

## Chapter: 2

### ADVENT OF SUFISM AND MUSLIM SETTLEMENT IN BARAK VALLEY

#### Advent of Sufism in Barak Valley:

Sufism basically means spiritual thought for the sanctification of the immortal soul. Sufism is a spiritual philosophy of Islam, the summary of which is to start a direct relationship with *Allah* by sanctification of the soul. It is not a separate religion but a tradition following the Quran and the life of Prophet Muhammad. The aim of Sufism is to rectify the soul through fulltime reminiscence of *Allah*. According to Sufism, meditation is the way to reach *Allah*. Sufis acquired their inspiration from Prophet Muhammad (S.A.) who forms the source of spiritual knowledge and teachings. It is the fact that Sufism got its origin from the Quran, sayings of the Prophet, and some of his followers' practices, but it must be accepted that the later day Sufistic philosophy is not purely Islamic.<sup>11</sup>

The question of the origin of Sufism had long been a controversy among western scholars. Many of them, till the last generation, opined that the indispensable ideas of Islamic mysticism had originated from alien and non-Islamic sources.<sup>12</sup> But Islam does not cheer up mysticism in any form and during the early days of Islamic practice, the notions were not felt. Only during the Umayyad period, its advocates practiced the mortifying soberness and asceticism, which were followed by the Jewish Quintessence, Christian monks and Hindu *Yogis*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>KalpanaSen, *History of Religions in Barak Valley (From 7<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.)*, A Ph.D. thesis submitted to Assam University in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of doctor of philosophy in History, 2014, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup>NazibUllah, *Islamic Literature*, Washington, pp. 149-50.

<sup>13</sup>Abdul Karim, *Corpus of Arabic Inscriptions of Bengal*, Dacca, 1992, p. 226.

To study the advent, development and expansion of Sufism in Barak Valley, it is essential to look at the geographical history of the then Barak Valley. Though it comprises of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of Assam today, but it reflects only the political boundaries. Modern Karimganj district, a part of Sylhet, was under the Muslim rule during the medieval period. Present Cachar and Hailakandi, the two districts of present Barak Valley, were under Tripura and Dimasa rule in succession. In other words, Cachar and Hailakandi never included a share of the Delhi Sultanate or the Mughal Empire. Although Barak Valley was politically separated during the medieval period, the system of cultural development went on with almost in homogeneous model over the whole Valley through ages. So, the socio-cultural history of Barak Valley extends from the present political area to the Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Politically, Sylhet had been fragmented, but the cultural assimilation between Sylhet and Karimganj remains untouched even today. So, the story of Sufism as well as the arrival of Islam in the Valley goes with the story of the arrival of Islam in Sylhet. Therefore, the history of Sufism and advent of Islam in Barak Valley cannot be formed without submitting to that of Sylhet.<sup>14</sup>

The soil of Barak Valley, 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. The 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 of the history of Barak Valley will not be completed. The Sufi saints came here along with invading Muslim army and traders with a zeal and enthusiasm for preaching Islam.<sup>15</sup> The chief architect behind the expansion of Muslim rule in Sylhet was *Hazrat* Shah Jalal, an Arabian Sufi saint. The time was the *Turko-Afghan* ruling period that crossed more than one hundred years in India. In 13<sup>th</sup> century and afterwards Karimganj Sub-division of modern Barak Valley was included in the Gaur kingdom situated on the north bank basin

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<sup>14</sup>KalpnaSen, op. cit. pp.107-108.

<sup>15</sup>Mohammad YahyaTamizi, *Sufi Movements in Eastern India*, Delhi, 2009, pp. 84-85.

of the Kushiara and the Tripura kingdom situated on the south bank basin of Kushiara. The other region of Sylhet like Tripura, Gaur, Laur and Jayantia hills were divided into small state units. Under such situation a revolutionary incident occurred in the history of Sylhet that led to a far reaching effect. The incident was the advent of *Hazrat* Shah Jalal from Yemen of Arabian country. The history of medieval Sylhet cannot stand without stating the activities and influences of Shah Jalal, a saint who came to Sylhet and started residing in the year 1303 A.D. But, it should be mentioned that Muslims were already there in this region before the advent of Shah Jalal.<sup>16</sup>

