

Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

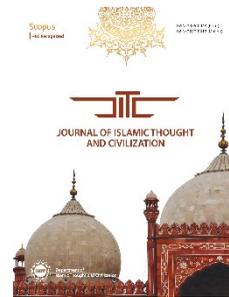
Volume 13 Issue 1, Spring 2023

ISSN(P): 2075-0943 ISSN(E): 2520-0313

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>



Article QR



Title: Districts of Bangladesh Named After Sufis Manifesting the Great Impact of Sufism on Bengal Civilization: A Qualitative Study

Author (s): Vahit Göktaş, Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury

Affiliation (s): University of Ankara, Türkiye

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.131.22>

History: Received: December 27, 2022, Revised: June 08, 2023, Accepted: June 12, 2023,
Published: June 20, 2023

Citation: Göktaş, Vahit and Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury. "Districts of Bangladesh Named After Sufis Manifesting the Great Impact of Sufism on Bengal Civilization: A Qualitative Study." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 1 (2023): 320–337. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.131.22>

Copyright: © The Authors

Licensing:  This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Conflict of Interest: Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



UMT

A publication of

Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Science and Humanities
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Districts of Bangladesh Named After Sufis Manifesting the Great Impact of Sufism on Bengal Civilization: A Qualitative Study

Vahit Göktaş*

Department of Basic Islamic Sciences (Sufism)
Faculty of Divinity, Ankara University, Ankara, Türkiye

Saeed Rashed Hasan Chowdury

Department of Basic Islamic Sciences (Sufism)
Graduate School of Social Sciences,
Ankara University, Ankara, Türkiye

Abstract

Sufism, a mystical Islamic practice, has profoundly impacted Bengal's culture and civilisation, including Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. The current study aims to discuss how Sufism has helped to reduce religious hatred and extremism among Bengalis. It has also established a system of equality, love, and fraternity among people in the Bengali culture. The history and influence of Sufism in Bangladesh is over a thousand years old and significantly impacts about hundred sixty-nine million people in Bangladesh. One of the reasons is the effect of the calling of *Dawah's* activities. After Sufism crossed the threshold of Bangladesh, it fascinated the Bengalis and left a meaningful impact on them, which also strengthened their Islamic ideology. Sufism immensely helped the promotion of societal peace in Bengal. The Bengali Sufi saints preached love and compassion, and their ideas also promoted different aspects of religion. They urged people to appreciate variety and value one another's uniqueness. This selfless act inspired many humans to leave their faith to convert to Islam. There is a unique contribution of Sufism to the development of social life and the civilisation of Bangladesh. Remarkably, the settlements of eleven out of sixty-four districts with the names of the famous Sufis show the influence of Sufism. Moreover, since the Sufis were charismatic leaders, their piety, helpfulness, and compassion continue to help Sufism remain a pillar of mystical Islam in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bengal civilisation, charismatic leaders, history of districts, religious tolerance, Sufism, Sufi saints, social development.

Introduction

Sufism is a mystical tradition within Islam that emphasises the inner dimension of the faith. Sufis seek to achieve direct knowledge of God through various methods, including Prayer and meditation, Spiritual companionship, Self-discipline, and Devotional music. Many Sufi orders have been introduced to the world in different eras. The Sufis who preached Islamic values and teachings left a lasting impact on countless people with their call and invitation, due to which many non-Muslims embraced Islam.¹ The influence of Sufism on the people of Bangladesh is undeniable. Moreover, there has been a considerable impact of Sufism on the culture and civilisation of the people of Bangladesh for thousands of years. The people of Bangladesh follow about twelve major Sufi orders in general. Though Buddhism and Hinduism were prominent in Bengal, the simplified philosophy that developed was primarily Sufism. Their teachings of love for humanity, for Allah, and for Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) continue to be demonstrated by mystic tales and folkloric songs

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Prof. Dr Vahit Goktas, Department of Basic Islamic Sciences (Sufism), Faculty of Divinity, Ankara University, Ankara, Türkiye, at vgoktas@ankara.edu.tr.

¹Anniemarie Schimmel, *Sufism in Indo-Pakistan: Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (USA: University of North Carolina Publication, 1975), 344.

till today. Sufis strongly refrain from religious and community conflicts and endeavour to be peaceful members of civil society.

Moreover, accommodation, adaptation, piety, and charism help Sufism to remain a strong pillar of mystical Islam in Bangladesh.² This study is about the thousand-year visibility of Sufism in Bangladesh since the eleventh century and its impact on the region's history, culture, and people. Sufism has played a crucial role in developing the Bengali language and literature. Bengali was the principal language of the Sufi saints of Bengal, known as '*Pīrs*' and '*Fakīrs*,' to transmit their lessons of love, peace, and harmony among people. They wrote many devotional songs and poetry in Bengali, forming an essential part of the region's cultural history. These melodies, known as Baul songs, are still popular among Bengalis.

Sufism had a significant impact on Bengali art and architecture as well. Bengal's Sufi shrines, known as '*Dargahs*,' are distinguished by their elaborate decorations and patterns, representing the region's syncretic culture. Sufi influences may also be seen in Bengal's terracotta art found in temples and mosques. In Bengal, Sufism led to several musical genres, including Baul, Kirtan, and Gazal. These musical traditions tend to blend the aspects of Hindu and Islamic music in order to create a unique and distinct style of music that represents the region's religious harmony and cultural diversity.

The current study implements qualitative and analytical procedures to gather secondary data. Several research institutions were also visited to collect secondary information, including the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh (IFB), the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, the Bangla Academy, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Various books, articles, and journals were reviewed on the contribution of Sufism to Bengali civilisation in these four libraries. The current study, from the source of these libraries, remarked that influential Sufis from different countries had contributed considerably to the spread of Islam in this country by visiting various important institutes in Bangladesh. Sufis also preached the teachings of Islam in other regions of Bangladesh and the Indian subcontinent. The people of Bangladesh were inspired by Sufis, leading them to embrace Islam. The original names of eleven of the sixty-four districts of Bangladesh are named after Sufis.

The primary objective of this research is to explore and document the role of Sufism in Bengal Civilization. The following purposes were set for the study:

- (i) Explaining the role of Sufism in expanding the influence of Islam in Bangladesh with different approaches.
- (ii) To identify why Sufis from Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East came to Bangladesh.

Considering the importance of the topics discussed above, the primary research question of this study is how have Sufi scholars successfully promoted Islam in Bangladesh? Why have millions of people embraced Islam as a religion?

²Saeyd Raashed Hasan Chowdury, "Bangladeş'te Tasavvuf Kültürü ve Temsilcileri," [Sufi Culture and Its Representatives in Bangladesh], ed. Ahmet Cahid Haksever, *Thematic Sufi Meetings* (Ankara: Sonçağ, 2019), 38-40.

