

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Islamic mysticism, also referred to as Sufism, is known as '*Tasawwuf*' in Arabic. It is the mystical aspect of Islam which encompasses the more veiled or esoteric elements of Islam. Sufism began as a spiritual movement in the early years of Islam. In Islam, it stands out as a vibrant and fascinating religious and cultural movement. Those who pursue Sufism are referred to as Sufis, and the name 'Sufism' encompasses the doctrines and rituals that seek to establish direct communication between God and man. The realisation of God is the ultimate goal of Sufism. It is, therefore, a process of spiritual progress activated by involvement, practice, and personal experience. Mere knowledge is insufficient to comprehend Sufism. It is devoid of all ill traits, including enmity, the urge for vengeance, and the temptation to use violence. Instead, it is characterised by affection, empathy, and altruism. There is a debate among scholars regarding the origin of Sufism. However, the Sufis consider Prophet Muhammad to be the epitome of their principles and doctrines, and they attribute the origins of Sufism to his actions and teachings. Gradually, Sufism has spread to vast geographical and cultural regions such as Iraq, Iran, Central Asia, Anatolia, and India, and later to other countries as well. The dissemination of Islam and Sufism across India might be viewed as a continuation of their expansion in north India. The beginning of Sufism in Assam was marked by the Bengal border. The rise of Turko-Afghan and Mughal rule in Bengal primarily influenced the emergence and diffusion of Sufism in Assam during the medieval period. Consequently, the eastern border of Bengal with Assam became an important conduit for the spread of Islam and Sufism. In various historical eras, numerous Sufis travelled from all over the world to Assam. Some of them returned home, while others permanently remained here, marrying local women. Being an integral part of Assam, the undivided Goalpara district has experienced the profound effects of Sufism over the centuries.

Statement of Problems

Sufism in Assam has been the subject of a few literary works. However, the lives and activities of the Sufi saints in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam have not been adequately explained by academia. There has been no systematic and cohesive attempt to provide a full account of the life-sketches of the Sufi saints of this region of Assam and

their contribution to the development of Islam and Sufism. Some of the writings about them that are currently available contain only meagre references, and they also mostly focus on the political aspect of these saints, giving little consideration to the socio-cultural significance of their deeds. Moreover, many of the Sufi saints themselves left no legacy in the form of writings. Their legacy is buried in myths and stories. That is why the proposed research aims to discuss all aspects of Sufism in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam, thereby addressing the research gap.

Objectives of the Study

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To trace the evolution of Sufism in Assam
- To examine the lives and teachings of the Sufi saints of undivided Goalpara district
- To discuss the influence and impact of Sufism on the society of the undivided Goalpara district

Study Area and Period

The study area is confined to the activities of the Sufis in the undivided Goalpara district, consisting of the present-day districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Chirang, and South Salmara-Mankachar. This region is also known as ‘western Assam’ or ‘Lower Assam’. The study period spans from the arrival of Sufism in this region until the independence of India in 1947 A.D.

Survey of Literature

In preparing the thesis, the works of different scholars on the origin and development of Sufism and Sufi practices have been consulted. Western Assam being adjacent to undivided Bengal, Sufi literature from both Assam and undivided Bengal has been dealt with in order to get a holistic picture of the topic. Some of the works that have been surveyed are: *Kashf al-Mahjub*, *Awarif-u 'l-Ma 'arif*, *Kitab-al-Ta 'arruf li-Madhhab-i-Ahl al-Tasawwuf (The Doctrine of the Sufis)*, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, *A History of Sufism in India, Vol. I*, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, *Sufi Movements in Eastern India*, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteenth to Nineteenth Century)*, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (down to A.D. 1538)*, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*,

Kochbiharer Itihash, Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh), Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis), Tarikh-e-Aasham or Fathiyah-i-Ibriya, Annals of the Delhi Badshahate, A History of Assam, Assam District Gazetteers Goalpara, Pavitra Asam, Assam-Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance, Luit Borak Aru Islam, The Muslims of Assam, Islamic Heritage in India's Northeast: Assam and Manipur, and the articles such as "The Muslim Population in Pre-British Assam: Their Social Status and Role in Cultural History," "Sufis and the Process of Islamization in the Pre-Colonial North East India," "Islam and Assam: A Socio-cultural Study in Historical Perspective," "The Sufis and the Political Authorities in Medieval Assam: A Historical Study," "Vernacularisation of Islam and Sufism in Medieval Assam: A Study of the Production of Sufi Literature in Local Languages," etc. These works deal with the various aspects of Sufism, as well as the history of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam.

Methodology

The study employs the historical method. The work is based on several primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Perso-Arabic literature, accounts of foreign travellers, Assamese chronicles, manuscripts, government gazetteers, British reports, census data, data collected by personal interviews with knowledgeable persons, field studies, etc. Archaeological records and oral histories associated with Sufi institutions have also been consulted. Moreover, secondary sources such as research books, unpublished theses, journals, proceedings, magazines, newspapers, souvenirs, internet sources, etc. have been consulted for the composition of the study.

Chapterisation

The research work has been organised into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Evolution of Sufism in Assam

Chapter 3: Life and Teachings of the Sufis of the Undivided Goalpara District

Chapter 4: Influence and Impact of Sufism on the Society of the Undivided Goalpara District

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter deals with the introduction to Sufism, the evolution of Sufism both in a global and Indian context, the important attributes of Sufism, the spread of different *silsilahs* in India, Sufism and other indigenous faiths in India, statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the research area and period, a survey of literature, methodology, and organisation of chapters.

