

CHAPTER 3

Life and Teachings of the Sufis of undivided Goalpara District

3.1 Undivided Goalpara District: A Brief Background

Prior to delving into Sufism in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam, a discussion of the historical background of the district is required. Goalpara has a long past dating back hundreds of years. Until a few decades ago, undivided Goalpara, located on both sides of the Brahmaputra River, was the westernmost district of Assam. Its northern border was formed by the mountainous region of Bhutan, its eastern border by the unified district of Kamrup, its southern border by the district of Garo Hills in Meghalaya, and its western border by the districts of Koch Behar, Jalpaiguri (in West Bengal), and Rangpur (in Bangladesh). According to Edward Gait, its borders included “basically the Brahmaputa Valley, Bhutan, Rangpur, and Koch Behar.”¹ Birendranath Datta asserts that Goalpara was never a unified territory ruled by its own monarch, and therefore its history needs to be discussed alongside that of the larger political entities of which it was a part at various points in time.² In antiquity, it was a part of the kingdom of *Pragjyotisha*, which is referenced in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and several important Puranas.³ The ancient region of Kamrupa was geographically separated into four distinct sections, known as *Kampith*, *Ratnapith*, *Suvarnapith*, and *Saumarpith*. Among them, the *Ratnapith* division encompassed the region situated across the Karatoya and the Manas rivers,⁴ and the Goalpara area was part of the *Ratnapith* division of ancient Kamrupa.

The erstwhile Goalpara area was included in the territory ruled by Bhaskara Varman during the seventh century A.D. After the death of Bhaskara, these areas were incorporated into the kingdoms of several kings. Thereafter, it became a part of the Kamata kingdom, ruled by Durlabh Narayan in the early 14th century A.D. The Khen ruler ruled the region in the 15th century A.D. The ascension and decline of the Koch dynasty after the death of the Khens had a significant and immediate impact on the fate of the region. Narnarayana, the son of Bishwa Singha, ascended the throne in 1540 A.D., and many portions of old Goalpara were part and parcel of the kingdom of Narnarayana. After Narnarayana, the former Goalpara region was under the control of Raghu Rai. Due to an internal quarrel, Goalpara then passed to the *Mohammadans*. In 1639 A.D., a peace

was established between the *Mohammadans* and the Ahom power, and the Barnadi river was designated as the demarcation point between the two entities.⁵ The Ahoms made another advance in 1658 A.D., taking and holding Goalpara for three years before being driven out by Mir Jumla's army. From then onwards, the region was incorporated within the *Mohammadan* sway, and it remained so until 1765 A.D., when it was given to the British along with the rest of Bengal.⁶ The undivided Goalpara district had been practically beyond the dominion of the Ahoms. B. C. Allen makes a similar point when he says, "Goalpara never, however, formed part of the Ahom kingdom, and, though it is one of the districts of Assam Valley, it belongs more to Northern Bengal than to Assam Proper."⁷

Since it first came under British authority, the former district of Goalpara has undergone various jurisdictional shifts. The permanently settled area belonged to the Rangpur district, and it remained so until 1822 A.D.⁸ In 1822 A.D., an independent district known as Goalpara with three police stations, such as Goalpara, Dhubri, and Koraibari, including Garo Hills, was established.⁹ The establishment of the office of Deputy Commissioner, also known as Principal Assistant Commissioner, took place in February 1825 A.D. The Commissioner and the Judicial Commissioner of Assam administered Goalpara after the British government annexed the region in 1826 A.D.¹⁰ On December 3, 1866 A.D., a government release officially detached Goalpara from Assam and placed it under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of the Koch Behar Division.¹¹ In 1874 A.D., it was absorbed into the new province when Assam was established as a distinct administrative unit.¹² 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.¹³ After independence, it consisted of three sub-divisions: Goalpara, Dhubri, and Kokrajhar, the last of which was established in 1957 A.D. Goalpara was split into three districts in 1983 A.D., with each of the former sub-divisions becoming a separate district of the identical name. Then, in 1989 A.D., a new independent district called Bongaigaon was formed from the former Kokrajhar district. Subsequently, Chirang and South Salmara-Mankachar districts were created in 2004 A.D. and 2016 A.D., respectively. The undivided Goalpara, presently comprising the districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Chirang, and South Salmara-Mankachar, bore the brunt of the tensions between Assam and Bengal because it lies on their shared border. It was the first district

in the entire Brahmaputra valley of Assam to witness the invasion of Muslim outsiders. 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. The majority of the population here belongs to the Muslim community.

3.2 Prominent Sufi Saints of Undivided Goalpara District

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Muslims came to Assam throughout the past under different circumstances and ultimately established enclaves in various locations of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam. From the study, it is known that the Sufi saints had traditionally found fruitful ground in this region of Assam as well. The primary objective that motivated them to leave their homes and travel to this area was to propagate their faith among the native people. The Sufi saints of the study area can be categorised into three groups: those who were the residents of undivided Goalpara district, non-resident Sufi saints, and semi-legendary figures. The accounts of prominent Sufi saints who were the residents of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam have been highlighted below:

3.2.1 Panch Pir of Dhubri

The *dargah* of *Panch Pir* is located in Dhubri town, on the banks of the Brahmaputra River (Plate-1). There exist two different viewpoints concerning the arrival of these five saints in this region of Assam. In the past, Assam was known for its magic and sorcery to the outsiders. According to '*Ain-i-Akbari*' of Abul Fazl, "The people of Kamrupa were described as being habitually engaged in the practice of sorcery."¹⁴ In '*Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*', the Khuntaghat region in western Kamrupa has been described as infamous for its practice of magic and sorcery.¹⁵ According to the historical account of Sihabuddin Talish, a 17th-century historian who accompanied Mir Jumla during his Assam campaign, the Muslim invaders held preconceived views about Assam being associated with occult practices and black magic.¹⁶ As a result, the Muslim powers chose to bring Sufi saints to Assam during their campaign in order to counteract the perceived influence of such magical practices. According to B. C. Allen, the five *pirs* were called upon to join the military invasion of Mir Jumla in this particular territory.¹⁷ Mofijuddin Ahmad Hazarika has also echoed this view in the narration of '*Pavitra Asam*', edited by

Maheshwar Neog.¹⁸ However, another theory holds that during the Assam invasion by Raja Ram Singha, the saints came here along with Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur.¹⁹ This perspective is also corroborated by a historical account kept in the Damdama Sikh Gurudwara in Dhubri town, which says that Raja Ram Singha, a noted Rajput commander of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, brought five renowned saints with him to combat Assamese magic and witchcraft.²⁰ Ghazi Shah Akbar, Shah Alom, Shah Kamal, Shah Suphi, and Shah Sareng were the five *pirs* in question.²¹ Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed, in his book '*Islamic Heritage in India's Northeast: Assam and Manipur*', claims that according to oral history, the *pirs* chose not to join the military campaign. Instead, they worked with the common people, acquired local customs and traditions, and became conversant in the Assamese language.²² The native people, regardless of their religious or other affiliations, sought refuge in the monastery established by the *pirs* when they were in distress or suffering.²³

Scholars hold divergent views on the precise whereabouts of the graves of these saints. Some hold the opinion that the tomb of Shah Akbar, the leader of these saints, is the only one present on the *Panch Pir's dargah* complex since he was the only one to remain there till his passing away. B. C. Allen writes, "In Dhubri, however, there is the tomb of Shah Akbar, who was one of the Panch Pirs, or five wise men, who are venerated by Hindus and Muhammadans alike in Eastern Bengal."²⁴ According to Chand Mohammad Choudhury, Shah Kamal was one of those five *pirs* who toured the Mahendraganj area,²⁵ where he passed away and was laid to rest on the campus of the *dargah* in Mahendraganj. Another set of people believe that the other three *pirs* were none other than *Pagal Pir*, or *faqir* of the Dhupdhara *dargah*, and the two of the Deg Dhowa and Panjatan *dargahs* of Goalpara. This belief is still a mystery that has remained unsolved owing to a lack of supporting evidence. Mohd. Assad Uz Zaman, in his doctoral thesis, opines that, with the exception of Shah Akbar, the other four *pirs* might have relocated to various regions of the province from the Dhubri *dargah* and founded *khanqahs* in their respective locations. However, upon their demise, it is likely that their physical bodies were transported and interred in the Dhubri *dargah*, where their commander Shah Akbar was buried.²⁶ As they lived together in Dhubri town for a couple of years, the *dargah* is commonly referred to as the *dargah of Panch Pir*.

It is well acknowledged that these five *pirs*, especially Shah Akbar, the leader of the five Sufis, had a cordial relationship with Guru Teg Bahadur, the 9th Guru of Sikhism, during the latter's stay in Assam. Interestingly, both the *dargah* of *Panch Pir* and the Sikh Gurudwara, founded by Guru Teg Bahadur, are situated in the present-day Dhubri town, which is very nearer to each other. Many native people later adopted Islam and Sikhism due to their influence.²⁷ Even today, many Sikh people visit the *dargah* of *Panch Pir* to seek spiritual blessings. As a sacred site, it attracts visitors from all over the country. So, it has turned into a well-known tourist destination in present-day Dhubri city. The *dargah* of *Panch Pir*, situated across the *Netai Dhubuni Ghat*, symbolises the peaceful cohabitation of different religious beliefs.

3.2.2 Deg Dhowa Pir

The *dargah* of Deg Dhowa *Pir* is located about twelve kilometres to the east of Goalpara town on the Deg Dhowa hill (Plate-2). Once upon a time, a famous Sufi resided there. The name of the saint, the precise date of his arrival, his missionary activities, and his death are not known owing to the paucity of authentic evidence. According to the account in '*Pavitra Asam*', the Sufi arrived at this site with the Muslim army from the west and stayed there until his demise.²⁸ However, the present *khadim* and the president of the *dargah* committee contradict this version, and according to them, politics had no bearing on the saint, and he came here on his own initiative.²⁹ To them, the *dargah* belongs to Hazrat Jalaluddin Tabrezi. They maintain that the *pir*, before his advent to this place, spent a few years in Gaur, Bengal. Finding that place not suitable for nurturing the tenets of Sufism, he subsequently left Gaur in search of a deserted and lonely place. Ultimately, his spiritual obligations drew him to the Deg Dhowa hill on the bank of the Brahmaputra River.³⁰ He stayed there for a couple of years and practised Sufism. According to '*Pavitra Asam*', the saint was awarded a land grant in the form of a *pirpal* by the royal authority. However, following his demise, the local zamindar of Mechpara took possession and control of the *pirpal* property.³¹ Regarding his death, one view is that an angry disciple of the saint fatally stabbed the *pir* due to personal jealousy.³² But evidence lacks in proving it. However, it is true that, after passing away, he was interred there. The *dargah* boasts one of the longest graves in India in terms of size. Legend says

that many people from the surrounding area came to the fold of Islam due to his teachings and spiritual greatness.

So far as the location of this *dargah* is concerned, it was very crucial in the medieval context. During that time, the primary mode of transportation in Assam was facilitated by the river Brahmaputra. This waterway served as a crucial channel for both invaders and foreign travellers, enabling their movement and interaction within the region. Being located on an important traffic route, earlier boatmen from both the Hindu and Muslim communities who happened to pass by this *dargah* paid respects to the *pir* and laid offerings at his tomb for a secure passage along the Brahmaputra River.³³ Another noteworthy feature of this site is that it was also the centre of both Hinduism and Buddhism in medieval period. Still, a few rock-cut artefacts can be found on the hill around the *dargah*. Subsequently, it has become an important religious site for followers of both Hinduism and Islam. Every year, *urs* festival is organised here on the 21st and 22nd of the month of *Magh* of the Assamese calendar, where people from far and wide, irrespective of their religious affiliation, come for the fulfilment of their wishes. It is one of the oldest *dargahs* in the Goalpara region and is a popular destination for the tourists.

3.2.3 Pir of Panjatan Dargah

This is one of the historic and significant *dargahs* located in Dakaidal village, on the southern side of the river Brahmaputra, approximately sixteen kilometres southeast of Goalpara town (Plate-3). It is situated adjacent to Sri Surjya Hill. The *dargah* is also known as Panjatan *dargah* or Dakaidal *dargah*. However, due to a lack of evidence, the name of the saint of this *dargah* is not known. Jogendra Chandra Sarkar claims that it is the burial site of a Muslim *darvesh* who came here with the Muslim invading forces during the medieval period.³⁴ According to the senior citizens of the locality, the Sufi saint in question might have accompanied Mughal forces, either with Mir Jumla or Ram Singha, during their Assam expedition.³⁵ The site of the *dargah* is believed to have been a medieval naval route and a possible encampment for Mughal troops due to its proximity to the Brahmaputra River. The precise date for the foundation of the shrine is also unknown. There are no records of his activities anywhere. Until recently, the *dargah* contained some war instruments from the medieval period, such as swords, armour, and so on. It is narrated in '*Pavitra Asam*' that Shah Alom, the Mughal emperor, engaged the

khadim of this *dargah*, and he was awarded 1002.7 bighas of land by the Mughal emperor for its maintenance.³⁶ The *dargah* sustained significant damage as a result of the earthquake in 1897 A.D., and it ultimately fell victim to the erosion of the Brahmaputra River. Recently, a new *dargah* was erected nearby. During the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram, the *dargah* premises experienced a festival-like atmosphere, with *tazia* processions, *lathi khel*, *torowal khel*, and other events held with pomp and gaiety in the past. Not only did Muslims participate, but many non-Muslim devotees from various locations also participated with *mannat* (vows). Thus, it served as a symbol of communal harmony.

