

Sufi Influence in Medieval Mangalkot: The Land of Eighteen Auliya

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Abstract: Mangalkot does considerably push back the proto history of the Burdwan district and all of Bengal. The city had a lease of life for a long time. The advantageous location of Mangalkot both on the road link and its riverine connection through the Ajay and Ganga hastened its rapid growth and prosperity. The principal purpose of this essay is to assess the legacy of Mangalkot, not a well-known site, where one encounters the vicissitudes of time. There is no doubt that the emergence of site as an important Centre from the so called Maurya period onwards, was caused by the growing urban factors in mid and eastern India. Mangalkot is situated present in the Katwa subdivision of Burdwan district. Burdwan district in general and Mangalkot in particular constitutes one of the few medieval sites in Bengal. After the end of the initial conflict, the composite culture developed here under the influence of the Sufis. The medieval Mangalkot considered as a land of Eighteenth Auliya or Pir but their names remained unknown.

The Muslim sufi saints, immigrating from Arabia, Persia and Central Asia were bound to influence the society of Mangalkot. They brought about a great transformation in lives of the people of Mangalkot, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Several cults with common beliefs and practices emerged as a result of the close social and intellectual contact between the Hindus and the Muslims. Many sufi khanqah in Mangalkot became the learning centre. The Khanqah also serves as an academic centre and also a relief camp where the disappointed and the destitute are looked after. The Sulh-i-Kul was the dominant feature of every sufis in medieval Mangalkot. This message of love preached by the Bhakti saints and Muslim sufis can eliminate or at least diminish the hatred between man and man. It will create an atmosphere of tolerance, love and communal harmony.

Keywords: Mangalkot; Sufi saint; Khanqah; Mysticism.

Introduction

Mangalkot does considerably push back the proto history of the Burdwan district and all of Bengal. The city had a lease of life for a long time. The advantageous location of Mangalkot both on the road link and its riverine connection through the Ajay and Ganga hastened its rapid growth and prosperity. The principal purpose of this essay is to assess the legacy of Mangalkot, not a well-known site, where one encounters the vicissitudes of time. There is no doubt that the

emergence of site as an important Centre from the so called Maurya period onwards, was caused by the growing urban factors in mid and eastern India.

Background

Mangalkot (23'32" N and 87'54" E) is situated near the confluence of the rivers Ajay and Kunur, in the Katwa subdivision of Burdwan district (Peterson, 1910). From ancient period this historical site became popular in the history of Bengal. The Ajay valley in Burdwan district played an important role in the growth and development of protohistoric culture in Bengal. Mangalkot situated on the southern bank of the Ajay River. The river Ajay was navigable at least till the late medieval period is clear from accounts in Mangalkavya literature. In the various accounts of Chandimangal Kavya, we come across the voyage of Dhanapati Sadagar, a merchant who sailed for Singhal from Ujjaninagar (Sen, 1382). There still exists a village called Ujjani in the vicinity of Mangalkot. Burdwan district in general and Mangalkot in particular constitutes one of the few medieval sites in Bengal. After the end of the initial conflict, the composite culture developed here under the influence of the Sufis.

In the history of Muslim mysticism (sufism) in medieval Mangalkot, which has long been recognized as an important component of the evolution of modern Bengali culture but has not yet received exhaustive treatment. Information about some of the early mystics who lived in Mangalkot during the medieval period is based on local traditions and secondary sources, mostly quoted in some modern publication in Bengali, Urdu and English. But these contain much legendary material, so that it is hard to identify historical facts out of the mass of tradition. Sufism as a means to achieving the highest form of obedience to God had a long course of development in the history of Islam. It is stream of intuitive perceptions with emphasis on an emotional attachment to God. It is personal and experiential in character and in apparent contrast to Islamic theology which lays stress on a received knowledge of God, Laws and rituals. Apart from the obligatory forms of prayers the Sufis developed and used certain practices to make their prayer more effective by practicing love, repentance, renunciation of the world, remembrance, meditation, devotion etcetera. (Arberry, 1979).

