

## Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate

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Bengal, comprising modern Bangladesh and West Bengal of India, was considered an important part of Eastern India in the medieval period. Before the advent of the Muslims in this land no ruler had connotated Bangala or Bengal in the sense of a country. It was then divided into so many *Janapadas* or principalities over which the rulers of various dynasties ruled. On the eve of Muslim conquest in the Sena period, Bengal is said to have been divided into five principalities of Barendra (the Barind of Muslim historians)<sup>1</sup>, Radha, Banga, Bagdi and Mithila,<sup>2</sup> possibly in consideration of the natural barriers and river courses. It was sultan Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah (1339-1358 A.D.) who united all the administrative divisions of Lakhnawati, Satgaon and Sonargaon, and various *Janapadas* into a compact country, which became widely known as Bangala (the Bengal referred to above).<sup>3</sup> The north west portion of Bengal is comparatively drier and higher land than the south and eastern portions. This facilitated the horse riding people of Turkish race to start their conquest and administrative set up from this convenient zone of Bengal. We, therefore, find that the Lakhnawati kingdom was conquered by Ghazi Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad b. Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204 A.D.,<sup>4</sup> and gradually comprising the whole of Bengal it emerged as an independent Sultanate in Eastern India. Bengal as a country consisted of the vast region from Teliagarhi pass in the west to Chittagong in the east and from the foot of the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the South.<sup>5</sup> In this paper we would like to throw light on the education system of the Muslims in Bengal during the Sultanate period which extended from its conquest in 1204 A.D. down to its annexation to the Mughal empire in 1576 A.D. The theme of this paper may be discussed under two broad heads, viz. (i) educational institutions that sprang up in Bengal and (ii) the syllabi or the contents of education which were followed in these institutions.

The acquisition of knowledge has been given the first consideration in Islam. The first revelation that came to the Prophet Muhammad started with the word 'Iqra' or 'read in the name of the Lord'.<sup>6</sup> The Prophet felt proud to declare that he was sent as a teacher to the whole of mankind.<sup>7</sup> This is why he uttered that the seeking of knowledge was obligatory on every Muslim man and woman.<sup>8</sup> The Prophet (sm) by his words and deeds inculcated this idealism in the newly founded state and society of Madinah. He compared knowledge with a valuable lost thing of the wise. As such its acquisition and collection are considered to be desirable from whatever source it may be achieved.<sup>9</sup> In analysing the reliable sources we may term the imparting of knowledge during the times of the Prophet and *Khulafa' rashidun* as primary and advanced. Primary knowledge mainly centred round the teachings relating to *Tawhid* or unity of Allah, the different

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aspects of *Iman* and 'Amal or the faith and obligatory deeds while the advanced knowledge was concerned with the social, national and international problems codified in the *Shari'ah*.

With these preliminaries let us see first the educational institutions that sprang up in Bengal in the period under review.

In the early days of Islam, *masajid* were considered to be the main forum for the two types of education referred to above i.e. primary and advanced. With the expansion of Islamic Commonwealth outside Arabia, *masajid* retained the function of education along with their original purpose as places of prayers to Allah. In the later periods *madaris* were set up in the towns, cities and other important places under the patronage of the rulers, nobles and well-to-do persons for imparting knowledge to the people in the different branches of Islamic learning. Education and educational seminaries flourished fully in the time of the Abbasid caliphate in the various conquered territories. The Muslim conquerors carried with them the tradition of their predecessors with regard to education to the countries conquered or ruled by them. Bengal is not an exception in this respect. The Khalji Turks who conquered the Lakhnawati kingdom of Laksmana Sena also brought with them the rich cultural heritage of their own country to the region they subjugated. The early conquerors of this land (Bengal) were fully aware of the fact that without proper arrangement for education and learning the military occupation could not last long and the society would be liable to disruption.

This realization possibly at the early period of conquest induced Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji and his other Khalji *maliks* to establish *masajid* (mosques), *madaris* (educational seminaries) and *khanqat* (seats of religious divines) in the capital city and other strategic places of their conquered territories.<sup>10</sup> Besides the capital Lakhnawati, Dewkut, Narkuti identified with Natore and Madisa Santush identified with Mahisantosh grew as administrative units in the early period. From the accounts of *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*<sup>11</sup> it is reasonable to presume that all these places had educational institutions in the forms of *masajid*, *madaris* and *khanqat* to impart learning to the people of their respective localities. Gradually in the successive periods Gaur, Pandua, Ikdala, *Qasbah* Tabrizabad *alias* Deotala, Ghoraghat, Satgaon, Sunargaon and Chatgaon (modern Chittagong) seem to have grown as cities and urban settlements. These places definitely provided educational facilities for the people of their respective areas. Due to non-existence of any structural complex it is not possible, in the long lapse of time, to locate *madaris* definitely in particular places. We may trace some *madaris* or institutions of learning from two sources, viz. (a) the epigraphic and (b) literary.