3.2.4 Faqir of Patpara

A *dargah*, namely ‘the *dargah* of *Pagal Pir*’, was located in a village named Patpara around 10 kilometres north-west of Dhupdhara town in Goalpara district. The actual name of the *pir*, his arrival at this place, and the construction of the *dargah* are all unknown due to a lack of proper evidence. As per my interaction with some senior citizens of the village, the said *pir* was more popularly known as the “*Faqir*” among the local populace, and eventually the village became famous as ‘*Faqirpara*’.³⁷ According to Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad, the unusual behaviour of the *pir* earned his nickname as ‘*Pagal Pir*’.³⁸ Tradition has it that *Pagal Pir* arrived in Assam with the Muslim invading force during the medieval period. It is mentioned in ‘*Pavitra Asam*’ that according to a government document, the *dargah* of *Pagal Pir* was granted 630 bighas of *pirpal* land in and around Dhupdhara for the upkeep of the *dargah*.³⁹ However, for an unspecified reason, Ahom Queen Bhagyashree revoked the same *pirpal* grant during her reign, incorporating it into the Bijni Raj estate.⁴⁰ ‘*Pavitra Asam*’ further asserts that the forefathers of Faqir Baksh Ali Shah and Faqir Duman Shah were in charge of maintaining this *dargah* at the time.⁴¹ It is also reported that the caretakers of this *dargah* and the Dakaidal *dargah* belonged to the same dynasty.⁴² The *dargah* was crucial to the expansion of Muslim habitation in this area. But when a terrible pandemic (*Kaala Zhar*) started, the majority of Muslims died, and the remaining ones fled the area and subsequently settled in the Dhupdhara and Dakaidal regions of Goalpara district. Currently, there is no trace of the *dargah* in the area. According to the narration of the local people, this place is also famous for a Hindu temple, namely Sri Sri Maa Kalpani

Temple, established in 1865 A.D. They also informed me that their forefathers had discovered some Hindu artefacts and some coins from the medieval period in the same location.⁴³ Kasim Ali Ahmed, in his book '*A History of Lower Assam including BTC Area*', claims that the creator of this *dargah* was the *pir* himself.⁴⁴ According to another version, his disciples, namely Faqir Baksh Ali Shah and Faqir Duman Shah, erected the *dargah* after his passing. Some other people claim that the said *pir* was none other than Faqir Baksh Ali Shah and Faqir Duman Shah, who were the disciples of the famous Sufi saint Azan Pir of Sivasagar.⁴⁵ His missionary endeavours lack verifiable information. However, it is widely recognised that he propagated a very liberal form of Islam, and several indigenous non-Muslim people took initiation under him.⁴⁶ Mohammad Yahya Tamizi, in his book '*Sufi Movements in Eastern India*', has mentioned that *Pagal Pir* had left a deep influence over many people in lower Assam as well as Koch Behar.⁴⁷ In his book '*Sufi Darshan Aru Azan Pir*', Sheikh Samsheer Ali states that this saint and Deg Dhowa *Pir* lived at the same time.⁴⁸

3.2.5 Abul Qasim Khurasani (d. 1896 A.D.)

Hazrat Abul Qasim is known to have been born in Khurasan of Central Asia, circa 1784 A.D.⁴⁹ At that time, Khurasan was a hub of Islamic education, and it was there where he obtained his primary education. Later, he moved to Qandahar and became a follower of Syed Muhammad Atajan, a *murshid* of the *Naqshbandi* order.⁵⁰ He learnt in-depth expertise about the *Naqshbandi* Sufi sect from Muhammad Atajan. After completing his spiritual study in Qandahar, he set out to travel to the Indian subcontinent on the advice of his spiritual mentor and arrived in India around the year 1804 A.D. Subsequently, he reached Rangpur, which is now in modern-day Bangladesh, after passing through several regions of India. There, he took shelter under a gigantic banyan tree just in front of the office of the Rangpur District Commissioner⁵¹ (Plate-4). He made frequent trips from Rangpur to adjacent villages such as Haragaj, Baraibari, Choddani, Haripur, Lalchamar, Chilmari, Mora Pagla, etc., propagating the message of Islam and the principles of Sufism. It was at Mora Pagla, a place currently situated in Bangladesh, where he got married. He stayed there for a few years and gave birth to five children.⁵² He made the decision to move to Goalpara after living there for a long time, leaving his family behind, and did so around the year 1844 A.D. via a steamer. He then relocated his

family to present-day Goalpara town, where he stayed until his demise. He founded his abode adjacent to the present Boys High School of Goalpara town and selected a small hillock just in front of the present Goalpara College as his place of meditation. At that time, this place was isolated, covered in dense forest, and teeming with wild animals.

Khurasani Pir was a Muslim divine of high rank who possessed a magnificent spiritual power. He was known for leading a simple life, upholding strong moral principles, demonstrating devotion to his religion, and engaging in peaceful activities. Later on, his popularity grew among the common people, and many of them accepted his discipleship. Abedur Rahman Saikia, the biographer of Khurasani Pir, asserts that during his stay at Goalpara, he occasionally used to visit nearby places such as Kamrup, Nalbari, Bijni, Rangiya, Abhayapuri, Barpeta, Habraghat (Krishnai), etc. in order to preach Islam.⁵³ Abul Qasim Khurasani discovered that Muslims in the Habraghat (Krishnai) area did not adhere to Islamic principles. So, he often frequented this area and instructed the local Muslims on the proper recitation of the '*Azan*' during prayers, educating them about the *Namaz*, the Quran, the *Hadith*, and other works of Islamic literature. As a result of his efforts, many members of the Rabha community living in the Krishnai region eventually embraced Islam.⁵⁴ The Habraghat area still hosts their descendants. He has made a greater contribution to the stabilisation of Islam in Goalpara and the neighbouring territories. He was popular with the majority of both Hindus and Muslims because of his good personality and willingness to mix with the common folk. Hindus made up the majority of the population in the area where he lived, but there was not a single instance of any hostility between them and the Muslims. His literary genius can be proved by the fact that while in Rangpur, he reportedly engaged in a '*Munazira*' (literary debate) with Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri on a very pertinent Islamic issue and came out victorious.⁵⁵

During his stay in Goalpara, the residents of the Bausiapara neighbourhood offered him the task of leading the daily prayers in their mosque. He accepted and faithfully carried out the same thing, and over time, the mosque at Bausiapara became a hub for Islamic scholarship. According to tradition, it was he who identified the location of the *mazaar* of an unknown *pir* along the western bank of the Bausiapara pond, popularly known as "*Awliya Mazaar Pukhuri*" (Plate-5). After that, the local people took up the task of preserving the *mazaar*. At that time, no proper medical facility was available in Goalpara. So, in times of illness, people would seek solace at the feet of the

pir, and even it is reported that once the wife of the local Mechpara zamindar became ill, she was brought to the *pir* for recovery, and ultimately, due to the blessings of this great saint, she got cured. Consequently, the Mechpara zamindar, having been satisfied, donated the entire land of his shelter and the place of his meditation in front of Goalpara College to him.⁵⁶ In 1896 A.D., the Khurasani Pir Sahib passed away in Golapara at the age of 112 years.⁵⁷ He was laid to rest on a small hillock directly in front of Goalpara College, where he had once practiced meditation. His descendants and followers later erected an edifice to cover his tomb (Plate-6). Presently, pilgrims flock to this site, where *urs* festival used to be celebrated annually on the 21st of '*Safar*' in the Arabic lunar month. However, due to weather conditions, the *urs* festival now takes place annually on December 25th and 26th, instead of the 21st of the Arabic lunar month of '*Safar*'. Each year, thousands of individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation, come here to participate in the *urs* festival. Worshippers of various faiths, especially on Thursday and Friday, come to the *mazaar* with vows and offer prayers in reverence.

3.2.6 Syed Nasiruddin Baghdadi (d. 1936 A.D.)

The saint was born in Baghdad, and he was the son of Hazrat Qurban Ali.⁵⁸ His date of birth is not known. He belonged to the *Qadiri* order of the Sufi organisation. His spiritual guide was Hazrat Shah Syed Jahir Ali Baghdadi. Mohammad Yahya Tamizi mentions that he was advised spiritually through a dream to leave for eastern states where people had forgotten to remember the Almighty Allah.⁵⁹ He then left his house and travelled through central Asia, from Baghdad to India. After traversing different regions of India, he finally reached Sirajganj in the Pabna district (now in Bangladesh) through Calcutta and the Sundarbans with the intention of engaging in jute business. He then travelled to Mahendraganj, Meghalaya, to visit Shah Kamal's *dargah*. He spent a few days in the *dargah*, giving lectures that focused on Islam.⁶⁰ From there, he travelled to a very distant area of east Bengal's Mymensingh district, where he had established a *khanqah*, and spent a few days carrying out his mission to preach Islam. Then, Nasiruddin established a second *khanqah* in Badekalpa village of the same district. This *khanqah* is still operating there. In that place, he got married to Atajan Saheba, an affluent widow of Mymensingh.⁶¹ He had a sizable following at Sirajganj, Mymensingh, and all over Bangladesh.

In 1906 A.D., the *pir* alias '*Faqir Baba*' travelled via Zamadarhat from Badekalpa to Katarihara, which was a part of the Lakhipur Zamindari Division of Goalpara district. After reaching the Brahmaputra valley in 1906 A.D., Syed Nasiruddin Baghdadi made the decision to establish his *khanqah* in Katarihara, Jaleswar, in the Goalpara district, where he stayed for thirty years until his death in 1936 A.D. A fairly thick forest covered the land when he arrived. In order to achieve the spiritual union of souls with the Almighty, he built a threshold house there beneath a large tree amid the jungle (Plate-7). His celebrity and reputation grew over time, and lots of people who had become his disciples began to move close to his cottage. As per the narration of Golam Saklayen, he obtained six thousand bighas of forest land from the local zamindar as '*Ijara*' and began to cultivate it with his followers.⁶² As a result, construction of dwellings in the area began, and over time, Katarihara rose to prominence. The community of Katarihara, or Jaleswar, grew over time in terms of economy, education, and social development. At different times, he took land from local zamindars, and his total land amounted to 6500 bighas. He himself tilled the land and employed numerous peasants for the cultivation of these vast lands. Actually, he was a successful peasant, a businessman, and an accomplished spiritualist. He also pursued a career in the fishing, timber, and animal skin trades. After retaining a little portion for his family's upkeep, he utilised the revenues from these to fund his *Musafir Khana*, donate to the poor, and support the Katarihara Senior Madrassa, which he subsequently founded.

Along with Muslims, his *khanqah* once welcomed visitors who practised Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, and Christianity.⁶³ The *khanqah* campus included a distinct non-Muslim *Musafir Khana*. In this *Musafir Khana*, there was a separate provision for cooking food for non-Muslim visitors. The visitors used to have free meals and shelter for a continuous three days in his *Musafir Khana*, and they were supposed to perform some physical labour on the fourth day in order to have free meals and shelter in his *khanqah*. Dewan Nazrul Qadir writes that *Faqir Baba* also awarded scholarships to deserving students who were not Muslims. After receiving a stipend from the *Faqir Baba*, one Balabhadra Das finished his legal studies and began practising law in the Dhubri Court.⁶⁴ Even Balabhadra Das acquired the rank of M. L. A. in the Assam Legislative Assembly. In addition, the *Faqir Baba* provided financial assistance to Akbar Ali Khan, a highly accomplished student, to facilitate his pursuit of higher education in London.

Similarly, Mahboob Ali, a former school Inspector of Goalpara, received financial support from *Pir Baba* to pursue further education at Aligarh Muslim University.⁶⁵

According to Golam Saklayen, an unknown Englishman who was also the proprietor of one of the tea estates in Assam accepted Islam by dint of the spiritual attainment of the saint and finally gave his daughter in marriage to the Sufi saint.⁶⁶ However, according to another version, Mr. Rodzer, the postmaster of Zamadarhat, who was an Englishman and a Christian by faith, married his only daughter, Ms. Lulo Mem, to the *pir*.⁶⁷ As a result, Lulo Mem Saheba changed her name to Mrs. Joynob Khatun and became the mother of all the disciples of *Faqir Baba*. He had three daughters with this second wife, namely Syeda Sofiya Khatun, Syeda Rabiya Khatun, and Syeda Asia Khatun. On the eighth *Magh* of the Bengali calendar year 1342, corresponding to January 21, 1936 A.D., the *Pir Sahib* passed away.⁶⁸ A magnificent shrine was built on his burial site by his followers and successors (Plate-8). Every year, people celebrate the *urs* festival, marking the death anniversary of this saint, with immense enthusiasm over the course of three days, beginning on the 8th *Magh* of the Assamese or Bengali calendar. Thousands of people from all across Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, and Bangladesh gather with various offerings and ask for his blessings.

