

Muslim kings ‘Ilyas Shahi Dynasty’ and Sufi saints in Medieval BengalTariqul Islam^{1*}, Dr Zamirul Alam^{2**}

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Abstract: With particular reference to Muslim kings and Sufi saints, this study examines how Muslims treated other religions in medieval Bengal between 1204 and 1757 CE. The study's foundation is a qualitative research design based on historical content analysis. According to the study, Bengal's interreligious tolerance and human rights were greatly advanced by the Muslim sultans and Mughals throughout the Middle Ages. Furthermore, Sufis and Muslim missionaries acted as a counterbalance to societal religious intolerance. The Mughals and Muslim sultans adopted tolerant and liberal attitudes toward non-Muslims. Non-Muslims were not coerced into accepting Islam. Both Muslims and non-Muslims have full socioeconomic and religious rights in an integrated community. Sufis also took a variety of stances toward both Muslims and non-Muslims. They spread the word of good behavior and equality among the many religions of the populace. Additionally, they used an adaptive, liberal, and syncretic approach to draw non-Muslims to Islam in Bengal. According to the study's findings, the majority of monarchs were kind and helpful when interacting with followers of different religions.

[Islam, T. and Alam, Z. **Muslim kings ‘Ilyas Shahi Dynasty’ and Sufi saints in Medieval Bengal.** *The International Journal of Interpretation, Observation and Analysis*, 2025; Volume 2, Issue 1:58-68 (April-June). ISSN 2349-0713, Peer-reviewed (online/offline), Refereed, Indexed and International Journal (Since 2013), Global Impact Factor: 5.776

Keywords: Muslim kings, ‘Ilyas Sahi Dynasty’, Sufi saints, medieval Bengal

Introduction

Islam places a high value on societal integration since it views all people as belonging to a one family known as the ummah (Elius et al., 2019; Khair et al., 2012). Islam therefore requests that its customs, beliefs, and property be preserved and forbids interfering with other religions' rites (Nor et al., 2018). In the past, when Muslims held power, non-Muslims were accepted and had the right to live there (Nor, 2012). There are several instances of Muslim leaders granting non-Muslims religious freedom (Nor et al., 2018).

With 90% of the population in Bangladesh practicing Islam and millions of Muslims residing in West Bengal, India, Bengal is one of the major linguistic groupings among Muslims despite being physically remote from the Islamic core, both east and west. Islam is the prevalent religion and culture of the majority of Bengali-speaking people (Siddique, 2008). From the arrival of Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji, a military general of Qutb Uddin Aibak of Turkic descent, in 1204 until the East India Company's conquest of Bengal in 1757 by overthrowing the final Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daulah, Muslims dominated Bengal for more than five and a half centuries (Siddiq & Habib, 2017). In addition to Bangladesh and West Bengal, India, the medieval Bengal (1204–1757 CE) encompassed areas of Tripura, Bihar, Assam, and Orissa where Bengali is the primary language (Rahman, 2018).

Bengal's Muslim medieval government was founded on social liberalism, peace, tolerance, and the welfare of people (Siddiq & Habib, 2017). Social cohesiveness was a top priority for the rulers. Every individual was regarded as an equal member of the community on the basis of their humanity rather than their ethnicity or religion (Siddiq & Habib, 2017). Because of their missionary work, erudite Sufis who came from the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, Iraq, northern India, and Central Asia during this time had a significant impact on society. They made a significant contribution to fostering peace and concord and lessening religious animosity (Al-Masud et al., 2017). During the medieval era, there was innovative contact between Muslims and Hindus, and Islamic egalitarian ideas appealed to society in avoiding untouchability (Dey, 2013). The Sufis or Pirs, who incorporated the regional customs into the egalitarian principles of Islam, created the accommodating nature of Islam, which allowed it to establish itself in Bengal (Roy, 1983 quoted in Alam, 2013).

The question is: What is the primary problem or issue that this research has to solve, and why is it important to discuss? Due to political and societal factors, there have been recent problems with interreligious intolerance in West Bengal and some areas of Bangladesh. In India, there have been several religious wars over a number of years. As an illustration, consider the 1984 Sikh-Hindu riots,

the 2002 and 2008 Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian disputes (Chakraborty, 2017; United States Department of State [USDOS], 2018; Wilkinson, 2006), and the Jammu and Kashmir Hindu-Muslim conflicts (Elius et al., 2019). Furthermore, many Muslims residing in Assam, West Bengal, and other regions of India are facing citizenship eligibility issues as a result of the Indian government's recent Citizenship Amendment Bill (Biswas, 2019; Deka, 2019; Kronstadt, 2018; Perrigo, 2019). Numerous issues between Indian Muslims and non-Muslims have been brought about by this Citizenship Amendment Bill.