*Dervish* Shah Jalal was a spiritual personality, played a vital role in extending Sufism and in preaching Islam in Barak Valley along with other places of our land. The information relating to his life, arrival in Sylhet and his conquest of Sylhet is crystal clear. Because the book written on it such as IbnBatuta's "*Rahela*", "*Suhal-e - Yeaman*", and their Bengali versions "*Tuarike-Jalali*" and "*Guljar-e-Abrar*" are all based on hearsays to a great extent. On the basis of available sources, historians opined that the year of his Sylhet conquest was 1303 A.D. when he was 31/32 years old. Accordingly, it is clear that he was born in 1271 A.D. at Kunia, (Yeaman) in Saudi Arab. At that time, Taij was the capital of Yemen. His father, Muhammad Bin Ibrahim was the Amir of the Ajjan fort, near Taij. He belonged to Kuresh dynasty. His mother SyedaHasina Fatima belonged to a pious and respectable family. His father had died in a war before he was born. His mother also died when he was just three months old.<sup>17</sup>

After his mother's death, Shah Jalal was brought up by his grandfather, Ibrahim Qureshi, who was a famous dervish. But, he was put behind the bars by the king in 673 A.H. and died in prison in 683 A.H. After the death of his grandfather, Shah Jalal was brought up by his uncle Ahmed Kabir, an *Alim* and spiritual guide of Mecca. And hence three years old Shah Jalal was taken to Mecca. His uncle Ahmed Kabir gave

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<sup>16</sup>Kamaluddin Ahmed, *KarimganjerItihas*, Silchar, 2013, p-44., Quoted in Abdul Karim, *Advent of Islam in Sylhet and Hazrat Shah Jalal (R)*, (ed.) Sharif Uddin Ahmed, *Sylhet: History and Heritage*, P-129.

<sup>17</sup>Kamaluddin Ahmed, *ibid*, p- 45., Quoted in FazlurRahman, *SylheterMati – Sylhete r Manush*, Bangladesh, 1991, pp-183-184., A.S.M. AzizulHoque, *BangladesherPirAuliyaMasaekderJiboni*, Banglabazar, Dhaka, Sulaimania Book House, p-17.

him the necessary religious education at the age of three. Then he became a disciple of *Hazrat* Ahmed Kabir and started taking spiritual education from him. When he was 30 years old, he dreamt a dream in which he was asked to preach Islam in Eastern India. Shah Jalal told his uncle Ahmed Kabir about his dream. Ahmed Kabir also directed him to go to Eastern India and to preach Islam there.<sup>18</sup>

It is said that prior to his visit to Eastern India, his spiritual guide, Ahmed Kabir, giving him a handful of clay said “ You settle there where you will find soil of the same taste, smell and colour.” Shah Jalal appointed one of his trust worthy disciples to take care of the soil and asked him to compare the soil given by Ahmed Kabir with soils of different lands that fall on their way towards East and that very disciple was given the title “*ChasniPir*”. It is said that the soil of Sylhet was exactly of the same taste, smell and colour, so he finally settled there.<sup>19</sup>

His uncle and spiritual guide, Ahmed Kabir blessed him. He left Mecca and set out for Yemen with a few disciples to see his birth place and perform *Zia-rat* of his parents. At that time, the ruler of Yemen, Sultan Omar Asraf, to test his spiritual power, invited Shah Jalal in 1296 to his palace and offered him poison mixed with cold drink. Shah Jalal drank the same. But Sultan Omar Asraf died a sudden death. Being afraid of the incident, Prince Shahjada Sheikh Ali refused to ascend to the throne of Yemen and became a disciple of Shah Jalal and left Yemen. Asraf’s brother Malik Muyeed became the ruler of Yemen.<sup>20</sup>

Shah Jalal along with his followers reached Delhi during the rule of Alauddin Khilji and met Nizam Uddin Awlia who gave a pair of pigeons as gift popularly known as “*Jalali-*

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<sup>18</sup>Achyutcharan Choudhury, *Sreehatter Itibritti- Purbangsho*, Kolkhata, 2010, pp- 175-76, Quoted in Shibtapan Basu, *Itihaser Aloy Badarpur*, Notun Diganta Publisher, Silchar, 2014, p-39

<sup>19</sup>Fazlur Rahman, *op. cit.*, p-185, Shibtapan Basu, p-39., Achyutcharan Choudhury, *ibid*, p- 176., Kamaluddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p- 46., Maulana Muhammad Gulam Mustafa (ed.), *Hazrat Shah Jalal o Hazrat Shah Poraner Jiboni*, Banglabazar, Dhaka, Sulaimania Book House, 2011, p-39.