2. The Emergence and Impact of Sufism in Bengal

Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam that emphasises the religious tradition's esoteric and spiritual dimensions. It started in the Middle East and extended throughout the Muslim world, including Bengal, which is split between India and Bangladesh today.³

The promotion and spread of Islam in Bengal led to the collapse of Hindu rule. In 1203, Turkish-origin commander of the Delhi Sultanate Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji (1150-1206) won the Gaur War in the eastern Indian regions of Bengal. Islam started spreading rapidly in Bangladesh, facilitating the formation of Sufism. When Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji went to Tibet, he helped the King of the Coach region to embrace Islam. Later, he became an advisor to Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji. During the reign of Bakhtiyar Khilji, many people in India converted to Islam. Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji issued coins in his name in the Bengal region. Numerous mosques, madrasas, and khanqahs were built in Bengal under Bakhtiyar's patronage. His later governors followed his work and built numerous Islamic religious institutions. The Bangladeshi poet Al Mahmud mentions Bakhtiyar Khilji as a vital hero of Bengal in a poem called "*Bakhtiyar's Horse*." Other Muslim rulers, such as Husain Uddin (1212-1226), Nasir Uddin Mahmud Sheikh (1226-1228), and Ruknuddin Barabak Sheikh (1459-1474), also contributed to the spread of Islam in Bengal.⁴

The arrival of Sufi saints and intellectuals in Bengal during the 12th and 13th centuries is widely regarded as the impetus for the spread of Sufism there. During this period, Sufis' teachings soon began to create an attraction among the local population. Sufis connected with the people of Bengal by emphasising love, compassion, and tolerance. They also adapted their teachings to the local culture.

Islam's most significant campaign spread in the country from the eleventh century to the seventeenth century. Sufis from Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Khorasan, Central Asia, Pakistan, and Northern India preached Sufism in Bangladesh.⁵ Hazrat Shah Jalal (1271- 1346), one of the most influential early Sufi saints in Bengal, is thought to have travelled to the area from Konya, Turkey, in the early 14th century. He established a Sufi order that became influential in the region, known as the Jalaliyya. The most notable Sufis credited with bringing Sufi teachings at that time were Shah Sultan Rumi (d. 1075), Baba Adam Shaheed (15th century), Shah Sultan Balkhi (14th century), Shah Niamatullah Butshikan (14th century), Shah Makhdum Rupos (1216-1313), Fariduddin Ganje Shakar (1173-1265), Makhdum Shah Dowah Shaheed (d. 1313), and others. They were proficient in Islamic jurisprudence. They established several Sufi organisations, such as the *Chishtiyya*, the *Qadiriyya*, and the *Naqshbandiyya*, which became widely practised in Bengal. Due to their extraordinary knowledge, eloquence, and human love, the ordinary people of this country were attracted to Sufism. In this way, Sufism flourished in Bangladesh gradually. Meanwhile, North Indian Sufism strengthened within only a half-century. Mainly, the North Indian Sufi doctrine of Ganga came into Bangladesh. The North Indian Sufis were the most influential in Bengal. Among them were Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (1143- 1236), Khwaja Kutubuddin Bakhtiyar (1173- 1235), Sheikh Fariduddin Ganje Shakar (1173-1265), Nizamuddin Awlia (1238-1325), Sheikh Sharfuddin Bu Ali

³Saeed Rashed Hasan Chowdury, and Vahit Göktaş, "A Critical Analysis of Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi's Doctrines on Sufism," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 1 (2021): 93-121.

⁴Muhammad Mojlum Khan, *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal* (UK: Kube Publishing Ltd, 2013), 9-17.

⁵Harder Hans, *Sufism and Saint Veneration in Contemporary Bangladesh: The Majibhandaris of Chattogram* (Routledge: Heidelberg University, 2011), 11.

Shah Qalandar (1209–1324), Badi' al-Din Shāh Madār (1315-1434), and Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thānī (1564-1624).⁶

In the Twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many people of Bengal accepted Islam by dint of Sufi activities. Due to their religious beliefs, many Sufi saints from Turkey, the Arab countries, Persia, Baghdad, Pakistan, India, and Bengal spread Islam. As a result of the Sultans' patronage, this country became a stronghold of the Sufis' activities. The lifestyle of these Sufi saints was exciting and instructive.⁷

Bengali Sufism was a religious, cultural, and social movement. Saints and scholars of the Sufi tradition contributed towards promoting peace and harmony in Bengal's many diverse religious and ethnic groupings. Sufi orders were instrumental in disseminating literacy and education throughout the region. Additionally, they served as a forum for expressing regional art, music, and language.

From the turn of the fifteenth century, the Sufi saints established the Muslim kingdom in Bengal. Besides, many other Sufi saints came to Bengal. They organised various activities in order to spread Islam. They invited people from Sylhet-Chattagram in Bangladesh to the Mangalokot of Bardhaman, India, and South Bagerhat to the Dinajpur district. Consequently, the path of propagators for Islam was relatively easy. Historian Mohar Ali mentioned that over one million Sufis preached and propagated Islam in Bangladesh.⁸

As a result of the Sufis' efforts, Islam spread rapidly in Bengal. By the 16th century, most of the population had converted to Islam. Sufism also had a significant impact on Bengali culture. Sufis were responsible for developing several Bengali art forms, including sema music and poetry. They also played a role in the spread of Bengali literature and education.

During the 18th century, the British East India Company began to exert its influence over Bengal. The British were initially hostile to Sufism but later appreciated its role in promoting social harmony. As a result, the British allowed Sufis to continue to operate freely in Bengal.

After nearly 600 years of Islam's birth, the Sufi saints influenced Bengal's Muslims by reflecting Islam's beauty. Before that, the people of Bengal were mainly Hindus, Buddhists, or belonged to some other religion. Therefore, under all the above-mentioned reasons, the influence of Sufi saints in Bengal still exists today. Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), Ibn al Arabi (1165-1240), and Hafiz Shirazi (1325-1390) influenced the Sufi doctrine of *murshidi*, *baul*, and *fakir* songs in Bengal. Lalon Shah's (1774-1890) and Hassan Raja (1854-1922)'s music has an unprecedented impact and is still being sung.⁹ Many different Sufi orders are still active and thriving in Bengal even in the modern day, which is evidence of the pervasive influence of Sufism on the region's religious and cultural landscape.

3. Districts and Provinces Named After Sufi Saints in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a South Asian country bordered by India to the west, east, and north and Myanmar to the southeast. Although Bangladesh is located between these two countries, India and Myanmar,

⁶Muhammad Bahauddin, "Sufism in Bangladesh," (Dhaka: *Daily Samakal editorial*, 2016), 7, Accessed December 24, 2022.

⁷Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Contributions of Muslims To Indian Subcontinents*, trans., Muhammad Asif Kidwai (Ankara: South Asian Youth Organization, 2018), 44.

⁸Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal* (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1985), 33-35.

⁹Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master Thesis, 2019), 17-29.

the Muslim population of this country is about 146 million. India has a significant population following Hinduism, and Myanmar has a considerable population following Buddhism. However, the most dominant religion in Bangladesh is Islam. Its credit, to an extent, goes to the dissemination of Sufism and the effect of the call of *Dawah's* activities. In Bangladesh, Sufism significantly influenced the development of the country's religious and cultural traditions. Sufi saints and scholars did much to bring peace and harmony between Bangladesh's many faith and ethnic groups. It has contributed to the dissemination of literacy and education in the region.