Similar to this, there are instances of interreligious intolerance against religious minorities in Bangladesh (Muhammad & Abdul Rahim, 2017). For example, Christians were attacked in 2001 (BBC News, 2001), Hindus were forced to leave their lands between 2001 and 2006 (Shakil, 2013), and a Buddhist temple was set on fire in 2014 (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization [UNPO], 2014). Numerous social, political, and religious problems are being brought on by these confrontations and acts of violence inside the communities of both nations.

Studying the history of Muslim leadership in such regions and their strategies for maintaining the highest possible degree of peace and tolerance within the community is therefore vital. More significantly, it will demonstrate that people of many races, religions, and cultures can coexist peacefully and harmoniously in the community. In such a case, study is also necessary to demonstrate that the community is entitled to its religious and moral rights to observe at a level that does not affect other religious communities by preserving the common ground among different religious groups. Thus, this research illustrates how Bengal's interreligious concord and peaceful cohabitation were established by the Muslim monarchs of the Middle Ages. It incorporates the liberal viewpoints of Sufi saints, who are thought to have been the main forces behind Bengal's Islamization.

Method

From the loss of the final Mughal monarch, Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, in 1757 until the victory of Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204, the research aims to comprehend the interreligious connection in medieval Bengal. The qualitative technique was used in this study to perform an in-depth investigation (Khan et al., 2018). To comprehend the state of interreligious interactions in medieval Bengal, information is gathered from books—both in Bangla and English—articles, published lectures, conference papers, and internet sources. The qualitative method's content analysis might employ primary or secondary data, or both (Elius et al., 2019; Harris,

2001). Consequently, a descriptive qualitative technique is used in this study's data processing and analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Only three phases of Muslim control in Bengal throughout the medieval era are highlighted by the scholars' investigation. The Delhi Sultanate selected delegates to rule Bengal during the first phase, which lasted from 1204 to 1338 (Eaton, 1984; S. Islam, 2007; S. Ahmed, 2004). During the second phase, which lasted from 1340 to 1576, Bengal was governed by autonomous sultans, some of whom went on to become Indian emperors. The third stage, known as the Mughal and Nawabi era, lasted from 1576 until Bengal was conquered by the East Indian Company in 1757 (S. Islam, 2007). Lastly, the study also takes into account the role that Sufis had in fostering interfaith unity and peace in medieval Bengal. Qualitative research is where thematic analysis is most frequently employed (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Thus, the information gathered from various sources is primarily categorized into three themes: the Mughal era, the Sultanate era, and the role played by Sufis during these two eras. The sources used in the study are identified in Mohammad Elius, 2020 (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/2158244020970546>).

An Overview of Bengal and Muslims in Bengal

Bengal did not have a single, stable name in the past (Husain, 2004; N. Islam, 2006). Bangladesh and Bangla were nonexistent (Mohsin & Ahmed, 2007). According to Alam (2013), A. M. Chowdhury (2009), and N. Islam (2006), several regions of Bengal were referred to by various names, including Pundra, Barendra, Gaur, Karnasubarna, Rarh, Vanga, Samatata, and Harikela. Pundra included portions of the Indian province of West Bengal as well as the northern regions of Bangladesh. Vanga represents the vast majority of modern-day Bangladesh, whereas Gaur and Rarh are mostly areas of modern-day West Bengal. Present-day Bangladesh also includes Samatata and Harikela (A. M. Chowdhury, 2004). The name Vanga appears many times throughout the Ramayana and Mahabharata (Hasan, 2013). There was no such nation as Bangala when Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered Bengal (Karim, 2007). Bengal was known as Vanga or Bengala when European traders first encountered the region (Karim, 2007). "The grammar of the Bengal language" is the title Hallhed gave to his 1778 grammar work on the Bengali language (N. Islam, 2006). In his letter from 1548, Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionary to India, referred to Bengal as Bengala (Hasan, 2013; Zami & Lorea, 2016). According to Shahanara Husain (2004), throughout the Middle Ages, the Bengal area was referred to as Vangla or Bengal. According to Sengupta (2011),

the term Bengal is derived from the words "Bangala" or "Vangla," which refer to the region that progressively encompasses the entire province between Kamrup on one side and Bihar on the other.

Sultan Shamsuddin Ilias Shah was dubbed "Shah-i-Bangala" for uniting the three parts of Bengal under his autonomous sultanate (S. Ahmed, 2004; A. M. Chowdhury, 2009; Hasan, 2013; Mohsin, 2004). Sultan Shamsuddin Ilias Shah was also referred to as "Shah-i-Bangala," "Shah-i-Bangalian," and "Sultan-i-Bangala," according to Abdul Karim (2007). This area was referred to as "Subah Bangala" during the Mughal era (S. Ahmed, 2004; A. M. Chowdhury, 2009). Bengal was divided into two parts by Lord Curzon in 1905; the eastern portion was called Eastern Bengal, while the western portion was called Bengal (Karim, 2007). Bengal has historically been expanded to include parts of adjacent territories, such as Bangladesh and West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, Bihar, and Orissa in India, as well as Arakan in Myanmar (Siddique, 2008). Thus, the term "Bengali" refers to an ethnic group that lives in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India.