3.2.7 Hazrat Ezadullah Shah (d. 1970 A.D.)

Hazrat Ezadullah Shah was another notable Sufi saint who established his *astana* (*khanqah*) at Kherupara village, situated at a distance of about 33 kilometres east of Goalpara town and nearby Simlitola Bazaar. His *mazaar sharif* at Kherupara is reminiscent of his legacy. There are no written sources to reconstruct his career. After interviewing several senior and prominent people, I have come to know that he originally belonged to the Chapra town of the Indian state of Bihar.⁶⁹ His childhood education took place in Chapra. According to the interviewee, he migrated to this region of the Goalpara district of Assam in and around 1920 A.D., along with the labourers of Bihar who came to Assam for working purposes.⁷⁰ He was well-versed in the various disciplines of Islamic theology, as well as contemporary issues. Physically, he was very well-built, sound, and extremely handsome. He adhered to the *Naqshbandi-Mujaddadi* school of Sufism. He disseminated Sufi doctrines in the eastern region of the Goalpara district of Assam, and his spiritual greatness inspired many people to take initiation under him, thereby gaining

a deeper understanding of Islam. He had a friendly relationship with non-Muslims and was popular among them.⁷¹ So far as his social reforms are concerned, he barred people from anti-social activities such as drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, gambling, theft, dacoity, killing innocent animals, etc., and was largely successful in this direction. His influence in the contemporary society of the locality was so immense that many prominent persons, as well as the Islamic theologians of that time, accepted his discipleship. Among them, mention may be made of Mojibar Rahman Mahajon, Irfan Hazi, Mokibur Rahman of Goalpara town, Maulana Kazi Bakhtiyar of Kherupara, and Mojibar Rahman of Mamudpur of Dalgoma area, etc.⁷² Among them, Sufi Mojibar Rahman of Mamudpur was appointed as his spiritual successor. Hazrat Ezadullah Shah is also known to have visited and spent three months at the *khanqah* of Nasiruddin Baghdadi of Jaleshwar, engaging in religious discourses with him.⁷³ His death occurred in 1970 A.D. on the 27th of Ramadan, a holy month for Muslims, and he was buried in the Kherupara graveyard, where his tomb was subsequently constructed by his devoted followers (Plate-9). Every year, the *urs* ceremony is observed with much pomp and gaiety on the 27th Ramadan of the Islamic calendar, with the intention of honouring the saint's death anniversary.

3.2.8 Abdur Rahman Firuzi (d. 1988 A.D.)

Abdur Rahman Firuzi was a prominent Sufi-cum-philosophical poet from the Goalpara district of Assam. He was born on September 30, 1919 A.D., at Dosora Ambari, in the west Goalpara area. His father was Kabiraj Mehtab Uddin Ahmed, and his mother's name was Sayeda Tahmina Khatun. In his childhood, he lost his parents and thus became an orphan. His education began at the P.C. Institute at Gauripur in the undivided Goalpara district (now in Dhubri district). The teaching community of the institute, impressed by his leadership, work-desire, strong memory, and intellectual power, bestowed upon him the title of "*Firuzi*."⁷⁴ The term "*Firuzi*" is a Persian word meaning to win or to defeat the opponent. He was elected as the general secretary in the student union election of the school. After studying up to the 10th standard at the P.C. Institute, he enrolled in higher education at a leading educational institution in Dhaka in 1934 A.D. under the supervision of one of his cousins, Abdul Aziz, the High Commissioner of Dhaka. From Dhaka, he went to England for homoeopathic treatment and research.⁷⁵ After completing his formal

education in England, he returned home. At that time, the freedom movement in India was going on in full swing under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, and he actively participated in the ongoing freedom movement. The British government imprisoned him for holding meetings (picketing in villages) to persuade the common people to use domestic products and boycott foreign goods. Firuzi got government jobs in the education and medical departments, but resigned due to obstacles to his literary pursuit and the development of his creativity.

He was the author of many books, a linguist, a Sufi saint, a learned physician, the inventor of many homoeopathic medicines, a speech artist, a philosophical poet, and the editor of the weekly magazine “*Biswa-Dut.*”⁷⁶ To satiate his thirst for spirituality, he went to Dhubri in the 1940s and stayed at D. K. Road, Bidyapara, for 22 long years alone, continuously studying and practicing Sufi rituals and literature. His spiritual mentor was Haji Jalal of the Chapar area. Dr. Firuzi disseminated mystical teachings in the western part of the then-Goalpara district. His *sadhana* (meditation) reached such a high level that even the muscles of his chest were seen chanting the name of God.⁷⁷ His spiritual teachings are found in many of his books. A multi-faceted genius, Abdur Rahman Firuzi breathed his last on September 21, 1988 A.D. He is survived by his wife, four daughters, and one son. Still, a few of his *murids* (disciples) are found living in the study area.

3.3 Non-Resident Sufi Saints of Undivided Goalpara District

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 different parts of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam before leaving for their original place. Prominent among them are highlighted below:

3.3.1 Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi

Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi is recognised as one of the earliest and most prominent figures among the Sufi saints in India. The Perso-Arabic texts such as “*Fawaid-al-Fuwad*” by Amir Hassan Al-Sizji, “*Siyar-ul Arifin*”⁷⁸ written by Maulana Jamali, “*Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*”⁷⁹ compiled by Abdul Haq Delhavi, “*Seka Subhodaya*,” a Sanskrit

text authored by Halayudha Misra, “*Rehla*” of Ibn Batuta, “*Ain-i-Akbari*”⁸⁰ by Abul Fazl, “*Khairul-Majlis*”⁸¹ by Hamid Qalandar, etc. all contain references to Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi in their respective works. According to ‘*Siyar-ul-Arifin*’, a collection of Sufi biographies written between 1530 A.D. and 1536 A.D., the saint was born in Tabrez (northwest Iran), and his father’s name was Shaykh Badruddin Abu Saeed.⁸² He studied Sufism in his home city of Tabrez before travelling to Baghdad in 1228 A.D. to pursue his studies for seven years under the famous mystic Shaykh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi.⁸³ However, as per the account of ‘*Fawa’id al-Fu’ad*’, his first spiritual *guru* was Shaykh Abu Said Tabrezi.⁸⁴ He then extensively travelled through Arabia, Iraq, Bukhara, and Nishapur and finally reached Delhi during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish (1210–36 A.D.).⁸⁵ After experiencing a lack of hospitality in Delhi by Najmuddin Sughra, the “*Shaykh-ul-Islam*” of Delhi,⁸⁶ he finally made his way to Lakhnauti via Badaun.⁸⁷ According to ‘*Fawa’id al-Fu’ad*’, he relocated to Bengal and resided there till his demise in 1244 A.D.⁸⁸ However, as per the narrative in ‘*Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua*’, his death took place in 1337 A.D.⁸⁹ According to ‘*Siyar-ul-Arifin*’, he converted many non-Muslims to Islam in Bengal.⁹⁰ He is more known for his significant contributions to the establishment and spread of Sufism in Bengal and the adjacent regions of Assam. Before him, no Sufi had ever served as a missionary in this area. He belonged to the *Suhrawardi* order.

It is known from the above-mentioned sources that he resided in Bengal for a duration exceeding two decades, during which he disseminated the teachings of Islam and Sufism in the surrounding regions, including the southern and western parts of Assam. Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi also maintained a very simple lifestyle. He would follow his spiritual teacher, Shaykh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi, around carrying a hot burner on his head and a pot for cooking on it in order to instantly deliver hot food to his master upon demand.⁹¹ Numerous sources state that the saint amassed a substantial estate in Pandua and Deotola,⁹² which is currently owned by a ‘*mutawalli*’ for the use of *faqirs* and the underprivileged. The name of this region is “*Ba’is Hazari*” (twenty-two thousand).⁹³ His impressive *khanqah* (Plate-10), located in Pandua, within the Malda district of West Bengal, serves as a poignant reminder of its historical grandeur. It can be assumed that his *khanqah* functioned as a central hub for his missionary endeavours in the region of Bengal and its adjoining areas. Regarding the spiritual greatness of this saint, in one of

the inscriptions of Pandua, he has been described as divinely chosen, with angelic qualities, and holding authority over both religion and the world.⁹⁴ According to F. A. Qadri, Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi distinguished himself from other Sufis by spending over five decades living and working with people who were almost cut off from civilisation in hostile regions.⁹⁵ Following his demise, he bequeathed a substantial cadre of successors tasked with the continuation of his mission of Sufism in Bengal. However, there is a paucity of information pertaining to the endeavours undertaken by these disciples. The lack of evidence makes it impossible to pinpoint the exact location of his tomb with certainty.

3.3.2 Shah Jalal Mujarrad (d. 1346 A.D.)

Hazrat Shah Jalal was one of India's most significant Sufi figures in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. According to the Persian hagiography '*Suhail-i-Yaman*', which was composed in 1860 A.D. by Nasiruddin Haldar, the actual name of the saint was Shah Jalal Mujarrad-i-Yameni.⁹⁶ Another Persian chronicle, '*Gulzar-i-Abrar*', identifies him as belonging to Bengal of Turkistani ancestry.⁹⁷ However, James Wise, the person who decoded one of the inscriptions pertaining to Shah Jalal at Sylhet, claims that the province of 'Kanya' is the place of his birth, which was located in Arabia, not in Turkey.⁹⁸ '*Gulzar-i-Abrar*' and '*Suhail-i-Yaman*', two Persian chronicles, have both attempted biographical sketches of this saint, but determining his original birthplace and childhood has proven to be quite challenging for historians. The author of '*Riazu-s-Salatin*' also remains silent on this subject. This much can be found in the footnote of the English version of '*Riazu-s-Salatin*' that "the country was conquered by the Musalmans led by a warrior saint, called Shah Jalal, at the end of the fourteenth century, when the Afghan king Shamsuddin ruled over Bengal with his capital at Gaur."⁹⁹ However, the accounts of '*Rehla*' by Ibn Batuta have the first mention of a Sufi saint from this area by the name of Jalal Uddin. S. A. A. Rizvi writes that Hazrat Shah Jalal arrived in Sylhet around 1303 A.D., accompanied by 303 disciples¹⁰⁰ and established settlements across the areas of southern Assam and Bengal. But '*Gulzar-i-Abrar*' says 313 men accompanied him when he reached Bengal.¹⁰¹ The saint dedicated his entire life to disseminating the Sufi mystical heritage and maintained a celibate lifestyle. Consequently, he was bestowed with the appellation "*Mujarrad*," denoting bachelor. Upon arrival in Sylhet, he established a *khanqah* and

dispatched his followers to other areas to promote Islam and Sufi ideology. His disciples were known as “*Jalalites*.” Thus, Sylhet was frequently called ‘Jalalabad’ in official records and historical narratives during the period of Muslim administration.

Ibn Batuta reported his voyage to the mountain of Kamrupa in 1345 A.D. with the purpose of meeting a saint named Jalal Uddin.¹⁰² However, academics on this issue continue to engage in an ongoing dispute regarding the identity of the saint, with some arguing that he was Shah Jalal of Sylhet while others propose Jalaluddin Tabzeri of Pandua. According to Ibn Batua,¹⁰³

“His hospice lay outside the cave of the mountain. There was no habitation whatever in its vicinity. The inhabitants of that locality, Musalmans as well as Hindus, come to visit the shaikh and bring him presents and gifts which the fakirs and visitors consume. As for the shaikh, he contents himself with a cow with whose milk he breaks his fast for ten consecutive days.”

Ibn Batuta was deeply captivated by Shah Jalal’s supernatural and intuitive abilities, for which his book claims the saint was well-known from China to the eastern Islamic world. He states that the religious preaching of Shah Jalal drew the inhabitants of the mountains, and they eventually converted to Islam.¹⁰⁴ Local literature further corroborates the opinions of this Moorish visitor. According to a traditional song, millions of Hindus lived in Sylhet, but there were no Muslims there. Shah Jalal was the pioneer who initiated the ‘*Azan*’ and propagated Islam in that location.¹⁰⁵ Muhammad Enamul Haq is of the view that this *darvesh* was largely responsible for the propagation of Islam in western Assam and the eastern area of Bengal.¹⁰⁶ In the words of Golam Saklayen, because of his endeavours, Islam spread extensively in the eastern part of Bengal and the western portion of Assam.¹⁰⁷ His massive impact on the people of these two regions can still be seen in the tremendous respect he continues to get from the Muslims of Bengal and the western and southern parts of Assam. According to ‘*Sek Subodhaya*’, the saint visited Goalpara and constructed a mosque there.¹⁰⁸ But there is no definite proof of it, and some scholars try to associate his name with the construction of the “*Powa Makkah*” mosque at Hajo. The *dargah* of Hazrat Shah Jalal is situated in Sylhet (Plate-11) and hundreds of Muslims and non-Muslims alike visit his tomb every day, considering it to be a sacred destination of pilgrimage.

