdered him with his sword. After Baba Adam Shahid's demise, he was laid to rest beside the streets of Rakibi Bazar Digharpura. In 1449, the esteemed ruler of Bikrampur, Kafur Shah, erected a magnificent mosque in honor of Baba Adam Shahid Khan.⁴⁹

James Wise narrates an alternative account of Baba Adam Shahid's arrival in Bangladesh. Raja Ballal Sen, the Hindu king of Bikrampur, was known for his staunch religious intolerance. He converted mosques into temples, prohibited cow slaughter, and the proclamation of Adhan in Bikrampur. A Muslim from the village of Abdullahpur, near Rampal, sacrificed cows to aqiqah for the birth of his son. Upon learning of this incident, Ballal Sen flew into a rage and dispatched spies to identify the culprit. Fearing torture, the Muslims fled Bikrampur and sought refuge in Mecca. There, he encountered a Sufi named Adam Shahid.⁵⁰

Desperate for relief from the tyranny of the pagan Vallail, this Muslim sought the aid of Adam Shahid, recounting the harrowing tales of Muslim persecution. Moved by the plight of his fellow believers, Adam Shahid, the esteemed Sufi saint of Bikrampur, resolved to intervene. With unwavering determination, he rallied an army of seven thousand soldiers and embarked on an arduous

⁴⁸ Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 87.

⁴⁹ Hanif, "Shahid, Baba Adam (14th Century)". *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: South Asia*, 356.

⁵⁰ Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 89.

journey from Mecca to Bikrampur. Their path was fraught with challenges and perils.

Upon arriving at Dargabari, a settlement bordering the Rampal River, Baba Adam Shahid and his forces established a fortified base. Their first act was the construction of a mosque, aptly named Adam's Mosque, to honor his father. This structure was the launching point for Baba Adam Shahid's public dissemination of Islam. His efforts included charitable acts like feeding the impoverished and commencing communal prayers marked by the evocative call to prayer, the Adhan. These resounding pronouncements, however, reached the ears of Ballal Sen, igniting his ire.

Ballal Sen, enraged by Baba Adam Shahid's defiance, dispatched an emissary to deliver an ultimatum. The envoy conveyed Vallail Sen's demand to either abandon Vikrampur or cease disrupting the established religious practices. Undeterred by the mighty Ballal Sen's threat, Baba Adam Shahid sent a bold reply, reaffirming his unwavering faith and the resolve of his followers. He declared, "There is no god but Allah and Hz. Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of Allah. Regardless of the king's demands or the allure of pagan rituals, I shall not deviate from the true path, even by a hair's breadth." Enraged by Baba Adam Shahid's defiance, Ballal Sen mobilized his army, setting the stage for a clash between faith and power.

Informed of the formidable strength of the Muslim army by his eastern spies, King Vallal devised a cunning plan to protect himself from capture in the event of defeat. He carried a dove with him, instructing his queen and other royal family members to assume his demise and perform self-immolation in the fiery furnace if they saw the dove return to the palace alone. This drastic measure was intended to preserve the honor of their caste in the face of defeat.

In anticipation of the worst-case scenario, a fiery furnace was already lit within the palace. A fierce battle ensued in the Kainting area, just two kilometers from the capital city of Rampal. Ballal Sen and his army, aided by cunning tactics, emerged victorious. Ballal

Sen, covered in the grime of battle, retreated to a nearby pond to wash himself. Meanwhile, the pigeon, unaware of Ballal Sen's survival, took flight, returning to the palace.

Upon seeing the lone pigeon, the queen, and other royal family members, they have interpreted it as a sign of Ballal Sen's demise. Fearful for their lives, they abandoned the burning furnace, believing their duty to preserve their caste had been fulfilled. Meanwhile, Ballal Sen, having evaded capture and cleansed himself of the battle's grime, hurried towards the capital city of Rampal. However, upon his arrival, he was met with utter despair. The fiery furnace had extinguished, and the palace was eerily silent, devoid of life. Overcome by grief and sadness, Ballal Sen perished in the same flames that were meant to protect his family's honor. Due to this tragic turn of events, the Muslims emerged triumphant, claiming dominion over Bikrampur. Adam Shahid's army emerged victorious, establishing permanent Muslim rule in Bikrampur.⁵¹ Adam Shahid was laid to rest on the eastern side of the mosque. From that day forward, the mosque has been known as Adam Shahid's Mosque, and the tomb has been revered as Baba Adam Shahid's Dargah.