Immigrant Muslims and converted Muslims make up Bengal's Muslim community, which has two composite identities. Arabs, Persians, Turks, Mughals, and Afghans make up the majority of Muslim immigrants (A. B. M. S. Ahmed, 2007; Mohsin & Ahmed, 2007; Schendel, 2009). The local Buddhist and Hindu communities are the source of the converted Muslims (Mohsin, 2004; Mohsin & Ahmed, 2007). When Islam spread to India in the seventh century, it also spread to Bengal (S. Ahmed, 2004). Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji (1204–1205 CE; Eaton, 1984; S. Islam, 2007) made Bengal accessible to Muslim immigration by conquering Nadia, the capital of the last Sena empire of Bengal (Alam, 2013). According to Abdul Karim (2007), the number of Muslim immigrants rose starting with Bakhtiyar Khalji. As administrators, warriors, preachers, instructors, dealers, doctors, masons, craftspeople, and fortune seekers, Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds came to Bengal (A. B. M. S. Ahmed, 2007; Mohsin & Ahmed, 2007). In the end, these individuals made Bengal their home (Mohsin, 2004).

According to Muhammad Akram Khan (2010), the conquest of Islam began with the province of Sind under the reign of Umar, the second caliph of Islam, and Muhammad bin Kassem achieved the greatest victory in 712. Long before capturing Bengal's lands, Arabs established trade relations with the region, particularly for coastal reasons (Alam, 2013; M. N. Islam & Islam, 2018; Karim, 2007; A. A. Khan, 2018; Mohsin, 2004). For this

reason, Bengal was mentioned in the works of Arab geographers between the sixth and the thirteenth century. Archaeological excavations in Bangladesh's Paharpur and Mainamati have yielded Arab coins (Al-Ahsan, 1994; Hasan, 2013; A. A. Khan, 2018).

Muslims who held political authority in Bengal from the start of the 13th century and the middle of the 18th century were mostly of "Turko-Afghan, Abyssinian, Mughal, and Persian origins" (Ahmed, 1994; A. B. M. S. Ahmed, 2007). Bengal also became the destination of several additional immigrants from upper India and Central Asia (Mohsin, 2004). Bengal was home to a sizable Turkish population under the Turkish Sultanate. They were a significant portion of Bengal's Muslim immigrant population and made a significant contribution to the sociocultural advancement of Bengali Muslims. Together the end, they blended together with Bengali Muslims (Mohsin & Ahmed, 2007). During his reign, Sultan Shamsuddin Ilias Shah imported a large number of Abyssinian slaves. These individuals rose to prominence during the latter part of the Ilyas Shahi Dynasty and ruled Bengal for a number of years (1487–1493 CE). In addition to having a significant presence among Bengal's Muslims, the Afghans briefly governed the state (Milot, 1970; Mohsin & Ahmed, 2007). The Afghans assimilated with other Bengali Muslims after the Mughals overran Bengal (Mohsin & Ahmed, 2007).

Muslim Treatment and Sufi Treatment of Other Religions in the Sultanate Period and Mughal Period

The state adopted the stance of encouraging peace and harmony between individuals of different religions throughout the Sultanate era (Milot, 1970). The fact that the majority of Indians are still Hindus despite the region's lengthy Muslim control suggests that non-Muslims had religious freedom and were not coerced into accepting Islam by the Muslim rulers (Eaton, 1993). Bengal has an integrated society with full socioeconomic and religious rights for both Muslims and non-Muslims (S. Islam, 2007; Rahman, 2018). According to Shahidul Hasan (2012–2014), the Sultans of Bengal implemented lenient laws to allow for the peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths. Throughout their reign, sultans appointed a large number of non-Muslims to positions of authority. Despite the fact that the monarchs were Muslims, O'Connell (2011) notes that their non-Muslim subjects were distinguished in business, revenue collecting, and educated professions. Many of them were in important government positions. According to Zami and Lorea (2016), Muslim sultans had a wide policy for people of various religions, which led to the Hindus having a strong landlord

(zamindar) system. According to Mohsin (2004), patronization and the use of vernacular language are important for local scholarship. Islam and Hinduism both flourished at this time, according to Shah Noorur Rahman (2018). According to Sirajul Islam's 2007 analysis, the Sultanate state was a mix of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others, although it was officially a Muslim kingdom. The complex of buildings around Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah's mausoleum is an illustration of Muslims' tolerance for other faiths. This includes a mosque, a mausoleum, and graves. In the back, on the complex's edge, was an etched statue of Vasudeva. Additionally, the mosque's front and rear include fragments of Shivalinga. Muslims would have taken such Hindu pictures out of locations of religious significance if they were religiously intolerable (Hasan, 2012–2014).