The Sufi's aspiration to secure the pleasure of God, created a wider scope for the movement. Within a small period a large number of people were trained in this discipline and were designated as Sufis. With the expansion of the mystic ideology, there was growth of *silsilahs* (orders), generally named after a teacher of substantial following. The *silsilah* was later stabilized with an elaborate system of mystic tradition, centered round the *pir*, *murid* and the *khanqah*. In the mystic organization the *pir* holds the central position. He is supposed to be obeyed and respected by his followers as the Prophet is by the *Umma* (Muslim community). Every *salik* or novice as a general rule takes a preceptor (*i.e.* shaikh, *pir* or *murshid*) ripe in experience and equipped with knowledge. According to

the Sufi belief, a *murid* is like a patient to his *pir*. He should not conceal anything from him if he wants success and he must have complete confidence to him. Changing of *pirs* is denounced in the mystic ethics and is considered a serious offence on the part of the *murid* (Alam, n.d.).

Mangalkot in Medieval Period

The medieval Mangalkot considered as a land of Eighteenth Auliya or *Pir* but their names remained unknown (Haque, 1975). The persons whose names we came to know were – 1. Makdum Shah Mohammad 2. Hazi Firoj 3. Golam Panjatan 4. Syed Shah Tajuddin 5. Abdullah Gujrati 6. Khazauddin Chisti 7. Shah Hazi Ali 8. Shah Siraj Uddin 9. Pir Ghora. The graves of the Auliya or *Pirs* till, existing in Mangalkot are – Hamid Daneshmand, Abdullah Gujrati, Shah Jaker Ali. On the occasion of the sad demise of Hamid Daneshmand, Shah Jaker Ali, Makdum Shah and Abdullah Gujrati the great fair is still held in Mangalkot. It proved that Mangalkot was a Muslim cultural hub in medieval period (Ghosh, 1957).

The principal ruins around Mangalkot include several tombs and *dargahs* dedicated to *pirs* or sufi saints such as Pir Panjatan, Rah Pir and Ghaznavi Ghazi. The other monuments worth mentioning are *Nakra Khana* (room of the musical instruments), *Hammam Khana* (Bathroom) and *Khankah* (one type of resting house). The dates of construction of these tombs and monuments cannot be determined with certainty for the lack of recorded documents. But this type of architectural monuments were much similar with the Mughal style. There is a cluster of mosque in dilapidated conditions and numerous *fakir* tombs in the nearby Natunhat village. Among the Islamic structures the Golam Panjatan- the tomb of five gazis, the mosque of Koar Saheb, the tomb and the mosque of Maulana Hamid Danesmand, the mosque of Hussain Shah and others assume significance. An inscription revealing the name of one Chandrasen, is found in the mosque of Hussain Shah, which belonged to 1439-1519 (Gait, 1917).

A number of Muslim religious divines and saints came to Mangalkot from the different countries of the Islamic world during the medieval period and settled here.

1) Shaikh Bahram Saqqa: Shaikh Bahram Saqqa a learned poet, was one of the disciples of Haji Muhammad Khubasham of Nishapur. He gave himself to severe austerities and become a devoted Sufi. He was of Turkish origin and belonged to the tribe of Bayat (Allami, 1873). Perhaps he first came to Agra during the reign of Akbar (Lees & Ali, 1965). During his sojourn at Agra he earned reputation as a mystic and a poet. It is said that at Agra he was seen distributing water to the people walking in the street and hence his poetic name 'saqqa'. He moved from Agra to Mangalkot and worked there. The people of Burdwan had great reverence for him and had built a mausoleum over his grave to preserve his memory (Lees & Ali, 1965).

2) Makhdum Shah Abdullah Gujarati: According to the tradition, Shaikh Abdullah was a native of Gujrat and had come to Bengal in the reign of Sultan Nusrat Shah (1519-1532). He settled at Mangalkot to propagate the mystic discipline. His tomb is situated at Mangalkot (Haque, 2012).

3) Shah Mahmud: Shah Mahmud was another sufi who rose to eminence at Mangalkot. As tradition has it, he waged war with Bikramjit, the raja of Mangalkot and won victory over him. He was a good scholar in Arabic and it said to have worked for the propagation of Islam. He lies buried at Arwal (Gait, 1917).

4) Shah Sultan Ansari: His father was a Muslim of the Ansar class of Madina. He left Madina in 900 A.D. and came to India. After the staying in Multan and Lukhnow, he started living in Mangalkot of Burdwan district. Among his three sons, Shah Sultan is more famous. He was a famous saint of Mangalkot who died here.

5) Khawza Anowar Shah: There is the tomb of Khawza Anowar Shah in Burdwan. It was built by emperor Faruk Shah. Here he died when he started the Muslim domination. He became died in 1715 A.D.

