

Syed Alaol (b. cir. 1607 - d. cir. 1680)

If writers and poets like Shah Muhammad Saghir, Amir Zain al-Din, Shaykh Faizullah, Syed Sultan, Dawlat Uzair Bahram Khan, Haji Muhammad, Mir Muhammad Shafi, Shaykh Paran, Nasrullah Khan and Chand Qazi are today considered to be the pioneers of medieval Muslim literature of Bengal, then the contributions and achievements of Muslim writers and poets of the late medieval era of Bengali literature was equally remarkable. Some of the most eminent Muslim writers and poets of this period included Abdul Hakim, Faqir Gharibullah, Nawazis Khan, Shaykh Mansur, Abdul Nabi, Afzal Ali and Hayat Mahmud, among others.

Following in the footsteps of their eminent predecessors, these writers and poets not only wrote narrative, cultural and religious poems but they also improved and popularised the art of writing spiritual and romantic works in verse, inspired by historical and cultural themes adapted from the original Persian and Arabic sources. In the words of Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, the prominent historian of Bengal, “The Muslim poets also enriched the Bengali literature by introducing the Islamic tradition and new themes, ideas and vocabularies. The vast wealth of the Arabic and Persian literatures contributed immensely to the prosperity of the Bengali language and literature.” Shah Muhammad Saghir’s *Yusuf-Zulaikha* is one such work. Originally based on the story of Prophet Yusuf and the wife of Potiphar as narrated in the Holy Qur’an, this work was in fact an adaptation from the Persian work of the same name by Hasan ibn Ishaq ibn Sharaf (better known as Abul Qasim Firdawsi).

Likewise, Syed Sultan’s *Nabi Bangsha* was based on a combination of original Arabic and Persian sources, tracing the history of humanity through the lives and careers of the prominent Prophets and Messengers, thus highlighting the fact that all the Divinely-inspired Prophets came with one message from one source, namely God Almighty. In the same way, Muhammad Khan’s *Maqtul Hussain* was inspired by the tragic story of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, at Karbala (located in present-day Iraq) in the seventh century.

In other words, the medieval Muslim writers and poets not only translated, adapted and versified Islamic tales, historical events and cultural themes into Bengali but they also inspired generations of other Muslim writers and poets to emerge and dominate Bengali literature during the late medieval period. One of the most prolific and inspirational Muslim writers and poets of this period was Syed Alaol.....

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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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