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A study on Sufi Saints in Karimganj District of Assam (1346-1947)

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Abstract

Sufi Saints Play an important role in Muslim Society. Muslim Society will never be complete without their involvement and contribution. Therefore, it is essential to study the life and activities of Sufi who were settled in Karimganj during the period of our study. In our proposed study, I want to highlight the influence of their activities on the Muslim Socio-religious conditions not in general but specifically in Connection with Sufi Saints in Karimganj district of Assam from 1346-1947.

Introduction : The Soil of Karimganj district of Assam, alike other parts of India, also did not lag behind in welcoming the spiritual missions of the Sufi Saints. Moreover, it still proves a prospective centre for the practice of Sufism. On arrival of some of the Sufi Saints and their activities are no doubt the valuable facts of history and without the study of the same, the study on the history of Karimganj district of Assam will not be completed. The Sufi Saints came here not only with invading Muslim army and traders but also with a zeal and enthusiasm for preaching Islam.

Indian Sufism has received much importance among the intellectuals, writers, historians and volumes of works on Indian Sufis and their activities have already been published. But unfortunately scholars have not gives due attention to the details account of Islamic religious development as well as the life and activities of the saints of Karimganj district of Assam. Some scanty reference can be found in some of the available works on Karimganj district of Assam but they are mostly deal with political history of the region and virtually the Social relevance of the Sufi Saints and their activities are hardly taken into account. The accounts of the introduction of Islam and Sufism are shrouded in the myths and legends, especially. The account of great saints like – Jalal Udin Tabrizi, Shah Jalal Mujarrad, Ghiyas Uddin Awliya and Azan Fakir are based only on pious legends and local traditions. Due to the silence of contemporary persian sources in connection with the saints and their activities in Assam, it is again not easy to say anything presently about their Social role and activities in the contemporary Society and after.

Incidentally a thorough study over the subject may reveal that many of the Muslim saints came to Karimganj district of Assam with the invading Muslim army, but subsequently a considerable part of them settled permanently in the region while other might have returned their native lands. The Saints who stayed here permanently , started their noble mission of preaching and spreading Islamic way of life. Gradually the importance of the places where they lived was increased and ultimately was turned into Dargah or Khangah. However, in the present article, it is intended to collect and examine, the authentic information regarding the arrival of Sufis, the life and activities of the Sufis in this land. The list of the Sufi Saints of Karimganj district of Assam is as follows.

Hazrat Shah Badaruddin (alive in 1346 A.D.): Hazrat Shah Badaruddin is the first prominent sufi of Assam. He was a companion of Hazrat shah Jalal Mujarrad. He was originally from Arabia, he joined Shah Jalal and Participated in the war against Goura Govinda . After the conquest of Sylhet, Shah Jalal sent him with sipahsalar Syeed Nashir Uddin to fight king Achak Narayan of Taraf in greater Sylhet. When Tarf became conquered, Hazrat Shahjalal finally deputed him karimganj for the propagation of Islam in the region. We do not have much information about him and his activities, but it is certain that he preached Islam in Karimganj district of Assam.

The presence of a large numbers of Muslims in Karimganj as well as in Barak Valley actually suggests the influence of Shah Badar and his fellows. His grave is located in the Dak Banglaow of Badarpur in Karimganj district. But due to the erosion of the Barak river Shah Badar's grave got washed away. Fisherman and Boatman take the name of shah Badar whenever they cross the side of his tomb as a token of respect of his memory. B C Allen recorded in the District Gazetteer of Cachar that Badarpur is named after Shah Badar.

Shah Adam Khaki: Shah Adam Khaki is another Sufi of Karimganj whose name is found in the list of Suhail-e-Yemen. As a companion of Hazrat Shah Jalal, he Came to Sylhet with Hazrat Shah Jalal during its conquest by the Muslims. Later, at the instruction of his mentor Hazrat Shajalal, Adam Khaki chose Karimganj as his working Place. He probably preached the message of Islam in the areas between Karimganj and Badarpur. Nothing much is known about this popular Sufi except his full Shah Adam Khaki. The shrine of Adam Khaki is located as the side of national highway connecting Karimganj and Badarpur at village Deorail. People belonging to Khadim bari claim themselves to be his descendents. Both Hindus and Muslims visit his shrine at Deorail in greater Badarpur and offer nazar-o-niyas. The people in large number rush to his Dargah on every Thursday night to offer prayer. It appears that people have been considering Adam Khaki as an icon of communal harmony for a long time.