This scenario depicts the popularity of Sufism in this country. Sufism has been a significant component of Bangladesh's religious and cultural landscape until today. The country is also home to a thriving community of Sufi organisations. Moreover, there are sixty-four districts in Bangladesh, eleven of which are named after the names of Sufi Saints. The sections called under the terms of the Sufi saints of ancient Bengal are discussed below.¹⁰

3.1. Meherpur District

The district of Meherpur is an administrative region of the Khulna division of the central part of Bangladesh. This district has an area of 716.08 sq. Km. Its boundaries are Kushtia district and West Bengal (India) on the north, Chuadanga and West Bengal (India) on the south, Chuadanga and Kushtia districts on the east, and West Bengal (India) on the west. Meherpur, situated in southwestern Bangladesh, is an ancient township. However, it has not been known how this old township of undivided Nadia (Meherpur) was developed. It is reported that the city was established during the time of Vikramaditya.¹¹ According to the historian Kumudanath Mallick (1883- 1970), Mohar Ali mentioned this place as the dwelling place of Mihir-Khana and imagined Mihirpur from Mihir's name, Maherpur.¹² This concept of naming is hypothetical and imaginative.

There are more opinions about naming. Ashraf Siddiqui (1927- 2020) states, "This region has been named after one of the 16th-century Sufi saints Mehar Ali Shah. Before getting the district's identity, the old township of Meherpur was separate. In the 2nd century A.D., in the famous geographical map of Mr Ptolemy, several small islands were found in the Ganges River. This small island was considered Kushtia, Chuadanga, and Meherpur."¹³

During the reign of Hindu King Laxman Sen (1118-1206) in Bengal in 1204, a Turkish Muslim young brave commander named Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji from Bihar occupied Nadia, the capital of Laxman Sen, with only 18 horse riders. At that time, Laxman Sen probably weakened the national structure through negligence and corruption in the princely state. Due to all these reasons, Laxman Sen could not take enough protection against Khilji. Bakhtiyar Khilji had taken possession of Nadia and went to Gaura. The conquest of Nadia in Bakhtiyar began Muslim rule in this region. Bengal's first Muslim rule lasted nearly six hundred years.¹⁴

In the first half of the thirteenth century, after the fall of the last independent ruler of Hinduism, Hindu Raja Laxman Sen, the rise of Muslim rule was seen in the capital of Nadia, along with the development of Muslim control all over Bengal. During the 561 years, From the year 1204 till the British East Indies Company's Diwani gain, 76 sub-Badars, Nazim, Raja, and Nawab, ruled Bengal. Meherpur was involved in the rule of all of them. The spread of Islam in this region began

¹⁰Aslam Nujrul, *Names of districts in the Name of Sufi Saints* (Dhaka: Thejoban.Com, 2011), 1.

¹¹Chowdury, *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century*, 27-43.

¹²Kumudanath Mallick, *The Nadia Story* (Dhaka, Movement publication, 1998), 145.

¹³Ashraf Siddiqui, *Bangladeshi Literature and Heritage* (Dhaka: Bangladesh, Choyon publication, 2001), 67.

¹⁴Nujrul, *Names of Districts in The Name of Sufi Saints*, 2.

significantly from that time. It is known that Meherpur was a prosperous region during the Sultan period. Several *Auliya* and Sufis came here to spread Islam in Meherpur in the fourteenth century.¹⁵

Meherpur has been ruled for a long time under the rule of King Krishna Chandra. Under Mughal Emperor Akbar's reign (1556-1605), Raja Bhabananda Majumdar established a prominent "*Nadia dynasty*." The area where the Nadia dynasty established the zamindari was known as "*Nadia*." At that time, the zamindari area of the state of Nadia was 3,151 square miles. Meherpur was one of the most critical districts in the Nadia region.¹⁶ In 1751, The British defeated Muslims in the Indian subcontinent with the support of Mir Syed Jafar Ali Khan Bahadur (1691-1765). During this period, Nadia and Meherpur were under British control. In 1857, Meherpur was established as *Muquma*. Being independent from Bengal in 1947, the Meherpur sub-district was formed with Gangni and Meherpur Sadar.¹⁷ On February 24, 1984, Meherpur got the status of a district.

Of all the explanations about naming the Meherpur district, the most accepted opinion is that the name of Islam preacher and Sufi Meher Ali was used to name Meherpur. He was born in Yemen in 605. He received extensive knowledge in the Qur'an, Shariat, Hakikat, Hadith, Tasawuf, Tafsir, and Fiqh. Afterwards, he came to the Indian subcontinent from Yemen to spread Islam. Hailing from India, he reached Meherpur in the year 1659. He came here and established a Dargah. Many people came to his house, and many people embraced Islam. Sufis built many madrasas and mosques in Meherpur. The Karmadi Gosainiddubi mosque, Barkat Bibi Mazar's shrine, and Baghul Pir have a Dargah where tourists like to travel on different occasions. Moreover, in Meherpur, various elements of Sufism are found in historical and ancient places.¹⁸

3.2. Bagerhat District

The District of Bagerhat is in Khulna Division. Its area is 3959.11 sq. Km. Its boundaries are Gopalganj and Narail districts on the north, the Bay of Bengal on the south, Gopalganj, Pirojpur, and Barguna districts on the east, and Khulna district on the west. Bagerhat district was formed in 1984. The ancient name of Bagerhat was Khalifatabad. People of non-Aryan people settled first in Bagerhat. These include Austric and Dravidian, and Mongolians from the Mediterranean Sea. Later, this region was occupied by Buddhists for a long time. In the 13th century, this region came under the control of the Muslims. In 1440 AD, the prominent Sufi and Muslim religious preacher Khan Jahan Ali (1369-1459) came to rule the area as a representative of Gaur's sultans.¹⁹ His other name was Bagicha. The word Bagerhat is derived from Bagicha. This idea is the highest accepted. He established various madrasas and mosques and invited people to Islam. Many people embraced Islam at his invitation. However, Mohar Ali thinks that Bagerhat was named according to the name of the Awgha Baker of Barisal.²⁰ Morgan Brennan said that this name had been called Bagerhat due to Bakir Khan's name.²¹ There are many signs of Sufism in the district of Bagerhat. Some of them are the sixty-dome mosque, the Mazar of Khan Jahan Ali, the Reza Khoda Mosque, the Zinda Pir

¹⁵Perween Hasan, *Sultans and Mosques: The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh* (London: I.B.Tauris; Illustrated edition, 2007), 18.

¹⁶H. Blochmann, *Contribution to the Geography and History of Bengal* (Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2003), 29.

¹⁷Muhammad Bahaiddin, "*Sufism in Bangladesh*," 7.

¹⁸Dewan Nurul Hussain Choudhury, *Amader Suftiaye Kiram (A collection of the Life-sketch of the Sufis)* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004), 11-29.

¹⁹Chowdury, *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century*, 53-57.

²⁰Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 39.

²¹Morgan Brennan, Michelle Cerone, "In Pictures: The World's 15 Lost Cities," *Forbes.com*. Retrieved January 14 2023.

Mosque, the Cold Peer Mosque, the Singair Mosque, the Bibi Puruni Mosque, the Chunakhola Mosque, the Nine Dome Mosque, the Ranbijaypur Mosque, and the Ten Dome Mosque.

3.3. Jamalpur District

Jamalpur is the 20th District of Bangladesh. The geographical location of this district is very charming. Jamalpur is situated in Garo Hills' foothills, remembered for Sufi Hazrat Shah Jamal (1588-1671). Jamalpur is in the Mymensingh Division. The area of this district is 2031.98 sq. Km. It is located on the west bank of the ancient Brahmaputra River. Its trade centre is quite significant for agricultural products. Jamalpur is one of the leading districts for importing goods and exports. The country's largest fertiliser factory is located here. It has a boundary of The Meghalaya state of India, Kurigram and Sherpur districts on the north, Tangail district on the south, Mymensingh and Sherpur districts on the east, Jamuna River on the west, and Bogra, Sirajganj, and Gaibandha districts on the west. Among the Mymensingh Division, the Jamalpur district is in sixth place, ranked 33rd among the 64 districts of Bangladesh.