Evolution of Sufism: Global Context

Sufism is believed to have originated from the ascetic tendencies of the Prophet Muhammad. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami has divided the evolution of the mystical movement within Islam into three phases: 1) the era of the Quietists; 2) the era of the mystic philosophers; and 3) the era of the *silsilahs*. In the first phase, which roughly spanned 661 A.D.–850 A.D., the Sufi movement was based on individual practice, with the early proponents adhering to the teachings and values outlined in the Quran and *Hadith*. The second phase started in the latter part of the ninth century A.D., with mystic cults focusing on mystic metaphysics. There emerged mystic philosophers who synthesised the teachings of various schools, incorporating other religious and mystical concepts to form a coherent mystic philosophy. During this phase, Sufism extended to a large geographical and cultural context, including Central Asia, Iran, Anatolia, and India. The emergence of the *silsilahs* in the 12th and 13th centuries was the final and most significant stage in the evolution of Islamic mysticism. During this period, the mystics concentrated on regenerating Muslim society and splitting the world into spiritual provinces (*wilayats*). The famous theologians who greatly influenced the development of Sufi notions at this stage were Jalaluddin Rumi, Fariduddin Attar, Shaykh Sadi, and Mohiuddin Ibn-al Arabi. It is crucial to consider that Sufi teachings have a sophisticated genesis. Although the development of the Sufi notion is often attributed to the influences of Greek, Neo-Platonic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Indian philosophies, almost all of the researchers agree that the fundamental essence of Sufism started from the Quran and the *Hadith*.

Attributes of Sufism

Sufi masterpieces like '*Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*', '*Kitab-al-Ta'arruf li-Madhab-i-Ahl al-Tasawwuf*', '*Awarif-u'l-Ma'rif*', '*Kashf al-Mahjub*', etc., detail the key features of Sufism. The Sufi doctrines include *tawbah* (repentance), *zuhd*

(piety), *tawakkul* (absolute reliance on God), *faqr* (poverty), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *sabr* (patience), *shukr* (thanksgiving), *rida* (contentment), *mohabbat* (love), *ihsan* (an intense religious state of mind), *ma'rifah* (divine understanding), etc. These qualities are acquired through *mujahida*, or self-mortification. Sufism holds that only a *murshid* (mentor) transmits the real knowledge of God to a *murid* (pupil). Therefore, the primary focus of the *murshid* is to mould the moral values of the disciple and aid him in achieving his objective, which is to get close to God and unite with Him. The highest stage in Sufism typically requires the pupil to stay with the mentor and follow his guidance for a considerable amount of time. The *murshid* chooses the most qualified student to succeed him as the *khalifa* (successor). Other prominent attributes of Sufism are practising *ba'ya* (pledge of allegiance), *chilla* (fourty days of seclusion), *muraqabah* (a meditative response), *kashf* (unveiling of divine knowledge in the hearts of lovers), *fana* (effacement), *baqa* (permanency), *tajalli* (epiphany), *hal* (mystic state), *maqam* (spiritual stage), *halqa* (a spiritual gathering), *karamat* (miracles), *khilafat nama* (deed of recognition), *shijra* (spiritual family tree of a Sufi order), *sama* (musical audition), etc.

The Genesis of Sufism in India

According to R. M. Eaton, Islam reached India in three waves. The Arab maritime traders brought Islam to India for the first time in the Malabar coast and Ceylon during the seventh century A.D. The second wave started in 712–13 A.D., when Arab political power extended over Sind and Punjab, and many people, including the Buddhists who opposed the tyranny of the Hindus and the dominance of the Brahmans, converted to Islam. With the second wave of Muslim conquests, a group of highly educated scholars, including Albiruni and a number of other historians, reached India. The third phase began in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the Mongols attacked India, and both *ulama* and other Muslim scholars migrated here. It should be noted that India has, to its credit, a large number of Sufis and *darveshes*. The *Shafi'i* Arabs were responsible for the process of Islamization along the Malabar coastline of south India, while the Sufis belonging to the *Hanafi* order carried out the same mission in the Gangetic plains and Bengal. Upon the arrival of Sufism in India, its theological horizons expanded significantly due to the presence of several theosophical, mystical, and spiritual traditions that had already developed within the Indian context. The later evolution of Sufism was affected more by the surroundings of India than by variations of Sufism that originated in other parts of the

world. The Sufi orders subsequently followed their own cycles of expansion, stagnation, and renaissance once they established themselves in various regions of India.

Various *Silsilahs* (Orders) in India

With the passage of time, the expansive framework of Sufism experienced the formation of orders known as *silsilahs*, which served as lineages connecting various Sufis. The *silsilahs* initially grew up around certain Sufis and their teachings. As they evolved, the Sufi *silsilahs* split into numerous branches. There are currently countless *silsilahs* operating in India. In accordance with their nature and characteristics, Sufi *silsilahs* are divided into two categories: “*ba-shara*,” which strictly follows the *shariah*, and “*be-shara*,” which does not. In his book ‘*Ain-i-Akbari*’, Abul Fazl listed the fourteen orders that were active in India throughout the 16th century A.D. These were *Habibi*, *Tayfuri*, *Karkhi*, *Saqatiy*, *Junaydi*, *Kazruni*, *Tusi*, *Firdausi*, *Suhrawardi*, *Zaydi*, *Iyazi*, *Adhami*, *Hubayri*, and *Chishti*. However, in the subsequent period, the *Chishti*, *Suhrawardi*, *Qadiri*, and *Naqshbandi silsilahs* became the most well-known ‘*ba-shara*’ *silsilahs* in India. In addition, there were several branches and distinct *silsilahs*, which originated largely from the above four main orders. These *silsilahs* played key roles in the cultural milieu of the time.