Sheikh Sikandar: Shekh Sikandar was another companion of Hazrat Shah Jalal who settled in Barak Valley for propagating Islam After his mentor Shah Jalal instructed to do the same He was also known as Shah Sikandar. He mainly worked in the old Deorail pargana , where his grave exists but this too got lost in the bed of the Barak river . He is said to have been involved in the war with the feudal Chiefs of Cachari king. Khodakar family of Deorail called themselves descendents of this great Sufi. It seems that the forefathers of the Muslims of the villages located on the bank of the Barak river in Deorail Pargana came to the touch of Islamic culture due to collective preaching of Sufis like Sheikh Sikandar . There is a Masjid in the Village of Gorekhafan in Badarpur which is considered to have been built by Shah Sikandar. Some people believe that his tomb lies in the village Saptagram in Cachar district.

Shah Ziauddin: Shah Ziauddin was a resident of Yemen and probably he joined Hazrat Shah Jalal from there . He was also deputed in Karimganj for missionary activities . He Permanently settled at village Bundashil (Badarpur) in Karimganj . It is said that he was very close to Hazrat Sah Jalal and it is on his request that Hazrat Shah Jalal came to Deorail. He was a Sufi of high rank and position. He established Madrassa for the teaching and training of religious people so that the trained people would rank others aware about Islam. The erosion of Barak had taken away the Madrassa and Masjid founded by Shah Ziyauddin at Bundashil. It also washed away his grave near that place.

Shah Abdul Malik: Shah Abdul Malik was a disciple of Hazrat Shah Jalal Mujarrad, who was also seat to Badarpur by his mentor , for the assistance of Shah Ziyauddin in teaching and imparting education among the commoners. He according to the order of Shah Jalal devoted his whole life in missionary activities. Shah Abdul Malik's dargah is located near Badarpur Bazar. People irrespective of religions respect his dargah.

Asim Shah: Asimganj is a village under Patharkandi Development block in Karimganj district. It is learnt from reliable sources that Asim Shah came to Asimganj from Bardishnu of South Daka. At first, he began to stay in Hatkhala village situated at a distance of about 1 k.m. towards south-east from Asimganj Bazar. There he renovated the Mukam and the grave yard of Khaja Hasan, one of the disciples of Shah Jalal Amoni. Asimganj was named after his name. In order to bring development to greater Asimganj, he established Mosques and Madrassas. A Madrassa was established at Hatkhala village in 1919 and later on it was shifted to Asimganj Bazar. That Madrassa was known as Asimia Senior Madrassa. It is now a provincialised institute of high standard providing quality education to the students of the north-east India. Asimganj Bazar, Asimia M.E. Madrassa, Asimia Higher Secondary School were also established and named after his name. He went to Mucca to perform Haj but he did not return. It is said that he breathed his last in Bagdad, the capital of Iraq. He is still respected and remembered by the people of greater Asimganj.

Hazrat Khaza Hasan: Hatkhala is a village near Asimganj in Karimganj district of Assam. It is situated at a distance of about 1.km towards south east from Asimganj Bazar. It is said that a Sufi came to hatkhala in 1880. He discovered there the grave of Hazrat Kaza Hasan, one of the companion of Hazrat Shah Jalal Amoni. The Sufi name was Asimshah. Asimshah renovated the Mukam and the grave –yard of Hazrat Hasan, one of the 360 Awlias who came with Sah Jalal Amoni .people keep thronging to Hatkhala village to visit the Mukam and the grave-yard with a view to seeking blessing of Hazrat Khaza Hasan. A Mdrasasa and Mosque have been established here .

Piar Moulavir Mukam: Biskut is a village in Karimganj district of Assam. An unknown boy came in this village in 17th century. He looks like a Madrassa student. A villager kept him as cowboy. He was given a separate room, one night house owner's wife happened to enter his room and saw that the room was lit without any lamp. The surprised woman showed the scene to her husband. Having realized, that the boy had supernatural power, they released him from his duty and gave him a plot of land in the nearby hillock.

He began to live there, after a few months, he took initiative to built a Mosque on that very hillock and came to be known as pair Moulavi . He then engaged a mason for the construction of the Mosque and the work progressed. One day an altercation arose between them, he got angry and beat the mason. The mason filed a police case against him. The police investigated the matter and came to arrest him. The local people began to cry. He told them that he always stay on that very hillock. He told the Police Officer to give him sometime to perform Salat and accordingly he was given. He did oju and went inside a mosquito net to perform Salat. When the police found that he was not coming out of the mosquito net, they peeped inside but did not find him. Thus, he left this world. Later on people gathered his cloths and put them into a grave. There is a pond at the bottom of the hillock and it was full of utensils. People used to take these utensils when there was any religious and social function. But it got stopped with the death of its Khadim, Khalasha. Presently, the pond of full of beech and these utensils are still there but none can take them and near the Mosque, his Mukam stands.