3.3.3 Shah Ismail Ghazi (d. 1474 A.D.)

The history of Ismail Ghazi has been reconstructed on the basis of the accounts narrated in the '*Risalat-us-Shuhada*', written in Persian by Muhammad Sattari in the year 1633 A.D. G. H. Damant translated the text into English and published it in the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1874 A.D. In the same source, it is stated that, according to tradition, Ismail Ghazi was supposedly a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and was born in the Islamic sacred city of Mecca.¹⁰⁹ He moved to India with the goal of spreading Islam. After travelling through different parts of north India, he finally established himself in Gaur during the rule of Sultan Rukunuddin Barbak Shah (1459 A.D.–1474 A.D.) of Bengal.¹¹⁰ Recognising his profound spiritual attainment, the Sultan offered him a prestigious position within his military establishment. So, he is commonly known as a “warrior saint” in Bengal. Shah Ismail launched his first offensive against the Raja of Orissa, known as the “Gajpati.” He emerged victorious over the Raja and reclaimed the Madaran, or Mandaran, fortress from him. He engaged in his second military campaign against Kameshwar, the ruler of Kamrupa.¹¹¹ The king was vanquished and forced to pledge loyalty to the Sultan of Bengal. Bhandasi Rai, a Hindu lieutenant of the Sultan at Ghoraghat, harboured feelings of jealousy towards Ismail Ghazi due to his accomplishments and popularity. So, Rai fabricated a report alleging Ismail Ghazi’s coalition with the king of Kamrupa. On the basis of the report, Barbak Shah promptly commanded the execution of Ismail Ghazi, and accordingly, Ismail was put to death in the year 1474 A.D.¹¹²

G. H. Damant asserts that following his defeat by the warrior-saint, Kameswar, the king of Kamrupa, acknowledged Ismail Ghazi as his spiritual mentor.¹¹³ However, the indigenous records of Assam do not mention the incursion of Ismail Ghazi or his triumph over the Kamrupa monarch. According to legend, the various body parts of the saint were engraved at different locations following his execution. Among them, one is located at Kanta Duar in the present Rangpur district of Bangladesh (Plate-12). Another burial site of the saint is located in Mandaran, near Jahanabad in the Hooghly district of West Bengal, where both Hindus and Muslims pay their respects to him. The Sultan later realised his mistake and sought forgiveness at his grave in Kanta Duar at Rangpur, and he and his queen would annually visit his *dargah*.¹¹⁴ It is said in '*A Report on the District*

of Rungpore' by E. A. Glazier that he converted a large number of zamindars from Ghoraghat and Rangpur.¹¹⁵ Prodyot Vottacharjee states in his book *'Bonge Sufi Provab O Sufitatteer Cromobikash'* that "it is learnt from the Persian biography *'Risalat-us-Shuhada'* that the saint had spread the message of Islam and the doctrine of Sufism in north Bengal as well as in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam during the reign of Sultan Barbak Shah."¹¹⁶

3.3.4 Shah Kamal

Shah Kamal was another significant Sufi saint of the erstwhile Goalpara district of Assam. According to a Bengali historical pamphlet translated into English by Mr. Donough, the then Deputy Magistrate of Jamalpur, Bangladesh, it is known that Sufi Shah Kamal reached Bengal from Multan around the year 1503 A.D.¹¹⁷ As per the account of the same source, Shah Kamal established himself at Durmut and compelled the evil spirits already prevailing there to relinquish the spades they were using to weaken the river bank. Shah Kamal, thus, with his extraordinary supernatural abilities, successfully expelled the evil entity and reinstated tranquillity in the region.¹¹⁸ Moreover, he cured the son of local Raja Mahendra Narayan of a chronic disease. Both Isfandiyar Khan and Raja Mahendra Narayan bestowed jagirs on Shah Kamal as a token of their appreciation for his kind assistance.¹¹⁹ The account in *'Pavitra Asam'* states that Shah Kamal arrived in Assam during the time of Hazrat Shah Jalal of Sylhet. Nevertheless, a few other academics have classified him as one of the *Panch Pirs* of Dhubri.¹²⁰ So, there are insufficient sources to draw any conclusions about it. It is known from the accounts of Mr. Donough that Shah Kamal spent several days with his many followers engaging in worship at Bakloi Mauza in Karaibari of Goalpara district, and the zamindar of Karaibari donated Baklai Mauza to Shah Kamal.¹²¹ He had four wives, of whom Baroi Bibi was the most prominent. She was the daughter of a Hindu belonging to the Baroi caste, known for selling *paan*.¹²² Baroi Bibi was interred in the village of Baroikandhi, where a *dargah* for her remains endures to this day. Shah Kamal died in the middle of the 17th century A.D.¹²³ The mausoleum of Shah Kamal is located in close proximity to the Indo-Bangla border, specifically along the Dalu-Mahendraganj-Mankachar frontier road in the West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya (Plate-13). The *dargah sharif* hosts the annual '*urs*' festival on a yearly basis. People belonging to the Muslim, Hindu, and Garo communities, hailing from both the

states of Assam and Meghalaya and nearby Bangladesh, congregate in significant numbers at the *dargah* with the purpose of seeking blessings from this revered Sufi. Common belief in the area holds that he played a major part in converting many local people into the faith of Islam in the Mahendraganj area, which was at that time a part of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam.

3.3.5 Keramat Ali Jaunpuri (d. 1873 A.D.)

Keramat Ali Jaunpuri was born on June 12, 1800 A.D., at Mullatola, Jaunpur (Oudh). He was a descendant of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique, the first Caliph of Islam. His father, Abu Ibrahim Muhammad Imam Baksh, was an accomplished Persian scholar who was also well-versed in the *Hadith* and other branches of Islamic scholarship. At the age of eighteen, Keramat Ali developed a strong desire to acquire spiritual knowledge and a restless yearning for self-purification. While in Rai Bareli, he met Syed Ahmad and took up his discipleship.¹²⁴ Syed Ahmed urged him to travel to Bengal and use pens and speeches to spread Islam. He began preaching Islam in Bengal and Assam in 1821 A.D., following the instructions of his *murshid*.¹²⁵ The Bengali Muslim community of that time was characterised by a plethora of innovations, superstitions, and activities that were not in accordance with Islamic *shariah*. Islamic thought had become saturated with the practices of '*shirk*' (associating partners with Allah) and '*bid'at*' (innovations in religious practices). He endeavoured to reinstate unadulterated Islamic principles within the Bengali Muslim community. Keramat Ali initiated the "*Taiyuni*" movement,¹²⁶ adopting a more accommodative stance towards the followers of other religions and the non-Muslim authorities of Bengal.¹²⁷ He tirelessly dedicated himself to revitalising Islam based on its fundamental principles in Bihar and Bengal, with a particular focus on eastern Bengal and western Assam. It was because of his charm that many Muslims in Bengal and western Assam responded to his call. Keramat Ali emerged as its most eminent proponent and accomplished evangelist.¹²⁸ In contrast to the prevalent mysticism in Bengal's Muslim community during that period, the spirituality of Keramat Ali was rooted in genuine Islamic beliefs and practices.

Golam Saklayen says Keramat Ali demonstrated immense prowess in rejuvenating Islam and recreating Islamic culture in east Bengal and its neighbouring regions of Assam for about 51 years of his life.¹²⁹ Under his influence, many non-Muslims

in Bengal and western Assam accepted Islam.¹³⁰ Jagadish Narayan Sarkar claims that the Nagas in Assam also embraced his message.¹³¹ Thus, the early nineteenth-century A.D. Muslims of eastern Bengal and western Assam were greatly impacted by the religious-reformative movement led by Keramat Ali Jaunpuri. He became critically ill during his stay in Rangpur and died on May 30, 1873 A.D. in Rangpur, Bangladesh. He was laid to rest in Mohalla Munshipara (Plate-14), where annual *urs* are conducted every year in his honour. Historian Muinuddin Ahmad Khan states that Keramat Ali Jaunpuri will endure in the memory of future generations for his imposing personality, moderate reformist views, and immense persuasive power.¹³²

His second son, Maulana Hafiz Ahmad, who dedicated the majority of his life to advancing Islam in Bengal, succeeded him. Both Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, his sons and successors Maulana Hafiz and Maulana Abdul Awal Jaunpuri (1866 A.D.–1921 A.D.) are known to have occasionally visited the various parts of western Assam, organising '*Jalsahs*' (religious gatherings) and other meetings in order to spread the messages of Sufism as well as puritan Islam.¹³³ Another prominent successor of Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, namely Abu Nasr Muhammad Wahid (1872 A.D.–1952 A.D.), was also a major figure in the dissemination of Islamic teachings in western Assam. He even served as the Professor of Arabic and Persian at the newly founded Cotton College in Guwahati from 1901 A.D. to 1905 A.D.¹³⁴ Subsequent Sufi saints of the Jaunpuri trend, such as Maulana Abdul Baten, Mahmud Hussain Jaunpuri, etc., also had a significant impact on disseminating Sufi ideology in the study area.¹³⁵ The descendants of Keramat Ali Jaunpuri still occasionally visit the various parts of the undivided Goalpara district to meet their followers. Even today, a sizeable number of followers of the Jaunpuri tradition are found in the study area.

3.3.6 Abu Bakr Siddiqui (d. 1939 A.D.)

Among the Sufi saints who pioneered the rejuvenation of Islam in Bengal and southern and western Assam, Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiqui stands predominant.¹³⁶ He was born in Hooghly, West Bengal, in 1845 A.D., to Haji Abdul Muqtadir and Musammah Mohabbatun Nesa.¹³⁷ His father, who was forty-four years old, passed away when Abu Bakr Siddiqui was just nine months old. His mother, Mohabbatun Nesa, raised him accordingly. He was taught the basics by Maulavi Ghanimatullah. Subsequently, he

pursued further religious studies at the Sitapur Madrassa in Hooghly and the Muhsinia Madrassa in Calcutta. Following the completion of his formal education, he dedicated eighteen years of his life to conducting extensive research on many facets of Islam. He accepted the discipleship of Hazrat Shah Fateh Ali Owaisi and became his spiritual successor.¹³⁸ This esteemed Sufi belonged to the *Naqshbandi-Mujaddadi* Sufi order. He was a versatile genius and contributed a lot to every sphere of society. In his doctoral thesis, A. R. M. Ali Haidar mentions that Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui travelled extensively throughout Assam and Bengal to teach people the true Islam and the doctrine of Sufism.¹³⁹ He would hold religious gatherings in the towns, villages, and outlying districts of Bengal and Assam, where he and his followers would preach about Islamic ethics and morality and how to live in harmony with people of other faiths. Many Muslims in Bengal, Bihar, and Assam looked to him as their spiritual guide. Due to his numerous reform activities and achievements in promoting Islam in undivided Bengal and Assam, his adherents held him in high esteem as a “*Mujaddid*” (Reviver) of Islam.¹⁴⁰

His role in mobilising the people of Bengal and western Assam in the freedom struggle of India is also significant. He called on his legions of followers to stand in solidarity against the colonial rule of the British.¹⁴¹ In pursuit of this goal, he laid the foundation for numerous significant Muslim organisations and newspapers in Bengal and Assam. These organisations, together with their mouthpieces, were instrumental in the Khilafat, Non-Cooperation, and Quit India movements. Prominent of these organisations are: “*Anjuman-e Ulama-e Bengal*” (Organisation of Ulama of Bengal), “*Islam Procharak Samiti*” (Association of Preachers of Islam), “*Anjuman-e Wai’zeen*” (Organisation of Sermonizers), and “*Jamiat-e Ulama-e Bangla-O Assam*” (Association of Ulama of Bengal and Assam).¹⁴² Maulana Abu Bakr Siddiqui presided over the “*Jamiat-e Ulama-e Bengal-O Assam*” till his demise in 1939 A.D. With reference to the activities of this organisation, Abu Bakr Siddiqui, President of it, once said:¹⁴³

“Special effort was being given to improve the activities of ‘*Jamiat-e Ulama-e Bengal-O Assam*’ to strengthen it and make it effective. I addressed a number of meetings in various districts in Assam and Bengal. In every place, the organization got the sympathy of Bengal and Assam. Already in some districts, branches were established.”

The “*Anjuman-e-Wai’zeen*,” an organisation of speakers, used to hold ‘*waj-mehfils*’ (religious gatherings) in various important places in Bengal and western Assam

to convey the message of guidance to the people.¹⁴⁴ Abu Bakr Siddiqui passed away in 1939 A.D. and was buried on the premises of the *Furfura Sharif* in the Hooghly district of West Bengal (Plate-15), which is a sacred site for both Muslim and Hindu communities. Following his death, his son Maulana Abdul Hai Siddiqui (1904–77 A.D.) assumed the role of spiritual leader. He was also a well-known Bengali Muslim saint. Both he and his father frequently visited various places in western Assam and propagated the doctrines of Sufism. Many Muslims in this region took initiation under them, and they established various socio-religious institutions in western Assam.¹⁴⁵ To date, many Muslims, particularly those in the northern bank of the original Goalpara district of Assam, are spiritually affiliated with the *Furfura Sharif*. During the *urs* celebration, the *Darbar Sharif* draws a substantial influx of pilgrims.

3.3.7 Shah Muhammad Ekramul Haq (d. 1944 A.D.)

Shah Muhammad Ekramul Haq was born at Jhaljhali in the year 1851 A.D., a region within the Koch Behar district of West Bengal. Another version gives his birth year as 1848 A.D. at Punashi village, which is now in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal.¹⁴⁶ Khandakar Shah Muhammad Ibrahim was his father, and his mother's name was Hajera Bibi. His lineage is thought to have Arab ancestry.¹⁴⁷ He was assigned an instructor at a young age to look after his education. For his higher education, he attended the Government College in Behrampur, in the present Murshidabad district of West Bengal. There, he pursued studies in various disciplines, including poetry, physics, and chemistry. Additionally, he had extensive knowledge of *hakimi* (herbal) medicine. During his early years, he interacted with a number of Sufi saints. He acquired profound spiritual wisdom from them. He was an apprentice and the designated successor of Shah Sufi Fateh Ali Owaisi.¹⁴⁸ He was a Sufi reformer affiliated with the *Naqshbandi* order. He dedicated himself to seeking divine knowledge in the forests, hills, and mountains of the *Duars* and Assam, following the guidance of his *murshid*.

After completing his spiritual training, he began delivering Islamic sermons in various places in Bengal and lower Assam. Md. Nabiul Islam, in his doctoral thesis, mentions that besides the districts of 24 Parganas, Nadia, Burdwan, Medinipur, Hooghly, Birbhum, Howrah, Bankura, Murshidabad, etc., he also preached in large portions of the *Duars* and Assam.¹⁴⁹ He also made efforts to introduce modern education in those

regions.¹⁵⁰ He frequently visited various parts of the northern bank of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam and preached the doctrine of Sufism among the local Muslims.¹⁵¹ In this way, his profound spiritual teachings had been a boon to many people in western Assam and Bengal.¹⁵² Shah Ekramul Haq passed away in 1944 A.D., at the quite old age of ninety-three.¹⁵³ His *dargah*, often referred to as “*Darbar-e-Ekram*,” is situated at Chilahati, under Haldibari town in Koch Behar district in West Bengal, along the India-Bangladesh international border (Plate-16). Annually, a magnificent *urs* festival takes place here on the 5th and 6th days of the Bengali month of *Falgun*. People from West Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Assam, regardless of their religious beliefs, come together to seek spiritual blessings from the saint. This *urs* festival, also known as “*Mela*,” is a unique example of communal harmony and strengthens the relationship between India and Bangladesh as well.