Syed Mir Nisar Ali Titumir's movement focused on social and religious reform, seeking to eradicate the practices of shirk and bid'ah within the Muslim community. His goal was to inspire Muslims to adhere fully to Islamic principles daily. Subsequently, he embarked on an armed revolution against British rule in the Indian subcontinent. Though his efforts ultimately failed to liberate the country, his unwavering courage and sacrifice served as a beacon of inspiration for future generations of freedom fighters. Titumir's legacy lives on in the steadfast spirit of his followers, who ultimately liberated Bengal from British rule.⁵²

⁵¹ Hanif, "Shahid, Baba Adam (14th Century)". *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: South Asia*, 356.

⁵² Mallarika Sinha Roy, "The Forgotten History of Our Times: Revisiting Utpal Dutt's Titu Mir in Contemporary India," *Theatre Research International* 48, no. 3 (2023), 264-283.

Establishment of Social Welfare, Including Religious Institutions

The Sufis of Dhaka adopted multifaceted activities and methods to propagate Islam. They played an essential role in spreading Islam by establishing various religious educational institutions like madrasas, khankas, and dargahs. They used to work among ordinary people in Islamic seminars, lectures, and waz-mahfils.

Baba Adam Shahid, a devoted Islamic preacher, traveled beyond Saudi Arabia to spread Islam, eventually arriving in Bangladesh's Dhaka region. He founded religious institutions and inspired social organizations. The Baba Adam Shahid Mosque, built in 1483 AD by Malik Kafur during Sultan Jalal al-Din Fath Shah's reign, stands in the Munshiganj district near Baba Adam's tomb. This historic mosque, linked to his legacy and a holy war against a Hindu Raja, is a protected monument under Bangladesh's Department of Archaeology, showcasing remarkable preservation.⁵³

1965, under Mohammad Ishaque's guidance, Azharul Islam Siddiquee established Talim e Zikr Manikganj Darbar Sharif to promote Eleme Shariat and Eleme Marfat. Traveling tirelessly, he invited people to Islam. 1977, he founded Jamiah Arabia Siddique Darul Ulum Madrasha, offering Arabic, Urdu, Science, and English education. The Darbar Sharif emphasizes love for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and adherence to his Sunnah. Siddiquee organized grand biannual Islamic gatherings, attracting thousands to learn Elme Shariat and spiritual wisdom.

Enhancing Sufi Activity Throughout Bangladesh

While spreading Islam in Dhaka, Sufis adopted various methods, one of which is writing books, publishing magazines, and multiple publications on Islamic Dawah. They also used to deliver lectures at waz and mahfils, invite non-Muslims to various Islamic events at khanqahs and dargahs, and give advice on

⁵³ Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)*, 88.

essential issues of Islam.⁵⁴ Among the Sufis of Dhaka who spread Islam by writing more Sufi books was Sufi Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri. Maneri has written various books related to Sufism, of them Rahatul Kulub, Ajwabah, Fawaide Rukni, Irshadut-Talibeen, Irshadus Salikin, Risalaye Makkiyya, Midanul Ma'ani, Lataiful Maani, Isharat Mukhkhul Maani.⁵⁵ Besides, he has some other important books, such as Khanepur Niyamat, Tuhfaye Ghaibi, Risalaye Dar Talbe Taleban, Malfuzat, Zade Safar, Aqaide Sharfi, Fawaide Murideen, Bahrul Maani, Safarul Muzaffar, Kanjul Maani, Ganje La Youfini, Munisul Murideen and Sharah Adabul Murideen is particularly noteworthy.⁵⁶

Hafiz Ahmad Jaunpuri's (d. 1899) legacy lives on through his established religious institutions and the memories enshrined within his final resting place—the south side of Chawkbazar Shahi Mosque in Old Dhaka.