<sup>20</sup>Fazlur Rahman, *ibid*, pp-185-86, Kamaluddin Ahmed, *ibid*, p-46

*Kabutar*” which is also respected by us in our region. Advancement of Shah Jalal continued towards the East.<sup>21</sup>

With the conquest of Sylhet in 1303 A.D., the administration of the state of Gour went under the direct of control of Shah Jalal’s Sylhet centric rule. That is the areas on the North Bank of the Kushiara of Karimganj Sub-division went under Shah Jalal’s Sylhet centric rule. Shah Jalal also sent his disciples to the other parts of Karimganj Sub-division. When he was alive, the Muslim dominion was established in Badarpur located in the eastern part of Karimganj Sub-division mentioned in the book “*Suhel-e-Yeamen*”. It is said that Shah Jalal sent Zia Uddin, one of his disciples, to Bundashil village situated on the bank of the river Barak. The grave-yards of *Awlia* Shah Zia-Uddin, *Awlia* Shah Sikandar and *Awlia* Adam Khaki are still in existence in Badarpur and its adjoining areas which are regarded as holy places.<sup>22</sup>

However, on reaching Bundashil, Zia Uddin came to know that a giant, named *Deorai*, had made the life of the people living there miserable. Zia Uddin wrote a letter to Shah Jalal seeking its remedy. Having got the news, Shah Jalal came to Bundashil and killed the giant *Deorai* and restored peace and normalcy in the area. Later on, *Deorai* dominated place came to be known as *Deorail*. It is said that water of the river Barak flows by the northern side of Bundashil village was not fit for drinking. Shah Jalal by his supernatural power made the water of Barak suitable for drinking purposes and thus solved the scarcity of water of Badarpur area. Shah Jalal than appointed, one of his disciples, named Shah Badar Uddin, as the ruler of Bundashil and *Deorail* and returned to Sylhet. Afterwards,

Badarpur Railway Junction and Badarpur Police Station were named after him. But the name of present Badarpur Police Station was Bundashil till the Mughal period.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Kamaluddin Ahmed, *ibid*, PP-46-47, Quoted in, Achyutcharan Choudhury, *op.cit.*, p- 177.

<sup>22</sup>Kamaluddin Ahmed, *ibid*, PP-49-50, Quoted in, Shibtapan Basu, *op. cit.*, pp-39-40., Md. Abdul Quddus, *Hazrat Shah Jalal (R)*, Furkahnia Kutubkhana, Badarpur, Karimganj, Assam, PP-93-110.

<sup>23</sup>Kamaluddin Ahmed, *ibid*, PP-50-51., Quoted in, Shibtapan Basu, *ibid.*, pp-39-40., Md. Abdul Quddus, *ibid*, PP-93-110.

After the escape of GourGobinda, the Sylhet centric administration that Shah Jalal founded, spread slowly in different parts of Karimganj Sub-division. In this expansion towards east he was mainly assisted by his disciples Shah Sharif, Shah Adam Khaki, Shah Abdul Malik, Mir- Ul- Arefin and Shah Nathan. The graveyard of Shah Sharif is in Pillakandi village of Jakiganj Sub-division in Bangladesh. The graveyards of the rest are presently located in and around Badarpur town. It seems that the eastern boundary of the ancient Srihatta state was known to the disciples of Shah Jalal and that is why they reached directly from Sylhet to the eastern boundary of the ancient state of Srihatta.<sup>24</sup>

The companions of Shah Jalal dedicated their life to the cause of Islam and according to the instruction of Shah Jalal his disciples settled in various places and preached Islam among the people of Sylhet- Barak Valley.<sup>25</sup>

### **Muslim Settlement in Barak Valley:**

Barak Valley is a truncated portion of Surma Valley of British period and present Karimganj district is a part of Sylhet as mentioned earlier was politically a divided area during the medieval period. It is clear that present Karimganj district of Barak Valley was under the Muslim rule as a part of Delhi Sultanate or the Mughal Empire whereas the two other districts of Barak Valley i.e. Cachar and Hailakandi were under Tripura and Dimasa rules in succession. Though, Cachar and Hailakandi were never a part of Delhi Sultanate or the Mughal Empire, yet, the cultural development of the Valley continued in a uniform pattern throughout the ages. In other words, it is an established fact that Cachar and Hailakandi is the cultural expansion of Sylhet through present Karimganj district. As a result, the advent of Sufism and the establishment of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> BazlurRahmanKhan, *Muslims in Assam History*, Delhi, 2009, p. 111.

Muslim settlement in this Valley are associated with the advent of Islam in Sylhet. It is to be noted that in the process of Islamization in this region, Sylhet played the central role surrounding present Karimganj, Cachar and Hailakandi and its peripheries. In this connection, advent of Sufism and the establishment of Muslim Settlement in Barak Valley are directly related to that of Sylhet.