Historical sources prove that during the reign of Emperor Akbar of Delhi (1556-1605), a missionary named Hazrat Shah Jamal (1588-1671) came to the region with 200 followers to preach Islam from Yemen. Hazrat Shah Jamal (1588-1671) was a famous Sufi. Many people accepted Islam at his invitation. Fascinated by this place's natural beauty, he constructed his house on the bank of the Brahmaputra River. Later, as a religious leader, he quickly gained prominence. At that time, when his popularity reached Delhi, Emperor Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar (1542-1605) granted him a Khanqah Sharif. Later, the region was renamed "*Jamalpur*" to commemorate the fate of Shah Jamal (1588-1671). Jamalpur was declared the 20th District of Bangladesh on December 26, 1978. In this district, there are many signs of Sufism. The Sufi saints established a beautiful place here: the most well-known Shaikandha Jami Mosque and Gauripur Kachari Jami Mosque. Many religious institutions exist here, for instance, 4202 Mosques, 44 temples, 39 churches, and 13 Tombs.²²

3.4. Shariatpur District

Shariatpur is one of the most important districts of Bangladesh. It is an administrative division of the Dhaka division. The area of this district is 1181.53 sq. Km. Munshiganj district is situated on the north, Barisal district on the south, Chandpur district on the east, and Madaripur district on the west of Shariatpur. This district was named after the leader of the anti-British movement, Sufi Haji Shariatullah (1781–1840). The Bangladesh government first declared this Shariatpur region a sub-district on August 10, 1977. Later, the Bangladesh government elevated Shariatpur sub-district to a district in 1984.²³

Although Shariatpur was established as a district in 1984, it was one of the first developed and progressed in all areas among Bangladesh's all other regions. Various kings from ancient times ruled this region. In ancient times, the location of Shariatpur was under the rule of '*Vanga*'. In the reign of the second Chandragupta (380 AD - 412 AD), the famous poet Kalidas in the book of Raghuvansha, called this region the island nation of the river Ganges. After the Gupta Era Gupta era (4th century to 544 AD), when Gupta Empire lost power between 615 and 620 AD, an independent king named 'Samachar' ruled this region. A renowned Chinese traveller, Hsuan Tsang (602-664), visited various Indian areas between 630 and 643 AD when Harsavardhana was at the top of India's power.²⁴ In his writings, the 'Bang' was part of the Harshavardhana Empire (606-647) in the middle of the

²²Nujrul, *Names of Districts in The Name of Sufi Saints*, 03.

²³Ahmed Khan Moinuddin, *History of Feraizi Movement in Bengal* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2007), 153.

²⁴Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *History of the Faraidi Movement in Bengal (1818-1906)* (Dhaka: East Pakistan Historical Society, 1984), 114.

seventeenth century. From 1080 to 1150 AD, a Hindu family called '*Barman*' from Bikrampur in Dhaka ruled this region. In this way began the reign of the Sena dynasty. Vijayasena, the third king of the Sena dynasty (1097-1160 BC), was the Shariatpur region's ruler. King Lakshman was the sovereign of the area till 1204. During that year, the Muslim commander, Ikhtiar Uddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji (1150- 1206), attacked Bangla and captured the capital of the Sena kings, Nadia. As a result, the elderly King fled from the capital and went to Bikrampur in Dhaka. Later, his descendants ruled this region for several decades. Between 1206 and 1225, the King of Vishvarupa Sena ruled this region. By the middle of the thirteenth century, the Senas led without restriction. Dasharathadevi was the last Hindu King who ruled south-eastern Bengal, including the Shariatpur area. Afterwards, the site came under the Muslim regime. In 1330, Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1290-1351) occupied eastern Bengal and divided it into three provinces: Lakhhanuti, Satgaon, and Sonargaon. The governors of these provinces were Tatar Bahram Khan.²⁵

During the rule of the Mughals in India (1576-1757), the Shariatpur region did not come under their control at the first stage. However, it came under control during the reign of Emperor Jahangir. Emperor Akbar led an expedition to Shariatpur in Southeast Bengal in 1574 under the leadership of a general named Murad Khan. General Murad Khan occupied Faridpur and Shariatpur. Murad Khan began ruling Shariatpur, and when he died six years later, Hindu landlords once again occupied the region. Emperor Jahangir annexed the area to the Mughal Empire through Islam Kha (1608-1613), the governor of Bengal. Shariatpur was under their control until the fall of the Mughals. After the rule of Islam Khan, twenty-one governors ruled the region from 1613 to 1757. During the time of Shaista Khan (1600-1694), this region was very peaceful and economically prosperous. In 1757, the British commander Lord Clive defeated Sirajuddaula (1733-1757) in the Battle of Palashi. In 1765, the British government brought the region under the administration of their East India Company. They formed the Dhaka division with the southern part of Faridpur and Shariatpur, and they started to rule this region.²⁶

The founder of an indigo and feudalism movement was Haji Shariatullah (1781–1840). Besides, Haji Shariatullah, the pioneer of the Faraizi movement in India, was one of the religious reformers and a Sufi. After visiting Mecca in 1799, he returned to Bengal in 1818 AD and started reforming religion. As his name suggests, the Shariatpur district under Dhaka was named after him.²⁷ Shariatpur district was part of greater Bikrampur earlier. In 1869, it was part of the Bakerganj district for the convenience of administration. Apurba Bangla is a Muslim-majority area therefore, the Muslim League's dominance in the province is more prominent.

Consequently, on August 14, 1947, the British-ruled Indian subcontinent was divided into Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. Afterwards, East Bengal became East Pakistan from August 14 to 1947. Until December 15, 1971, the Shariatpur district was a part of Pakistan. Later, after the independence of Bengal, it was decided in 1976 that a new sub-district would be formed in the eastern region of Madaripur. On March 7, 1983, the government of Bangladesh announced the district. There are many symbols of Sufism in this conventional district of Shariatpur.²⁸ Burir Hat's mosque is one of them. This mosque is located at the Burhi Hat Market in

²⁵James Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes, and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (London: 1884), 27.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 28.

²⁷Amir Ali, *A Cry for the Indian Mohamedans, Nineteenth Century* (New York: vol, xii. A.D, 1882), 183.

²⁸D. N. Majumdar and Rao, C. R, *Race Elements in Bengal* (Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1960), 96-114.

Shariatpur Bhedarganj Upazila. This mosque was built almost a hundred years ago as a fantastic marking of Islamic architecture besides Sureshwar Darbar Sharif.²⁹

3.5. Madaripur District

Madaripur District is an administrative division of Dhaka and the middle division of Bangladesh. Madaripur district was a historically rich and populated town long ago. According to the 15th-century Sufi saint Badi' al-Din Shāh Madār (1315-1434), the Madaripur district was named after him. The area of this district is 1144.96 sq. In ancient times, Madaripur was called Idilpur. Idilpur was a developed hamlet in the state of Chandradvipa.