Because of his liberalism and tolerance for Hindus, Alauddin Husain Shah's rule (1494–1519 CE) is considered a golden age in Bengal, when he let Hindus to hold numerous important posts. Regardless of religion or faith, Husain Shahi Bengal placed a strong emphasis on bolstering the state's basis via compassion and assistance (Majumdar, 1960). Injuring the sensitivities of other religions was one of the key aspects of his rule (Dasgupta, 2004). Furthermore, the prime minister, or wazir, of Alauddin Husain Shah was a Hindu. Additionally, two Hindu brothers named Rupa and Sanatana took on the roles of sakarmalik (state minister) and dabir-i-khas (secretary to the Sultan) (Hasan, 2012–2014). His tolerant attitude toward other faiths aided Chaitanya in spreading Vaishnavism across Bengal. During his reign, a new religious organization called Vaishnavism came into being (Hasan, 2012–2014; Milot, 1970). During his rule, the epic Manasa Mongal was also written (M. A. Khan, 2010). More significantly, Sultan Alauddin Husain Shah's liberalism was commended by the populace of every civilization. He was even identified as one of Krishna's incarnations by the renowned Hindu poet Vijaya Gupta (Hasan, 2012–2014).

According to Richard Eaton (1984), a distinctive Bengali Muslim culture emerged under the Ilyas Shahi Dynasty, particularly during the restored era from 1433 to 1486, and the Husain Shahi Dynasty from 1493 to 1538. He went on to say that the sultans of this era combined Islamic influences from the Middle East, North India, and Central Asia with Bengali religious, literary, and architectural expressions to create a vibrant Bengali culture. Shahidul Hasan (2012–2014) cites historian M. A. Rahim (1963) as saying that Ilyas Shah gave several Hindu leaders, military commanders, and zamindars rewards for their dedication to the empire. Sultan Ilyas Shah enlisted

a large number of Hindus in his army between 1339 and 1358, according to Akbar Ali Khan (2018). Additionally, he picked Shaha Deva, a Hindu, to lead his army. According to Salahuddin Ahmed (2004), non-Muslims—especially Hindus—benefited more under Bengal's Muslim rule than did Muslims.

Even after 300 years of Muslim rule, several strong Hindu zamindars still held control of various regions of Bengal, according to Akbar Ali Khan (2018), who also notes that Muslim rulers did not force Islamic laws on Bengal's non-Muslim citizens. For instance, Binod Ray in Manikgong, Lakkhan Manikya in Noakhali, Kandarpa Narayana and Ram Chandra in Barishal, and Pratapditya in Jessore. Some Muslims launched a complaint against the Christians when the Augustinian preacher Manorick visited Bengal in 1640 and saw that they were breaking Islamic law by consuming wine and pig flesh. Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor, did not penalize them, nevertheless. According to Zami and Lorea (2016), Ralph Fitch encountered Isa Khan, a member of the Baro Bhuyans (12 warrior chiefs and landowners), in the late 16th century and described him as one of the Christians' closest allies.

The majority of Muslim monarchs in North India levied poll taxes (jizyah) on Hindus, according to Hasan (2012–2014) and Milot (1970). But the Bengali Sultans never forced it on their non-Muslim subjects. According to Sharma (1988), the amount of jizyah was frequently determined by an agreement between the people and the rulers throughout the Sultanate era. Since it might have been paid with the current revenue streams, it wasn't usually an additional sum. Jizyah was still determined on an individual basis. There was no set sum for each individual. Muhammad Akram Khan (2010) discovered that several attempts had been made to revive Hinduism, which was only made feasible by the Gaur Muslim sultans' patronage. The development of Hindu sacred literature benefited greatly from the influence of Muslim sultans (Milot, 1970). Sultan Jalaluddin Mahmud Shah, for instance, paid tribute to the Sanskrit intellectuals and poets of his day (Hasan, 2012–2014). The translation of the famous Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, into Bengali was sponsored by Sultan Nasiruddin (M. A. Khan, 2010). Bengal had a flourishing of Vaishnavism under Sultan Husain Shah and Nasir Uddin Nusrat Shah. Maladhar Basu wrote a number of Vaishnava poetry, such as Sri Krishna Vijaya (M. A. Khan, 2010). Many Sanskrit classics, such as the Padma Purana, Krishna Mangala, and Manasa Vijaya, were translated into Bengali under their patronage (S. Ahmed, 2004).