3.3.8 Hazrat Ruhul Amin (d. 1945 A.D.)

He was born in 1882 A.D. at Taki, Narayanpur, in the North Twenty-four Pargana district of West Bengal.¹⁵⁴ According to some other scholars, Ruhul Amin was born in 1875 A.D. However, the first view is more reliable. His parents were Rahima Khatun and Munshi Dabir Uddin Khan.¹⁵⁵ At a young age, Ruhul Amin completed his basic education in the Bengali language under the tutelage of a Hindu scholar named Rakhhal Pandit. Later, he relocated to Basirhat town and commenced studying Arabic and Persian under the tutelage of Maulana Wazed Ali, an Arabic instructor at Basirhat Town High School. Subsequently, Ruhul Amin was admitted to the Anglo-Persian department of the ‘Calcutta Alia Madrassa’ (now Alia University) in 1896 A.D. and stood first in every class of the Calcutta Madrassa.¹⁵⁶ He possessed fluency in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English, and Bengali. After completing formal education, he became a disciple of Abu Bakr Siddiqui, the spiritual leader of ‘*Furfura Sharif*’, in order to acquire profound spiritual insight.¹⁵⁷ He was associated with the *Naqshbandi silsilah*. Following his graduation, he was encouraged to become an assistant professor at the institution by Maulana Ahmad, the Principal of the Alia Madrassa at the time. But his spiritual mentor, Abu Bakr Siddiqui, urged him against joining the institution and instead encouraged him to dedicate his efforts to propagating Islam and eliminating superstition.¹⁵⁸

Ruhul Amin was an effective orator, a social reformer, a prolific writer, and above all, a Sufi saint of the subcontinent. He inspired Bengali Muslims to seek progressive thoughts in politics, economics, civics, literature, and other areas. At that time, Christian clergy and Hindu scholars erroneously translated the Quran and expressed criticism of Islam through the production of various books and booklets. Moreover, several factions within Islam undermined the unity and harmony among the Muslims. Ruhul Amin debated with them and authored multiple books to illustrate the authentic essence of Islam. Ruhul Amin was regarded as a superb religious debater in Bengal and Assam during his own era. He and Maulana Nurul Haq engaged in an argument in 1926 A.D. at Gauripur in Dhubri, Assam, over certain Islamic legal matters.¹⁵⁹ This, often referred to as “*Gauripurer Bahas*,” was later published along with a summary of the discussion.¹⁶⁰ He delivered numerous lectures on different aspects of Islam in many places in western Assam, and a lot of people joined the ranks of puritan Islam by hearing his religious discourses.¹⁶¹ Md. Abdul Karim mentions in his book that he spent almost forty years speaking at religious gatherings in Bengal and western Assam.¹⁶² So far as his public career is concerned, together with Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqui of *Furfura Sharif*, he founded the organisation “*Anjuman-e Wai’zeen*” in 1911 A.D. with *ulama* from Bengal and Assam in order to instruct Muslims of all social strata in Islamic principles and practices.¹⁶³ Along with his spiritual mentor, he founded a new political party, “*Jamiat-e Ulama-e Bangla-O-Assam*.”¹⁶⁴ He was chosen to serve as the vice president of the party. After the death of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiqui, Hazrat Ruhul Amin assumed the presidency of the party, a position he held until his death.¹⁶⁵ He passed away in the year 1945 A.D. at the age of 63 and was buried at Basirhat, where his followers subsequently constructed a mausoleum (Plate-17). His reputation grew throughout Bengal, Assam, and even Burma.¹⁶⁶ The Muslims in Bengal, Assam, and Tripura still recall and honour his enduring influence.

3.3.9 Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (d. 1952 A.D.)

Yunus Ali Enayetpuri, often known as “*Enayetpuri*,” was a very influential Sufi figure of undivided Bengal in the twentieth century A.D. In 1886 A.D., he was born in the Pabna district of the Bengal Presidency, in the Enayetpur village of Sirajganj.¹⁶⁷ He was given the name ‘*Enayetpuri*’ after the name of the village where he resided. The

names of his parents were Shah Abdul Karim and Tahmina Begum. *Khwaja* Enayetpuri dedicated twelve years of his life to submitting himself to the teachings of Allah, under the supervision of his spiritual mentor, Syed Wazed Ali Shah.¹⁶⁸ The goal of Enayetpuri was to attain spiritual enlightenment and provide assistance for the benefit of all people. He is recognised for having proliferated the *Naqshbandi-Mujaddadi* order in Bangladesh and western Assam.¹⁶⁹ According to Golam Dastagir, the biographer of Enayetpuri, because of his unwavering commitment to Sufi ideals and his tireless preaching of Islam, his *tariqah* attracted a huge number of peace-loving devotees throughout Bengal and Assam.¹⁷⁰ During my interaction with Ashraf Ali Fakir, aged 99 years,¹⁷¹ he let me know that his father was the disciple of Yunus Ali Enayetpuri. He also informed me that the Sufi saint occasionally visited different locations in lower Assam, and many Muslim people accepted his discipleship. Enayetpuri had an immense influence over the East Bengal migrant people of western Assam. He imparted spiritual training to numerous followers, a few of whom had achieved success and established *khanqahs* in different regions of Bengal and western Assam. One of his prominent disciples upon whom he conferred *Khilafat Nama* was *Khwaja* Nur Mohammad of Adalguri village in the Chirang district of Assam, who died in the year 1972 A.D. Like his *murshid*, *Khwaja* Nur Mohammad also propagated the ideology of Sufism in this region of Assam.¹⁷² Even today, many Muslim families in the study area are following the Sufi path shown by Enayetpuri.

In addition to spiritualism, *Khwaja* Enayetpuri also participated in political activities. He fought for the ongoing freedom struggle and opposed the partition of the country.¹⁷³ He passed away in 1952 A.D. and was interred at Enayetpur, located in Sirajganj, Bangladesh. The *khanqah* founded by *Khwaja* himself is known as the “*Enayetpur Darbar Sharif*” (Plate-18) and is the most extensive among all the *khanqahs* in Bangladesh. This shrine is commonly referred to as “*Bishwa Shanti Manzil*,” which translates as “World Peace Centre.” During *urs*, many hundreds of thousands of visitors gather from far and near at his *mazaar* in Enayetpur to observe the occasion with due solemnity.

3.3.10 Syed Asad-ud Daula Shiraji (d. 1971 A.D.)

Asad-ud Daula Shiraji was born in 1908 A.D. in Banikunj village of Sirajganj city in then-east Bengal.¹⁷⁴ His father was Syed Ismail Hussain Shiraji, who was a prominent freedom fighter, an author, and a renowned poet of the contemporary period. His ancestor migrated from the city of Shiraj in Iran to undivided Bengal and received honour in the Mughal court. The formal education of Asad-ud Daula Shiraji took place in Calcutta, Lucknow, and Delhi under the mentorship of Maulana Abdul Bari of Lucknow, Khwaja Syed Hassan Nizami, Professor G. H. Rodger, Professor J. C. Ghosh, and Pandit Digendra Narayan Bhattacharya.¹⁷⁵ Inspired by his father, he participated in the ongoing freedom struggle, and for this reason he was unable to pursue further study. He demonstrated literary genius and oratory skills from an early age. On May 21, 1927 A.D., he delivered an inflammatory speech in Calcutta on the occasion of the 8th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The British government imprisoned him for anti-nationalist sentiment. During the freedom movement, he worked along with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Dr. M. A. Ansari, Choudhury Khaliqzaman, etc. He was associated with the Indian National Congress until 1934 A.D., when he left it and joined the Muslim League. Much before the partition of the country, he took initiation under the famous Sufi saint, namely Khwaja Syed Hassan Nizami, in order to satisfy his spiritual yearnings, and gradually he became popular in society as an accomplished Sufi or a *pir*. He belonged to the *Chishti* order of Sufi *silsilah*. He frequently travelled to the various areas in the original Goalpara district of Assam during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1943 A.D., he established a *khanqah* at Pakhritari village in the Basbari neighbourhood under the Lakhipur circle of the present Goalpara district (Plate-19).¹⁷⁶ Because of the affable traits and supernatural character of the saint, the Lakhipur zamindar granted the *khanqah* a revenue-free land of approximately 14 bighas.¹⁷⁷

So far as his missionary activities are concerned, he propagated the liberal teachings of Islam and preached universal brotherhood. That is why the orthodox *ulama* of his time issued a decree against his ideology.¹⁷⁸ Some tribal people of the Garo community are said to have been converted to Islam under his influence.¹⁷⁹ He has significantly contributed to the cultivation of forest lands in the area, resulting in increased human settlement. It is known that even the contemporary Lakhipur zamindar

would occasionally visit his *khanqah*, seeking his blessing.¹⁸⁰ Even today, he has a few followers in the western region of Goalpara district. Some of his prominent disciples who are at present no longer alive include Meher Faqir, Alim Uddin Mollah, Nasir Master, Mohimullah, Nishan Mollah, Chand Miya Faqir of the Ambari area, Azim Munshi, Musa Khadem, and Hormuz Dewani of Pakhritari, Bholu Dewani of Darirpar, Sher Ali Mondal, and Khorshed Faqir of Khonarpar, etc. Among them, Alim Uddin Mollah was a freedom fighter and superintendent of the Rakhaldubi High Madrassa, established in 1936 A.D. Some of his non-Muslim followers who showed great respect to the saint were Joytun Korta, the local zamindar of Lakhipur; Gopal Pandey, the former Principal of Lakhipur College; Uma Pandit of Baguan, etc.¹⁸¹ Each year, during the month of *Magh Purnima* in the Bengali calendar, *urs* celebration is observed at his *khanqah* at Pakhritari, Basbari, where his son and spiritual successor, Syed Shamim Shiraji, attends. After halting for a few years at Pakhritari *khanqah*, particularly following the partition of India in 1947 A.D., Asad-ud Daula Shiraji returned to his previous *khanqah* in Sirajganj, Bangladesh. He was assassinated in 1971 A.D., during the anarchy of the Bangladesh freedom movement. His *mazaar* is located in Sirajganj town of Bangladesh (Plate-20).

3.3.11 Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (d. 1976 A.D.)

Abdul Hamid Khan was born in 1880 A.D. in a village called Dhanpara, which is located in the Sirajganj district of present-day Bangladesh. His parents were Muhammad Sharafat Ali Khan and Mosammat Mojiran Bibi, and he was their second son. He had to navigate a tumultuous childhood because of the untimely deaths of his parents and grandfather during his formative years. With the exception of a limited period of schooling at the nearby school and seminary, he lacked substantial formal education. At the age of sixteen in 1901 A.D., Abdul Hamid met Nasiruddin Baghdadi, a renowned Sufi saint, at Hussainpur, Sirajganj, Bangladesh.¹⁸² The Sufi, hailing from Baghdad, reached Sirajganj while en route to Assam through Mymensingh. As soon as the *pir* learnt that Abdul Hamid was an orphan, he brought him to Jaleshwar, Goalpara, in Assam.¹⁸³ In Jaleshwar, Baghdadi Sahib employed Abdul Hamid as his domestic servant. After recognising his diligence and admiring his interest in religious mysticism, Baghdadi educated him in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Baghdadi Sahib also helped Abdul Hamid gain knowledge of the Quran, *Hadith*, and *Fiqh* by providing private tuition.¹⁸⁴ Upon the

advice of Nasiruddin Baghdadi, he also had the unique chance to spend nearly two years studying religion at '*Darul Uloom Deoband Seminary*' in Uttar Pradesh.

His association with Nasiruddin Baghdadi lasted from 1901 A.D. to 1907 A.D., during which he eventually transformed himself into a mystic practitioner. According to Abdul Qayyum, a biographer of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan, he must have gained a high spiritual potential under the direct supervision of the Baghdadi Pir, who taught him '*Ilm-i-Tasawwuf*', or knowledge of mysticism.¹⁸⁵ The fondness of Abdul Hamid for his *pir* was so strong that he named his first son, 'Nasir', as a tribute to his spiritual *guru* Nasiruddin Baghdadi.¹⁸⁶ According to Peter Custers, "Abdul Hamid was originally from Sirajganj in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), but he acquired the name '*Bhashani*' from Bhashan Char, a geographically low-lying region in the present Dhubri district of western Assam."¹⁸⁷ In the late 1920s, Abdul Hamid cleared the forests to build his own bamboo home here in Bhasan Char after being driven out by the British colonial authority to seek safety outside of Bengal. Because of his association with Bhashan Char, people subsequently began to refer to him as "*the Maulana of Bhashani*" or just "*Bhashani*."