Shah Ahsanullah (d. 1926), a renowned Sufi of Dhaka, was born in Arai Hazari and excelled in Arabic, Persian, Tafsir, Hadith, and Tasawwuf. After performing Hajj, he visited the graves of prominent Sufis across Baghdad, Iraq, and Iran, receiving spiritual teachings from Shah Pir Mohammad. From 1838 to 1852, he served at Shah 'Alī al-Baghdādī's dargah in Mirpur, Dhaka, where he established religious institutions. Shah Ahsanullah was a disciple of Kaleem Shah Baghdadi and mastered the principles of the Qadariyya Tariqa.⁵⁷

Shamsul Haque Faridpuri received the caliphate of Sufism from Jafar Ahmad Usmani and Abdul Ghani. Faridpuri played a significant role in establishing numerous Madrasahs and Mosques like Lalbagh Jamia Qurania Arabia Qaumi Madrasah along with

⁵⁴ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, *Banglades'te İslâm ve Tasavvuf (Islam and Sufism in Bangladesh)* (Ankara: Ankara Kalem Neşriyat, 2023), 13-17.

⁵⁵ Sharafuddin Manerī, *The Hundred Letters*, trans. Jackson (Paul. Paulist Press, 1980), 1.

⁵⁶ Nadvi, *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas (History of the Savior of Islamic Spirit)*, 216.

⁵⁷ Banglapedia, "Shah Ahsanullah."

Gauhardanga Qaumi Madrasah, Faridabad Qaumi Madrasah and Bara Katara Qaumi Madrasah.⁵⁸

Syed Mir Nisar Ali Titumir was a prominent religious reformer of Bangladesh and a key figure in the anti-British movement. Married to Maymuna Khatun, the daughter of Hazrat Shah Sufi Muhammad Rahim Ullah Siddiqui, Titumir was introduced to Sufism through his father-in-law. His transformative journey began with his Hajj pilgrimage in 1822, where he met Hazrat Shah Maulana Muhammad Hussain and his pir, Syed Ahmad Barelvi, a renowned Sufi and reformer of the Indian subcontinent.⁵⁹ Barelvi is also a follower of prominent Sufi Shah Waliullah Dehlawi.⁶⁰ Under Barelvi's mentorship, Titumir embraced Islamic reformist ideals. Upon returning in 1827, after visiting Egypt, Persia, and Afghanistan, he dedicated himself to eradicating shirk and bid'ah in Muslim society, establishing himself as a pioneering Sufi leader and revolutionary.⁶¹

In modern times, Anayetullah Abbasi's dedication to education and spiritual guidance manifests through various channels by establishing madrasas and dargahs. He imparts knowledge and clarifies religious matters through Waz, Bahas-Munazarah, and Fatwa-Farayez. Additionally, the dargah regularly hosts zikir and milad-mahfil gatherings, fostering spiritual practice and community engagement.

⁵⁸ Ismail, *Development of Sufism in Bengal*, 282-283.

⁵⁹ Md Nazrul Islam, and Md Saidul Islam, "Political Islam in Pre-independent Bangladesh: Puritanism, Muslim Nationalism, and Ethno-Nationalism," *Islam and Democracy in South Asia: The Case of Bangladesh* (2020), 137-166.

⁶⁰ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, Harun Alkan, and Murat İsmailoğlu, "A Critical Analysis of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent," *Sufiyye* 15 (2023): 23-62.

⁶¹ Mohammad Abu Tayyab Khan, "A Narration on Muslim Bengal's Struggle for Freedom," *Journal of History and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2012): 81-102.

Sufi's Last Journey: Uncovering the Circumstances and Implications of their Demise

Sufis have contributed significantly to the development of Islam in Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka. Even after their death, thousands of people still remember them and even visit their graves every year to pray for them. Governments and various institutions have named various religious institutions like mosques, madrasas, place names, and foundations after them.

Adam Shahid was laid to rest in the village of Munshiganj District, within the Dargah of Bikrampur. His mausoleum lies within the courtyard of the Baba Adam Shahid Mosque. The mosque's construction commenced in Hijri 888, corresponding to 1483 AD, and spanned four years. In 1909, the Archaeological Survey of India undertook renovations and preservation measures to safeguard the mosque. Since 1948, the Department of Archaeology of Pakistan has been responsible for overseeing this revered site.⁶² In 1991, the Bangladeshi Department of Archaeology enhanced the mosque's protection by installing iron-bordered fences. Adam Shahid is deeply respected by many Bangladeshis, who often pilgrimages to Munshiganj to pay their respects.