The advent of Islam in Sylhet is connected with the Muslim conquest of Sylhet and consequently with the arrival of great sufi saint Shah Jalal and his 360 companions in Sylhet. However, it is evident that Muslim Settlement prior to the conquest was not lacking. This fact is proved by the legend of BurhanUddin, a resident of the Kingdom of GourGobinda, who was also involved in the Muslim invasion of Sylhet. S.K. Chatterjee said, "Sylhet was brought under the power of the Muslim Sultan of Bengal in 1303 A.D. Prior to that there was considerable penetration of Sylhet by Muslim preachers from the West, from Eastern Uttar Pradesh, and its present day Muslim preponderance seems to go back to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century." Karimganj was being a part of Sylhet which later on transferred to Barak Valley by Sylhet Referendum (1947), it is confirmed that Muslim settlement in Karimganj took place in the early part of 14<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the establishment of Muslim Settlement in present Karimganj district or western part of Barak valley is traced back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century whereas Muslim settlement in plain Cachar (present Cachar and Hailakandi) took place in 17<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of Cachari *Rajhas* and British administrators.<sup>26</sup>

However, some authentic sources that can confirm the testimony of those account are available at hand, one of those sources is the travelling account of great Moroccan traveller IbnBatuta in his '*Rahela*'. IbnBatuta arrived in Sylhet and met the great saint Shah Jalal in 1345 A.D. In his book he mentioned that the inhabitants of this greater Sylhet region had converted to Islam under the influence of Shah Jalal who stayed in

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<sup>26</sup>MatiurRahman, *Teaching of Arabic Language in Barak Valley: A Historical Study (14<sup>th</sup> To 20<sup>th</sup> Century)*, A Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Assam University, Silchar for award of Ph.D. degree in the department of Arabic, 2009, pp. 9-10., Quoted in Abdul Karim, *op. cit.*, PP-129-134, Dr. Kasim Ali Ahmed, *The Muslims of Assam*, Guwahati, 2010, p-43, Rabindra Das, *The Muslims of Assam-A Critical Study*, (IOSR-Journal of Humanities & Social Science) Vol-19, Issue -1 Ver-xi, 2014, p-99, Dr. MoynulHoque, *A Concise Histoy of Tea Labour in Assam*, Kolkata, Gutenberg, 2017, p-23.

Sylhet till his death. Another record regarding this issue is a Persian inscription preserved in Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka that testifies the arrival of Shah Jalal in Sylhet. Simultaneously the establishment of Muslim habitation through the Muslim conquest of Sylhet in the hands of Sikandar Khan Ghazi in 1303 A.D. during the reign of Shams Uddin Firuz Shah. This epigraphic evidence confirms the establishment and wide spread of Islam and Muslim settlement throughout the Sylhet region during the time of Shah Jalal's arrival in Sylhet.<sup>27</sup> In Accordance with Richard M. Eaton and K. S. Lal, "enthusiastic soldiers who, in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, spread the faith of Islam among the timid races of Bengal, made forcible conversions by the sword and penetrating the dense forests of the Eastern frontier, planted the crescent in the villages of Sylhet."<sup>28</sup> The famous Moroccan traveler IbnButtuta who traveled to Sylhet to meet the renowned saint Shah Jalal in 1345 later recorded in his book "the inhabitants of these mountains had embraced Islam at his [Shah Jalal's] hands, and for this reason he stayed among them." But it is not at all clear that Ibn Battuta was mentioning here to a peasant population. As he said, it was the inhabitants of the mountains, not those of the plains that accepted Islam through the representation of *Hazrat* Shah Jalal.<sup>29</sup>

The Muslims started their settlement in Cachar, especially in Badarpur area much earlier than 1745 A. D., even before the shifting of capital to the plain area i.e. Khaspur by the

Kachari king Lakshmi Chandra. It is proved that the Muslim settlement in the western part of Badarpur began from the first half of 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> In the early part of 14<sup>th</sup> century the Muslims permanently settled in Badarpur area of modern Barak Valley and *Hazrat* Shah Badaruddin was the first prominent Sufi saint of Assam who came to

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<sup>27</sup> Matiur Rahman, *ibid*, P-11.

<sup>28</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p. 58, Quoted in K.S.Lal, *Indian Muslims Who are They*, New Delhi, Voice of India, 1993, p- 58.

<sup>29</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *ibid*, P-60.

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Kasim Ali Ahmed, *op. cit.*, P-43.