According to Amalendu Guha, "The wandering Maulana, renowned for his austere and pious way of life and his extraordinary organisational abilities, was revered by rural people as a political figure and also as a *pir* (holy person), believed to possess supernatural qualities."¹⁸⁸ Bhashani had a considerable number of Hindu followers who respected him as '*Pir Baba*', and Hindu peasants also called him '*Kishan Bandhu*' (friend of farmers).¹⁸⁹ Maulana Bhashani had a substantial number of adherents in Assam. He was, in fact, revered as a *pir* in western Assam, a saintly person who attracted an enormous following who were prepared to back his political views as well as his doctrines of religion.¹⁹⁰ He orchestrated several peasant conferences with these supporters. Maulana Bhashani gained legendary status in Assam during the mid-1930s and 1940s. His efforts led to the establishment of an agricultural farm, a school, college, library, madrasa, veterinary hospital, and an orphanage in Hamidabad, in the southern part of present-day Dhubri district.¹⁹¹ After his departure following the partition of the country in 1947 A.D., all these became *waqf* property. One of his prominent disciples, upon whom he conferred *Khilafat Nama*, was Abu Taher Qadiri, alias Turab Pagla, of Padmer Alga in the Dhubri district of Assam. Maulana Bhashani passed away on November 17, 1976

A.D., in Dhaka, Bangladesh, at the age of 96. He was laid to rest in Santosh, Tangail, a town in Bangladesh, where a mausoleum was erected later on (Plate-21).

3.4 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 the lack of sources, it is very difficult to reconstruct their lives and histories. The little that is known 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. Notable of them have been delineated below:

3.4.1 Khwaja Khizr

In eastern and northern Bengal, numerous local cults developed around *pirs* and mythical figures of unknown identities. These cults gained enormous popularity among Muslims and Hindus alike. Both high and low-born people held them in high esteem. Khwaja Khizr was such a legendary Sufi figure. There are several myths and legends associated with him. The Persian city of Shiraj is generally accepted to have been his birthplace.¹⁹² He was presumably Jewish and descended from the dynasty of Hazrat Nooh.¹⁹³ His early career was spent as a businessman and chemist.¹⁹⁴ However, after deciding to devote his life to God, he changed his lifestyle and started touring as a wanderer. He was portrayed as ‘God of Water’ in numerous Mughal-era miniature artworks.

Assam also has a tradition associated with him. Mohammad Yahya Tamizi writes that Khwaja Khizr was a Sufi from western Assam.¹⁹⁵ In western Assam, the name ‘Khwaja Khizr’ or ‘Kheyaj Pir’ carries a great deal of respect. He was said to be the river god ‘Varuna’, who lived in the water and rescued drowning victims.¹⁹⁶ Muslims threw some money in the water as a tribute to the ‘Kheyaj Pir’ whenever they travelled across a body of water by boat or steamer. A stone inscription that reads “*abe haayat cashma khizr*” was discovered close to a creek at the base of the eastern slope of the Kamakhya Hills.¹⁹⁷ ‘*Abe hayat*’ is for eternal water, ‘*chasma*’ is for spring, and ‘*Khizr*’ denotes river deity. The sage Jaypal Faqir, who resided there for a long time in the seventeenth century

A.D., is believed to have composed these verses, which may have originated from the Khwaja Khizr celebration of the Bengali Muslims.¹⁹⁸ This demonstrates the reverence and high regard that the local people had for the saint. Certain *zikirs* composed by Azan Pir incorporate references to Khwaja Khizr, thereby signifying his relevance to the people. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad says that Khwaja Khizr was highly respected by the inhabitants of Koch Behar and western Assam throughout the medieval era.¹⁹⁹ James Wise writes that Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah of Bengal also practiced the worship of Khwaja Khizr.²⁰⁰ However, with the passage of time and more people becoming educated, these practices are gradually fading away.

3.4.2 Satya Pir

Bengal and the western region of Assam witnessed parallel developments in the proliferation of religious cults centred around Satya Pir among the Muslims and Satya Narayan among the Hindus. According to Muhammad Enamul Haq, the influence of Satya Pir was all-pervading both among the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal once upon a time.²⁰¹ Girindra Nath Das, in his book '*Bangla Peer Sahityer Katha*', has discussed the biography of different Sufis or *Pirs* under two sections: historical figures and imaginary figures. In this book, the writer has included the accounts of Satya Pir in the imaginary section.²⁰² There is relatively little historical information available on the lives and deeds of Satya Pir. However, his contribution to the fusion of Hindu and Muslim traditions made him a Sufi saint of considerable significance. In Bengal, a vast body of literature centred on the Satya Pir developed around the dawn of the eighteenth century A.D. Shaykh Faydullah is credited with producing the oldest text on Satya Pir, "*Satya Pir Kavya*," which was written between 1545 A.D. and 1575 A.D.²⁰³ It goes without saying that the Satya Pir concept wouldn't have evolved in a day or a year; it required several years to become well-liked by the people and ingrained in social norms.

Regarding the origin of Satya Pir, Muhammad Enamul Haq believes that he was more of an idealistic invention of Hindu and Muslim imaginations, who in the 15th century A.D. were keen to interact with one another on the basis of amity and harmony.²⁰⁴ The correlation between his name and Satyanarayan Puja, as well as other birth narratives, indicates his affiliation with Hinduism. Numerous historical accounts identify Satya Pir and Satyanarayan as one and the same.²⁰⁵ Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad says

neither Satya Pir nor Satyanarayan are differentiated from one another in the ‘*Panchali*’ of Satyanarayan.²⁰⁶ According to Abdul Karim, the Hindu Satyanarayan Puja and the Muslim Satya Pir fundamentally symbolise the same beliefs and practices.²⁰⁷ Dinesh Chandra Sen says the customs and ceremonies associated with the saint exhibit a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim elements.²⁰⁸ The impoverished and low-born Muslims participated in the Satyanarayan Puja and other Hindu religious celebrations during the medieval era in Bengal and some areas of western Assam.²⁰⁹ Montgomery Martin, in his book ‘*The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*’, comments on the observance of Satya Pir:²¹⁰

“... I find, that here as well as in every part of Bengal, there is an object of worship common to both. By Hindus, he is called Satya-Narayan, the true Lord, and by Muslims he is called Satya-Pir, or the true saint. There is no image; but the Hindus make hymns in his praise. These hymns are composed in the political language of Bengal, and are read both by Brahmans and Sudras. The Moslems worship the same personage in a similar manner; but the hymns, which they read, are different.”

Satya Pir is still remembered with reverence in Koch Behar, and western Assam. Numerous spiritual songs, commonly referred to as “*Satya Piror Geet*,” have also been attributed to him. These songs were prevalent in the western part of Assam until recently. In addition to Satya Pir, many people later composed “*Satya Piror Geet*.” According to V. R. Bhandarkar, ‘*Satya Piror Geets*’ are the best specimen for the peaceful co-existence of the Hindu-Muslim community.”²¹¹ Therefore, Satya Pir, alias Satyanarayan, can rightly be regarded as the best embodiment of Hindu-Muslim unity in western Assam. In the songs of *char-chapori* from the modern Goalpara and Dhubri districts of Assam, the presence of Satya Pir can be observed.²¹² Some of the stanzas of ‘*Satya Piror Geet*’ are mentioned below:²¹³

“হিন্দুৰ দেবতা
মুছলমানৰ পীৰ,
আমাৰ নাম সত্য পীৰ।
সত্যপীৰ বোলে বাজা শুনহ বচন।
কালিকালে অৱতাৰ মুই সত্য নাৰায়ণ।।
হিন্দুৰ দেৱতা মুছলমানৰ পীৰ।
ঘৰে ঘৰে মোৰ নামে ভৰিল জিকিৰা।”

Translation: My name is ‘Satya Pir’. I am the god of the Hindus and the Pir of the Muslims. Satya Pir urges the king to listen to his speeches. I am the incarnation of Hindu god in the ‘Kali age’. I am the god of the Hindus and the Pir of the Muslims. In every home, people invoke ‘*zikir*’ in my name.

3.4.3 Shah Madar

Hazrat Shah Madar, also known as ‘Sayed Badiuddin Ahmad’ and ‘Qutub-ul Madar’, was an important saint whose influence on the Muslim society of Bengal and western Assam was immense. There exist various narratives pertaining to the saint. The precise chronology of his existence is uncertain due to a scarcity of empirical evidence. Girindra Nath Das writes that Shah Madar was born in 1315 A.D. in Syria.²¹⁴ According to certain other scholars, Shah Madar was a resident of Madina and a follower of Mohammad Bustami. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad claims that his migration from Madina to India occurred during the conquest of Timur in 1398 A.D.²¹⁵ Before his advent to Bengal, he extensively travelled to Gujrat, Lucknow, Ajmer, Kanauj, Jaunpur, Kanpur, etc.²¹⁶ According to legend, before his arrival in Kamrupa, he had spent many years in erstwhile Bengal, where several holy places bear his legacy, such as Paharpur, Rajshahi, Bogura, Sherpar, and Basta near Dhaka.²¹⁷ According to Mohammad Yahya Tamizi, he spread Islamic philosophy eastward from there.²¹⁸ The organisation that he established became well recognised as the *Madari* Order. The present “*Madari Faqir*” group is supposed to have originated from Shah Madar. There are still pockets of *Madari* order adherents in Goalpara, Cachar, and Kamrup districts of Assam. Until the mid-20th century A.D., the event known as “*Madar Jhanda*” was observed by people belonging to the lower socio-economic strata of both the Muslim and Hindu communities in Bengal and lower Assam. Until recently, in certain regions of the former Goalpara district, the “*Madarer Bas Tula*” celebration was traditionally observed by both the Muslim and Hindu communities.²¹⁹

There is an enigma surrounding the whereabouts of his burial site. According to one perspective, his *dargah* is located in Makaran, in the Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. An alternative perspective posits the existence of two *dargahs* dedicated to Shah Madar in Bangladesh. One is situated in the Sherpur section of the Bogura district, while the other is located in the Vasta hamlet within the Dhaka district. Due to the lack of tangible proof, we cannot say anything definite in this regard. Maheshwar Neog, in his work

'*Prachya Sasanavali*', mentions an inscription from 1780 A.D. that pertains to a land grant bestowed upon Anwar Faqir of Barbhag Pargana, Kamrupa.²²⁰ This inscription reveals that King Lakshmi Singha of the Ahom dynasty awarded him an estate and instructed the division of the income of the territory among four *maqams*. The persons associated with these four *maqams* were Shah Madar of Bausi Pargana, Shah Faqir of Barnagar Pargana, Panch Pir of Kshetri Pargana, and Bar Maqam of Hajo.²²¹ This document demonstrates the saint's profound influence and impact on the government, as well as his eligibility for a *pirpal* (revenue-free) land award. However, Assam now lacks a *dargah* bearing his name.

3.4.4 Pir of Dohela Mazaar

There is a *mazaar* situated in the village of Dohela Kalitapara, which is roughly ten kilometres northwest of the town of Dudhnoi (Plate-22). To the locals, the *dargah* is known as the "*Pagla Pir Babar Mazaar Sharif*." Within the *mazaar* enclosure, there are the graves of three people. Kasim Ali Ahmed, in his book '*The Muslims of Assam*', has identified them as *Pagla Pir*, his brother Satya Pir, and one of their attendants.²²² However, there is a dearth of authentic information detailing their lives and actions. It is to be noted here that the *dargah* is situated in an area that is totally surrounded by non-Muslim populations, especially the Bodo and Kalita communities. Only one Muslim family is attached to the *mazaar*, which takes care of it. During my visit to the *dargah*, the head of that family, who is also the custodian of the *mazaar*, informed me that all Muslim families in the area left the place during the post-partition communal riot of 1950 A.D. and relocated to various other locations. He also informed me that their family too migrated to the nearby Muslim area at that critical juncture, but the local Hindu community subsequently approached them and persuaded them to resettle in their former home and take on the responsibility of maintaining the *dargah*.²²³ According to his narration, even today, the local Hindu community is very respectful of the *mazaar*, and they often visit it with *mannat* (vows) and various offerings in the belief that it will grant their wishes. During the first 10 days of the Islamic month of *Muharram*, a fare-like situation prevails in the *dargah* premise, where people from both Hindu and Muslim communities gather together. It, thus, serves as a symbol of religious harmony and Hindu-Muslim unity. According to Kasim Ali Ahmed, Pir Nasiruddin Baghdadi of Jaleshwar

used to visit this *dargah* during his lifetime, showing his respect and demonstrating the *Tazia* procession during the *Muharram* celebrations.²²⁴ The *dargah* was granted 10 bighas of land by the then king of Bijni estate, and the present *khadim* of this *dargah* is still enjoying this vast tract of land.²²⁵

3.4.5 Pir of Mamudpur Dargah

This *dargah* is located in the village of Mamudpur, close to Dalgoma, in the present district of Goalpara (Plate-23). It was established in 1880 A.D., according to Shamsul Hoque, who is associated with this *dargah*.²²⁶ He informed me that it was a ‘*Gaebe* (Heavenly) *mazaar*’, and his father, Genda Sheikh, who died in 1966 A.D., once dreamt about this *mazaar*, and subsequently it came into existence.²²⁷ Mojibar Rahman, popularly known as “Moji Mahajon,” a prominent citizen of Goalpara town at the time, donated bricks and other materials for the construction of the *dargah*.²²⁸ Kasim Ali Ahmed mentions that the *mazzar* is dedicated to *Gaibe* Ghiyasuddin Auliya.²²⁹ The *mazzar* goes by the name “*Pir Babar Mazaar*,” or more commonly, as “*Pirar Than*.” Nothing more is known regarding this *mazaar* because of the paucity of sources. The *mazaar*, on the other hand, has a tremendous influence on the locals. Worshippers frequent the *dargah* to offer ‘*sinni*’, candles, and incense sticks, as well as to take a little earth from the *mazaar*. Hindu attendees from various locations are also seen visiting this *dargah* with their vows and sacrifices.