6) Shah Mir Jakir Al- Qadri: It is known from local folklore that Shah Jakir came to Mangalkot after sometime of Hamid Danishmand. He died and buried here. Till his grave was showing full of respect by the people of all religion.

POLITICS IN MEDIEVAL MANGALKOT

In 1204 Bakhtiyar Khalji captured Bihar, established control over Nabadwip in the District of Nadia (Ray, 1990). Subsequently another Ghori's generals, Muhammad Shiran captured Burdwan. Gradually the greater part of Bengal came under the governors of Bengal. Later Ghiasuddin Iyaz Khalji (1213-1227) captured Gaur and annexed Birbhum in 1214 and his empire extended over Burdwan as well. He created two separate Parganas – Sarifatabad (Birbhum) and Sulaimanabad (Burdwan) and construction of a vital road link from Devkot to Gaur and from Gaur to Rajnagar (Birbhum district). The road is believed to have been later extended to Mangalkot. This crucial road link with Gaur was later extended to Cuttak (Orissa) through Hooghly and Midnapore districts by the Mughal rulers for both strategic and military purposes. This was a vital link road till the end of the 17th century and it clearly notified by Van-Dan Brouke (1660) in his map. He describes the road as a "Badshahi Sarak" and this road closely connected with Mangalkot (Mukherjee, 2003).

Mangalkot again came into the limelight when it was annexed to the kingdom of Hussain Shah and Nusrat Shah. Hussain Shah credited with the construction of a huge mosque at Natunhat near Mangalkot in 1510 A.D./916 Hijra (Gait, 1917). Nusrat Shah constructed the Jami Masjid at Mangalkot in 1523 A.D. (930 Hijri). But all the mosques now in ruins.

Burdwan is mentioned in the *Ain-i-Akbari* as a *mahal* or pargana of sarkar Sarifatabad with an assessment of 1,876,142 dam (Lasker, 2014). It was during the rule of the Mughals that Mangalkot became not only a prosperous township but also a great centre of Muslim learning and culture. The place came into prominence for several causes. Prince Khurram who revolted against Jahangir while absconding at Mangalkot came in contact with Maulana Hamid Daneshmand, a renowned Muslim saint. A mosque built in honour of the saint in 1654 A.D. (1065 Hijri), the name of emperor Shah Jahan is mentioned (Gait, 1917; Ahmed, 1960).

There was a legendary story of Meherunnisha and Jahangir heard often which was related to Mangalkot. Burdwan came under Mughal jurisdiction after the conquest of the region in 1575 by Emperor Akbar. During that time prince Salim, Akbar's son fell in love with Meherunnisha, the beautiful wife of Sher Afghan who had been appointed as a faujder of Burdwan by Akbar. After the death of Akbar his son named as Jahangir became the Mughal emperor. He appointed Man Singh as a Subadar of Bengal but transferred him to Bihar in 1605 then he deployed Qutubuddin Khan Koka, his step brother in Bengal as a Subadar. His intention was to achieve Meherunnisha at any cost. According to the direction of Jahangir Qutubuddin Khan Koka met Sher Afghan and tried to kill him during their friendly conversation. Both of them were killed during their fight. After that Jahangir brought Meherunnisha to Delhi to marry her. During their journey to Delhi Meherunnisha spent one night at Mangalkot (Hossain, 2000).

IMPORTANT HISTORICAL SITES OF MEDIEVAL MANGALKOT

Tomb of Golam Panjatan : The graveyard of Golam Panjatan was an important historical site here. They came to possess Mangalkot but were killed by certain Hindu ruler. A great fair is held in remembrance of the Pir Panjatan every year.

Maulana Hamid Daneshmand Mosque : Hamid Daneshmand mosque which was built by the patronage of Mughal king Shah Jahan in 1665 was another important historical site. There are two mosques the old and the new situated there adjacent to the tomb. The tomb has 22' 2" in length. *Nakara khana* was also noted historical site situated on 18 square feet land and it had close proximity to Hamid Daneshmand mosque. The mosque has undergone subsequent renovations and the present structure, also now in dilapidated condition, was built on its old site by one Maulavi Muhammad Ismail.

Seven Gazies or Pirs : Seven Gazies sacrificed their life to occupy the Mangalkot and brought the place under Muslim control. They were buried in that place and their graveyard were considered as a holy place.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

The ancient ruins of Mangalkot have been reported from time to time for a long period by different scholars and amateur archaeologists. But the significance of

such antiquities has largely remained unattached to until 1975 when the Department of Archaeology, Calcutta University undertook a systematic exploration in this region. The exploration yielded valuable materials which together have emphasized the importance of the site.