Sylhet with Shah Jalal *Mujarrad*. Shah Jalal sent him to Badarpur to propagate Islam and its teachings.<sup>31</sup>

The Muslim population of Cachar and their settlement is said to have commenced in 17<sup>th</sup> century prior to the reign of Cachari *Rajah* Laksmi Chandra who migrated from Sylhet as well as East Bengal. Most of the Muslims entitled themselves as *Panchgaiya*, *Bhuiya*, *DatirBhuiya*, and *NoktarBhuiya*. Subsequently, they settled in Baranga, Dutpatil, Banskandi, Udharbond of Cachar district. The Rajah of Dimasa - Kachari Kingdom encouraged the Mohammedan peasants, soldiers and traders from lower Barak Valley i.e. Karimganj and Bengal to migrate to his territory i.e. Cachar during 18<sup>th</sup> century. Gradually large number of Muslims of Mughal and Pathan origin migrated to Cachar in 18<sup>th</sup> century. It became more intensive during the British period which can be confirmed from the census report of 1872 as there were 74361 Muhammadan populations out of 205027 total population of Cachar<sup>32</sup>.

Some Muslims soldiers accompanied *Chillarai* during the expedition to Barak Valley in 1562 and they settled here in Barak Valley. Some Koch people also embraced Islam influenced by the Sufi saints during that time. A large number of tea labourers were imported from the west by the British during 19<sup>th</sup> century. Amongst them some Muslim labourers were also found in the tea gardens of Barak Valley. A group of Manipuri Muslims settled in Barak Valley during the early part of 18<sup>th</sup> century when political chaos and confusion took place in Manipur.<sup>33</sup>

However, from observation it is seen that Muslim settlement in Barak Valley was a continuous process. It was through the Sylhet conquest by Sikandar Khan Ghazi (1303) during reign of Shamsuddin Firuz Shah. Edward Gait also highlighted the

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<sup>31</sup> Mohd. Assad Uz Zaman, *Sufi Tradition and Culture: A study of Sufi Saints and Growth of Shrines in Medieval North East India*, A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of doctor of philosophy in History, Assam University, Silchar, 2006, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> Upendra Chandra Guha, *Kachar Itibritta*, Guwahati, Asom Puksan Prishad, 1972, p-97, Quoted in Rabindra Das, op. cit., p- 99, J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North East India*, New Delhi, 1977, pp- 3-4, B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*, vol-1, Calcutta, 1905, p-58, W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol-2, 1975, p-379.

<sup>33</sup> Ali Haidar Laskar, *A history of the Muslims and the Barak Valley*, Guwahati, Prithibi Prakashan, 2013, PP- 106-7.

conquest of Sylhet by Sikandar Khan Ghazi in 1303.<sup>34</sup> It is also found that Sufi saint Shah Jalal started his mission to propagate Islam in Sylhet and gradually he advanced towards Barak Valley, first in present Karimganj (the then Sylhet sub-division) along with his 360 *Awlia*. Next some of his companions also visited Cachar region to propagate Islamic ideology amongst the people of this region. As a result, a large number of *Mosques* were established to perform namaj. The old *Mosques* existed from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards testify the Muslim settlement in the three districts of Barak Valley. It is evident from the fact that in all the three districts of Barak Valley, the existence of old *Mosque* and *Dargahs* clearly shows us that Muslim population gradually increased due to the influence of Sufi saints in this region. Moreover, the old inscriptions available in present Karimganj district in relation to Muslim settlement in Barak Valley also proved the Muslim settlement right from 14<sup>th</sup> century. For example the old *Mosque* and *Dargahs* of Karimganj district like- BundashilJame*Mosjid*, GorekafanJame*Mosjid*, KhadimanJame*Mosjid*, and KhadimparaJame*Mosjid*, all these are in Badarpur. (These *Mosques* were established in the early part of 14<sup>th</sup> century which is evident from the field study.) HatkhalaJame*Mosjid*(1463 A.D.) in Asimganj, *Mosjid* at Kaliganj (1502 A.D.), *Mosjid*TillaJame*Mosjid*(1531A.D.) in Ballia, Latujame*Mosjid*(1556-1605 A.D.), FakirtilaGoivi*Mosjid*(1630 A.D.) in Sarifnagar, KachukhauriMukambariJame*Mosjid*, KanishailJame*Mosjid*(1700 A.D.), SingariaJame*Mosjid*(1705 A.D.), SatghoriJame*Mosjid*(1718 A.D.), RatabariJame*Mosjid*(1795 A.D.), HulashnagarPacca*Mosjid*(1810 A.D.), GanshahmarchakDarus Salam Jame*Mosjid*(1864 A.D.), BiskutJame*Mosjid*(1890 A.D.) etc. are the Proof of Muslim settlement from 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

Along with the *Mosques* some *Dargahs* were established in Karimganj like -*Dargah* of Shah BadarUddin, Shah Sikandar, Shah Zia Uddin, Shah Adam Khaki, and Shah

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<sup>34</sup> Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, Guwahati, 1997, P- 262.