The administrative name of this region was then Navvomondol. Kotalipara was one of the centres of the civilisation of Bengal. Eidilpur and Kotalipara were famous for trade and commerce in the fourth century A.D. During the invasion of Alexander, the Great in India, the Gangesri tribe ruled independently in the Kotalipara region before 327 BC. Afterwards, this region (320-496AD) was under the Guptas. Later, Shashanka ruled (590-625) the area as the first independent Bengali emperor between 590 and 625 AD. After the death of Shashanka, the era of chaos and anarchy began in Bengal. In the year 750, Gopal was chosen as King. The Pala dynasty ruled Bengal from 750 to 1224 AD. In the fifteenth century, Badi' al-Din Shāh Madār (1315-1434) was an influential Sufi scholar who ruled the region for a while and made many significant contributions to spread the message of Islam to ordinary people. Later the people of the Madaripur district named this district after his name. In 1984, Madaripur was recognised as a district by the Bangladeshi government.³⁰

Many Sufi Saints came to this district. The renowned Sufis include Sufi saint Badi' al-Din Shāh Madār (1315-1434), religious reformer and founder of the Faraizi movement, Haji Shariatullah (1780-1840), noted Urdu poet and writer Moulubi Abdul Jabbar Faridpuri (1801-1876), Pir Muhsinuddin Dudu Mía (1819-1862), renowned spiritual saint Sufi Amir Shah (d. 1944), eminent Islamic scholar, and politician Abu Khaled Rashid Uddin (1884-1956). There are various Sufi monuments for instance, the shrine of Sufi Amir Shah and Shāh Madār Dargah Sharif.³¹

3.6. Munshiganj District

Munshiganj is an administrative district of the Dhaka division. The area of the Munshiganj district is 954.96 sq. Km. Dhaka and Narayanganj Districts are situated north of Munshiganj. Madaripur and Shariatpur districts are located in the south of Munshiganj. Comilla and Chandpur districts are situated east of Munshiganj, and Dhaka and Faridpur districts in the west. The Bangladesh government turned the Munshiganj subdivision into a district in 1984.³²

During the Mughal rule, Munshiganj's name was Idrakpur. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the name of the faujdar was Idrak. It is assumed that after his name, it was called Idrakpur. After the permanent settlement movement, Munshi Enayet Ali was the zamindar of the Kazi Kasba village of Rampal, Idrakpur. Afterwards, Munshiganj was named after his name. According to Muhammad Mojlum Khan, Munshiganj was named after the Criminal Court head of the area, Munshi Haider Hossain, during the Mughal rule. The most notable thing is that Munshi Haider Hossain was in that Idrakpur village during the Mughal rule.³³ He was appointed Chief of the law enforcement agencies of Bikrampur, whom the Mughal rulers appointed. The most trustworthy claim is that the

²⁹Mallick, *The Nadia Story*, 147.

³⁰Ashok Biswas, *Bangladesh River Cell* (Dhaka: Hareket Publications, 2011), 397.

³¹A. C. Salahuddin and M. Bazlul, *Bangladesh National Culture and Heritage, An Introduction Reads* (Dhaka: Independent University Press, 2004), 29.

³²Bahauddin, "Sufism in Bangladesh," 7.

³³Chowdury, *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century*, 60-61.

name of Idrakpur was changed to Munshiganj by the name of Munshi Haider Hossain, a great philanthropist and saintly person.³⁴ Munshiganj was undoubtedly the most important political centre in ancient times. The region was Chandra's capital, Varman, and Sen Kings, from the 10th century to the thirteenth century. Later, it was upgraded to the Munshiganj sub-district and sub-division for administrative convenience. On March 1, 1984, it was turned into the Munshiganj district.³⁵

3.7. Mymensingh District

The district of Mymensingh is a vast area located in central Bangladesh. Mymensingh district was the largest district of Bangladesh in the year 1970. On the other hand, Mymensingh is one of Bangladesh's oldest cities. The name of this city is also found in many ancient books of Bangla literature. The central part of Mymensingh's heritage is the Mymensingh Geetika, published as a compilation of old pundits and folk songs. Mymensingh refers to the greater Mymensingh (present-day Mymensingh, Netrokona, Sherpur, Tangail, Jamalpur, Kishoreganj, and Gazipur districts). This district is the fourth largest district in Bangladesh. This city is one of the major cities in Bangladesh. It is located on the bank of the ancient Brahmaputra River in the centre of the Mymensingh district.

Mymensingh district has an area of 4363.48 sq. Km. Garo Hills and the Meghalaya State of India on the north, Gazipur District on the south, Netrokona and Kishoreganj districts on the east, and Sherpur, Jamalpur, and Tangail districts on the west. There is a distinct conflict about the naming of the Mymensingh district among historians. In the sixteenth century, Alauddin Husain Shah (d. 1519) was the independent sultan of Bengal.³⁶ He established a new kingdom in the region named Nasirabad for his son, Syed Nasir Uddin Nasarat Shah (1518-1533). The name of Nasirabad was changed to Mymensingh due to a mistake. Baurjonlal Company ordered some agricultural products and requested these products to go to Nasirabad in Bangladesh. Mistakenly these products were sent away to Rajputana Nasirabad railway station in India. At that time, the names of the two provinces in Greater India were similar, so Nasirabad in Bangladesh was changed to Mihmanshahi to solve various problems. Afterwards, the Mihmanshahi region of Bangladesh was altered to 'Manmanisingh' and 'Mymensingh'.³⁷

On the other hand, according to the historian Mohar Ali, Mymensingh was named after Man Singh, the chief general of Emperor Akbar. Emperor Akbar sent General Man Singh to Nasirabad to defeat Isha Khan, the Bar Bhuiyan chief. Emperor Akbar's general, Man Singh, came to Nasirabad and fought with Isha Khan, and Man Singh was defeated. Later Nasirabad was changed to Mymensingh from the name of General Mansingh.³⁸

Thus, the name Mymensingh has been prevalent since Emperor Akbar's reign. During the British period, the government accepted the request of the rich zamindars or King of the Mymensingh region when they requested to name the district '*Mymensingh*'.³⁹ Furthermore, Mymensingh City has many signs of Sufism. Among them are Bara Mosque and Bhati Kashar Mosque.

3.8. Faridpur District

Faridpur is an administrative division of the Dhaka division in the middle of Bangladesh. Its area is 2072.72 sq. Km. In the north of this district are Rajbari and Manikganj districts, the Gopalganj districts on the south, Dhaka, Munshiganj, and Madaripur districts on the east, and the Narail Magura districts on the west. The section of Faridpur was established in 1815. Faridpur has been named after

³⁴Biswas, *Bangladesh River Cell*, 399-400.

³⁵Bahauddin, "Sufism in Bangladesh," 7.

³⁶Ibid., 8.

³⁷Nujrul, *Names of Districts in The Name of Sufi Saints*, 03.

³⁸Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 41-57.