Sonargaon city of Dhaka became Sharf al-Din Abu Tawwamah's final resting place, where his tomb still stands as a testament to his influence.⁶³ His book, *Manjile Maqamat*, remains a cherished text on Sufi philosophy, offering insights into the mystical traditions of ancient Bengal.

Shāh 'Alī al-Baghdādī's influence left a lasting mark on Dhaka. The Delhi Sultans, impressed by his devotion, commissioned a mosque in Mirpur to honor his memory. Built-in 1480, the structure stands as a testament to his impact. Even today, institutions like the Shāh 'Alī Police Station and Shāh 'Alī Mahila

⁶² Vahit Göktaş, and Saeyd Chowdury, "Districts of Bangladesh Named After Sufis Manifesting the Great Impact of Sufism on Bengal Civilization: A Qualitative Study," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 1 (2023).

⁶³ Abu Hanifa Md Noman, Md Aslam Mia, Hasanul Banna, Md Sohel Rana, ASA Ferdous Alam, Chan Sok Gee, Che Ruhana Isa, and A. C. Er. "City profile: Narayanganj, Bangladesh," *Cities* 59 (2016), 8-19.

College bear his name, preserving his legacy for future generations.

Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri died around 1380 at the age of 121. He is buried in the Samadhi Badi Dargah of Sharif Nalanda in Bihar. Later, a mosque was built next to his grave. Devout Muslims regularly visit his tomb. Every year on five Shawwals, many people gather at his Samadhi Badi Darga to observe five days of Urs.⁶⁴

The shrine of Shah Niamatullah Butshikan, one of the famous Sufis of Dhaka city, is in Dilkusha, Motijheel, the current commercial area of Dhaka. Dilkushabagh Mosque was built next to his grave during the Pathan period of Bengal. There are two more graves beside Niamatullah Butshikan's shrine. These two graves are his disciples and murids, one named Muradullah, the other named Sa'dullah. Many people of Dhaka regularly visit his grave and dargah.

Shah Ahsanullah spread Islam by building a mosque and Madrasah in Shah Sahib Lane of Dhaka in 1871. His mausoleum is in Shahsaheb Lane, Dhaka. Orphanages, shelters, Madrasahs, and college complexes have been built around his shrine. Every year, on the first Friday of the month of Falgun, many people visit the dargah established by him in Dhaka to observe his Urs (death anniversary).⁶⁵

The memory of Syed Mir Nisar Ali Titumir (d. 1831) served as a source of inspiration for the freedom fighters during Bangladesh's Liberation War. In 1971, when Bangladesh gained independence, Muhammad Jinnah College was renamed Titumir College to honor his legacy. A student dormitory at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) was named after Titumir. The British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) ranked him the 11th greatest Bengali in history. As a testament to his enduring legacy, a Bangladesh Navy ship was

⁶⁴ Atif Imran, "The Contribution of Shaikh Sharfuddin Ahmad Bin Yahya Maneri in Persian Literature: An Overview," *VFAST Transactions on Islamic Research* 9, no. 1 (2021), 17-23.

⁶⁵ Banglapedia, "Shah Ahsanullah."

named B.N.S. Titumir. Titumir's unwavering resistance against the zamindars and the British, epitomized by his iconic bamboo fortress, continues to be revered by the Bengali people. His struggle for freedom and justice has become indelible in Bangladesh's national identity.⁶⁶

A Critical Analysis of Sufism in Contemporary Bangladesh, Focusing on the Dhaka Region

Sufism has historically played an indispensable role in the establishment and spread of Islam in the Bengal region, particularly within the Dhaka area. A critical examination of the historical evolution of Sufi practices and their socio-religious impact highlights the enduring legacy of Islamic mysticism, which continues to shape the spiritual landscape of Bangladesh. Beginning with the spread of Islam by early Sufi mystics, figures such as Nesaruddin Ahmad and Syed Ishaq Muhammad have been integral to the establishment of religious institutions like dargahs, khanqahs, and madrasas, which have served as crucial centers for the propagation of Islam, spiritual guidance, and social transformation in the region.

Nesaruddin Ahmad's foundation of the Sarshina Dargah, for instance, marked a significant contribution to the socio-religious development of the region. Similarly, Syed Muhammad Ishaq, his son Syed Fazlul Karim, and his grandson Syed Rezaul Karim established Charmonai dergah and Islami Andolan Bangladesh, an Islamic political organisation in Bangladesh.