- (a) **Madaris derived from epigraphic source** : On inscriptional evidence it is held that a *madrasah* was built at Triveni in Hoogly district of West Bengal of India in the reign of Rukn al-Din Kay-ka'us (1291-1301 A.D.) under the patronage of Qadi Nasir in 698 A.H./1298 A.D.<sup>12</sup> Another epigraph inserted in the northern side of Zafar Khan's tomb at Triveni reveals the fact that a *madrasah* known as *Dar al-Khayrat* or the house of benevolence was built in the same locality during the reign of Shams al-Din Firuz Shah (1301-1322

A.D.) of Bengal under the order of Khan Jahan Zafar Khan in 713 A.H./1313 A.D.<sup>13</sup> S. Ahmed is of opinion that the *madrasah* mentioned in the above two epigraphs refer to the one and same *madrasah* in the way that extension was made to the *madrasah* of the time of Rukn al-Din Kay-ka'us dated 1298 A.D. by Khan Zafar Khan in 1313 A.D.<sup>14</sup> But on the epigraphic evidence it is to be pointed out that in the case of second *madrasah* the words used as *بدار الخيرات* (this *madrasah* known as the house of benevolence was built) clearly testify to the erection of a separate *madrasah* other than the first one which was built a few years earlier in 1298 A.D. No such word referring to the meaning of extension or repairing could be traced in the contents of the epigraph. We may, therefore, presume that these two *madrasahs* at Triveni, named Firuzabad after sultan Shams al-Din Firuz Shah of Bengal, were considered centres of learning in the Satgaon region.

The Navagrama inscriptions<sup>15</sup> of Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah (1442-1459 A.D.) dated A.H. 858/1454 A.D. indicates the existence of an academy for learning in the *Khittah* Simlabad. The internal evidence<sup>16</sup> of the epigraph has led us to place the *Khittah* Simlabad in the tract of land comprising some portions of northern Panba, south-western Bogra and south-eastern Rajshahi of north-western zone of Bangladesh. It is reasonable to deduce from the inscription that the educational institution referred to in the epigraph was located in the *Khittah* Simlabad. Though the contents of the epigraph do not clearly mention the existence of a *madrasah*, the use of the terms '*ulama*' (teachers) and *muta'allimun* (students)<sup>17</sup> therein implies the existence of a *madrasah* in that area. The epigraph, therefore, indirectly refers to the foundation of a *masjid* and *madrasah* as separate institutions in that administrative unit.<sup>18</sup> On the evidence of this inscription we may assume that a *madrasah* was set up in the headquarters of *Khittah* Simlabad during the reign of sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud Shah of Bengal by Ulugh Rahim Khan, the executive head of that administrative unit.

An inscription of the reign of Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah (1474-1481 A.D.) was procured from the debris of Darasbari *masjid*.<sup>19</sup> It records the erection of a *Jami' masjid* by the sultan in 884 A.H./1479 A.D. The plan of the Darasbari *Masjid* conforms to its being a *Jami' masjid*.<sup>20</sup> As it is called Darasbari by the local people, it is, therefore, possible that arrangement for education was provided in the precincts of the mosque. A few yards away on the east side of the mosque had been unearthed the site of a structural complex which could be taken for a *madrasah* building on the evidence of an inscription discovered from its debris in 1973.<sup>21</sup> It may be presumed that Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah started constructing a *Jami' masjid* with the provision of arrangement for learning and a separate *madrasah* in the same locality which is known today as Darasbari. The *Jami' masjid* was completed in 884 A.H./1479 A.D. while the *madrasah* building was finally completed in the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah in 909 A.H./1503-04 A.D.

Another epigraph of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah (1493-1519 A.D.) dated 1<sup>st</sup> Ramadan A.H. 907/10<sup>th</sup> March, 1502 A.D. records in clear term the erection of a *madrasah* by the order of the sultan.<sup>22</sup> As the inscription slab was not *in situ*, it is not possible to assert anything conclusively regarding the location of the

*madrasah* referred to in the epigraph. The inscription slab was found by Westmacott on the enclosure wall of a little mosque, north-west of English bazar police station in the district of Malda,<sup>23</sup> but no trace of a *madrasah* could be found nearby. It is, therefore, probable that the epigraph was taken to that place from somewhere else. Westmacott and Blochmann are of the opinion that the slab may have belonged to some *madrasah*, the ruins of which exist in Gaur.<sup>24</sup> Stapleton, on the other hand, suggests that the inscription slab must have been brought from some *madrasah* either that at Darasbari or that at Belbari<sup>25</sup> We have shown above that the *madrasah* at Darasbari was begun in the reign of Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah and was completed in the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah in 909 A.H./1503-04 A.D. as mentioned in the inscription. Hence, this *madrasah* could be located at Belbari, which was situated on the northern end of Chhota Sagar Dighi in Gaur.

The Kaitahar Inscription<sup>26</sup> of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah refers to a mosque which had possibly proper arrangement for imparting religious education to the people of the locality.<sup>27</sup> The epigraph is believed to have been fixed above the tympanum of the eastern doorway of the mosque built in the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah in 916 A.H./1510-11 A.D.<sup>28</sup> Though at present nothing of the original mosque except the bases of three *mihhrabs* in the *Qibla* wall remain, the topography of the place is indicative of its being a place of some importance in the medieval time. It may, therefore, be presumed that either the mosque had an attached academy for learning or it had contained in itself special arrangement for imparting religious knowledge to the people of the area.