Shah Monaf Moniashah: Hazrat Shah Jalal Mujrrad Yemoni, accompanied by 360 followers, Shah Abdul Monaf Moniashah was one of them. He lived in the north of Monoshangon in the district of Karimganj. He concentrated many people towards Islam and served for the Islam till death. Unmarried Abdul Monaf Moniashah's holy grave –yard is situated at Monoshangon. Many people irrespective of cast, creed, sex attend at his grave-yard for prayer .

Sayed Khaza Ambar Shah Amoni: With a view to preach Islamic idealism and to extend and establish the Islam, Hazrat Shajalal who came from East Bengal along with 360

followers, syeed Khaza Ambar Saha Amoni, the nephew of Khaza Mayeen Uddin Sisty was one of them. His prayer ad ovation. Place was situated in the locality of Basla Bazar of South Badarpur in the district of Karimganj. His grave –yard was situated at Lamarkhala village a distance of 1 k.m. away from the prayer place. It is now in the midst of an Idgah and his Mukam was situated at Rupashibari of Sri Gouri.

Shah Abdul Karim: There is no confirmed information as to when and how he came to Karimganj. Nobody could also confirmed when and how he died. But there is confirmed record that his parlour was there on the top of Deli hillock situated near Banamali of Karimganj town. There is an Idgah adjacent to the parlour of Shah Abdul Karim and the people of Kanishail and its adjoining villages perform Salat -e- Idh here. Karimganj district was named after his name 'Shah Abdul Karim'. There is no confirmed report as to his death. His holy grave-yard is there at Hadargram. People visit his grave-yard to perform Ziarat. According to some people, he came to Karimganj after Shah Jalal Amoni and the 360 Awlias.

Shah Abdullah: Abdullapur is a village near Nilambazar in Karimganj district. The village was named after the pir's name Shah Abdullah. Hazrat Baba Tajuddin Siddiqui Qureshi was one of the followers of Shah Jalal Amoni. He was Shah Abdulla's father. His holy grave-yard is there at Nabiganj in Habiganj district of Bangladesh.

Shah Baba Abdullah had five sons. They were Shah Abdullah, Shah Nuruddin, Shah Alimullah, Shah Oliullah and Shah Azizullah. They were Siddique and Qureshi. The Grave-yard of father Shah Abdullah and Son Shah Atabullah are at Abdullapur. The Grave-yard of Shah Nurullah is at Bosla of Karimganj district. The grave-yards of the remaining thee are at Tiger's Mukam at Katabari, Abdullapur. The identity of the remaining 5 pir's of the 8 pir's is not available.

It is unbelievable but true that Shah Baba Abdullah Siddique Qureshi came here floating on a stone. The stone is still preserved at Ranibari. Since time immemorial, Tiger's used to this Mukam. Even these days, Tiger's visit the Mukam. With the donation from the people of all segments of Society, an Idgah has recently been constructed inside the mukam premises.

Moulana Mozaid Uddin Choudhury: He was born in a Choudhury family of Malua Village in Karimganj district in 1863 and died on 18th June 1941. His grave-yard is there by the side of the local Mosque. He went abroad for higher education. He was conferred the title Samsul Ulama by the Government. He wrote a number of books. He had two highly educated sons named Gulam Moula Choudhury and Gulam Yeahya Choudhury. He was the principal of Srihatta Title Madrassa. He used to be the Chief guest at different functions in different places of this sub-continent.

It is said that a non-Muslim had bought his father's home but he could not stay at that home it use to take the name of Allah. Every Friday, people throng to his grave-yard and perform prayers.

Moulana Najib Ali Choudhury: Moulana Najib Ali Choudhury was the descendant of Shah Omar who came with Shah Jalal Amoni. He was the founder principal of Bagbari Madinatul Ullum Madrassa in Karimganj district of Assam. Moulana Gulam Rob Choudhury of Karimganj was his son. Abdul Munim Choudhury , the grand son of Moulana Najib Ali Choudhury was once elected to M.L.A. from South Karimganj Constituency. He was one of the friends of Syeed Mohammed Madani of Ujandhi. He was having supernatural power. It is known from a reliable source that even after 30 years of his death, once late at night he appeared in person to save one his sons who was in danger and it happened when his son remembered him and sought his help. His holy grave-yard is there at Routgram in Karimganj district.