³⁹Biswas, *Bangladesh River Cell*, 399-400.

the renowned saint Sufi Shah Sheikh Fariduddin and his disciple Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (1143-1236).⁴⁰ Primarily, This district's name was '*Fatehabad*.' When the Faridpur district was established in 1786, its name was Jalalpur. The head office was in Dhaka.⁴¹ In 1807, it was segregated from Dhaka Jalalpur, called the Faridpur district. Head Quarter was established in Faridpur town. The Faridpur district was transformed into Faridpur, Rajbari, Gopalganj, Madaripur, and Shariatpur. This region is very well-known as the home of many saints and Sufis.⁴² Among the ancient mosques in this area are Gheda Mosque (1013H), Pathreel Masjid and Dighi (1493-1519), and Sattar Shahi Mosque (1519).⁴³

3.9. Chandpur District

Chandpur District is an administrative division of the Chattagram division of the south-eastern region of Bangladesh. This district is at the confluence of Padma, Meghna, and Dakota. The people of Chandpur are famous for their hospitality. The area of this district is 1704.06 sq. Km. It is located with Munshiganj and Comilla districts on the north, Noakhali, Laxmipur, and Barisal districts on the south, Comilla district on the east and Meghna River, Shariatpur, and Munshiganj districts on the west. In 1878 The Bangladesh government formed the first Chandpur sub-division. On October 1, 1896, Chandpur City was declared a municipality. On February 15, 1984, Chandpur was introduced as a district.⁴⁴

This region is named Chandpur after Chand Fakir of Purnandpur Mahalla in Chandpur City (Kotalia). According to Shashibhusan Dasgupta, an administrator named Shah Ahmed Chandra came from Delhi in the fifteenth century to establish a river port. Chandpur is named after him. Chandra was under the control of the Zamindar Chandra of Bikrampur during the time of Bhuiyan. According to historian JM Sengupta, Chandpur (Kolalia) was named after Chand Fakir of Purnandpur Mahalla.⁴⁵ Bakhtiyar Khan Mosque, Hajiganj Bara Mosque, Hazrat Shahrati Mosque, Shastri of Raghu Mughal period, and the 3-domed mosque are the historical architecture of Sufism in this region.

3.10. Habiganj District

Habiganj district is in the Sylhet division. Its area: 2636.58 sq. Km. It is located with the Sunamganj district north, the Tripura state of India in the south, the Moulvibazar and Sylhet districts in the east, and the Brahmanbaria and Kishoreganj districts in the west. Syed Nasiruddin, the companion of Hazrat Shahjalal (1271- 1346), the most influential pir of Bengal, lived in the Habiganj district. The region is of immense importance in Bangladesh because of his significant contribution to spreading Islam. Syed Sultan (1550-1648 AD), the murid of Syed Nasiruddin and the famous medieval poet of Bengal, founded the historic Sultanate of Habili in the Sylhet region. His grandson Syed Habib Ullah established a market on the banks of the Khoai River. After the name of Syed

⁴⁰Vahit Göktaş, and Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "An Evaluation of Mu'in al-Din Chishti's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent: The Case of Chishti Tariqa," *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 31, (2023): 47-76.

⁴¹R. C. Majumdar, *History of Medieval Bengal* (Calcutta: G. Bharadwaj & Co., 1973), 196-97.

⁴²Chowdury, *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century*, 61-62.

⁴³Nujrul, *Names of Districts in The Name of Sufi Saints*, 03.

⁴⁴Chowdury, *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century*, 57-58.

⁴⁵Brannon Ingram, *Sufis, Scholars, and Scapegoats: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (D. 1905) and The Deobandi Critique of Sufism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 278-501.

Habib Ullah, this township was first called "Habibganj" and later became the "Habiganj" district.⁴⁶ During British rule, Habiganj was declared a sub-district in 1867, and in 1878 Habiganj sub-district was formed. The historic old township was upgraded to a district on March 1, 1984.⁴⁷

There are various signs of Sufism in Habiganj district. Notable among them are the Syed Sultan Literary and Research Council, Sultanasi Habili Foundation, Syed Nasir Uddin Memorial Council, Murarband Darbar Sharif, and Ragib Rabeya Foundation.

3.11. Moulvibazar District

Moulvibazar district is in the country's northeast, with great natural beauty. It is located with Sylhet district on the north, the Tripura state of India on the south, Assam and Tripura states of India on the east, and Habiganj district on the west. It is also an administrative area of the Sylhet division. Moulvibazar Municipality is considered one of the most beautiful municipalities in Bangladesh. The extent of this district is 2601.84 sq. Km.

Maulvi Syed Qudrat Ullah, grandson, and murid of the famous Sufi Syed Shah Mustafa, established a market in 1810 on the banks of the Manu River. The market gradually became the centre of business and commerce in the east-north side of Bangladesh. The British government formed Dakshin Srihatt sub-district with 26 unions centred on the market, founded by Maulvi Syed Kudrat Ullah on April 1, 1882. In 1960, the government of Pakistan changed the name of South Srihatt to the Moulvibazar sub-district. The Bangladesh government promoted Moulvibazar sub-district to a district on February 22, 1984.⁴⁸

At present, there are various monuments of Sufism in Moulvibazar, such as Mazar Sharif of Maulvi Syed Qudrat Ullah, Mazar Sharif of Shah Mostafa, Kazi Khandkar's shrine, and the Ghaibi Mosque.⁴⁹

4. Influence of Sufis on the Establishment of Bengali Civilization

Shah Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar was the first Sufi in the 10th and 11th centuries before the emergence of Muslim power in Bengal, who devoted himself to spreading Islam in Bangladesh. He came to Bengal in 1047 AD. His holy shrine was in Mahasthan of Bogra district in Bangladesh. Mahasthan has been named '*Mastanagar*' or '*Mahasthan*' instead of Pundravaradhana due to Shah Sultan Balkhi Maheshwar and, later, many other shrines of the saints. Sufi Balkhi Mahisawar crossed the sea by ship and came to Bengal to stand in Sandwip. Afterwards, he went to Harirampur in Dhaka city. At that time, the Hindu King Balaram battled with him. He defeated the Hindu King Balaram. The Hindu King's minister was fascinated by his Karamat and accepted Islam. Then he went to Bogra to invite Islam. Furthermore, another Hindu king, Parshuram, obstructed him.⁵⁰ Later, King Parshuram was involved in a war with Sufi Maheshwar and was killed in this war. Maheshwar defeated the tyrannical kings with his miraculous power and fantastic combination of self-confidence and courage. His honesty, justice, and religiousness played a valuable role in Islam's victory at Bogura in Bangladesh.

⁴⁶Abdullah Ahsan, *Spread of Islam in pre-Mughal Bengal* (Dhaka: Intellectual Discourse, 1994), 119.

⁴⁷Bahauddin, "Sufism in Bangladesh," 9.

⁴⁸Nujrul, *Names of Districts in The Name of Sufi Saints*, 05.

⁴⁹Chowdury, *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century*, 65-66.

⁵⁰Seyyid Anwar Hossain, *Sufis contribution to the spread of Islam in Bengal* (Dhaka: Daily Manab Zamin, 2017), 08. Accessed January 2 2023.

Shah Mohammad Sultan Rumi (d. 1075) was a Sufi saint who came to Bengal from Iran. His holy shrine was located under the Madanpur Union in the Netrokona district. He came to Madanpur in 445 AH. According to Shashibhusan Dasgupta, he was the first Sufi in the entire Indian sub-continent.⁵¹ Around Shah Sultan Rumi (d. 1075)'s shrine, a Mazar of his companions is also in the Madanpur area. He preached Islam throughout his life. In the month of Falgun in Bangla, many followers pray to him yearly. Moreover, millions of people from different countries are united in this way.⁵² Shah Jalal (1271- 1346) occupied a prominent place among the Sufi saints of Bangladesh. He came to Bengal in 1227 AD. Ibn Battuta came to Bengal in 1345 and met with Shahjalal.