According to Sharma (1988), Hindus in India had a far higher status under Muslim control than those in several European nations whose religions differed from the ruling ones. Muslim sultans promoted equality of opportunity and a cooperative environment for all people, irrespective of their religious beliefs. They always had a tolerant stance toward non-Muslims, which promoted peaceful coexistence and good ties amongst religions. Most academics agree that Muslim monarchs throughout the Sultanate era were tolerant and respectful of other faiths. Nonetheless, several Muslim monarchs have encountered difficulties and criticism. For instance, Dulal Bhowmik (2007) claims that in addition to demolishing Hindu temples, the Muslim rulers also used temple stones to construct mosques. He notes that the mausoleum of Sultan Jalaluddin at Eklakhi, the Adina Mosque, and the Zafar Khan Mosque were all constructed using stones that were curled with Hindu figures and goddesses. However, he also notes that the monarchs' mindset shifted at the end of the Sultanate era. Additionally, the sultans were accepting of Hindu religious traditions and constructed new temples, donating untaxed land for their upkeep (Bhowmik, 2007).

In Bengal, the Mughals lacked a plan to spread Islam. The state provided patronage to a large number of Hindus (Schendel, 2009). According to Siddiq and Habib (2017), anyone with quality and competence might hold a top position in the state. According to Bhardwaj (2011), the Mughals selected their administrators from a variety of religious backgrounds. According to Dulal Bhowmik (2007), Hinduism saw a significant expansion under Emperor Akbar's liberal reign. According to Richard Eaton (1984), Emperor Akbar's religious freedom was mirrored in Bengal during the Mughal era in the 17th century. Additionally, he claims that Islam Khan Chishti, the Mughal general, did not participate in any form of religious conversion and accepted Bengal's political integration with Mughal India.

According to Akbar Ali Khan (2018), General Islam Khan Chishti disciplined a subordinate officer for converting Hindus to Islam. Numerous Hindu scholars visited Emperor Akbar and discussed their religious beliefs with him, according to a wealth of evidence. According to Sharma (1988), Akbar gave everyone an equal chance to share their thoughts with him. The extremely intelligent Abû'l-Fazl was connected to Emperor Akbar's court and used to facilitate discussions amongst religious academics (Webb, 2009). According to Pushpa Prasad (1997), Akbar was frequently visited by individuals of all faiths and beliefs, such as Sufis, jurists, philosophers, Shia, Sunni, Jain, Charbaka, Brahmin, Jew,

Zoroastrian, and so on. Akbar made significant contributions to Sikhism as well. According to legend, Akbar went to see Guru Amar Das and asked him to accept the favor. Despite the Guru's refusal to accept any favors, Akbar gave the Guru's daughter ownership of a number of villages in and around Amritsar (Grewal, 1997). For Sikhs, this is presently the most significant place of pilgrimage.

The task of translating Hindu sacred texts into Persian fell to Akbar's newly formed translation department. Numerous works of Sanskrit literature have been translated into Arabic and Persian. He gave the order to translate the well-known Hindu sacred texts into Persian, including the Harivamsa, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Atharva Veda (Sharma, 1988). In his reign, Akbar appointed individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds. Additionally, he appointed Jain ministers. Singh and Jai Chand Suri, two well-known Jain intellectuals, were employed at Akbar's court (Sharma, 1988). Three Portuguese Christian delegates were also present in his court. During his rule, he constructed several churches and countless temples at well-known Hindu pilgrimage sites. In Shatrunjaya and Ujjain, a number of Jain temples were also constructed (Sharma, 1988). Akbar expanded official support for non-Muslim organizations and people (Grewal, 1997). During this time, Hinduism had a significant expansion (Bhowmik, 2007).

Other religious traditions were also developed with the assistance of the Mughal Emperor Humayun. He donated three hundred acres of land to the upkeep of Uttar Pradesh's Jangamvadi Math in Banaras (Sharma, 1988). A clash between Muslims and Christians took place under Emperor Jahangir's reign. To save the Christians, Jahangir personally stepped forward (Zami & Lorea, 2016). Almost three-fourths of Bengal's zamindars and many of its petty landowners were Hindu during the time of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan (1700–1727). The practice of heavily enlisting Bengali Hindus in the state service was instituted by the Nawab (Ahmed, 1994; S. Ahmed, 2004). All secretariat branches had Hindu employees. Krishna Narayana and Darpa Narayana were the principal Qanungos (land record-keeping officers) (Karim, 2004). At this period, 75% of Talukdars and petty zamindars were Hindu, while almost all large zamindars were. The important positions of Naib-Nazim and Diwan were also occupied by several Hindus (Karim, 2004). According to Sirajul Islam (2007), "Hindu mustadids (officers) replaced many Muslim zamindars."