Hazrat Kanu Shah: Kanu Bhutu was born in the village Sharkaribari under P.S. Ratabari in district Karimganj, later known as Hazrat Kanu Shah for his Miraculous activities. His father

was Danish Mohmod and mother Joytuna Bibi. Kanu Shah died in 1911 A.D. at the age of about 75 years. His forefather was originally the resident of Joyantia area in the district of Srihatta. While learning Quran and Hadith in Madrassa, one day he become insane suddenly and claimed a high tree and a stayed on the branch of the tree leaving all the earthly activities. He was taken to ground with the help of sincere effort of his mother and confined him with an iron chain. But one day he disappeared by avoiding all barriers and entered in the western deep forest of his residence and all effort to trace out him from the Jungle went in vain.

After a long gap of 15 years one day he reappeared again and was seen setting under a tree in the place of present Mukam and grave-yard as reported. Many people started to visiting for his strange reappearance. Thereafter many Miracle incidents in his life were noticed. Sometimes he was seen walking over the water of the Shanbill, by length and breadth of 20/8 K.M. wearing wooden foot wearer from east to west. The boatman and the people did not want to board him in their boat because he tried to sink the boat in the midst of Shanbill. But he was seen reached the destination before their arrival. He cultivated people's devotion and respect for his such supernatural activities. His Mukam is situated in the foot hill of Duhalia and western bank of Shanbill near Fakua and Bazarghat railway station. It was on the top of a tilla and now the village is known as Digalikandi, earlier it was called Bisthargoan. That is why the Mukam is known as Bistar Mukam.

The life of Hazrat Kanu Shah was full of mystery and miracle. Innumerable supernatural events were taken place in his life. There was a great devotee, lived in the deep forest of Duhalia at his contemporary period, called as Anahari Baba. Anahari Baba generally did not take food and rice. He took only fruits and milk. As per secretary of Bistar Mukam that Anahari Baba possesses 30 Nos of cows and are Tiger. Both were intimate friend but nobody seen them in the same place or never seen their meeting.

Anahari Baba used to send milk to Hazrat Kanu Shah through his followers and in return Kanu Sha sent fruits. One a shirney (celestial feast) of beef was arranged in Bistar Mukam from which a potful cooked beef duly packed was sent to Anahari Baba by Kanu Shah. While Anahari Baba was abstained from taking cooked rice, so question of taking beef is beyond imagination, but as soon as he found the pot, he opened it and started feeding. But it was a matter of great strange that the beef shirney turned into sweet. It is very difficult to illustrate all the miracle incidents of his life

Kari Nazib Ali: Kari Nazib Ali was born in 1867 in Singaria village of Karimganj district of Assam. He died in 1947. Syeed Moulana Abu Bakkar was his spiritual guide. He Schooling was in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. At the behalf of his spiritual guide, he went to Mucca and become a disciple of Moulana Shah Sufi Abdul Hoque Mukkit Madani, one of the followers of Owas Qwarni. His life style, Conversation, Movement etc were full of mystery. He was believed to have supernatural power. His grave-yard is there at Singaria Village.

The study over the life and missionary activities of the Sufi Saints of the Karimganj during the period of our study reveals that they did not remain mere spectators of the political events help and cooperation to the society and state and thus a friendly and congenial relationship between Sufi Saints, Society and state had gradually been developed ever the time in the region.

Equality and spirituality and universal brotherhood were the important teachings which were to be maintained by the Sufi Saints in their devotional matter. There two factors , along with the liberalisation of the prophetic. Islam, made Sufi cult extremely popular in this region. It is a common observation that the shrines built over the graves of the Sufi Saints draw pilgrims. A pilgrimage to a shrine is more often then not an extension of the excessive honour paid to them in their life time. Flowers are offered on the grave-yard and small

earthen lamps are lit and placed mostly on Thursday. The shrine called a Mazar (place of pilgrimage) and sometimes called a Dargah (Court) may be dedicated to a Saint.

Therefore, it may be safely concluded that the Sufism in Karimganj as a whole is a golden chapter in the religious history of Islam, which requires volumes to assess its various effects on the religious, Socio-Political and cultural life of this region. The untiring Zeal and services rendered by the Sufis the cause of Islam resulted in a large number of new adherents to the creed in this part of the country. Thus, Islam spread by sheer force of appeal and simple Islamic doctrine of peace, equality, fraternity and common brotherhood which the Sufis and their disciples demonstrated in public and practiced in their private life.

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