According to Ibn Battuta, "Shahjalal was the greatest of his time. His contribution to the expansion of Islam in Bangladesh is incredible. He was once a missionary and a warrior. He was the first to proclaim Islam in East Bengal and West Assam in the 14th century. So, Bengal Muslims still respect different Islamic programs in their honour."⁵³

Hindu King Gaur Gobinda (14th century) of Sylhet used to humiliate the people. King Gaur once harassed a Muslim named Burhanuddin. Afterwards, the innocent Burhanuddin went to New Delhi, met with Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1309-1388), and complained about the Hindu King on this issue. Sultan Firoz Shah Dehlavi had sent his representative Sikandar Ghazi to punish King Gaur Govind in Sylhet. At that time, Shah Jalal (1271- 1346) also participated in this war as the joint force of this army and defeated King Gaur Gobind. As a result, the King fled to another country. The Muslims first conquered Sylhet. Shah Jalal (1271- 1346) spent the rest of his life preaching Islam there. Ibn Battuta said, "*The people of this hill country had embraced Islam from Shah Jalal. Therefore, he lived among them.*"⁵⁴

Shah Makhdum Rupos (1216- 1313), famous for spreading Islam in the northern region of Bangladesh, has been unforgettable. His holy shrine was on the north bank of the river Padma and the Rajshahi City in the Dargapara Mahalla. He came to Bengal during the reign of Sultan Hussein Shah. He took his stand against religious prejudice in Muslim society.⁵⁵ Moreover, he called on people to Islam. Khan Jahan Ali (1369-1459) has been unmasked in history for making distinctive contributions to Islam's establishment, especially in the Khulna and Jessore areas of Bengal. Khan Jahan Ali, Abdul Qadir Gilani's descendant, came from far away Turkey to Delhi and later to Gaur after coming to the Khulna in Bangladesh from Gaur in India only to invite people in terms of Islam.⁵⁶

Hazrat Shah Shareef Zandani (1098-1215) in the Sundarbans province, Baba Adam Shaheed (15th century) in Bogra region, Shah Ali Baghdadi (15th century) in Dhaka region, Shah Afzal Mahmud (17th century), and Shah Sharif Zindani (15th century) in Pabna region, Turkan Shah (d. 1288), Makhdoom Shahdaula (d. 1313) and Shah Niyamat Ullah Wali (d. 1664) in Rajshahi region, Shah Adam Kashmeeri (d. 1613) and Shah Jamal (1588-1671) in Tangail region, Kadal Khan Ghazi (14th century), Shāh Amānat Ullāh Khān (d. 1809), and Syed Ahmad Ullah Maizbhandari (1826-

⁵¹Bahauddin, "Sufism in Bangladesh," 9.

⁵²Catherine B Asher, *Inventory of Key Monuments. In the Islamic Heritage of Bengal* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1984), 88.

⁵³Ibn Battuta, *Ibn Battuta's Rehla*, Translator: Mehdi Hüseyin (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1995), 45.

⁵⁴Sajida Sultana Alvi, *Perspectives on Mughal India: Rulers, Historians, Ulama, and Sufis* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11.

⁵⁵Hossain, *Sufis contribution to the spread of Islam in Bengal*, 9.

⁵⁶Bahauddin, "Sufism in Bangladesh," 10.

1906) in Chattagram region, along with many other Sufis have played a significant role in spreading Islam in Bangladesh.⁵⁷

The influence of Sufism on the beliefs, practices, chants, traditions, and ideas of the people of Bengal has been actively and visibly felt since the beginning of the 13th century. Sufi activities were not static and limited but essential to Islam's spread. Sufism significantly impacted a tiny part of the population and overall society.⁵⁸ The Bengal Sufis are renowned for their simplicity of life, strength of character, spirits dedicated to faith, and peaceful efforts. Most Sufis focused on North India, and others turned to Bengal. Several factors help the Sufi mission in Bengal to succeed:

- i. The principal reason for the success of the Sufis in Bengal is their highest efforts, goodness, simplicity and, at the same time, admirable life. They cut all kinds of worldly ties and avoided comfort and pleasure.

Besides, the support of the Sultans under the auspices of the Sufis helped Bengal to succeed.

- ii. The country's religious and social conditions helped them spread their faith. Buddhism and Hinduism were the two leading religions of Bengal, but their moral degradation was at its peak. There was a distinction and divination between people in society, but Islam offered people a golden opportunity to unify their social status. In this way, the Sufis were very successful. Sufis promoted social harmony by preaching tolerance and understanding. They also worked to bridge the gap between different religious communities.⁵⁹
- iii. The Bengali Sufis offered a path to spiritual development open to people of all backgrounds. They emphasise the importance of love, compassion, and self-discipline.
- iv. Sufis used their charisma, piety, and knowledge of local culture to attract people to convert. They have dedicated their lives to Islam and the service of humanity.
- v. Sufis played a significant role in developing Bengali culture. They introduced new art forms, such as sema music and poetry, and helped spread Bengali literature and education.

Sufis established the foundations of harmony and peace and found equality of status, love, and fraternity. They taught people to respect other people's religions, feelings, and practices. Thus, Sufism became an influential element in society. It was the contribution of Sufis to the improvement of society in Bangladesh.⁶⁰

The devotional practices and modest living traditions of the Sufis have influenced all people in Bengal. Their teachings of humanity and their love for Allah and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) continue to remind them of mystical tales and hymns today. The Sufis were determined to avoid religious and social conflicts and sought to be peaceful elements of civil society. In addition, the

⁵⁷Murshid Tazeen, *Sacred and secular Muslim Discourses (1871-1977)* (England: Oxford University Press, 1995), 117.

⁵⁸Azizur Rahman Mallick, *British policy and the Muslims in Bengal 1757-1856, A study of the development of the Muslims in Bengal with Particular Reference to Their Education* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1977), 22-51.

⁵⁹Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslim in Bengal* (Dhaka: Jatiya Sahitta Prakash, 2007), 84.

⁶⁰Vahit Göktaş, Mohammad Mahmudul Hasan, Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, and Murat İsmailoğlu, "Spirituality in the Context of Tablighi Cemâat and its Implication on Muslim Society: The Sûfi Perspective," *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 9, no. 1 (2022): 49-66.

accommodation, harmony, piety, and charismatic attitudes of the Sufis were the factors that helped Sufism to remain a pillar of mystical Islam in Bangladesh.

5. Conclusion

The article tries to shed light on why 11 of the 64 districts of Bangladesh are named after Sufism and the influence of Sufis on Bengali civilisation. As Sufism is a mystical tradition within Islam that emphasises the personal experience of the divine, it has played a significant role in developing the Bengal civilisation, both in terms of its religious and cultural impact. The continuous activity of Sufi preachers explains the widespread Islamic sentiment in Bangladesh. The Sufis introduced the mystical form of Islam. Sufi scholars who travelled from all over Continental Asia were instrumental in Bangladesh's social, economic, and philosophical development. In addition to preaching in prominent cities and centres of intellectual thought, Sufis reached marginalised rural communities. They preached the Islamic traditions in the Bangla, Sindhi, and West Bengal regions. Sufism emerged as a "*moral and comprehensive socio-religious force*" that influenced other religious traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.⁶¹

The Pir and Awliya's tombs in Bangladesh are intertwined with religious culture. There is no area in which the influence of Sufism in the spread of Islam in Bangladesh can be denied. Sufis often even sacrificed their own lives to preach Islam in this country.⁶² Many were martyred at the hands of Hindu kings. Many of them became tortured. Their contribution to the spread of Islam in 64 districts of Bangladesh cannot be ignored. The people of Bangladesh still commemorate their memory through various activities. In this context, the name of Bangladesh's main airport, 11 districts name of Bangladesh, countless universities in the country, and countless hospitals, colleges, madrasas, schools, and mosques, were chosen from Sufis' names. The history of Islam in Bangladesh can be deemed equivalent to the history of Sufism because the Islamic religious teachings, which still dominate the society, were conveyed through Sufism. Overall, Sufism has forever influenced Bengal's culture and civilisation. Its love, peace, and harmony messages have contributed to developing a distinctive and varied society that values individuality and fosters respect for others' viewpoints.