3.5 Other miscellaneous Sufi Saints and their Orders

In addition to the above-mentioned Sufi saints, there were still a number of lesser-known Sufis who exerted significant influence on the society and culture of the study area. Unfortunately, owing to the scarcity of proper written evidence, we can’t say much about them. For reconstructing their history, oral sources play an important role. Their impact and influence on the Muslim society of the study area is still palpable. 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, Adalguri, Chirang,

Assam; Goni Khalifa of Darrang district, etc. In addition, five *mazaars* were discovered during 1964–65 A.D. in the Chatla Hill of Hadira Chawki of the present Bongaigaon district by Syed Keramat Ali of Hajo. It was assumed that these graves belonged to five *pirs*, namely Shah Niadullah, Anowar Shah, Syed Badar Shah, Hazrat Haidar Ghazi, and Syed Sana.²³⁰ However, at present, no traces of these *mazaars* are to be found due to a lack of preservation.

Moreover, during the last few decades, numerous Sufi saints or *pirs* appeared among the Muslims in the original Goalpara area of Assam. Notable of them were Hasan Ali of Bhoter Kandi, Mazam Shah of Suwapata, Abu Taher Qadiri, alias Turab Pagla, of Padmer Alga, Yusuf Maulavi of Bhalarbhita of west Goalpara, etc. It is known from the interaction with Alauddin Mollah, a social activist, that during his lifetime, Yusuf Maulavi visited Baghdad, the origin place of the *Qadiri* order, and stayed there for a few years.²³¹ Yusuf Maulavi also met an unknown ‘Pagla’ (*darvesh*) of historic Paglatek in present-day Goalpara district and discussed spirituality.²³² Yusuf Maulavi, alias Yusuf Faqir, died around 1972 A.D. The influence of these *pirs* was restricted to small areas, with some only having influence in specific villages. So, they could be described as regional *pirs*. These *pirs* primarily attracted disciples from the poorer classes of society, and they contributed to the formation of some new regional *tariqahs* (orders) having no connection with the acknowledged mainstream *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. The followers of these *tariqahs*, on specific days, congregate in the residence of a spiritual mentor or a distinguished disciple. In addition to engaging in prayers, they participate in *dhikr*, a spiritual practice involving the vocalisation of their inner sentiments under the guidance of their spiritual mentor, and chant spiritual songs such as ‘*Murshidi*’ and ‘*Bissed Geet*’ to demonstrate their spiritual obedience to the Almighty. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as “*Halqa*.” In certain regions of erstwhile Goalpara, adherents of the *Faqiri tariqah* engage in the consumption of an intoxicating substance known as “*Bhang*,” despite the fact that such practices are strictly prohibited by Islamic *shariah*. The locals refer to them as “*Pagla tariqah*.” *Halqa* allows both males and females to sit together, which is also against the fundamental tenet of Islam. They prefer to use musical instruments while singing, and they avoid eating beef as part of their daily diet. Since their method of

salvation resembles that of the *Vaishnavite* sect of the Chaitanya group of Bengal, some have sarcastically referred to them as “*Krishna tariqah*.” In addition to these *tariqahs*, there were many other Sufi sects in this region of Assam, but each of them was concentrated in a small area. The foundation of these *tariqahs* lacks clarity. However, one cannot deny the potential impact of secret cults from other communities on these *tariqahs*.

3.6 Teachings of the Sufi Saints

Sufism is an unavoidable component of Islamic civilisation, where the differences between religions are minimal. The Sufis held the belief that humanism was an integral component of all religions. They lived an austere and pious lifestyle, forgoing comfort and pleasures. Their strong religious convictions guided the way they lived. The Sufis’ primary goal was to purify the lower self, known as the ‘*qalb*’ or spiritual heart. They possessed qualities such as dedication, sacrifice, generosity, peace, purity, etc. The Sufi saints eschewed superficial religious practices by encouraging people to have compassion for all of their fellow humans and to revere the creations of God. They urged their adherents to develop a more tolerant and ethical way of life. Their mission was to disseminate both Islamic and spiritual ideals to the masses. Sufis propagated Islam by adhering to a few key principles. Living simply, emphasising God’s sovereignty and accessibility, taking a vow to own nothing other than what is necessary for daily survival, repenting of wrongdoing, and purging oneself of self-orientation are some of them. Other teachings included developing self-control, being fearful of God, expressing gratitude for God’s mercy, acquiring and filling oneself with divine virtue, and being obedient to God’s will. The Sufi saints believed that it was important to work towards eliminating all forms of prejudice and inequality from contemporary culture. They treated all men equally, whether they were wealthy or impoverished, Hindu or Muslim, freeborn or slaves. They spoke out against slavery, drug usage, alcoholism, gambling, and anything else they considered to be morally repugnant. They worked to minimise religious extremism and foster mutual respect and understanding between Hindus and Muslims in the study area. Their teachings served as a source of inspiration for truth-seekers and individuals who embrace the idea of ‘*Vasudev Kutumba*’ and the ideology of promoting peace, alleviating suffering, and seeking prosperity for all living creatures.

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¹¹³ G. H. Damant, “Notes on Shah Ismail Ghazi, with a Sketch of the Contents of a Persian MS., entitled: Risalat ush-Shuhada,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1873, p. 220.

¹¹⁴ G. H., “Notes on Shah Ismail Ghazi, with a Sketch of the Contents of a Persian MS. entitled: Risalat ush-Shuhada,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1874, p. 221.

¹¹⁵ E. A. Glazier, *A Report on the District of Rungpore*, Central Press Company Ltd., Calcutta, 1873, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ Prodyot Vottacharjee, *Bonge Sufi Provab O Sufitatteer Cromobikash* (in Bengali), Rodela Prokashani, Banglabazar, Dhaka, 2015, p. 180.

¹¹⁷ H. Blochmann, “Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period.) No. II,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1874, p. 285.

¹¹⁸ H. Blochmann, “Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period.) No. II,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1874, p. 285.

¹¹⁹ H. Blochmann, “Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period.) No. II,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1874, p. 285.

¹²⁰ Maheshwar Neog (ed.), *Pavitra Asam* (in Assamese), Kiran Prakashan, Dhemaji, 2008, p. 371.

¹²¹ H. Blochmann, “Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period.) No. II,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1874, p. 285; Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, p. 213.

¹²² H. Blochmann, “Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period.) No. II,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1874, p. 285.

¹²³ H. Blochmann, “Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period.) No. II,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, Nos. I to IV, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1874, p. 286.

¹²⁴ James Wise, “The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vols. LXIII, LXV and LXVII, Part III, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1903, p. 54.

¹²⁵ Md. Abdul Karim, *Mymonsingh Zelai Islam (Islam in Mymonsingh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2002, p. 57; Shaykh Sharfuddin, *Bangladeshe Sufi Provab O Islam Prochar* (in Bengali), Bornayan Publication, Dhaka, 2006, p. 27.

¹²⁶ James Wise, "The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal," in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vols. LXIII, LXV and LXVII, Part III, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1903, p. 54.

¹²⁷ Muhammad Mojlum Khan, *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal*, Kube Publishing Ltd., Markfield, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 96.

¹²⁸ Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteenth Century)*, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 1972, p. 68.

¹²⁹ Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, pp. 69–70; Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 181.

¹³⁰ Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, p. 70; Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 181.

¹³¹ Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteenth Century)*, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 1972, p. 70.

¹³² Cited in Muhammad Mojlum Khan, *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal*, Kube Publishing Ltd., Markfield, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 101.

¹³³ Md. Abdul Karim, *Mymonsingh Zelai Islam (Islam in Mymonsingh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2002, p. 66; Muhammad Bahaz Uddin, Age- 83, a Sufi Practitioner, Village- Padmapur, Dist.- Chirang (Assam), Date of Interview: 14-10-2023 (Saturday). He claims to have learned this from his father and grandfather when he was a child.

¹³⁴ Md. Abdul Karim, *Mymonsingh Zelai Islam (Islam in Mymonsingh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2002, p. 73.

¹³⁵ Alauddin Mollah, Age- 74, retired assistant teacher of Rakhaldubi High School and a prominent social activist, Village- Nolonga Pahartoli, P.O.- Ram Harir Char, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 24-10-2023 (Tuesday). He also narrated that in 1967 A.D., the local

people of West Goalpara sought the blessing of Maulana Abdul Baten Jaunpuri in order to prevent the erosion of the Brahmaputra River in their locality.

¹³⁶ Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 332.

¹³⁷ Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, p. 271.

¹³⁸ Muhammad Mojlum Khan, *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal*, Kube Publishing Ltd., Markfield, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 165.

¹³⁹ A. R. M. Ali Haidar, *Shah Sufi Syed Fateh Ali, Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui and Shah Sufi Mawlana Nisaruddin Ahmad (R): A Survey of the Lives and Deeds of these Three Sufi-Saints of Bengal* (in Bengali), Doctoral Thesis, Dhaka University, 1997, p. 72.

¹⁴⁰ Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 332; “প্রসঙ্গ ইসলাম ॥ ফুরফুরা শরীফের যুব সংস্কারক” (The topic is Islam: Furfura Sharif’s Youth Reformer), in *The Daily Janakantha*, published on March 15, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.dailyjanakantha.com/opinion/news/409720>, accessed on 23/09/2021.

¹⁴¹ Md. Shamin Firdous, “The Light of Furfurah Sharif,” in *Journal of Islamic History and Culture in India*, Volume 4, 2015, Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Calcutta, p. 118.

¹⁴² Md. Mahmudul Hussain, “Maulana Abu Bakr Siddiqi’s Participation in the Freedom Movement of India,” in *Sprin Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, Vol. 2 (02), Sept. 2023, p. 49, retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjaes.v2i02.42>, accessed on 14/12/2023; Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 446.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Mostafa Abdul Quayum, *Muhammad Ruhul Amin: His Life and Works*, Doctoral Thesis, Calcutta University, 1993, p. 140.

¹⁴⁴ “জাতীয় জাগরণে পীর আবু বকর সিদ্দিকী (রহ.)-এর অবদান” (Contribution of Pir Abu Bakr Siddiqui (R.H.) to National Awakening), in *The Daily Inqilab*, published on June 4, 2016, accessed on 16/11/2021.

¹⁴⁵ Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, p. 279; Md. Abdul Karim, *Mymonsingh Zelai Islam (Islam in Mymonsingh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2002, p. 87; Ashraf Ali

Fakir, Age- 99, Village- Bartalowa, Dist.- Chirang (Assam), Date of Interview: 09-10-2021 (Saturday).

¹⁴⁶ Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, p. 307.

¹⁴⁷ Abdur Rahaman, *Sitare Ekram o Atthar Prodip* (in Bengali), Sodrit Publication, Cooch Behar, 2013, pp. 12–13.

¹⁴⁸ Muhammad Ismail, *Development of Sufism in Bengal*, Doctoral Thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, 1989, p. 276.

¹⁴⁹ Md. Nabiul Islam, *The Nashya Sheikh Community of North Bengal in the Twentieth Century: A Study of the Socio-Economic and Political Transformations*, Doctoral Thesis, University of North Bengal, 2021, p. 177; Source: <https://coochbehar.gov.in/festivals/>, accessed on 03-12-2023.

¹⁵⁰ Abdur Rahaman, *Sitare Ekram o Atthar Prodip* (in Bengali), Sodrit publication, Cooch Behar, 2013, pp. 66–69.

¹⁵¹ Ashraf Ali Fakir, Age- 99, Village- Bartalowa, Dist.- Chirang (Assam), Date of Interview: 09-10-2021 (Saturday).

¹⁵² Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, p. 307.

¹⁵³ Golam Saklayen, *Bangladesher Sufi-Sadhak (Lives and Activities of the Saints of Bangladesh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2011, p. 307.

¹⁵⁴ Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 460.

¹⁵⁵ A. R. M. Ali Haidar, *Shah Sufi Syed Fateh Ali, Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui and Shah Sufi Mawlana Nisaruddin Ahmad (R): A Survey of the Lives and Deeds of these Three Sufi-Saints of Bengal* (in Bengali), Doctoral Thesis, Dhaka University, 1997, p. 88.

¹⁵⁶ A. R. M. Ali Haidar, *Shah Sufi Syed Fateh Ali, Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui and Shah Sufi Mawlana Nisaruddin Ahmad (R): A Survey of the Lives and Deeds of these Three Sufi-Saints of Bengal* (in Bengali), Doctoral Thesis, Dhaka University, 1997, p. 89.

¹⁵⁷ A. R. M. Ali Haidar, *Shah Sufi Syed Fateh Ali, Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui and Shah Sufi Mawlana Nisaruddin Ahmad (R): A Survey of the Lives and Deeds of these Three Sufi-Saints of Bengal* (in Bengali), Doctoral Thesis, Dhaka University, 1997, p. 90.

¹⁵⁸ Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 461.

¹⁵⁹ Md. Abdus Salam, *Mawlana Ruhul Amin: Life and Works*, M. Phil. Dissertation, Dhaka University, 1998, p. 146.

¹⁶⁰ Muhammad Khairullah, *Gauripurer Bahas* (2nd edition), (in Bengali), Basirhat, 1978.

¹⁶¹ A. R. M. Ali Haidar, *Shah Sufi Syed Fateh Ali, Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui and Shah Sufi Mawlana Nisaruddin Ahmad (R): A Survey of the Lives and Deeds of these Three Sufi-Saints of Bengal* (in Bengali), Doctoral Thesis, Dhaka University, 1997, p. 91.

¹⁶² Md. Abdul Karim, *Mymonsingh Zelai Islam (Islam in Mymonsingh)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2002, p. 86; Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 461.