Sufism and Indigenous Faiths

Sufism has a rich history of encountering Hinduism and Buddhist mystical concepts in India. In the eleventh century A.D., the *Nath Yogis* of north India influenced Sufi organisations in Central Asia and Iran, while Hindu scholars imparted knowledge of Indian sciences in the esteemed educational institutions of Baghdad. So, the early pantheistic philosophical expositions found in the *Upanishads* had a significant influence on Sufi thinking. The *Nath Panthi Yogis* were responsible for introducing the Sufis to ‘*hath-yoga*’. The 13th century saw the concept of “*Wahdad-al-Wujud*” (Oneness of God) propounded by Ibn al-Arabi dominating subsequent Sufi ideologies. The Muslim interpretation of this idea mirrored the *Advaita* philosophy. Thus, Vedanta and Sufism in India eventually began to practise the same discipline in their spiritual endeavours. The *Chishti* Sufis engaged Hindu and Jaina *yogis* in open discussion on a range of subjects, including *yogic* practices. There are striking similarities between Sufism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, with the structure of *khanqahs* and the rituals associated with them inspired by

Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian monasteries. The Sufi tenet of ‘peace with all’ (*sulh-i-kul*) bears a notable resemblance to the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism and Yogi Hinduism.

Chapter 2: Evolution of Sufism in Assam

The second chapter discusses the advent of Muslims to Assam in both the pre- and post-Bakhtiyar Khilji eras and during the colonial period as well. The chapter also examines the emergence of Sufism in the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys of Assam, different stages of Sufism in Assam, the spread of different Sufi *silsilahs* in Assam, and the prominent Sufi shrines of Assam.

Advent of Muslims to Assam: Pre-Bakhtiyar Khilji Era

Due to a dearth of written history and a paucity of authentic materials, reconstructing Assam’s history with the Muslims before the 13th century A.D. is a challenging endeavour. However, Kamrupa, strategically located on a trade route, had connections to Muslim merchants from Arabia and Persia even before 1205 A.D. Arab geographer al-Masudi (d. 956 A.D.) documented the first mention of Muslims in the Kamrupa-Bengal region, particularly in the old “Samatata.” The Persian work ‘*Hudud al-Alam*’ provided a detailed account of a kingdom called “Qamrun” in Hindustan, characterised by rhinoceroses and gold mines. Ibn Batuta mentioned the travel time from ‘Sudkawan’ (Chittagong) to the highlands of “Kamaru” as one month. The ‘Southern Silk Route’ connecting Iran, Afghanistan, and India, passed through Kamrupa and Arab traders used Kamrupa as a trading route to reach China and Tibet. Subsequently, Persian traders replaced Arab traders, and Muslim missionaries and Sufi saints also made homes in Bengal and Kamrupa. Amit Dey claims that in 1053 A.D., a Sufi converted a Koch monarch to Islam. Thus, it is apparent that prior to the Muslim invasion of eastern India, Arab traders had already established a presence in Bengal and Assam, thereby introducing a cultural impact that led to the incorporation of Arabic vocabulary into the Assamese and Bengali languages.

Advent of Muslims to Assam during the post-Bakhtiyar Khilji Era

From the 13th to the 18th centuries, Assam experienced a series of destructive invasions, initially by the Turko-Afghan monarchs of Delhi and Bengal and later by the Mughal empire. These invasions laid the groundwork for Muslim settlements in Assam.

The first contact between Muslims and the kingdom of Kamrupa occurred in 1205 A.D., when Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji embarked on his Kamrupa expedition. The conquest of Bakhtiyar Khilji had far-reaching consequences for the region, as it established mosques, seminaries, and *khanqahs* in Lakhnauti and other areas of Bengal. The subsequent invasions of Kamrupa were undertaken by Ghiyasudin Iwaz Khilji in 1227 A.D., Malik Ikhtiyaruddin Yuzbek Tughril Khan in 1257 A.D., Sultan Ghiyasuddin of Bengal in 1321–22 A.D., Sultan Sikandar Shah in 1357 A.D., Rukunuddin Barbak Shah in 1460 A.D., Sultan Alauddin Husain Shah in 1498 A.D., and many more. During these Muslim invasions, a substantial number of Muslims were able to find a permanent home in the Goalpara and Kamrupa districts of Assam. A few Sufi saints also arrived in Assam during these expeditions.

During the Mughal era, several invasions were carried out in Assam by various Mughal generals, the most important being the invasions of Mir Jumla and Ram Singha. In 1662 A.D., Mir Jumla departed Koch Behar with a vast army and sailed up the Brahmaputra River, overcoming opposition from Ahom king Jyadhvaj Singha. The treaty of Ghilazharighat was signed in 1663 A.D., separating the Ahom and Mughal domains by the Bharali and Kalang rivers. Again, in 1668 A.D., Aurangzeb assigned Raja Ram Singha to reclaim lost territory in Assam. The conflict of the Ahom-Mughal frontier lasted until 1671 A.D., with Lachit Barphukan defeating Ram Singha in the ‘Battle of Saraighat’. The river Manas became the boundary between the Mughals and the Ahoms, marking a significant milestone in medieval Assam. Nawab Mansur Khan conquered Kamrupa and Gauhati in 1679 A.D., but ultimately faced defeat in 1682 A.D. The river Manas served as the western boundary between the Ahoms and Mughals until 1826 A.D. Moreover, during the medieval period, the Ahom monarchs imported a large number of Muslim artisans and expert men to Assam and recruited them to positions across the government, working in occupations such as woodcarving, needlework, engraving, cannon-casting, sword-forging, and other fine arts.