A *madrasah* seems to have been built at Bagha<sup>29</sup> in the Husayn Shahi period. An epigraph fixed above the central doorway of the mosque at Bagha records the erection of this *Jami' masjid* by sultan Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah (1519-1531 A.D.) in A.H. 930/1523-24 A.D.<sup>30</sup> From the accounts of Abdul Latif it is known that Hawda Mian ran a *madrasah* in a mud-built house with a thatched roof.<sup>31</sup> Hawda Mian is possibly a corrupt form of the original name of Hadrat Hamid Danishmand. Abdul Latif found him a man of about one hundred years in 1609 A.D.<sup>32</sup> It is, therefore, plausible to take him to be contemporaneous to Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah. Shah Mu'azzam Danishmand popularly known as Shah Dawlah, the father of Hadrat Hamid Danishmand might have started a *khanqah* and a *madrasah* in that locality. Gradually the settlement received the name of *Qasbah*, and Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah, the Bengal sultan realizing its importance built a *Jami' masjid* at Bagha. We may, therefore, place the *madrasah* to the reign of Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah who may be credited with founding the *Jami' masjid* and the *madrasah* as well in A.H. 930/1523 A.D.

It is evident from the epigraphic sources that there were a number of *madaris* in the important places of Bengal in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. This will lead us to hypothesize that *madaris* and educational seminaries were opened in almost all the administrative headquarters of Bengal in the Sultani period either by the Muslim rulers, their deputies or by the individual '*alim* and *sufi*.

(b) **Madaris derived from literary and other sources:** It is stated that Mawlana Taqi al-Din 'Arabi established an educational seminary at

Mahisun<sup>33</sup> identified with Mahisantosh of present Rajshahi district possibly in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>34</sup> Yahya Maneri, the father of the celebrated *sufi* and renowned scholar Shaykh Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneri is reported to have received learning under Mawlana Taqi al-Din 'Arabi at Mahisun.<sup>35</sup> Yahya is said to have died in 1291 A.D. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to assume that Yahya Maneri received his education under Taqi al-Din 'Arabi in about the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. at the educational seminary of Mahisantosh. In the successive periods of Bengal Sultanate this place got much prominence, and ultimately a mint was set up there by sultan Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah (1459-1474 A.D.). For this reason the town received the name of Barbakabad.<sup>36</sup> Even today a dilapidated mosque,<sup>37</sup> city ramparts, and several tombs bear witness to its being a place of great importance in the Muslim period of medieval Bengal. It is, therefore, more reasonable to say that the academic seminary set up by Mawlana Taqi al-Din 'Arabi at Mahisantosh was further developed and patronized by the Muslim rulers of Bengal. This *madrasah* attracted students from other parts of this subcontinent.

Mawlana Sharaf al-Din Abu Tawwama, an inhabitant of Buhara came to Bengal in 1281, settled down at Sonargaon, now in Dhaka district of Bangladesh and built a *khanqah* and an academy for learning in the city.<sup>38</sup> Religious as well as secular sciences were taught and studied in this great educational seminary of Sonargaon. It produced illustrious sages and scholars. Mawlana Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneri was the product of this academy and a student of Mawlana Abu Tawwama. The *madrasah* at Sonargaon earned its fame as a seat of higher learning, and to this institution the students from all over this sub-continent flocked together to receive training in all subjects. The founder of this great institution of learning Mawlana Abu Tawwama breathed his last in A.H. 700/1300 A.D., and was buried in Sonargaon.<sup>39</sup> However, this *madrasah* played an important role in spreading education in East Bengal in the successive period of Bengal Sultanate.

Pandua emerged as a capital city of the Muslim rulers of Bengal, such as Shams al-Din Ilyas Shah, Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah, Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah, Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah and Jalal al-Din Fath Shah who were patrons of learning and the learned. It was a centre of spiritual and cultural activities of the eminent sages and *sufis* of the time. The *khanqahs* of the *masha'ikh* at Pandua provided education for the people of the locality. Hadrat Nur Qutb 'Alam, an eminent *sufi* of the time, built a great *madrasah* and a *maristan* or hospital at Pandua. Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah made land-grant for these institutions.

The layout of a *Jami masjid* in the Mahasthan Garh<sup>40</sup> provides in itself three raised platforms in the western side. They seem to have been the seats for the teachers to teach the students before and after the obligatory prayers.<sup>41</sup> Such device can be found in almost all the mosques of Persia.<sup>42</sup> In case of its being so as suggested, it is reasonable to assume that this *Jami masjid* of Mahasthan also met the requirements of an educational seminary in the Sultanate period of Bengal.

We have tried to give a brief description of important *madaris* and educational seminaries traceable in the epigraphic, literary and other sources. Besides these, on further investigation, there may come to light some other educational institutions which existed in Bengal in the Sultanate period.