Alam Chand served as both a member of the advisory council and the dewan, or top tax official, during the reign of Nawab Shuja-ud-Din (Karim, 2004). High-ranking non-Muslim commanders

were trusted by Nawab Alivardi Khan and his successor, Siraj-ud-daulah (S. Ahmed, 2004). Ummid Rai, Durlabhram, Janakiram, Gokul Chand, and Biru Dutta were among the notable Hindu officers of Nawab Alivardi Khan's time. Because of his lenient stance toward non-Muslims, Rajballabh, Omi Chand, Nand Kumar, and Siraj-ud-daulah rose to prominence during the reign of Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah (Karim, 2004). According to Salahuddin Ahmed (2004), Hindus in Bengal enjoyed special treatment when Muslims were in power. The Muslim rulers gave them aristocratic titles, such as "Rajas, Maharajas, and Seths." According to Akbar Ali Khan (2018), Hindus profited financially more than Muslims did when Muslims ruled Bengal. For this reason, the majority of Bengal's zamindars were Hindus when the British took control of the region (McCutchion, 1984). There was no concrete evidence of political pressure to convert to Islam during Medieval Bengal, despite the fact that the monarchs were Muslims (S. Ahmed, 2004; A. M. Chowdhury, 2009). Because the Muslim royal authority had dominated Delhi, Agra, and the Ganga-Jamuna region for about 600 years, it is suggested that Muslims should have made up the majority if the conversion to Islam was the result of political compulsion (A. M. Chowdhury, 2009; Eaton, 1993). According to Akbar Ali Khan (2018), the Muslim-majority areas of Bengal were distant from the Muslim-controlled government. The Muslims in isolated districts like Bogra, Noakhali, and Pubna, for instance, live far from the capitals of Muslim monarchs like Maldaha, Dhaka, or Murshidabad. Special financial incentives were also available to freshly converted Muslims. People from the lower caste of Hinduism who converted to Islam continued to practice their prior occupation after becoming Muslims, as noted by Akbar Ali Khan (2018). The state did not give them any preferential treatment. According to Maurice O'Connor (2018), the egalitarian message drew many to Islam. Regarding religious tolerance against certain Mughal emperors, there is also controversy. Emperor Aurangzeb, for instance, is charged with forcing the non-Muslims to embrace Islam by generously enforcing jizyah. Nonetheless, it is also said that non-Muslims were free from jizyah in the event of crop failure (Chandra, 1969).

Apart from the aforementioned, there were several additional Muslim monarchs in various regions of India, such as present-day Pakistan and Kashmir. From 1206 to 1526, the Delhi region was ruled by the renowned Delhi sultanate (Mehdi, 2015). Sultanate rulers such as Ala ud-din Khalji and Muhammad Tughlaq appointed Hindus to the administrative elite in order to create a uniform governing class (Ali, 2008). In addition to denying

Hindus jizyah and promoting Hindu education, Zain-ul-Abidin was the notable ruler of Kashmir from 1420 to 1470 (F. S. Ahmed, 2011). Future studies comparing Bengal to other regions of India can be carried out for these areas.

One important aspect of Islamic religious and cultural expression is Sufism (Elias, 1998). Heitzman & Worden, 1988; Elias, 1998; Al-Masud et al., 2017, p.105; it frequently alludes to Islamic mystical theology and philosophy. According to Rahman (2018), Sufism offers Muslims a mystical way of existence. According to Amit Dey (2013), the Sufis place a strong emphasis on personal religious experience via instruction between a student or murid and an experienced mystic leader—pir, murshid or sheikh. According to Heck (2006), Sufism's emphasis on charity toward all living things has greatly influenced the development of Muslim morals. Sufis, sometimes called Pirs, Darbis, or Fakirs, are generally considered spiritual mentors (Heitzman & Worden, 1988).

According to Al-Masud et al. (2017), Sufis generally arrived in Bengal around the middle of the eleventh century and expanded so widely that there was not a single city or town in Bengal other than where a Sufi had lived (Alam, 2013; Al-Masud et al., 2017). Before Muslim rule was established in Bengal, Baba Adam Shahid, Shah Sultan Rumi, Shah Sultan Mahiswar Mokhdudh Shah Dowla Shahid, and Mokhdum Shah Gajnawi were among the Muslim saints (Sufis) who traveled from Arabia and Persia to various parts of the state, including Netrokona, Bogra, Pabna, Bikrampur, and Bardaman (Al-Ahsan, 1994; Hasan, 2013; A. A. Khan, 2018).

Sufis made a substantial contribution to the development of Islamic culture in medieval Bengal (A. M. Chowdhury, 2009; Halim, 2018; S. Islam, 2007; Karim, 2007). The bulk of Sufis throughout the Sultanate era were from Persia, Central Asia, and Turkey (S. Islam, 2007). According to Al-Masud et al. (2017), Islamic intellectuals and Sufi saints from Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Central Asia, Khurasan, and Northern India frequently traveled to Bengal throughout the Middle Ages.