<sup>35</sup> Observation from field studies in Karimganj District.

Abdul Malik. These *Dargahs* were established in the early part of 14<sup>th</sup> century and these were graveyards of the disciples of *Hazrat* Shah Jalal.<sup>36</sup>

In Cachar, a large number of *Mosques* were established and among them notable *Mosques* are PaikanBoro*Mosjid* (1700 A.D.) in Gumrah, BorkholaPacca*Mosjid* (1705 A.D.), Buribail Old Jame*Mosjid* (1707 A.D.), KanakpurPuratanPacca*Mosjid*, Cachari*Mosjid* (1876 A.D.) in Silchar town, SilcharBoro*Mosjid* (1884 A.D.), FatakazarJame*Mosjid* (1890), Banskandi Madrassa *Mosjid* (1897 A.D.), GhaniwalaMarkaz*Mosjid* (1925 A.D.), MadhurbondBoro*Mosjid* (1903 A.D.), Udharbond Bazar*Mosjid*(1930 A.D.) and Bhaga Bazar Jame*Mosjid* (1948 A.D.) etc.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, along with the *Mosques* a few *Dargahs* were established in Cachar district which are as under,-*Dargah* of Shah Nathan in Nathanpur, Shah Chand Ali &Pata Shah in Dargahkuna, Langar Shah in Pullerttal, Bakhar Shah (1943 A.D.) in Madhurbond, Charki Shah (1952 A.D.) in Saidpur, Makha Shah (1973 A.D.) in Ghoniwala. etc. These *Mosque* and *Dargahs* of Cachar district testify the advent of Sufism as well as Muslim settlement from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>38</sup>

Concerning the establishment of *Mosques* in Hailakandi district a large number of *Mosques* were established and among them prominent *Mosques* are MuhammadpurJame*Mosjid*,BarnagodJame*Mosjid* in Algapur, MatijuriJame*Mosjid*(1815 A.D.), Boalipar Bazar *Mosjid*(1895 A.D.), Sahabad Madrassa Jame*Mosjid*(1899 A.D.)

HailakandiCachari*Mosjid*(1907 A.D.), Lalabazar Town *Mosjid*(1908 A.D.), HailakandiPuran Bazar *Mosjid*(1914 A.D.), Hailakandi College *Mosjid* (1960 A.D.) and Gharmurah Bazar*Mosjid*(1979 A.D.) etc.<sup>39</sup>

Along with the *Mosques* a few *Dargahs* were established in Hailakandi.*Dargah*of Mir-Ul-Arifeen in Panchgram, Shah Noor in Charakuri, Ambaar Ali (1964 A.D.) in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Observation from field studies in Cachar District.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Observation from field studies in Hailakandi District.

Visingsa and Abdul Aziz Chourdhy(1984 A.D.) in Tantoo etc. testify the Muslim settlement in Hailakandi district.<sup>40</sup> Thus, from the above mentioned *Mosques* and *Dargahs* it is proved that the advent of Sufism as well as Muslim settlement in Barak Valley started from 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>41</sup>

**Epigraphic Sources:**In addition to these, some Epigraphic and Numismatic sources have provided information regarding the Muslim settlement in Barak Valley. Among them, mention may be made of the oldest stone inscription discovered in Karimganj district placed on the wall of a recently built *Mosque* at village Hatkhola near Asimganj, about 27 K.M. south of Karimganj town. The inscription is dated in Arabic language and character. It was issued in 868 AH, (1463 A.D.) by the care taker of the royal palace of Sultan Rukn Uddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474 A.D.). The inscription confirms that a *Mosque* was built by the care taker at the place which is situated near the southern boundary of the Sylhet district of the British period.<sup>42</sup>

Figure: 2.01

**First Stone Inscription of 1463 A.D.**

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Observation from field studies in Barak Valley.

<sup>42</sup> Researcher twice visited the place on 28.4.2015 & 07. 5.2018. Quoted in MatiurRahman, op. cit., p. 12, Kamaluddin Ahmed, op. cit., p. 54, BazlurRahman Khan, op. cit., p. 79., Dr. Sahabuddin Ahmed, *A historical study of the art and architecture in Barak Valley*, IJRSS, vol-2, issue-3, 2012, p. 308., KalpanaSen, op. cit. p. 109.