(ii) **Content and course of education:** It is very difficult to determine the content and course of education accurately in the educational institutions mentioned above in the period under study. Sifting materials from various sources we may give some ideas about the syllabi and contents of education which were followed in those institutions. The Muslim children, as beginners, started their primary course in the *maktab*<sup>43</sup> and in the mosque. The *maktabs* were generally attached to the mosques,<sup>44</sup> and sometimes they were run by the well-to-do persons in their homes. Muslim boys and girls are expected to start saying prayers at the age of seven.<sup>45</sup> They require at least two years to acquire knowledge of their obligatory prayers and other related rituals. It may, therefore, be presumed that at the age of five they started their educational career in the *makatib* and *masajid*. It was customary to start with *bismillah* ceremony of a boy or girl at the age of four years, four months and four days.<sup>46</sup> In any case, we may hold that in between the age of four and five years the Muslim boys and girls were required to attend the *makatib* for their primary education. In exceptional cases the age may have exceeded five and extended upto seven.<sup>47</sup>

Religious instruction seemed to be the basis of primary education in the *makatib* and *masajid*. An *Imam* of the mosque as teacher is expected to teach his students the fundamentals of Islam and other rituals. Contemporary Bengali literature<sup>48</sup> substantiates the view that the Mawlavi taught the Muslim children about ablution and prayer in the *makatib*.<sup>49</sup> To understand the fundamentals and other rituals the students should also have adequate knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadith. The *Sayyids*, the *Qadis* and the head-men of the Muslim society used to decide the various cases in accordance with the injunctions of the holy Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet (sm.).<sup>50</sup> We may, therefore, presume that the Qur'an and the Hadith were also included in the courses of education at the primary and higher levels. Muhammad b. Yazdan Bakhsh, a famous *muhaddith* transcribed in Ikdalah three volumes of the Hadith collection of the celebrated traditionist al-Bukhari.<sup>51</sup> It may at least show the demand of the authentic Hadith to be taught in the educational seminaries of Bengal.

*Fiqh* or elementary knowledge of jurisprudence is pre-requisite for performing the obligatory duties of Islam. The subject was, therefore, in all fairness, included into the courses of study at the primary level. *Nam-i-Haq*<sup>52</sup> a work on *fiqh* in elegant Persian, supposed to be a contribution of Muslim Bengal to Islamic learning, supports the contention of introducing the *fiqh* into the courses of study at the primary and higher levels as well. In the light of this observation, it is not, therefore, unreasonable to conjecture that the Qur'an, Hadith and *Fiqh* formed the main subjects of study in the *makatib* and *masajid* of Bengal at the primary level.

Along with these subjects, Arabic, Persian and Bengali as languages were taught to the students in the primary stage of their educational career. Arabic as

being the language of the Qur'an should have been learnt by the students. The epigraphs<sup>53</sup> of the Bengal Sultanate testify to the cultivation of Arabic learning by the Muslim rulers in the period under review. Persian being the court language<sup>54</sup> was similarly given importance for study in the *makatib* and *masajid* in the elementary courses. Religious books were also written in Persian. The students were, therefore, required to learn Persian to have access to the books written in Persian. The accounts of the Chinese envoys in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. regarding nobles and courtiers' proficiency in Persian and Bangali<sup>55</sup> support the contention.

The students after completion of the primary education in the *makatib* and *masajid* would proceed to the *madaris* for higher education. The *madaris* (institutions of higher learning) provided higher education for the advanced students. Advanced learning would, no doubt, be a continuation of the primary education. It is, therefore, possible that an analytical study of the Qur'an and Hadith formed the principal part of the advanced courses. *Tafsir* of the Qur'an and *Tashrih* of the Hadith belonged to this category.

To derive decision on minor questions and multifarious problems from the Qur'an and Hadith, *Ijtihad* played an important role in the system of Islamic *Shar'ah*. While sending Mu'adh b. Jabal as governor to Yaman, the Prophet (sm.) is reported to have praised his desire to exercise his own judgement in the cases uncovered by the apparent verdict of the Qur'an and Hadith. Herein lies a clear indication of the role of *ijtihad* in Muslim legal system. The *madrasah* founded and maintained by Ghiyath al-Din A'zam Shah (1392-1410 A.D.), a Bengal sultan in 813 A.H./1410-11 A.D. at al-Makkah near Umm-i-Hani gate provided teaching for the students of four schools of Muslim jurisprudence.<sup>56</sup> An account of the students studying in that *madrasah*<sup>57</sup> shows that the *madrasah* was meant to impart advanced learning on *fiqh* specially for the students of four schools of jurisprudence. We may, therefore, come to this conclusion that an advanced study of *fiqh* also formed one of the main subjects of study in the *madaris* of Bengal. Ghiyath al-Din A'zam Shah belonged to the Hanafite school of law.<sup>58</sup> His descendants are expected to follow in his track, and, therefore, almost all the sultans of Bengal belonged to the Hanafite school. However, they showed liberal attitude to other schools of law as is evident from the patronization of four schools equally in the *madrasah* of Makkah.<sup>59</sup> This fact leads us to infer that the *madaris* built by the Muslim rulers in various parts of Bengal opened courses on four schools of *fiqh*. But the population being predominantly Hanafite, the *madaris* were mostly attended by them.