Sufism has had a profound impact on Bengal civilisation. It has helped shape the region's religious, cultural, and social fabric. Sufis continue to play an essential role in the lives of millions of people in Bengal. Today, Sufism remains an integral part of Bengali culture. Sufi shrines are famous pilgrimage destinations, and Sufi music and poetry are still widely enjoyed. Sufism has also significantly impacted the development of Bengali Islam, known for its emphasis on tolerance and moderation.

Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Funding Details

This research did not receive grant from any funding source or agency.

Bibliography

Ahsan, Abdullah. *Spread of Islam in pre-Mughal Bengal*. Dhaka: Intellectual Discourse, 1994.

⁶¹Vahit Göktaş, and Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Freedom of Religion, Faith and Religious Tolerance in Bangladesh: A Case Study on the Islamic Mysticism," *Disiplinlerarası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 5 (2019): 41-67.

⁶²Ahemd Sharif, *Bengali Sufi Literature* (Dhaka: Time publication, 2011), 11-25.

- Alvi, Sajida Sultana. *Perspectives on Mughal India: Rulers, Historians, Ulama, and Sufis*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Ali, Amir. *A Cry for the Indian Mohamedans- Nineteenth Century*. New York: vol, xii. A.D, 1882.
- Asher, Catherine, B. *Inventory of Key Monuments. In the Islamic Heritage of Bengal*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1984.
- Bahauddin, Muhammad. "Sufism in Bangladesh." Dhaka: *Daily Samakal editorial*, 2016, 7, Accessed January 24, 2023, <https://samakal.com/todays-print-edition/tp-islam-society/article/1610245583>.
- Biswas, Ashok. *Bangladesh River Cell*. Dhaka: Hareket Publications, 2011.
- Blochmann, H. *Contribution to the Geography and History of Bengal*. Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2003.
- Brannon, Ingram. *Sufis, Scholars, and Scapegoats: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (D. 1905) and The Deobandi Critique of Sufism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009.
- Choudhury, Dewan., Nurul Hussain. *Amader Sufiaye Kiram (A collection of the Life-sketch of the Sufis)*. 2nd Ed. Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 2004.
- Chowdury, Saeyd Rashed Hasan., and Vahit Göktaş. "A Critical Analysis of Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi's Doctrines on Sufism." *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 1(2021): 93-121.
- Chowdury, Saeyd Rashed Hasan. *Evaluation of Islamic Mysticism in Bangladesh Perspective: Role and Social Development, A Case Study on The Twenty-First Century*. Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master Thesis, 2019.
- Chowdury, Saeyd Raashed Hasan. "Bangladeş'te Tasavvuf Kültürü ve Temsilcileri." [Sufi Culture and Its Representatives in Bangladesh]. Edt. Ahmet Cahid Haksever, *Thematic Sufi Meetings*. Ankara: Sonçağ, 2019.
- Göktaş, Vahit., Mohammad Mahmudul Hasan, Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, and Murat İsmailoğlu. "Spirituality in the Context of Tablighi Jamaat and its Implication on Muslim Society: The Sufi Perspective." *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 9, no. 1 (2022): 49-66.
- Göktaş, Vahit., and Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury. Freedom of Religion, Faith and Religious Tolerance in Bangladesh: A Case Study on The Islamic Mysticism. *Disiplinlerarası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 5 (2019): 41-67.
- Göktaş, Vahit., and Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury. "An Evaluation of Mu'in al-Din Chishti's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent: The Case of Chishti Tariqa." *Şirnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 31, (2023): 47-76.
- Hasan, Perween. *Sultans and Mosques: The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh*. London: I.B.Tauris; Illustrated edition, 2007.
- Ibn Battuta. *Rehla of Ibn Battuta*. Translator: Mehdi Hüseyin. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1953.
- Shariatullah, Haji. *Muslim Ummah of North America*, Retrieved December 29, 2020.
- Harder, Hans. *Sufism and Saint Veneration in Contemporary Bangladesh: The Majibhandaris of Chattogram*. Routledge: Routledge Advances in South Asian Studies Heidelberg University, 2011.

- Hossain, Seyyid Anwar. *Sufis' contribution to the Spread of Islam in Bengal*. Dhaka: Daily Manab Zamin, 2017. Accessed January 2, 2023, <http://www.mzamin.com/details-archive2016.php?mzamin=70909>
- Karim, Abdul. *Social History of the Muslim in Bengal*. Dhaka: Jatiya Sahitta Prakash, 2007.
- Khan, Muhammad Mojlum. *The Muslim Heritage of Bengal: The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal*. UK: Kube Publishing Ltd, 2013.
- Khan, Muin-ud-Din Ahmad. *History of the Faraidi Movement in Bengal (1818-1906)*. Dhaka: East Pakistan Historical Society, 1984.
- Khokhar, Ashar Johnson., and Yaar Muhammad. "An Imagined Space with an Imagined Time: Analysis of English language Textbooks Used in State Schools in Pakistan." *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* 17, no. 2 (2022): 227-247.
- Mallick, Azizur Rahman. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal 1757-1856, A Study of the Development of the Muslims in Bengal with Particular Reference to their Education*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1977.
- Majumdar, R. C. *History of Medieval Bengal*. Calcutta: G. Bharadwaj and Co., 1973.
- Majumdar, D. N. and C. R. Rao. *Race Elements in Bengal*. Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1960.
- Mallick, Kumudanath. *The Nadia Story*. Dhaka: Movement publication, 1998.
- Ali, Mohar. *History of the Muslims of Bengal*. Riyadh: Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1985.
- Moinuddin, Ahmed Khan. *History of the Feraizi Movement in Bengal*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2007.
- Nadwi, Abul Hasan Ali. *Contributions of Muslims To Indian Subcontinents*. Trans., Muhammad Asif Kidwai. Ankara: South Asian Youth Organization, 2018.
- Nujrul, Aslam. *Names of districts in the Name of Sufi Saints*. Dhaka: Thejoban.Com, 2011, (Accessed December 29, 2022).
- Ahmed, A. F. Salahuddin., and Bazlul Mobin Chowdhry. *Bangladesh National Culture and Heritage, An Introductions Reads*. Dhaka: Independent University Press, 2004.
- Schimmel, Anniemarie. *Sufism in Indo-Pakistan: Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. USA: University of North Carolina Publication, 1975.
- Sharif, Ahmed. *Bengali Sufi Literature*. Dhaka: Time publication, 2011.
- Siddiqui, Ashraf. *Bangladeshi Literature and Heritage*. Dhaka: Bangladesh, Choyon Publication, 2001.
- Tazeen, Murshid. *Sacred and Secular Muslim Discourses (1871-1977)*. England: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Wise, James. *Notes on the Races, Castes, and Trades of Eastern Bengal*. London: 1884.