The second inscription found in the remains of a *Mosque* unearthed by a local excavation at the village Surjadas near Kaliganj bazar about 15 K.M. south east of Karimganj town. This stone inscription is presently preserved in a nearby *Mosjid* named Choudhry Para Jame *Mosjid*. The inscription recorded in the stone shows the prevalence of Muslim Settlement in this region during the reign of AlaUddinHussain Shah of Bengal Sultanate in 1502 A.D.<sup>43</sup> (Appendix-A)

Figure: 2.02

**Mihrab of Unearthed Mosque of 1502 A.D.**

<sup>43</sup> Researcher visited twice the spot on 7.6.2015 & 22.2.2016. Quoted in MatiurRahman, op. cit., p. 13, Kamaluddin Ahmed, op. cit., p. 56, Kamaluddin Ahmed, *Sources of History of the Medieval Surma Barak Valley*, Historical Review, vol-1, 1997, p.37, Dr. Sahabudin Ahmed, ibid, p-308, *DainikNababartaPrasnga*, published news on 15, 19, 23.2.2016, regarding the origin of the said *Mosjid.*, KalpanaSen, op. cit. P-109.



This is the Mihrab of the then Kaliganj Mosque which was established in 1502 A.D. during the period 1498 to 1519 under the reign of Bengal Sultanate AlaUddinHussain Shah. The Mihrab and the Mosque are recently discovered in the village Surjadas at Kaliganj under Karimganj district. The Archeological Survey of India visited the spot and assured the antiquity of this newly discovered Mihrab.

Figure: 2.03

### **Second Stone Inscription of 1502 A.D**



The third stone inscription was discovered in a remote village named Ballia near Nilambazar about 18 K.M. south west of Karimganj town. The inscription marked the

relic of an ancient *Mosque* built during the reign of Nusrat Shah of Bengal Sultan in 1531 A.D.<sup>44</sup>

Figure: 2.04

**Ruins and Remains of MosjidTillaJameMosjid of 1531 A.D.**



The fourth stone inscription is now preserved in the wall of the Settlement Bazar *Masjid* of Karimganj town. The inscription in black stone records the existence of *Masjid* in the locality dated 1531 A.D. during the reign of Nusrat Shah of Bengal Sultanate.<sup>45</sup>

Figure: 2.05

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<sup>44</sup> Researcher visited the spot on 4.5.2015, Quoted in Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *A commemorative inscriptions of an unidentified Masjid in Karimganj, Assam, India from the reign of Nusrat Shah dated 937 (1530-31)*, Al- Shurooq Al-Hindi, vol-2, no-1, 2014, Assam University, Silchar, pp. 94-95.

<sup>45</sup> Researcher visited the spot on 24.5.15, Quoted in Dr. Sahabuddin Ahmed, *Ibid*, op. cit., p. 308,

**Fourth Stone Inscription of 1531 A.D.**



The fifth stone inscription which was preserved in a kali temple located at the village Pirnagar or Pinnagar about 9 K.M. south of Karimganj town. It was a forceful evidence of Muslim Settlement in the western part of modern Barak Valley. This inscription records the existence of a *Mosque* of that place dated 1539 A.D. during the time of Muhammad Shah, son of Hussain Shah.<sup>46</sup>

Figure: 2.06

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<sup>46</sup>Kamaluddin Ahmed, op. cit., p. 56. Quoted in Ibid, Kamaluddin Ahmed, *Sources of history of the Medieval Surma Barak Valley*, op. cit. p. 37. MatiurRahman, op. cit., p. 13., KalpanaSen, op. cit. p. 109.

**Fifth Inscription:**



**Numismatic Sources:**

The extent of Bengal Sultanate headed by Muslim rulers like Jalal Uddin (1414-31 A.D.), NasirUddin Muhammad Shah (1442-59 A.D.) and Rukn Uddin Barbak Shah (1459- 74 A.D.) in the modern western part of Barak Valley during 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. is evident from numismatic sources. A hoard of 177 silver coins of various denominations restored at Aylabari Tea Estate, about 5 K.M. south west of Karimganj town. The coins which are now preserved Assam State Museum, Guwahati were issued by those Muslim rulers during 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>47</sup> Recently in one newspaper named *Jugasankha*, published news on 25.07.2018, regarding the origin of some silver coins which are unearthed at

Jalapur in Cachar district of Barak Valley and these coins were issued during the period of Bengal Sultanate.<sup>48</sup> (Appendix-B)

<sup>47</sup>MatiurRahman, op. cit., pp. 13-14, Quoted in Kamaluddin Ahmed, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>48</sup>TajUddinChoudhury, *Jugasankha*, Silchar, Gumrah, reported news on 25. 07.2018. P-03.