Besides these subjects, other sciences such as logic, arithmetic, medicine, alchemy, hindasa (geometry), astronomy and others were also taught in the *madaris*. Though of later period, the statement of Abu'l Fadl confirms this. He writes, "Every boy ought to read books on morals, arithmetic, agriculture, mensuration, geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household matters, rules of governmental, medicine, logic, higher mathematics, science and history, all of which may gradually be acquired."<sup>60</sup> The *madaris* for advanced studies kept provisions for all these subjects for the students. But they were not required to

study each and every subject. There had been different grades of *madaris* on the basis of the subjects taught in them.

Anatomy as a branch of medical science was considered a subject of study in the *madaris* of first grade. In an epigraph Jalal al-Din Fath Shah (1481-1486 A.D.) is designated as *kashif* or interpreter of the secrets of the Qur'an and 'alim or learned in the knowledge of religions and bodies.<sup>61</sup> These connotations, ascribed to the sultan, substantiate the view of introducing the *tafsir* (commentary of the Qur'an), comparative study of religions and the science of anatomy in the *madaris* of higher learning. Sultan Ghiyath al-Din A'zam Shah was an archer,<sup>62</sup> and archery formed an important technique in the art of warfare.<sup>63</sup> Archery, therefore, seemed to have been taught to those interested in it, in the academy of higher learning. *Hidayat-i-Rami*,<sup>64</sup> a book on archery compiled by Muhammad Buda'i better known as Sayyid Mir 'Alawi in the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah supports the contention.

Beautiful writing on the inscription slabs of the *masajid* and other monuments of Bengal leads us to infer that penmanship was introduced as an important subject of study in the *madaris* of higher learning. The names of two calligrapher-artists are traced in two epigraphs.<sup>65</sup> For transcribing books studied in the *madaris*, in the absence of printing press in the period under study, and for engraving inscriptions on the stone-slabs of the monuments, expert hands in penmanship were needed. It may, therefore, be presumed that this subject was assiduously studied by the advanced students in the academies for higher learning.

The nature of the subjects studied in the *madaris* of higher learning required proficiency in Arabic and Persian languages. In order to pursue the subjects of higher study written either in Arabic or in Persian, the learners should have achieved mastery over them. The epigraphs of Bengal incised in Arabic in the period under review show the extent of cultivation of Arabic language by the Muslim rulers. This bears witness to the fact that Arabic was seriously studied in the *madaris* of higher learning in Bengal. Sultan Ghiyath al-Din A'zam Shah's proficiency in Persian and his composing of verses in this language<sup>66</sup> testify to the study of Persian language in the *madaris*. We may, therefore, presume that the courses on Arabic and Persian were given to the students in the *madaris* of higher learning in the period of Bengal Sultanate.

The *madaris* of higher learning were, in all fairness, financed by the Muslim rulers of Bengal. It appears from the epigraphic sources that grants were awarded by the rulers to the teachers as well as to the pupils.<sup>67</sup> The *madrasah* at Qasba Bagha described as an endowed institution of long standing<sup>68</sup> was run by the grant of some neighbouring villages as *madad-i-ma'ash*.<sup>69</sup> According to local tradition<sup>70</sup> a land grant of 2750 bighas continued a *lakharaj* even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D. for running mosque, *madrasah* and other religious institutions in Mahisantosh. It is at least indicative of land endowment for running the religious institutions by the Muslim rulers of Bengal.



Sultan Ghiyath al-Din 'Iwad Khalji (1212-1226 A.D.) built *masajid*, *madaris* and caravan sarais in his conquered territories and bestowed gifts on the learned.<sup>71</sup> This refers to the fact that the sultan bore the expenses of these institutions along with their accessories. Epigraphic records<sup>72</sup> ascribe the title of *badhil* to some sultans.<sup>73</sup> In Arabic terminology *badhil* derived from the root *badhl* refers to the person who spends money in some benevolent works to obtain Allah's blessings. Construction and maintenance of *madaris* may be regarded as one of the virtuous works. Some sultans were also referred to as *fadil* (learned) and *kamil* (ripe in understanding) in the epigraphs.<sup>74</sup> Taking into consideration the connotations of '*alim*, *badhil*, *kamil* and *kashif*'<sup>75</sup> (of the secrets of the Qur'an) ascribed to the sultans in the epigraphs, we may come to this proposition that the *madaris* mentioned above were run by the endowment of the Muslim rulers of Bengal.

This brief survey on the education system of Bengal Sultanate gives us a bright picture regarding the state of learning as well as the direct patronage of the sultans for education in the medieval period. All these factors, therefore, testify to the height of culture and civilization which the Muslims attained during the times of Bengal Sultanate (1204-1576 A.D.).