Muslim Exodus to Assam during the Colonial Period

The British administration encouraged immigration to Assam due to the abundance of arable land and the government’s need for sustained revenue. The Goalpara district in Assam was a prime location for wasteland tenures, allowing new Bengali settlers to settle conveniently. The Assam government also imported skilled Muslim farmers from East

Bengal to Assam under the “Grow More Food” initiative. In the early 20th century A.D., a significant number of Muslim migrants settled in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, and Nagaon of Assam.

Advent of Sufism to the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam

The emergence and diffusion of Sufism in medieval Assam were primarily influenced by the rise of Turko-Afghan and Mughal rule in Bengal during medieval period. As a result, the eastern border of Bengal, with the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys of Assam, became an important conduit for the spread of Islam and Sufism. Throughout the medieval period, the concentration of Sufis in Assam can be attributed to two distinct places, both of which were adjacent to Bengal. One was Hajo, near Guwahati, while the other was Sylhet. Each of these locations served as prominent commercial hubs and emerged as early epicentres of Sufism in the region of Assam. Moreover, Kamrupa was recognised for the esoteric practices of local yogis. Sufi literature mentioned yogic activities, and Muslim holy people travelled to Kamrupa to study yogic methods. The work “Amrita Kunda” (the Pool of Nectar) of Kamrupa had a profound influence on the efficacy of yogic spiritual techniques. The book gained widespread circulation throughout mystic communities in India and beyond, facilitating a convergence between the Sufi saints and the erudite individuals of pre-colonial Assam. In both Sufi groups of north India and Southeast Asia, it was widely believed that Kamrupa contained a clandestine site of worship frequented by medieval Muslim Sufi saints who ventured to the region. Prominent Sufis of the Brahmaputra valley who settled in this region during the medieval and colonial periods, were Hazrat Jalaluddin Tabrezi, Ghiyasuddin Awliya, Khwaja Khizr, Pir Shah Madar, Satya Pir, Deg Dhowa Pir, Panch Pir of Dhubri, Pagal Pir, Hazrat Azan Faqir, Chand Khan, Hazrat Saleh Pir, Hazrat Khandakar Pir, Hazrat Sawal Pir, Nabi Pir, Hazrat Zulqad Ali, Muqaddam Shah, Shah Noor Dewan, Hazrat Abul Qasim Khurasani, Syed Nasiruddin Baghdadi, Syed Asad-ud Daula Shiraji, Maulana Mirza Abdur Rahman Beg, and many more. The majority of them arrived here as part of the Muslim invading army, while others were sent by their spiritual mentors to propagate Islam and Sufism.

Emergence of Sufism in the Barak Valley and Sylhet

The Barak valley, comprising the present-day districts of Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj, was historically inhabited by Sufi saints who arrived in the region during the

medieval period. E. A. Gait, in his *“Report on the Census of Assam, 1891,”* states that Sylhet was a constituent of Assam throughout the medieval era and held the position of the second-biggest town in Assam, following Gauhati. Gaur Govind, the Hindu monarch of Sylhet, was overthrown in the fourteenth century A.D. by Hazrat Shah Jalal and his associates. Legend has it that Hazrat Shah Jalal traversed the Barak valley accompanied by no less than 360 trusted associates, including Shah Badar Uddin, Shah Sikandar, Shah Adam Khaki, Shah Abdul Malik, Shah Zia Uddin, Mirul Arifin, Shah Natawan, Shah Paran, and others. In this valley, numerous places, schools, and madrassas have been named in honour of Hazrat Shah Jalal and his disciples. This unequivocally demonstrates that the arrival of Shah Jalal and his adherents at the beginning of the fourteenth century A.D. gave Muslim colonisation and Sufism a fresh lease of life. Other prominent Sufi saints of the valley were Shah Muhammad Yaqub Badarpuri, Khwaja Shaykh Tamizuddin, Talib Hussain, Hazrat Alqum Shah, Shitalang Shah, Mahmud Ali Chishti, Baqar Shah, Shah Hatim Ali, Amjad Ali Naqshbandi-Mujaddadi, Ashraf Shah, Khwaja Aftabuddin, Maulana Mohsin Ali Mujaddadi-Naqshbandi, Maulana Mahmud Ali, Syed Shah Musharraf Ali Qudumi, Syed Ahmed Shahid, etc.

Different Stages of Sufism in Assam

The history of Sufism in Assam, spanning from the 11th to the 20th centuries, has been divided into three phases. During the initial phase, which began in the second half of the 11th century and continued until the 14th century A.D., western and southern Assam were the only areas in the state where the Sufi movement was active. In this stage, the prevalence of north Indian intellectual discourse overshadowed the Sufi theological perspectives of Bengal and Assam. The second phase, from the 14th to the 17th centuries, saw the emergence and assimilation of Sufism with local culture, leading to the formation of a distinctly Assamese brand of Sufism. This brand incorporated aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Tantricism. The third phase saw a decrease in the prominence of Sufism in Assam and India. This phase was a period of reformation within Sufism, as Islamic reform movements emerged in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. These movements advocated for a more authentic expression of the religion by removing non-Islamic elements.

Spread of Different *Silsilahs* in Assam

The Sufi *silsilahs*, prevalent in Assam, were mainly the offshoots of north Indian Sufism. The notable Sufi orders in Assam were: *Suhrawardi*, *Chishti*, *Madari*, *Qadiri*, *Naqshbandi*, etc. Yet numerous Sufi sub-orders also emerged as an interaction with local culture. Moreover, a significant number of Sufis in Assam remained unaffiliated with any specific *silsilah* or order.