Sufis used a variety of techniques and strategies with both Muslims and non-Muslims. The provision of a Langarkhana (free kitchen for supplying food to those in need) at the Khanqah (the Sufi residence) was one of the most popular and influential strategies used. In the past, people from various nations, faiths, and creeds came to Khanqahs to receive spiritual healing. This made it possible for the Sufis to spread their spiritualism to common people (Siddiq & Habib, 2017). According to Sanjay K. Bhardwaj (2011), Sufism

had a major effect on Islamic culture, which was supported by the mosque or dargah.

Sufism's liberal stance, which drew followers of various religions, was another important strategy (Haque, 1975; Rahman, 2018). Sufis promoted harmony among Bengalis and preached against religious extremism and hostility (Al-Masud et al., 2017). Sufis were the most important contributors to Bengal's Islamization, according to most academics (Alam, 2013; A. H. Chowdhury, 2017; Halim, 2018; S. Islam, 2007; M. N. Islam & Islam, 2018; A. A. Khan, 2018). Locals who were oppressed and repressed by the caste system and stringent religious laws were drawn to their interpretation of Islam's unwavering faith in strict monotheism, brotherhood, human equality, and accountability (S. Ahmed, 2004; A. M. Chowdhury, 2009; Halim, 2018; Mohsin, 2004). One of the influential factors that had an impression on many individuals was the Sufis' propagation of equality and decency. According to Manzur-I-Khuda (2004), throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, the Sufis promoted the ideas of equality and good behavior, which inspired people and caused them to convert to Islam. He adds that Sufis brought the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah to Bengal, including Shah Jalal, Jalaluddin Tabrizi, Shah Makhdum, Shah Mahisawar, and others. They advocated Islam vocally, yet many people converted to Islam because of their devout and simple lifestyle (Halim, 2018). According to Abdul Karim (2007), the Sufis also founded madrasahs and khankahs to educate and learn Islam.

Sufis encouraged non-Muslims to embrace Islam by fostering an accommodating and syncretic mindset. According to Sirajul Islam (2007), the Sufis used a syncretic strategy to draw non-Muslims to Islam. They encouraged newly converted Muslims to follow the bare minimum of Islamic law, but they did not demand that they immediately abandon their old customs. According to O'Connor (2018), new Muslims also showed a greater level of syncretism after adopting to Islam. According to Asim Roy (2001), syncretism is essential to Bengali Muslims' sense of self. "Islam got on its feet in Bengal because of its accommodative nature developed by the Sufis or Pirs, who absorbed the local traditions into the egalitarian values of Islam," notes Alam (2013), quoting Roy (1983) once again. According to Sri Ram Sharma (1988), Hindus participated in the celebrations of several Muslim holidays while Muslims ruled India. Similar festivities were also attended by a large number of Muslims in Hindu states. Christians in the area were treated in the same way.

Discussion

Bengal was a major social force throughout the Sultanate and Mughal eras, when many Muslim officials attempted to maintain harmony among the many religions and civilizations. Bengal was governed by Muslims for almost 500 years (Siddiq & Habib, 2017). In order to preserve harmony and peace in the multireligious and multicultural society, the Muslim leaders left behind several admirable accomplishments throughout their lifetime. They have always respected and coexisted with other religions since the early days of Islam in India, when Arab traders used to travel to South India and subsequently spread Islam to the populace. I. Prasad (1933) said that when Muhammad Bin Qasim arrived in India, he did not meddle in Hindu religious matters. At that time, the panchayats, or traditional local courts, were in existence.

History demonstrates that Muslim rulers during the Sultanate era were more tolerant and respectful of other faiths. In the government and administration sectors, non-Muslims were assigned to positions like as zamindars, secretariat, officials, and so forth (O'Connell, 2011). Numerous Hindus were granted the position of a strong landowner (Zami & Lorea, 2016; Zamindar). During Alauddin Husain Shah's reign, the highest post, such as wazir (prime minister), was held by a Hindu. Additionally, two Hindu brothers, Rupa and Sanatana, held the positions of sakarmalik (state minister) and dabir-i-khas (the Sultan secretary) (Hasan, 2012–2014). Because of his admirable contributions to people of all religions and cultures, the Hindu poet Vijaya Gupta regarded Alauddin Husain Shah as one of the avatars of Krishna (Hasan, 2012–2014). Regarding religious development, throughout the Sultanate era, Muslims and non-Muslims were granted the same religious privileges without distinction (Majumdar, 1960). An illustration of this kind of interfaith harmony is the Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (S. Islam, 2007). The presence of several non-Muslim zamindars and other high-ranking officials across the Bengal region indicates that the Islamic laws were not imposed on the populace. With the help of the Sultans, non-Muslim texts and Sanskrit literature, including the Padma Purana, Krishna Mangala, Manasa Vijaya, and Mahabharata, were translated into Bengali (S. Ahmed, 2004; M. A. Khan, 2010). Additionally, Muslim rulers gave the Hindu community untaxed land for religious purposes and assisted in the construction of new temples (Bhowmik, 2007).