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## Notes and References

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- <sup>2</sup> H. Blochmann, *Contribution to the Geography and History of Bengal* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1968), p. 3; E. Lethbridge, *An Easy Introduction to the History and Geography of Bengal* (Calcutta: Thacker Sping & Co., 1875), p. 13; S.N. Majumder, "Some Notes on Ancient Geography," *Sir Asutosh Mookherjee Silver Jubilee Volumes*, Calcutta University, 1925, p. 56.
- <sup>3</sup> A.H. Dani, "Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, Shah-i-Bangalah," *Sir Jadunath Sarker Commemoration Volumes*, Punjab University, 1958, p. 56.
- <sup>4</sup> A.H. Dani, "Date of Bakhtiyar's Raid on Nudiya," *Indian Historical Quarterly (IHQ)*, Vol. XXX, Calcutta, 1954, pp. 133 ff; A. Karim, *Vanglar Itihasa* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1977), p. 81; A.M. Choudhury, *Dynastic history of Bengal* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1967), p. 258.
- <sup>5</sup> A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, Vol. I (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1963), p. 2; B.C. Law, "The Vangas," *Indian Culture*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1934, p. 55.
- <sup>6</sup> al-Qur'an, Ch. XXX, Surah LXLVI (al-'alaq), Vs. 1ff.
- <sup>7</sup> *Mishkat al-Masabih*, (Karachi: n.d.), Kitab al-'ilm, p. 36.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibn Majah, *Sunan* (Karachi: Nur Muhammad Library, n.d.), p. 20; *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Kitab al-'ilm, p. 34.
- <sup>9</sup> *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Kitab al-'ilm, p. 34.
- <sup>10</sup> *TN*, Vol. I, Persian (Kabul edition), p. 427.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 427 & 436.
- <sup>12</sup> *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (Henceforth *EIM*), 1917-18, p. 13, Plate II.
- <sup>13</sup> *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Henceforth *JASB*), 1870, PP. 287-88; *EIM*, 1917-18, pp. 33-34, Plate XII(a).
- <sup>14</sup> S. Ahmad, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. IV (Rajshahi: Varendra Research Museum, 1960), p. 28. (Henceforth the source is abbreviated as *IB*).
- <sup>15</sup> Navagrama is now a village under Tarash Police Station of Pabna District of Bangladesh. The provenance of the epigraph seems to be a site of antiquarian relics. The epigraphs bearing the Museum Accession No. 3171 is now lying preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. It has been first deciphered by the author and published in the *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum (JVRM)*, Vol. 6. It is the early dated inscription of north western zone of Bangladesh (the area is mentioned as Barind in *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of Minhaj Siraj) to refer to the teachers and the students, thus indicating the existence of an academy for learning.
- <sup>16</sup> By internal evidence we mean the word ريفية or high, a variant reading ريفة or fertile land, possibly in the confluence of two rivers of Atrai and Karatoya, as used in the inscription. cf. *JVRM*, Vol. 6, p. 104.
- <sup>17</sup> No other epigraphs of this sultan mentioned bestowing gifts on the teachers and students. Therefore, it is indicative of an arrangement for learning in that locality.
- <sup>18</sup> Khittah Simlabad. In Medieval Muslim history the term *khittah* is supposed to mean an administrative unit like the terms *Iqlim* and 'Arsah. Generally the term *khittah* is applied to an administrative zone with a city fortified with ramparts and walls.
- <sup>19</sup> Darasbari, a locality in the suburb of Gaur is now situated in the Shibganj Police Station in Rajshahi district of Bangladesh. The epigraph in question is now preserved in the Indian National Museum, Calcutta. For details see *Archaeological Survey Report* (Henceforth *ASR*), Vol. XV, p. 76; *JASB*, Vol. LXIV, 1895, pp. 222-23; 'Abid 'Ali Khan' *Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua*, ed. H.E. Stapleton (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book depot, 1930), p. 77 (Henceforth the source is referred to as *Memoirs*); A.H. Dani, *Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal* (Dacca : Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960), p. 31 (Henceforth the source is referred to as *Bibliography*); S. Ahmed., *IB*, Vol. IV, pp. 104-105.
- <sup>20</sup> The mosque proper occupies an extensive area fronted by a *verandah* in the east. The prayer-chamber (*zullah*) is divided into three sections viz. a central nave and a hall in each north and south side. The side halls in the north and south are divided into three