Extent of *Dargahs* in Assam

The Sufi saints died here, and their disciples subsequently erected tombs over their graves, which are known as *dargahs*. These sacred sites, scattered throughout the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys of Assam, are considered spiritually important. Assam has around 100 major *dargahs*, visited by people of various castes, creeds, and religions. The most popular ones are the *dargahs* of Azan Pir in Sivasagar, Ghiyasuddin Awliya in Hajo, Boga Baba in Dibrugarh, and Panch Pir in Dhubri. The impact of such Islamic shrines on society is immense. Ahom rulers supported these *dargahs*, granting them revenue-free land and holding Muslim saints in high regard. However, rapid urbanisation and other factors have led to the destruction of many *dargahs*, and many of which are crumbling due to environmental hazards.

Chapter 3: Life and Teachings of the Sufis of Undivided Goalpara District

The third chapter deals with a brief background of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam, the lives and deeds of the prominent native Sufis of the undivided Goalpara district, non-resident Sufi saints, semi-legendary Sufi figures, some regional Sufi saints and their orders, and the teachings of the Sufi saints.

Undivided Goalpara District: A Brief Background

Goalpara, a district in Assam, has a rich history dating back hundreds of years. It was once part of the kingdom of '*Pragjyotisha*' and ruled by various kings from time to time. The region was incorporated within the *Mohammadan* sway for the first time during medieval era, and it remained so until 1765 A.D., when it was given to the British along with the rest of Bengal. It underwent various jurisdictional shifts when it came under British authority. In 1822 A.D., an independent district with three police stations, Goalpara, Dhubri, and Koraibari, including Garo Hills, was established, and in 1866 A.D., it was

officially detached from Assam and placed under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of the Koch Behar Division. In 1874 A.D., it was absorbed into the new province when Assam was established as a distinct administrative unit. In 1905 A.D., it once again became a part of the then-Eastern Bengal. The entire district was ceded to Assam for good in 1912 A.D. After independence, Goalpara was divided into three sub-divisions: Goalpara, Dhubri, and Kokrajhar. In 1983 A.D., Goalpara was split into three districts, with each sub-division becoming an independent district, and in 1989 A.D., Bongaigaon was formed from the former Kokrajhar district. Again, the South Salmara-Mankachar district emerged from Dhubri district in February 1916 A.D. The undivided Goalpara was the first district in the entire Brahmaputra valley of Assam to witness Muslim invasions. Therefore, it is very likely that Islam and Sufism had a more secure foothold in this area far earlier than they had elsewhere in Assam.

Prominent Sufis of Undivided Goalpara District

The Sufi saints had traditionally found fruitful ground in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam. Sufi saints of the study area can be classified into three groups: those who were the residents of the undivided Goalpara district, non-resident Sufi saints, and semi-legendary figures.

(i) Resident Sufi Saints

The prominent Sufi saints who were the residents of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam are: Panch (Five) Pirs of Dhubri, Deg Dhowa Pir, Pir of Panjatan Dargah, Faqir of Patpara, Hazrat Abul Qasim Khurasani (d. 1896 A.D.), Syed Nasiruddin Baghdadi (d. 1936 A.D.), Hazrat Ezzadullah Shah (d. 1970 A.D.), Abdur Rahman Firuzi (d. 1988 A.D.), etc.

(ii) Non-Resident Sufi Saints

There were still a number of Sufi saints who were not residents of the study area, but they frequently visited this area, thereby leaving a deep imprint of their ideology on contemporary society. Some of them even spent a large portion of their working lives establishing *khanqahs* and *astanas* in the different parts of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam before leaving for their original place. Notable among them are: Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi, Hazrat Shah Jalal Mujarrad (d. 1346 A.D.), Shah Ismail Ghazi (d. 1474

A.D.), Shah Kamal, Keramat Ali Jaunpuri (d. 1873 A.D.), Abu Bakr Siddiqui (d. 1939 A.D.), Shah Muhammad Ekramul Haq (d. 1944 A.D.), Hazrat Ruhul Amin (d. 1945 A.D.), Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (d. 1952 A.D.), Syed Asad-ud Daula Shiraji (d. 1971 A.D.), and Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (d. 1976 A.D.).

(iii) Semi-Legendary Sufi Saints

There were a few semi-legendary Sufi saints in this area regarding whom no authentic information is to be found. Due to a lack of sources, it is very difficult to reconstruct their lives and histories. Whatever information is available about them is also shrouded in myths and legends. However, observing various traditions and rituals prevalent in the present society, it can certainly be said that they, once upon a time, must have exerted immense influence on the society of this region of Assam. Prominent among them are Hazrat Khwaja Khizr, Satya Pir, Shah Madar, Pir of Dohela Mazaar, and Pir of Mamudpur Dargah.

Other Miscellaneous Sufi Saints and their Orders

There were a few regional and lesser-known Sufis about whom our sources are very scanty, and oral sources play an important role in reconstructing their history. Examples include Hazrat Abdul Bari Chishti of Nichintapur, Noakhali, Bangladesh; his disciple Hazrat Abdur Rezzak al-Chishti of Dharmakam, Sherpur, formerly Bogura district of Bangladesh; Hazrat Shah Nurullah Misri of Hatijana, Gaibanda district of Bangladesh; Hazrat Shah Mehboob Alom al-Chishti of Burdwan, West Bengal; Maulana Abdul Qader and Maulana Abdul Hai of Furfura Sharif; Khwaja Nur Muhammad, Adalgur village, Chirang, Assam; Goni Khalifa of Darrang district, etc. Furthermore, numerous other Sufi saints, or *pirs*, appeared among the Muslims in the study area over the past few decades. Some notable of them are Hasan Ali of Bhoter Kandi, Mazam Shah of Suwapata, Abu Taher Qadiri, alias Turab Pagla, of Padmer Alga, Yusuf Maulavi of Bhalarbhita in west Goalpara, etc. These regional *pirs* attracted disciples from the poorer classes of society and contributed to the formation of some new regional *tariqahs*. *Faqiri tariqah*, *Pagla tariqah*, *Krishna tariqah*, etc. are some notable localised *tariqahs* that are particularly prevalent among Muslims of east Bengal background in this area.