The Pir of Furfura, Sheikh Mishkat Siddique Al-Qurayshi, and Anayetullah Abbasi represent Sufi leadership's continued relevance, preserving Islamic traditions and addressing contemporary social issues.⁶⁷ Abbasi has maintained a prominent position in the socio-religious sphere, serving as a spiritual guide

⁶⁶ Chowdury, "Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century," 143.

⁶⁷ Jagannath Koley, "The Great Charismatic Leader: Pirzada Toha Siddique-A Great Soul and True Protector of Muslim Minority Community and Other Backward Classes of West Bengal," *International Journal in Management & Social Science* 4, no. 4 (2016): 375-385.

while leading educational initiatives through institutions such as the Markaju Tahrike Khatme Nabuyat Karamatiya Matlaul Uloom Madrasah.⁶⁸

Despite these efforts to maintain the authentic practice of Sufism, the Dhaka region has seen the emergence of several pseudo-Sufi groups that have significantly altered the religious discourse within the country. These groups, which emerged primarily in the 18th century and gained prominence in the 20th century, have contributed to the distortion of Sufi teachings. By leveraging the mystique of Sufism, such groups have manipulated religious followers for personal, economic, and political gain. The Dewanbaghi sect, for instance, represents an apparent deviation from traditional Sufi principles, with its leader, Mahbub Khuda (Dewanbaghi)⁶⁹, claiming divine status and falsely attributing himself as the husband of Hazrat Fatima (SA), the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and intervening in the Iraq and USA war. Such claims have sparked controversy and criticism as they counter Main Islam.⁷⁰

Further exacerbating this problem is the proliferation of pseudo-Sufi khanqahs and dargahs in the Dhaka region, where leaders promote practices that contradict the foundational principles of Islam. These include mixed-gender dhikr sessions, prostrations before the Pirs, and the elevation of the Pir to a position of spiritual infallibility. For instance, the Sureshwari Dargah and Rajarbaghi practices, which require followers to prostrate before the Pirs and engage in actions of shirk, represent a clear divergence from the tenets of Islam as outlined in the Quran and Sunnah. Such practices not only threaten the religious integrity of Islam in Bangladesh but also distort the authentic teachings of Sufism.

⁶⁸ Chowdury, "Preserving Inner Peace in Islam in the Context of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict in the Indian Subcontinent," 163.

⁶⁹ Uddin, *Islami Aqeedah O Vrant Matabad*, 461-524.

⁷⁰ Mohammad Alamgir Khan, "A Glimpse of Some Beliefs and Statements of Dewanbaghi", somewhereinblog.net (4 September 2024).

Moreover, groups like Enayetpuri have further contributed to this misrepresentation of Sufism by advocating for the belief that the fate of individuals rests solely in the hands of the Pir, thus centralizing power in a manner that undermines the principles of personal responsibility and accountability in Islam. In their quest for power and influence, these pseudo-Sufi factions have also fostered an environment where the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment is secondary to the material and political gains of the leaders.⁷¹

The rise of these pseudo-Sufi movements poses a critical challenge to the preservation of authentic Sufism in Bangladesh. The distinction between genuine Sufi orders, such as the Chishti, Naqshbandi, and Qadriya, and the distorted practices propagated by these pseudo-Sufi groups must be maintained. Authentic Sufi orders, rooted in spiritual discipline and community welfare, emphasize the inner dimensions of Islamic teachings, focusing on personal growth, ethical conduct, and service to humanity. In contrast, the practices of the pseudo-Sufi groups often serve as vehicles for social control and exploitation rather than genuine spiritual transformation.

Therefore, while Sufism has undoubtedly shaped the spiritual and social fabric of Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka, its modern-day influence is threatened by the proliferation of pseudo-Sufi groups. The need for a critical re-examination of these groups and reaffirming the principles of authentic Sufism is essential for safeguarding the integrity of both Sufi teachings and actual Islam in Bangladesh. This requires a concerted effort from religious scholars, community leaders, and policymakers to counter the spread of erroneous beliefs and practices and to promote a more accurate understanding of Sufism in contemporary Bangladeshi society.

