

Shah Jalal of Sylhet (b. ca.1271 - d.1347)

In his acclaimed book, *The Preaching of Islam* (reprinted 1961), Sir Thomas W. Arnold wrote, "...in Bengal the Muslim missionaries were welcomed with open arms by the aborigines and the low castes on the very outskirts of Hinduism, despised and condemned by their proud Aryan rulers. 'To these poor people, fishermen, hunters, pirates, and low caste tillers of the soil, Islam came as a revelation from on high. It was the creed of the ruling race; its missionaries were men of zeal who brought the Gospel of the unity of God and equality of men in its sight to a despised and neglected population. The initiatory rite rendered relapse impossible, and made the proselyte and his posterity true believers for ever. In this way Islam settled down on the richest alluvial province of India, the province which was capable of supporting the most rapid and densest increase of population. Compulsory conversions are occasionally recorded. But it was not force that Islam owed its permanent success in Lower Bengal. It appealed to the people, and it derived the great mass of its converts from the poor. It brought in a higher conception of God, and a nobler idea of the brotherhood of man. It offered to the teeming low castes of Bengal, who had sat for ages abject on the outer-most pale of the Hindu community, a free entrance into a new social organisation.' The existence in Bengal of definite missionary efforts is said to be attested by certain legends of the zeal of private individuals on behalf of their religion, and the graves of some of these missionaries are still honoured, and are annually visited by hundreds of pilgrims."

One of these early Muslim missionaries to Bengal was Shaykh al-Mashaykh Makhdum Shaykh Jalal al-Din al-Mujarrad ibn Muhammad, better known as Hazrat Shah Jalal. Despite being a high profile Muslim preacher and reformer, his family background and early life is shrouded in mystery. It is not surprising therefore that his biographers disagree concerning some of the most important details about his ancestry and early activities. So much so that the exact date of birth and death of Shah Jalal is hotly contested; some have claimed that he was born in 1271 while others (such as Ibn Battutah) have stated that he died in 1347.....

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To read this full BIOGRAPHICAL ENTRY by **Muhammad Mojlum Khan**, please see his long-awaited book,

THE MUSLIM HERITAGE OF BENGAL:
The Lives, Thoughts and Achievements of Forty Great Muslim Scholars, Writers and Reformers of Bangladesh and West Bengal

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