The Mughal emperors were just as hospitable and tolerant of people of all faiths as the Muslim monarchs of the Sultanate era. Higher positions and ranks are held by non-Muslims in the Mughal emperors' administration and government. Non-

Muslims were granted positions such as dewan (top tax officer) and advisory council member (Karim, 2004). In their respective eras, Siraj-ud-daulah and Nawab Alivardi Khan also appointed a large number of non-Muslims to prominent positions. During the Mughal era, Bengal witnessed the expansion and flourishing of religions other than Islam. Christianity, Sikhism, and Hinduism are all free to practice their faiths and share their teachings with the public. The translation of religious texts like the Atharva Veda, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Harivamsa into Persian is one example of how the faiths have developed (Sharma, 1988). Akbar also established a translation department to translate several holy texts into Arabic and Persian. In the name of Guru Amar Das, he bestowed a number of villages (Grewal, 1997). During his reign, Akbar sponsored several churches and temples for non-Muslims. In order to balance the strife between Muslims and Christians, Emperor Humayun also gave territory to the Jangamvadi Math of Banaras and offered other forms of assistance to the non-Muslims. Non-Muslims were not subjected to jizyah, or poll taxes, by the Muslim authorities of Bengal. Nonetheless, there are accusations made against several Muslim monarchs who levied taxes on non-Muslims, such as Emperor Aurangzeb, who generously enforced jizyah on non-Muslims (Chandra, 1969). Additionally, Chandra (1969) emphasized that in the event of crop failure, non-Muslims were excused from jizyah. As a result, the prominent roles played by non-Muslims during the Sultanate and Mughal eras, as well as the assistance that the Muslim rulers gave to them, demonstrate the diversity of those leaders and other peoples, and more especially, the degree of harmony and tolerance that existed within the multireligious society of medieval Bengal. In terms of how Sufis interacted with non-Muslims, they did not participate in or have any influence over state leadership other than by disseminating their message of the highest possible degree of harmony and peace (Manzur-I-Khuda, 2004). Non-Muslims were impressed to adopt the Sufis' practice rather than offended by the way they disseminated their message (Halim, 2018). Being inclusive of all community members, irrespective of their ethnicity and religion, made it easier for them to engage with individuals at all levels, comprehend their beliefs, and accommodate them with a message of peace and respect for one another (Alam, 2013). The Sufis' approach became more accepted and valued by individuals of other religions as morality and equality spread across the population. This study is supported by several studies. For instance, Eaton (1993) noted that Muslim rulers in medieval Bengal maintained

peace and theological coherence among many religions and cultures by adopting liberal views toward non-Muslims. According to Al-Masud et al. (2017), Sufis in Bengal had liberal opinions on advancing Islam and religious peace. According to Sirajul Islam (2007), the Sufis used an accommodating and syncretic strategy to draw non-Muslims to Islam.

Lastly, the study demonstrates that wealth and social harmony will result from the rulers treating their minority group—whether it be Muslims, Hindus, or any other race or religion—better. People's lives will be peaceful and easier if harmony and tolerance are adopted. Therefore, the Muslim majority in Bangladesh will provide non-Muslims the freedom to fulfill their religious responsibilities, and the Muslim minority in India will also be granted their religious rights and permitted to fulfill their duties. Hindus and Muslims, both majority and minority, should respect everyone as an equal citizen of a nation, regardless of their color, religion, culture, or creed.

Conclusion

The study comes to the conclusion that a tradition of religious tolerance and interreligious peace predominated in medieval Bengal during the Muslim era. The rulers prioritized social cohesiveness. Regardless of their ethnicity or religion, all people were regarded as equal members of society. In Bengal, Muslim sultans and Mughals during the Middle Ages used lenient and accommodating tactics for non-Muslims. The monarchs did not stop non-Muslims from spreading their faith, but they did play a major role in the creation of their religious literature. Additionally, they supported all religious institutions. Even if there are a few instances of religious intolerance, the great majority of medieval Muslim monarchs treated Muslims and non-Muslims equally in every area of their lives, therefore it cannot be said that they were intolerant of or unfair to them. Once more, the Muslim Sufis were instrumental in reducing animosity and fostering harmony among Bengalis of all faiths. In order to draw non-Muslims to Islam, they advocated liberal, syncretic, and tolerant viewpoints. Interreligious tolerance was established in medieval Bengal as a result of their humanitarian endeavors and modest lifestyle, which inspired people of all faiths. It follows that religious hostility and animosity will be lessened and a genuine atmosphere of interreligious cooperation will be created if the examples of Sufi saints and Muslim monarchs from the Middle Ages are emulated today.

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