Conclusion

This study has explored the profound legacy of Sufism in Dhaka, Bangladesh, emphasizing its pivotal role in shaping the

⁷¹ Uddin, *Islami Aqeedah O Vrant Matabad*, 461-524.

region's spiritual, social, and cultural landscape. Sufi mystics were instrumental in introducing Islam to the predominantly Hindu-Buddhist society of Dhaka, fostering interfaith harmony and promoting equality, compassion, and peace. Their austere lifestyle and spiritual guidance resonated with local communities, contributing to the widespread acceptance of Islam and the establishment of a new social order. The findings reveal that Sufi scholars' outreach extended beyond religious teachings, addressing familial, social, and political issues, strengthening their influence and leading to a significant cultural transformation in the region.

However, this study also highlights a critical challenge to preserving the legacy of Sufism—the rise of pseudo-Sufi groups since the 18th century. These groups, engaging in un-Islamic practices such as shirk and bid'ah, have not only undermined the core principles of Islam but also tarnished the reputation of authentic Sufism. The findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between genuine Sufi practices and the activities of pseudo-Sufi groups to maintain the integrity of Sufism as a spiritual and socio-cultural force.

This research contributes to the academic discourse on Sufism in Bangladesh, especially Dhaka, by addressing an underexplored aspect of its history—the dual impact of authentic and pseudo-Sufi groups. The originality of this study lies in its balanced approach, analyzing both the positive contributions of genuine Sufi scholars and the challenges posed by pseudo-Sufi practices.

The implications of this study are significant for religious leaders, policymakers, and scholars. Preserving the authentic legacy of Sufism requires collaborative efforts, including public awareness campaigns, community-level initiatives, and educational programs that highlight the teachings of genuine Sufi mystics. Future research should expand on this foundation by conducting ethnographic studies, exploring archival materials, and examining contemporary socio-religious dynamics to understand further the evolving role of Sufism in Dhaka and Bangladesh.

References

Banglapedia. "Shah Ahsanullah." Accessed July 12, 2024. <https://bn.banglapedia.org>.

Banglapedia. "Abdul Hai Siddiqui." Accessed July 14, 2024. <https://bn.banglapedia.org>.

Bahauddin, Mohammad. "Bangladesh of Sufi Saints." *Daily Samakal*, July 5, 2024.

Chowdury, Saeyd Rashed Hasan. "Bangladesh'te Tasavvufun ve Tarikatların Değerlendirilmesi Sosyal Gelişimleri ve Oynadıkları Rol: Yirmi Birinci Yüzyılda Bir Vak'a İncelemesi (Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century)." Master's thesis, Ankara University, 2019. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

—. *Bangladesh'te İslâm ve Tasavvuf (Islam and Sufism in Bangladesh)*. Ankara: Ankara Kalem Neşriyat, 2023.

—. "Hint alt kitasında sufî-selefî mücadelesi bağlamında İslâm'da iç barişin korunması (Preserving Inner Peace in Islam in the Context of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict in the Indian Subcontinent)." PhD dissertation, Ankara University, 2023.

—. "Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi and the Conclusive Argument from God." *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 4, no. 3 (2024).

—. "Prof. Dr. Hasan Kâmil Yılmaz. An Outline of Sufism and Sufi Orders (Ana Hatlarıyla Tasavvuf Ve Tarîkatlar)." 29th Edition. Istanbul: Ensar Publication, 2019. 367 P. ISBN: 978-975-6794-30-2". *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 11 (2):1-10.

Chowdury, Saeyd Rashed Hasan, and Harun Alkan, and Murat İsmailoğlu. "A Critical Analysis of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent." *Sufiyye* 15 (2023): 23–62.

Chowdury, Saeyd Rashed Hasan, and Vahit Göktaş. "A Critical Analysis of Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi's Doctrines on Sufism." *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 1 (2021).

Eaton, Richard. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*. California: University of California Press, 1996.

Göktaş, Vahit, and Saeyd Chowdury. "Districts of Bangladesh Named After Sufis Manifesting the Great Impact of Sufism on Bengal Civilization: A Qualitative Study." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 1 (2023).

— — —. "An Evaluation of Mu'in al-Din Chishti's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent: The Case of Chishti Tariqa." *Şırnak University Journal of Divinity Faculty* 31 (June 2023).