¹⁶³ Muzammel Haq, *Maulana Parichaya* (in Bengali), Ganesh Pustakalay, Calcutta, 1321 B.S., pp. 35–36; Dewan Nurul Anwar Hussain Choudhury (ed.), *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A Collection of the Life-Sketch of the Sufis)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2004, p. 461; A. R. M. Ali Haidar, *Shah Sufi Syed Fateh Ali, Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui and Shah Sufi Mawlana Nisaruddin Ahmad (R): A Survey of the Lives and Deeds of these Three Sufi-Saints of Bengal* (in Bengali), Doctoral Thesis, Dhaka University, 1997, p. 95.

¹⁶⁴ Julfiqar Ahmad Kismati, *Azadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika* (in Bengali), Professor's Book Corner, Dhaka, 1970, p. 102.

¹⁶⁵ A. R. M. Ali Haidar, *Shah Sufi Syed Fateh Ali, Shah Sufi Abu Bakr Siddiqui and Shah Sufi Mawlana Nisaruddin Ahmad (R): A Survey of the Lives and Deeds of these Three Sufi-Saints of Bengal* (in Bengali), Doctoral Thesis, Dhaka University, 1997, p. 97.

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¹⁶⁷ Md. Azam Ali Khan, *Hazrat Shah Sufi Khwaja Muhammad Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (R)-Er Jibon o Kormo Abong Ilm-e-Tasauf (The Life and Work of Hazrat Shah Sufi Khwaja Muhammad Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (R) and Ilm-e-Tasauf)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2015, p. 63.

¹⁶⁸ Md. Azam Ali Khan, *Hazrat Shah Sufi Khwaja Muhammad Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (R)-Er Jibon o Kormo Abong Ilm-e-Tasauf (The Life and Work of Hazrat Shah Sufi Khwaja Muhammad Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (R) and Ilm-e-Tasauf)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2015, p. 70.

¹⁶⁹ Md Golam Dastagir (ed.), *Bangladeshe Sufivada: Khwaja Enayetpurir Jibondarshaner Alope (Sufism in Bangladesh: In Light of the Philosophy of Life of Khwaja Enayetpuri)*, Hakkani Publishers, Dhaka, 2011, p. 54.

¹⁷⁰ Golam Dastagir, “Some Aspects of Khwaja Enayetpuri’s Sufism,” in *Copula*, Vol. 19, Journal of Philosophy Department, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, June 2002, p. 1; Md. Azam Ali Khan, *Hazrat Shah Sufi Khwaja Muhammad Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (R)-Er Jibon o Kormo Abong Ilm-e-Tasauf (The Life and Work of Hazrat Shah Sufi Khwaja Muhammad Yunus Ali Enayetpuri (R) and Ilm-e-Tasauf)*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2015, p. 83.

¹⁷¹ Ashraf Ali Fakir, Age- 99, Village- Bartalowa, Dist.- Chirang (Assam), Date of Interview: 09-10-2021 (Saturday).

¹⁷² Shahid Ali Ahmed, Age- 63, retired school teacher, Village- Bartalowa, Dist.- Chirang (Assam), Date of Interview: 14-10-2023 (Saturday). He himself is the disciple of Khwaja Nur Mohammad of Adalguri village in the Chirang district of Assam.

¹⁷³ Ashraf Ali Fakir, Age- 99, Village- Bartalowa, Dist.- Chirang (Assam), Date of Interview: 09-10-2021 (Saturday).

¹⁷⁴ Hossain Mahmud & Syed Shamim Shiraji (ed.), *Syed Asaduddoula Shiraji* (in Bengali), Bonafide Printing Press, Fakirapool, Dhaka, 2004, p. IV.

¹⁷⁵ Hossain Mahmud & Syed Shamim Shiraji (ed.), *Syed Asaduddoula Shiraji* (in Bengali), Bonafide Printing Press, Fakirapool, Dhaka, 2004, p. IV.

¹⁷⁶ Dewan Nazrul Qadir, *Glimpses of Sufism in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (From 13th Century till Date)*, Devika Publication, New Delhi, 2010, p. 75.

¹⁷⁷ Dewan Nazrul Qadir, *Glimpses of Sufism in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (From 13th Century till Date)*, Devika Publication, New Delhi, 2010, p. 75.

¹⁷⁸ Syed Shamim Shiraji, Age- 65, Son of Syed Asad-ud Daula Shiraji, a journalist, Banikunj, Dist.- Sirajganj, Bangladesh, Date of Interview: 25-10-2023 (Wednesday). During his early years, the interviewee learned about this from his father.

¹⁷⁹ Abdul Barik, Age- 67, a Chishti Sufi practitioner, Village- Ambari, P.O.- Balarbhita, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 22-10-2023 (Sunday). It is to be noted here that his father, ‘Meher Faqir’, who died in 2003 at the age of 90, was a direct disciple of Syed Asad-ud Daula Shiraji. Meher Faqir was one of the prominent disciples of Pakhritari *Khanqah* of Syed Asad-ud-Daula Shiraji.

¹⁸⁰ Abdul Barik, Age- 67, a Chishti Sufi practitioner, Village- Ambari, P.O.- Balarbhita, Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 22-10-2023 (Sunday). This information was passed down to him by his father.

¹⁸¹ Abdul Barik, Age- 67, a Chishti Sufi practitioner, Village- Ambari, P.O.- Balarbhita, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 22-10-2023 (Sunday).

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- ¹⁸² Syed Abul Maksud, *Bhasani: Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasanir Jiban, Karmakanda, Rajniti O Darshan*, Part I (in Bengali), Naoraj Publisher, Dhaka, 1986, p. 61.
- ¹⁸³ Syed Abul Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani* (in Bengali), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1994, p. 15.
- ¹⁸⁴ Syed Abul Maksud, *Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani* (in Bengali), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1994, p. 15.
- ¹⁸⁵ Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.), *Majlum Jananeta Mawlana Bhasani* (in Bengali), Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1988, p. XVIII.
- ¹⁸⁶ Hasan Abdul Quayyum (ed.), *Majlum Jananeta Mawlana Bhasani* (in Bengali), Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1988, p. 372.
- ¹⁸⁷ Peter Custers, “Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal,” in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XLVII, No. 2, April-June 2010, p. 232.
- ¹⁸⁸ Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj (Freedom Struggle & Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826–1947)*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2019, p. 174.
- ¹⁸⁹ Nozrul Islam Mondal, “Muslim Politics in the Undivided Goalpara District under Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan: An Assessment,” in Uttam Kumar Poddar (ed.), *Souvenir*, published by the Department of History, Ratnapith College, Chapar, on the occasion of the UGC-sponsored State Level Seminar held on 21-09-2006, p. 47.
- ¹⁹⁰ Shamsul Alom, Age- 103, Village- Simlabari, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 23-10-2023 (Monday). It is to be noted here that during my interview, he informed me that on several occasions, he met Maulana Bhasani during his childhood, and he subsequently took initiation under Maulana Bhasani.
- ¹⁹¹ Prasun Barman & Gorky Chakraborty (ed.), *Char-Chapori: Abalokan-Punorabalokan* (in Assamese), Bandhav, Guwahati, 2020, p. 130.
- ¹⁹² N. Hanif, *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis (South Asia)*, Sarup & Sons, New Delhi, 2000, p. 194.
- ¹⁹³ Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad, *Kochbiharer Itihash* (in Bengali), Dibya Prakash, Dhaka, 2016, p. 132.
- ¹⁹⁴ Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad, *Kochbiharer Itihash* (in Bengali), Dibya Prakash, Dhaka, 2016, p. 132; N. K. Singh (comp.), *Sufis of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Vol. II, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, 2002, p. 24.
- ¹⁹⁵ Mohammad Yahya Tamizi, *Sufi Movements in Eastern India*, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, New Delhi, 2009, p. 89.

¹⁹⁶ James Wise, “The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vols. LXIII, LXV and LXVII, Part III, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1903, pp. 38–39.

¹⁹⁷ Mohammad Yahya Tamizi, *Sufi Movements in Eastern India*, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, New Delhi, 2009, p. 89.

¹⁹⁸ Medini Choudhury, *Luit Borak Aru Islam* (in Assamese), Rhino Books, Guwahati, 1982, pp. 58–59; Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2021, pp. 134–135.

¹⁹⁹ Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad, *Kochbiharer Itihash* (in Bengali), Dibya Prakash, Dhaka, 2016, pp. 132–133; Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2021, p. 135.

²⁰⁰ James Wise, “The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal,” in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vols. LXIII, LXV and LXVII, Part III, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1903, p. 39; Medini Choudhury, *Luit Borak Aru Islam* (in Assamese), Rhino Books, Guwahati, 1982, p. 58.

²⁰¹ Muhammad Enamul Haq, *Bonge Sufi Provab* (in Bengali), Ramon Publishers, Dhaka, 2015, p. 154.

²⁰² Girindra Nath Das, *Bangla Peer Sahityer Katha* (in Bengali), Shehid Library, Kazipara, 24 Pargana, 1960, p. 447.

²⁰³ Muhammad Enamul Haq, *Muslim Bangla Sahitya* (in Bengali), Pakistan Publications, Dacca, 1955, pp. 113–114.

²⁰⁴ Muhammad Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dacca, 1975, p. 292.

²⁰⁵ Dinesh Chandra Sen, *The Folk Literature of Bengal*, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1985, pp. 99–102.

²⁰⁶ Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad, *Kochbiharer Itihash* (in Bengali), Dibya Prakash, Dhaka, 2016, p. 128.

²⁰⁷ Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (down to A.D. 1538)*, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca, 1959, p. 167.

²⁰⁸ Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1954, p. 677; Girindra Nath Das, *Bangla Peer Sahityer Katha* (in Bengali), Shehid Library, Kazipara, 24 Pargana, 1960, p. 447.

²⁰⁹ Dwijendra Nath Neogi, *Sacred Tales of India*, MacMillan and Co., Limited, London, 1916, p. 95.

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- ²¹¹ Rofiul Hussain Baruah, *Islamiya Aytijya Aru Asom, Part- I (upto 1615 A.D.)* (in Assamese), Lucy Publication, Jorhat, 1989, p. 72.
- ²¹² Ismail Hossain, *Asomor Char-Chaporir Loka-Sahitya (The Folk-Literature of Riverine Land of Assam)*, Banalata Prakasan, Guwahati, 2012, pp. 96–97.
- ²¹³ Dwijen Nath, *Goalparia Loka Sanskriti (A Collection of Essays on Folk-Culture of Goalpara)*, Banalata, Guwahati, 2008, p. 151, 288; Ismail Hossain, *Asomor Char-Chaporir Loka-Sahitya (The Folk-Literature of Riverine Land of Assam)*, Banalata, Guwahati, 2012, p. 43.
- ²¹⁴ Girindra Nath Das, *Bangla Peer Sahityer Katha* (in Bengali), Shehid Library, Kazipara, 24 Pargana, 1960, p. 321; Muhammad Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dacca, 1975, p. 151.
- ²¹⁵ Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmad, *Kochbiharer Itihash* (in Bengali), Dibya Prakash, Dhaka, 2016, p. 131.
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- ²¹⁸ Mohammad Yahya Tamizi, *Sufi Movements in Eastern India*, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, New Delhi, 2009, p. 89.
- ²¹⁹ Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2021, p. 135.
- ²²⁰ Maheswar Neog (ed.), *Prachya-Sasanavali* (in Assamese), Assam Prakasan Parisad, Gauhati, 1974, p. 174.
- ²²¹ S. K. Bhuyan (tr. & ed.), *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, 2016, p. 16.
- ²²² Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2021, p. 62.
- ²²³ Monower Hussain, Age- 47, *Caretaker of the Mazaar*, Village- Dohela Kalitapara, P.O. Dohela, Dist. Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 05-11-2023 (Sunday). He obtained this information during his childhood from his grandfather, Kandura Sheikh, who died in 1988 A.D. at the age of 96.
- ²²⁴ Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2021, p. 62.

²²⁵ Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2021, p. 63; Monower Hussain, Age- 47, *Caretaker* of the *Mazaar*, Village- Dohela Kalitapara, P.O. Dohela, Dist. Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 05-11-2023 (Sunday). He obtained this information during his childhood from his grandfather, Kandura Sheikh, who died in 1988 A.D. at the age of 96.

²²⁶ Shamsul Hoque, Age- 79, Village- Mamudpur, P.O.- Dalgoma, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 05-11-2023 (Sunday).

²²⁷ Shamsul Hoque, Age- 79, Village- Mamudpur, P.O.- Dalgoma, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 05-11-2023 (Sunday). He told me that Genda Sheikh himself was a saint and a mysterious person who spent the majority of the day in meditation.

²²⁸ Akkash Ali, Age- 74, retired Principal of Dalgoma Higher Secondary School, Village- Mamudpur, P.O.- Dalgoma, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 05-11-2023 (Sunday).

²²⁹ Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2021, p. 63.

²³⁰ Akdas Ali Mir (ed.), *Aitihasic Patabhumit Asomor Aitijyamandita Islamdharmi Sakal* (1714–1857), Vol. III (in Assamese), The Raushanara Education Foundation, Guwahati, 2010, p. 188.

²³¹ Alauddin Mollah, Age- 74, retired assistant teacher of Rakhaldubi High School and a prominent social activist, Village- Nolonga Pahartoli, P.O.- Ram Harir Char, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 24-10-2023 (Tuesday).

²³² Alauddin Mollah, Age- 74, retired assistant teacher of Rakhaldubi High School and a prominent social activist, Village- Nolonga Pahartoli, P.O.- Ram Harir Char, Dist.- Goalpara (Assam), Date of Interview: 24-10-2023 (Tuesday). According to the interviewee, he acquired the aforementioned information from a personal interaction with Yusuf Faqir in 1962 A.D., when he was a primary school student.