Teachings of the Sufi Saints

Sufism is an unavoidable component of Islamic civilisation, promoting humanism and a pious lifestyle. The primary goal of the Sufi saints is to purify one's lower self. They possessed qualities such as dedication, sacrifice, generosity, peace, purity, etc. They encouraged self-control, gratitude, and obedience to God's will. The Sufi saints believed in the unity of God (*Tauhid*), and their mission was to keep many faiths united under the banner of unity and togetherness. They aimed to eliminate prejudice and inequality, treat all men equally, and promote mutual respect and understanding between different communities. One of their missions was to disseminate Islam and spiritual ideals to the masses.

Chapter 4: Influence and Impact of Sufism on the Society of Undivided Goalpara District

The fourth chapter discusses the different aspects of society in the original Goalpara district of Assam on which Sufism had an impact and vice versa. It talks about Sufism and Islamization, Sufism and religious syncretism, Sufism and expansion of Muslim power, Sufi nexus with contemporary political authority, impact of Sufi *khanqahs* and *dargahs*, Sufi saints and their literary compositions, impact of Sufism on education and agriculture, Sufism and Vaishnavism, Sufism and folk songs such as *murshidi*, *marifati*, *baul*, *dhuan gaan*, *bisshed* songs, *bhatiali* songs, *bhawaiya* songs, songs of Ghazi Pir, songs of Doriya Pir, etc. This chapter also deals with Sufism and folk tales, the impact of Sufism on Assamese and Bengali languages, Sufism and Islamic reform and revivalist movements, Sufi saints and social reforms, Sufism and the context of women, and the present status of Sufism in the study area.

In India, Sufis played a major role in advancing secular society through the integration of culture and religion. The Sufi saints imparted the genuine essence of Islam to the native people. The presence of Sufism in Assam holds significant importance in the history of Islam, with a profound impact on the religious, socio-political, and cultural aspects of the region. The societal and cultural fabric of Assam was profoundly impacted by the Islamic culture introduced by the Sufi saints. Being an integral part of Assam, the undivided Goalpara district has had profound effects from Sufism, which have contributed to spiritual progression, philanthropic endeavours, cultural amalgamation, and communal

cohesion. The lives and endeavours of these Sufi saints served to introduce Sufism as a brand-new religious, intellectual, and cultural concept within the study area. The Sufi saints were universally admired and appreciated by people of all social standings, ranging from commoners to royalty. This allowed the saints to establish a rapport with the villagers. By fostering a sense of uniformity in manners and practices, these Sufi saints lessened the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. In reality, Sufi *dargahs* became the focal points of cordial relationships between Muslims and Hindus. The impact of every major Sufi in the region has gone far beyond his own lifetime.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The fifth chapter examines the final outcome and significant discoveries of the research work. Following are the major research findings:

1. **Gradual Development of Sufism in Assam:** Sufism in Assam was an ongoing process, facilitated by Arab and Persian merchants and Muslim invaders. The available sources reveal the advent of several Sufi saints and the presence of numerous Sufi shrines in Assam from the beginning of the eleventh century A.D. until the twentieth century A.D. When considering the geographical distribution of Sufi *dargahs*, it becomes evident that they are not only concentrated in urban centres or prominent locations but rather dispersed across the entirety of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys of Assam.
2. **Sufism in Assam as a North-Indian Extension:** The spread of Islam and Sufism in Assam is an extension of those movements in north India. The prominent Sufi saints of north India sent their disciples to the north-eastern part of the country, specifically to the regions of Bengal. The penetration of Islam into Assam occurred through Bengal. The Sufi saints, who spent a large portion of their lives in Bengal, are credited with the introduction of Islam and Sufism in this part of Assam. The gradual conversion of the people of Assam was mostly brought about by the proselytising efforts of the Bengali and north Indian-origin Sufis.
3. **Push behind the Advent of Sufi Saints:** Most of the Sufi saints of Assam arrived here with Muslim armies to pave their pathways from different types of adversities with the help of their supernatural prowess. A handful of them travelled to this region in association with some traders, whereas a few of them also came out of

personal zeal. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of them were dispatched to this land by their spiritual mentors with the specific mission of preaching Islam.

4. **Arab Stock of People:** It is apparent that the majority of the Sufi saints who arrived in this area of Assam were of Arab descent. It is also documented that a large number of disciples travelled to this area with each of the saints. A total of 360 disciples followed Hazrat Shah Jalal, and they all settled in and around Sylhet. This demonstrates that a sizable portion of Arab immigrants migrated here as Sufis and Islamic missionaries.
5. **Participation in Politics:** Some early Sufi saints, including Hazrat Shah Jalal, Shah Ismail Ghazi, and Ghiyasuddin Awliya, played a significant role in Muslim invasions in medieval Bengal and western Assam, expanding Muslim political influence and Sufi doctrines. They also exerted pressure on the decision-making power of the Sultans of Bengal. However, the relationship of the Sufi saints with political power varied, with some avoiding court involvement.
6. **Sufi Saints and Land Grants:** Many of the Sufis in this area received '*pirpal*' land from the contemporary state apparatus for their maintenance. This sponsorship involved the establishment of *khanaqahs*, the endowment of revenue-free estates for the management of either *khanaqahs* or *dargahs*, occasional financial assistance for the Sufi saints, the construction of tombs to commemorate the deceased, etc. This allowed them to freely and securely disseminate their religious beliefs among the inhabitants of the area.
7. **Participation in the Indian Freedom Struggle:** In addition to spiritualism, several Sufi saints of the early 20th century also participated in India's ongoing freedom struggle. Among them, Abu Bakr Siddiqui of *Furfura Sharif*, Ruhul Amin of Basirhat, Yunus Ali Enayetpuri, Asad-ud Daula Shiraji, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, and Abdur Rahman Firuzi were the prominent ones. They played an important role in the freedom struggle in India by mobilising the people of Bengal and the Bengali-speaking people of western Assam. On multiple occasions, the colonial government put several of them in jail because of anti-British agitations.
8. **Interaction with Other Faiths:** Sufism shares intimate ties with the mystical traditions of other faiths. Archaeological findings in the Deg Dhowa and Mahendraganj *dargahs* reveal a medieval connection between Sufism and Tantricism. Evidence of both Hindu and Buddhist sculptures at Paglatek, believed