Haq, Muhammad Enamul. *A History of Sufism in Bengal*. Dhaka: Remon Publishers, 2011.

Hanif, N. "Shahid, Baba Adam (14th Century)." In *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: South Asia*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2000.

Hussain, S. M. Sakhawat. "Life and Work of Hadith Scholar Mufti Ameel Ihsan," *Daily Inqilab*, July 12, 2024.

Imran, Atif. "The Contribution of Shaikh Sharfuddin Ahmad Bin Yahya Maneri in Persian Literature: An Overview." *VFAST Transactions on Islamic Research* 9, no. 1 (2021).

Islam, Md Nazrul, and Md Saidul Islam. "Political Islam in Pre-independent Bangladesh: Puritanism, Muslim Nationalism, and Ethno-Nationalism." In *Islam and Democracy in South Asia: The Case of Bangladesh*, 2020.

Ismail, Muhammad. *Development of Sufism in Bengal*. Uttar Pradesh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1989.

— — —. *Hagiology of Sufi Saints and the Spread of Islam in South Asia*. Delhi: Jnanada Prakashan, 2010.

Karim, Abdul. *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (Down to AD 1538)*. Chittagong: Baitush Sharaf Islamic Research Institute, 1985.

Khan, Mohammad Abu Tayyab. "A Narration on Muslim Bengal's Struggle for Freedom." *Journal of History and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2012).

Khan, Mohammad Alamgir. "Ek Nojore Dewanbaghir Kichu Akida o Ukti Somuho (A Glimpse of Some Beliefs and

Statements of Dewanbaghi)." Accessed July 12, 2024. <https://m.somewhereinblog.net>.

Khan, Muhammad Mojum. *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal*. UK: Kube Publishing, 2013.

Koley, Jagannath. "The Great Charismatic Leader: Pirzada Toha Siddique-A Great Soul and True Protector of Muslim Minority Community and Other Backward Classes of West Bengal." *International Journal in Management & Social Science* 4, no. 4 (2016).

Manerī, Sharafuddin. *The Hundred Letters*. Translated by Paul Jackson. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

Manzar, Hossein Akbar. "Makhdum-Ul-Mulk Sheikh Sharfuddīn Ahmed Maneri of Biharsharif." *Makhdoom e Jahan*. May 18, 2016.

Miah, Muhammad Abul Hashem, and Nizamuddin Ahmed. *Archaeological Survey Report of Greater Faridpur District*. Dhaka: Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 2000.

Nadvi, Sayeed Abul Hasan Ali. *Shangrami Shadhakder Itihas (History of the Saviours of Islamic Spirit)*. Translated by A. S. M. Omr Ali. Dhaka: Muhammad Brothers, 2015.

Noman, Abu Hanifa Md, Md Aslam Mia, Hasanul Banna, Md Sohel Rana, ASA Ferdous Alam, Chan Sok Gee, Che Ruhana Isa, and A. C. Er. "City Profile: Narayanganj, Bangladesh." *Cities* 59 (2016).

Rabbani, A. K. M. Golam, and Roxana Hafiz. *400 Years of Capital Dhaka and Beyond: Urbanization and Urban Development*. Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2011.

Rashid, A. N. M. Bazlur. *Amader Sufi Sadhak: The Saints of Ours*. Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1984.

Roy, Mallarika Sinha. "The Forgotten History of Our Times: Revisiting Utpal Dutt's Titu Mir in Contemporary India." *Theatre Research International* 48, no. 3 (2023).

Saklayen, Ghulam. *Bangladeshher Sufi Sadhak*. Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2003.

Sharif, Ahmed. *Banglar Sufi Shahitto*. Dhaka: Time Publications, 2011.

Taifoor, Syed Muhammed. *Glimpses of Old Dhaka: A Short Historical Narration of East Bengal and Assam with Special Treatment of Dhaka*. Dhaka: S. M. Perwez, 1956.

Uddin, Muhammad Hemayet. *Islami Aqeedah O Vrant Matabad (Islamic Creed and Misguided Beliefs)*. Dhaka: Maktabatul Abrar, 2014.

Zakaria, Muhammad. *Contribution of Peer-Mashayekh Towards the Spreading and Propagation of Islam and Maintaining Social Discipline in Bangladesh: A Discussion*. Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 2019.