During the first half of the year 1915 Rakhai Das Banerjee visited Mangalkot. During his visit, he observed some religious places and historical elements of the Sultanate period. The main archaeological site was situated at the outer space of the village from the way Natunhat to the Mangalkot. The length of the main archaeological site near about 70 Bighas and width 10 feet to 30 feet But the greater Mangalkot is surrounded by the village- Ujani, Kogram, Natunhat, Boxinagar, Boro Bazar, Padimpur, Debpur and Shripur (Jana, 2002).

According to the sources published in the Statesmen dated 22th April, 1990 the civilization excavated by the Calcutta University Archaeology Department belong to a highly developed civilization during the period from Pre-historic to medieval period. It was during the rules of the Mughals that Mangalkot became not only a prosperous township but also a great centre of Muslim learning and culture. Thus Burdwan district in general and Mangalkot in particular constituted one of the famous historical sites in medieval Bengal. It may have been settled as early as the chalcolithic period because of its advantageous location on both the east-west-north-south trade routes. Directly South is the famous port city Tamralipta which was the most celebrated port of the East by the time of Buddha. Mangalkot was likely replaced by the newer settlement of Burdwan from the Gupta period.

IMPACT OF SUFISM IN MANGALKOT

The Muslim sufi saints, immigrating from Arabia, Persia and Central Asia were bound to influence the society of Mangalkot. They brought about a great transformation in lives of the people of Mangalkot, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Sufi saints influence on houses, food, dress, position of women may be obtained from the following sources. Mukandaram refers to the categories of people/castes among them including those of- Tirakar, Kagchi, Qalandar, Hajjam, Darji (Chakravarti, 1352). The immigrants and converted Muslims mixed together in a social system where both the foreign and the local elements were accommodated. The immigrants who came from the deserted lands had to adopt to the peculiar geography and the climatic condition of Mangalkot. The account of the dress of the immigrants and converted Muslims is available from the sources.

The Chinese account says that the language in universal use was Bangla it may logically be assumed that not only did the local people speak Bangla but also some of the immigrants who had settled in Mangalkot for a long time and had long associations with the local people. While the immigrants learnt the local

language, Arabic and Persian as well. The persianization of the administration gradually ushered in an era of cultural conquest (Rahman, 2001).

Several cults with common beliefs and practices emerged as a result of the close social and intellectual contact between the Hindus and the Muslims. Certain Hindu rites and customs were continued by people newly converted to Islam. They retained many Hindu customs and institutions. The cult of Satyapir reveals the same blending old Hindu and Muslim ideas. God here is called Satyapir (i.e. Truth, the *pir*) by the Muslims and Satyanarayan (i.e. Truth of Narayan) by the Hindus (Sen, 1960). The worship of Panch Pir was popular at various place in Burdwan district, particularly in Mangalkot. It is worshipped even today as a family deity and is represented by a small mound erected on a clay plinth in the north-west corner of the house. Every Wednesday this mound is watered, incense is burnt and offering the flowers is made (Smith, 1919).

Many sufi *khanqah* in Mangalkot became the learning Centre. Where the sufi lives and guided a *Salik*. The *Khanqah* also serves as an academic centre and also a relief camp where the disappointed and the destitute are looked after. Maulana Hamid Danishmand established a Madrasha in Bohar for the development of learning. A lot of students came here from the different part of India (Banerjee, 1321).

Conclusion

The local converts, no doubt, preferred state services but they were engaged primarily in their old professions. The change from a Hindu Bengali way of life to the Islamic system and culture was mostly due to the influence of the sufis who were the torchbearers of Islam and Islamic life in Mangalkot, especially in its early phase (Ismail, 2011). The *Sulh-i-Kul* was the dominant feature of every sufis in medieval Mangalkot. They preached that no sin is greater than to torture someone. Heart is regarded as the abode of God and it is advised not to hurt the feeling of any one, because to break one heart is worse than demolishing thousands of Kaba. Muslim mystics looked upon service of other as a major aim of their spiritual life and made every effort to create love and affection in the hearts of the people. This message of love preached by the *Bhakti* saints and Muslim sufis can eliminate or at least diminish the hatred between man and man. It will create an atmosphere of tolerance, love and communal harmony and help us to achieve national integration.

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