to be the abode of a “*Pagla*,” alias a Sufi saint, is also present. In the past, new converts perceived similarities between Sufi saints and Tantric Gurus, drawing parallels between their *dargahs* and Buddhist chaityas. Moreover, standing across the ‘*Netai Dhubuni Ghat*’, the *dargah* of Panch Pir in Dhubri town represents the harmonious coexistence among the different faiths.

9. **Clash between Sufis and Orthodox Ulama:** The Sufi saints, unlike the conservative *ulama*, promoted a tolerant and inclusive version of Islam. They did not criticise the ancient religions of this land or excessively praise their own faith. This resulted in conflicts with the orthodox *ulama*, who often issued religious decrees against the Sufis for not following Islamic *shariah*. However, the common people rallied with the Sufi saints, as they were more popular among the people than the orthodox *ulama*.
10. **Predominance of Naqshbandi-Mujaddadi Order:** Many *Naqshbandi-Mujaddadi* Sufi saints, such as Abul Qasim Khurasani, Abu Bakr Siddiqui of *Furfura Sharif*, Maulana Abdul Qadir, Maulana Ruhul Amin, Shah Muhammad Ekramul Haq, Hazrat Ezaullah Shah, and Nurullah Misri, propagated Sufi doctrines in the study area during the late-Mughal period and British era. This explains why the undivided Goalpara district of Assam exhibits a noticeable predominance of this *silsilah* compared to other Sufi orders.
11. **Perceiving Sufi Saints as Supernatural Entities:** The people thought that the Sufi saints possessed amazing spiritual and superhuman abilities that Allah had enlightened them about. They were known in society for having the ability to perform miracles. In those days, people had deeply ingrained superstitions in their minds, viewing the Sufis with a sense of superhuman awe. As a result, a significant number of them were drawn to the Sufis for various reasons, including medical treatment.
12. **Mixed Responses to Sufi Teachings:** The teachings of the Sufi saints elicited varied responses among people of all backgrounds, revealing the true essence of Islam and misguiding others. Several ‘*Bid’at*’, or religious innovations, were subsequently assimilated into Muslim society under the guise of Sufi traditions. Many unhealthy and erroneous practices had infiltrated Muslim culture under the disguise of Islam, for which the Sufis of that age should bear responsibility.

13. **Scarcity of Sources:** Many Sufi saints from this region did not pay enough attention to documenting their biographies, ideas, and practices in written form. Even their disciples did not leave behind a comprehensive hagiography, so very little is known about their lives and deeds. In some cases, other than their names, not much is known. Furthermore, it is highly likely that we have not inherited the names of many Sufi saints. Our limited knowledge of them is primarily based on local legends and a few surviving literary writings from a much later period. Therefore, it is very challenging to verify their accuracy or place them in a clear chronological order.
14. **Proliferation of Islam:** A number of factors contributed to the spread of Islam in the study area, including commercial interactions between Arab-Persian traders and the Kamrupa kingdom, Turko-Afghan and Mughal incursions, and the advent of Sufi saints, with the Sufi saints largely responsible for its subsequent growth. During the Sultanate period, East Bengal was a fertile delta inhabited by tribal and semi-tribal people. Sufis established *khanqahs* in the region during the Mughal period, causing native people to become associated with Islamic culture. Subsequently, several of these Sufi saints and the newly converted Muslims migrated to western Assam, now making up the majority of the Muslim population in Assam's undivided Goalpara district.
15. **Growth of Syncretism:** Sufism in medieval Assam has evolved over centuries, leading to conversion, religious education, and cultural assimilation. This has resulted in a composite culture incorporating elements from other religions. In western Assam and eastern Bengal, the worship of saints like Satya Pir, Manik Pir, Madar Pir, etc. emerged, exhibiting characteristics of Vaishnava and Sufi traditions. Hindus and Muslims revered these saints as spiritual mentors, collaborating for social harmony and mutual respect. Moreover, syncretic culture is evident in folk songs such as *baul* songs, *bisshed* songs, songs of Ghazi Pir, songs of Doriya Pir, and so on.
16. **Cultural Expression:** The undivided Goalpara district has benefited culturally from Sufi practices, poetry, and music. Overcoming linguistic and cultural boundaries, Sufi music, including *Qawwali* and Sufi melodies, has enthralled audiences and prompted profound spiritual encounters. The presence of Sufi poetry, characterised by its emphasis on devotion, mysticism, and dedication, has had a

significant impact on both Bengali and Assamese literature and artistic production in this area of Assam.