All these Archaeological and Numismatic sources mentioned above give a vivid historical track regarding the existence of Muslim settlement in Barak Valley from 14<sup>th</sup> century in Karimganj and in Cachar and Hailakandi in 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>49</sup>

Besides the above mentioned points, from political or administrative point of view it is observed that the expansion of Muslim Settlement of a region is generally attributed to the Muslim rule of that region. In this ground it also observed that though the dimension of the Muslim rule of Bengal Sultanate was extended up to modern Karimganj or the western part of Barak Valley, yet it was never extended to the region covered by Cachar and Hailakandi districts. These two districts had successively been under Tripura, Koch and Dimasa Kingdoms during the medieval period. As per the information recorded in the ‘‘ Baharistan-i-Ghayabi’’ of Mirza Nathan, the Subadar of Bengal, Qasim Khan invaded Dimasa or Cachari kingdom in 1612 A.D. Ultimately, the Dimasa King Yasa Narayan offered huge tributes to both the *Subadar* and *Thanadar* of Bundashil (Bundashil- Badarpur), the then commandant of the Mughal invasion. Accordingly, the Surma River became the boundary between the Dimasa Kingdom and the Bangla-Subah of the Mughals. A *Thanadar* was posted at Bundashil (Badarpur) under the Mughal regime. During the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, a Mughal attack was made by Nawab Jamal Khan, the then *Thanadar* of Bundashil (Badarpur), who occupied Khaspur. But he was soon killed by a stratagem made by Dimasa king Yasa Narayan. So, during this phase there was no reasonable influence of Islam on the population pattern of this region and from archeological evidence there was no available proof regarding the Muslim settlement in these two districts before 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The starting of Muslim settlement in Hailakandi and Cachar can be traced back to the migration of Muslim peasants from neighboring area i.e. from Sylhet or modern Karimganj. The migration was possibly made under the encouragement of Dimasa kings for developing waste land and jungles into arable land.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Information collected from field study.

<sup>50</sup> MatiurRahman, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

However, some historians try to identify the traces of Sufi Movement made by Shah Jalal in some places of Cachar and Hailakandi district. They want to indicate to specific places namely a *Dargah* at Nathanpur under Katigorah police station of Cachar district and the *Mukamof* Mir-Ul-Arefin at Panchgram of Hailakandi district were the parts of glorious Sufi Movement led by Shah Jalal in the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. They hold the notion that both Shah Nathan and Mir –Ul- Arefin were two remarkable companions of Shah Jalal. The remarkable historian AchyutCharanChoudhury has made it clear in his book ‘ SrihatterItibritta’. However, this source cannot refute the above mentioned claimed as AchyutCharanChoudhury could not collect the name of 61 companions of Shah Jalal out of his 360 companions. But these two places cannot provide us sufficient archeological sources as we find in case of modern Karimganj district. It cannot be ignored that during the life time of Shah Jalal some of his near or distance disciples might have travelled Cachar and Hailakandi as the close neighborhood of Badarpur. But these occurrences cannot strongly prove the existence of Muslim Settlement in Cachar and Hailakandi during the time. It is most likely that in the first phase Islam was welcomed by the agrarian masses of Sylhet including Karimganj and newly converted peasants in groups began to enter the plains of Cachar and Hailakandi with the economic intension of transforming the fallen lands into cultivating lands. In the later part of 16<sup>th</sup> century the Koch general *Chilarai*, extended his dominion up to the boundary of modern Tripura defeating the king of Tripura that paved the way for tribal inroad upon the local people of plain lands that led to the depopulation of plains of Cachar and Hailakandi. As a result, the land hungry Muslim peasants of Sylhet and Karimganj were greatly attracted in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. But it is during the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the capital of Dimasa king Lakshmi Chandra provided the settlement of Muslim peasants abundantly with the aim of transforming the waste lands into vegetation. This action of the king was directly influential to the rise of Muslim population that increased to a great extent during the reign of King Lakshmi Chandra.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>MatiuRahman, *ibid*, PP- 14-17, Quoted in BazlurRahman Khan, *op. cit.*, pp-75-81, Kamaluddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp- 52-60, Upendra Chandra Guha, *KacharerItibritta*, Guwahati, AsomPuksanPrishad,

Thus, it is observed that Muslim settlement in Barak Valley is directly connected with the advent of Sufism as well as socio-economic and political situations prevailed right from 14<sup>th</sup> century. So, some Muslims came to this region for conquest, some for religious purposes, some for shelter and livelihood, some for trade and commerce and some people converted themselves to Islam in a gradual process in the three districts of Barak Valley.<sup>52</sup>

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1972,p-97

<sup>52</sup> Information collected from field study.