- aisles by two rows of pillars which supported nine domes in either wing. In the north wing at the north west corner there seems to have been a raised platform in the second storey which could be presumed either as a ladies' gallery for prayer or as a *maqsurah* device for the royal personages. The mosque as a whole in its constructional devices resemble the *Jami'* masjid at Hadrat Pandua, now in Malda district of West Bengal of India. These factors, therefore, lead us to suppose that it was a *Jami' masjid*.
- <sup>21</sup> The madrasah referred to in the inscription was completed in the reign of 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah in A.H. 909/1503-04 A.D. See *Journal Of The Asiatic Society Of Bangladesh*, Vols. XXIV-VI, Dhaka, 1979-81, p. 32, Plate XXIII.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Abid 'Ali, *Memoirs*, pp. 157-58; A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*, p. 49; S. Ahmed, *IB*, Vol. IV, pp. 158-59.
- <sup>23</sup> H. Blochmann, "Geography and History of Bengal- No. II," *JASB*, Vol. XLIII, Part I, p. 303.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> 'Abid 'Ali, *Memoirs*, p.157.
- <sup>26</sup> Kaitahar, a village, lies at a distance of about 8 miles to the east of Jaipurhat sub-divisional town in Bogra district of Bangladesh. The inscription under notice was collected from the ruined mosque of the village in 1953, and is now lying preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, its Accession number being 2662. It was deciphered by the author and was first published in *JVRM*, Vol. IV, Rajshahi, pp. 63-69.
- <sup>27</sup> In the epigraph the word دروسيا has been used. It means a place where religious education is imparted to the people. cf. *JVRM*, Vol. 4, 1975-76, Rajshahi, p. 64, f.n. 1.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63 ff.
- <sup>29</sup> Bagha lies at a distance of about 25 miles to the south West of Rajshahi town in the sadar sub-division. Previously it formed a part of *pargana* Lashkarpur which according to *A'in-i-Akbari*, p. 137; *JASB*, Part 1, 1904, p. 111; S. Ahmed, *IB*, Vol. IV, p. 212.
- <sup>30</sup> A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*, p. 68; S. Ahmed, *IB*, Vol. IV, p. 214.
- <sup>31</sup> J.N. Sarkar, "A Description of North Bengal in 1609 A.D.," *Bengal Past and Present* (BPP), 1928, P. 144, *Pravasi*, Vol. I, 1326, B.S., p. 553.
- <sup>32</sup> *BPP*, 1928, p. 143; *Pravasi*, Vol. I, 1326, B.S., p. 553.
- <sup>33</sup> Shah Shu'ayb, *Manaqib al-Asifiya'* quoted in *Maktubat-i-Sadi*, p. 339; A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History*, *op.cit.*, p. 180.
- <sup>34</sup> A.K.M. Yaqub Ali, "Mahisantosh: A Site of Historical and Archaeological Interest in Bangladesh," *Islamic Culture*, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, Hyderabad, April, 1984, pp. 139-140.
- <sup>35</sup> *Maktubat-i-Sadi*, p. 339.
- <sup>36</sup> Mir Jahan, "Mint towns of Medieval Bengal," *Proceeding of Pakistan History Conference*, Dhaka, Session 1953, pp. 236-37; A. Karim, *Corpus of the Muslim Coins of Bengal* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1960), p. 162. (Henceforth the source is referred to as *Corpus*). Sultan Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah struck coins from this Barbakabad mint. Coins were issued from this mint by two other sultans viz. Sultan Shams al-Din Muzaffar Shah and Sultan Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah. The earliest available coin of this mint is dated A.H. 864 and the last known date is A.H. 928.
- <sup>37</sup> Mahisantosh, the place of antiquarian relics is about 75 miles in distance from Rajshahi district headquarters to the north. The author visited this site in 1980, and was very much charmed by the exquisite beauty of the mosque, though a little of its structure remains in the form of *mihrab* in the *qiblah* wall and the stone wall to a certain height in the west wall and the stone-bases all round. The mosque was of three aisles deep divided by two rows of stone pillars and five bays, and may presumably be ascribed to the later Ilyas Shahi period of Bengal Sultanate.
- <sup>38</sup> *Manaqib al-Asifiya'*, extracts in *Maktubat-i-Sadi*, p. 339-40; *Calcutta Review*, 1939, Nos. 1-3, p. 196.
- <sup>39</sup> See letter of Hadrat Jahangir Simnani in *BPP*, 1948, no. 130, p. 35.
- <sup>40</sup> Mahasthan, the ancient Pundranagara is a site of antiquarian relics in Bogra district of Bangladesh. Excavation undertaken by the Archaeology Department in 1965-66 at the Mankalir *bhita* unearthed the remains of a pre-Mughal *Jami' masjid*. The author visited several times the site of the mosque and prepared a complete plan of the mosque on the basis of existing remains. The *zullah* or the sanctuary of the mosque is divided into three longitudinal aisles running from north to south and five bays running from east to west. This mosque may tentatively be dated to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.
- <sup>41</sup> *Mahe Naw*, Oct., 1966, p. 31.