17. **Role in Agriculture and Human Habitation:** Sufi saints also played a socio-cultural role, contributing significantly to the advancement of human habitation and agriculture. They sought desolate and forest areas for their spiritual pursuits, leading to the construction of *khanqahs* and *astanas* in these places. These structures indirectly contributed to the expansion of human settlements in their vicinity. The Mughal policy, from emperor Akbar onwards, encouraged spiritually influential people to settle in isolated places for cultivation. The construction of *khanqahs* thus benefited the state by attracting locals to agriculture, thereby increasing the state's revenue.
18. **Sufistic Islam more influential than Political Islam:** The Sufi saints were the driving force of the Muslim society in the study area, spreading Islam more influentially than the Muslim invaders. Due to their precarious political situation and prioritisation of political gains, the Muslim invaders were unable to undertake any systematic attempts to spread Islam. So, the missionary and charitable efforts of the Sufi saints ensured the peaceful dissemination of the Islamic message. As a result, Sufistic Islam gained a deeper hold on the people of the study area than the theoretical Islam pioneered by political invaders.
19. **Spiritual Guidance and Healing:** The Sufi saints and mystics in the region were highly respected for their profound spiritual insight and remarkable healing prowess. They acted as spiritual mentors and advisors for numerous people, providing guidance, comfort, and solutions for both spiritual and practical problems. Their burial sites, also known as *dargahs*, remain destinations of pilgrimage and spiritual consolation for pilgrims who seek blessings and healing.
20. **Institutionalisation of Islam:** After establishing themselves in this area, they dedicated themselves to formalising their religious beliefs by setting up mosques, *maktabs*, madrassas, *khanqahs*, *dargahs*, and *iddgahs*. They endeavoured to build these institutions in order to consolidate their teachings, customs, and rites. These exemplified the zenith of Islamic structural development in this area. The process also contributed to the formation of Muslim individual identities.

21. **Influence of Persian Culture:** Persian culture has greatly influenced the people of the study area, leaving its mark in almost every facet of their lives. The credit for this goes largely to the Sufi saints, who themselves were immensely influenced by Persian culture during the course of their migration from west and central Asia to India. Because the Sufi saints were highly accessible and popular in society, Persian culture had a versatile influence on the local people. Some celebrations, like the Muharram festival and the nomenclature of Ali, Hussain, etc., are a few examples of Sufi Persian influence. Moreover, many Persian terminologies are still in vogue in this region.
22. **Emergence of Bengali Sufi Folk Songs:** The undivided Goalpara district of Assam, bordering Bengal, is home to a large population of migrant Muslims who have a strong affinity for Bengali traditional culture. This has led to the emergence of Bengali Sufi musical culture, resulting in three distinct genres of Bengali folk songs: *murshidi*, *marifati*, and *baul*. Apart from these, a number of Bengali spiritual songs were recently popular among them, such as “*Baromashi Geet*,” “*Doria Pিরer Geet*,” and “*Ghazi Pিরer Geet*,” etc. However, due to various factors, the significance of these songs has significantly decreased.
23. **Sufism and Women:** The study area lacks information on the involvement of women in Sufism, resulting in uncertainty about their treatment in the Sufi tradition. It is assumed that medieval Sufi attitudes were unfavourable towards women due to *purdah* regulations. Moreover, most *dargahs* had limited access to women. In spite of this, some women have successfully transcended societal constraints and actively participated in Sufism by attending Sufi gatherings like *urs* and *sama* and recounting the extraordinary deeds of the Sufi saints. This suggests that women have contributed to the development of Sufi doctrine, despite its ongoing diffusion and ambiguity.
24. **Causes of Success of the Sufi Mission:** For a variety of reasons, the Sufis were successful in converting diverse tribes and communities to Islam and imparting Islamic education. Firstly, the Sufi saints adapted and simplified Islamic principles to make them easily comprehensible for the average person. Secondly, the Sufi mission aimed to eliminate social distinctions between castes and classes, allowing underprivileged and untouchable populations to convert to Islam. Thirdly, the distinctive personalities of the Sufis, such as their miracle-performing powers,

unwavering enthusiasm, exceptional devotion, austere lifestyle, etc., also contributed a lot in this regard. Fourthly, Muslim rule in Bengal, generous support from Muslim kings and nobles, and the positive attitude of Ahom monarchs also played a significant role in their success.

25. **Degeneration of Sufism:** Sufism is gradually declining in the study area, with its current support base consisting of the poor, uneducated, oppressed, and irrational. This is due to the fact that no genuine Sufism is to be found these days, and what prevails in the name of Sufism is a diluted and twisted form of Sufism. As time has progressed, Sufi ideologies and institutions have become associated with numerous non-Islamic rituals and unhealthy practices. Moreover, the people associated with the Sufi *dargahs* have become corrupt as a result of land grants and the influx of cash from various sources. Consequently, Sufism has gradually lost its original spiritual magnificence, and the common people have begun to lose faith in it.
26. **Legacy of Sufism:** One of the most fundamental Sufi beliefs is that we should treat all living beings with kindness and pity, as they all contain the souls of Allah, and therefore, we should respect and treat them without any discrimination. Because of these Sufi doctrines, many individuals are still seen as being exceedingly humble, straightforward, well-behaved, dedicated, refined, and virtuous. Among other factors, this could be due to their direct or indirect exposure to Sufi doctrines or the inheritance of Sufi legacies.

To conclude, it can be claimed that Sufism has the ability to bring people of all roots together to express their viewpoints, comprehend, sympathise, and learn from one another. At a time when most communities across the globe witness growing intolerance and exclusion, Sufism may offer a meaningful remedy to increased violence and hostility. Sufism energises peace, love, and harmonious coexistence among various cultures; hence, it may drive out the prevailing hatred of contemporary society.