- <sup>42</sup> A.U. Pope (ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. II (Oxford: University Press, 1939), pp. 956-57.
- <sup>43</sup> Mukundarama Chakravarti, *Kavi Kankan Chandī*, ed. Sri Kumar Bandhapadhaya (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1952), p. 345 (Henceforth the source is referred to as *Kavi Kankan Chandī*).
- <sup>44</sup> H.G. Rawlison, *India: A Short Cultural History* (London, 1937), p. 372.
- <sup>45</sup> مروا صبيانكم ادابلغوا سبعا Tr. The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: Enjoin your children with prayer when they are seven years old. cf. Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, Vol. I (Cairo, 1952), p. 115; *Mishkat al-Masabih*, p. 58.
- <sup>46</sup> A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History*, Vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 189.
- <sup>47</sup> Dawlat Wazir Bahram, *Laila Majnun* (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1957), pp. 17-18.
- <sup>48</sup> Vipradasa, *Manasavijaya* ed. Sukumar sen (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1953); Mukundarama, *Kavi Kankan Chandī*, *op.cit.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Manasavijaya*, p. 67; *Kavi Kankan Chandī*, p. 345.
- <sup>50</sup> *Kavi Kankan Chandī*, p. 345.
- <sup>51</sup> *Catalogue of Arabic and Persian MSS. in Oriental Public Library*, Bankipure, Vol. V, Part I, Nos. 130-132 quoted in A. Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1959), p. 80 (Henceforth the source is referred to as *Social History*).
- <sup>52</sup> *Nam-i-Haq* (Canpore, 1332 A.H.).  
The Book seems to have been written either by Sharaf al-Din Abu Tawwamah or by some of his disciples on the basis of his teaching. *Nam-i-Haq* has ten main chapters and three introductory chapters with a number of one hundred and eighty three verses. The three introductory chapters contain the *Hamd* and *Na't*. The remaining ten chapters deal with the fundamentals and rules relating to *wadu*, *ghusl*, *namaz* and *ruzah* in Ramadan. Even it discusses *farḍ*, *sunnat*, *wajib*, *mustahab* and *makruh*.  
cf. A. Karim, *Social History*, pp. 74-76.
- <sup>53</sup> A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*; S. Ahmed, *IB*, Vol. IV; *EIM*.
- <sup>54</sup> M.R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965), p. 11; A.R. Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p. 153; E. Haq, *Muslim Bangla Sahitaya* (Dacca, 1955), p. 12.
- <sup>55</sup> P.C. Bagchi, "Political Relation between Bengal and China in the Pathan Period," *Visva Bharati Annals*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1945, p. 124.
- <sup>56</sup> Ziauddin Desai, "Some new data regarding the pre-Mughal Muslim rulers of Bengal," *Islamic Culture*, Vol. XXXII, Hyderabad, 1958, p. 200.
- <sup>57</sup> Sixty students were attending this institution of whom twenty were studying Shafi'ite law, twenty Hanifite and ten each Malikite and Hambalite.  
cf. *Islamic Culture*, Vol. XXXII, 1958, p. 200.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- <sup>60</sup> Abul Fadl 'Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. I, Tr. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), p. 279.
- <sup>61</sup> cf. *JASB*, Vol. XLII, Part I, 1873, pp. 282-86; *ASR*, Vol. XV, p. 65; Abid 'Ali, *Memoirs*, p. 87; A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*, p. 36; S. Ahmed, *IB*, Vol. IV, p. 123.
- <sup>62</sup> Ghulam Husain Salim, *Riyad al-Salatin*, Tr. Abdus Salam (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1904), p. 110.
- <sup>63</sup> Diya al-Din al-Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, Persian Text ed. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862), p. 593.
- <sup>64</sup> Asiatic Society, Calcutta, *MS Curzon Collection*, No. 625, f.n. I, cited in A. Karim, *Social History*, p. 80.
- <sup>65</sup> Wazir Beldanga Inscription (in Rajshahi district) of Ghiyath al-Din Bahadur Shah (1301-1322 A.D.) discloses the name of Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Ahmad as scribe-inciser. The epigraph bearing Museum Accession No. 3471 is now lying preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi. The author used it as unpublished primary material in his Ph. D. thesis, "Aspects of Society and Culture of the Barind, 1200-1576 A.D." Appendix A, pp. 445-447, Plate No. VII.  
Another inscription in the Dargah of Mawlana Shah 'Ata, Dinajpur of the reign of Abu'l Mujahid Sikandar Shah (1357-1392 A.D.) reveals the name of Ghiyath, the *Zarrin dast* i.e.

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- a golden hand (in penmanship). cf. A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*, pp. 11-12; S. Ahmed, *IB*, Vol. IV, pp. 34-35.
- <sup>66</sup> *Riyad al-Salatin*, pp. 108-09.
- <sup>67</sup> A.K.M. Yaqub Ali, "Two Unpublished Arabic Inscriptions," *JVRM*, Vol. 6, Rajshahi, p. 106.
- <sup>68</sup> William Adam, *Report on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Bihar* (Calcutta: Home Secretariat Press, 1868), p. 112.
- <sup>69</sup> *JASB*, 1904, Part I, p. 110; *BPP*, 1928, p. 114.
- <sup>70</sup> Alhajj Ghiyath al-Din, an old man of about eighty years of the locality related to the author that a land-grant of 2750 bighas was earmarked for the maintenance of *madrasah* and other sacred places as *lakharaj*. Of this 550 bighas fell in India and the rest in Bangladesh. He heard this from his father. Now there is no *lakharaj* land. Only 36 decimals for the mosque with thatched roof within the southern side of the great dilapidated mosque and one acre and 42 decimals for the *mazar* as *lakharaj* are still recorded.
- <sup>71</sup> *TN*, Vol. I, (Kabul edition), p. 436.
- <sup>72</sup> A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*, Inscriptions Nos. 35, 50, 60, 72 & 121.
- <sup>73</sup> An the inscriptions so far studied the *badhil* has been ascribed to sultan Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah, Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah, Jalal al-Din Fath Shah, Shams al-Din Muzaffar Shah and 'Ala' al-Din Husayn Shah. Cf. *IB*, Vol. IV, (relevant inscriptions).
- <sup>74</sup> A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*, *Inscription* Nos. 29 & 72.
- <sup>75</sup> 'Abid 'Ali, *Memoirs*, p. 87; A.H. Dani, *Bibliography*, p. 36; S. Ahmed, *IB*, Vol. IV, p. 123.

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