


# Sufi Movements on British Anti-Colonial Resistance in Bengal of Indian Subcontinent: A Study of Religious and Political Intersections

Hint Alt Kıtası Bengal'de İngiliz Sömürge Karşıtı Direnişinde Sufi Hareketler: Dini ve Siyasi Kesişimler Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Saejd Rashed Hasan CHOWDURY 

Bartın University, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Department of Basic Islamic Sciences, Division of Sufism, Bartın, Turkey

## ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the resistance movements initiated and led by Sufi leaders against British colonial rule in the Bengal region of the Indian subcontinent, focusing on present-day Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam. The study highlights significant historical events such as the Fakir Rebellion (1765), the Battle of Balakot led by Sayyid Ahmed Barelvi, the Bamboo Fort Movement led by Titu Mir, the Faraizi Movement initiated by Haji Shariatullah, and the Khilafat Movement, which aimed to protect the Ottoman Caliphate and resist British imperialism. It analyses the multifaceted resistance strategies employed by Sufi leaders in response to British imperial oppression. British colonial control in Bengal commenced with the defeat of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and lasted until the subcontinent's partition in 1947. During this period, Bengal's Muslim population faced significant social, cultural, and religious repression under colonial rule. Sufi leaders played an essential role in mobilising the Bengali Muslim community around the concept of Ummah, organising a formidable resistance against colonial authorities. This study employs qualitative research methods, exploring the Sufi movement's resistance to British colonialism in Bengal and focusing on its influence on the Muslim community's political and cultural identity formation.

**Keywords:** Sufism, Indian Subcontinent, Bengal, British Colonial Rule, Resistance Movements.

## ÖZ

Bu makale, Hint alt kıtasının Bengal bölgesinde, günümüz Bangladeş, Hindistan'ın Batı Bengal, Tripura ve Assam eyaletlerinde, Sufilerin İngiliz sömürge yönetimine karşı yürüttükleri direniş hareketlerini eleştirel bir perspektifle incelemektedir. Çalışma, Fakir İsyanı (1765), Seyyid Ahmed Barelvi liderliğindeki Balakot Savaşı, Titu Mir önderliğindeki Bambu Kalesi Hareketi, Hacı Şeriyatullah'ın başlattığı Faraizi Hareketi ve Osmanlı Halifeliğini korumayı ve İngiliz emperyalizmine direnmeyi amaçlayan Hilafet Hareketi gibi önemli tarihi olayları vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma, İngiliz emperyal baskısına karşılık Sufi liderler tarafından uygulanan çok yönlü direniş stratejilerini analiz eder. İngiliz İmparatorluğu'nun Bengal üzerindeki hakimiyeti, 1757'de Navabı Sirac-üd-devle'nin Plassey Savaşı'nda yenilmesiyle başlayıp, 1947'de alt kıtanın bölünmesiyle sona ermiştir. Bu süreçte Bengal'in Müslüman nüfusu, İngiliz yönetiminin etkisiyle sosyal, kültürel ve dini baskılara maruz kalmıştır. Sufi liderler, Bengal Müslüman topluluğunun Ümmet kavramı etrafında birleştirilmesinde önemli bir rol oynamış ve sömürgeci güçlere karşılık kritik bir direniş sergilemişlerdir. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bu çalışma, Bengal'deki Sufi hareketinin İngiliz sömürgeciliğine karşılık mücadelesini incelemekte ve Müslüman toplumun siyasi ve kültürel kimlik oluşumu üzerindeki etkisine odaklanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tasavvuf (Sufizm), Hint Alt Kıtası, Bengal, İngiliz Sömürge Yönetimi, Direniş Hareketleri.

Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar:  
Saejd Rashed Hasan CHOWDURY  
E-mail: schowdury@bartin.edu.tr

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## INTRODUCTION

After the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir (1658–1707) of the Mughal Empire, the decline of Muslim power began to accelerate. The successors who ascended the throne of Delhi after Aurangzeb were mostly incapable and weak rulers. They could not stem the decline that had set in across religious, intellectual, moral, social, political, cultural, and economic spheres. Exploiting the weakness of the central government, regional rulers declared themselves nominally subordinate to Delhi, while in practice, they governed their respective territories independently. Observing the weakening of Muslim rule in the subcontinent, the British, initially arriving as traders, began to aspire to become the rulers of the region by establishing the East India Company. This ambition culminated in the British defeating and killing Sirāj al-Dawlah, the ruler of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 through deceit, marking the beginning of the Muslims' downfall at the hands of the British. Over time, the Muslims of Bengal found themselves increasingly subjugated under British rule. During this period, the Muslims of Bengal, particularly the Sufis, organised various movements against the British, achieving success on several occasions.

Several significant movements against British rule were organised in Bengal during the colonial period in the Indian subcontinent. These movements represented a collective expression of resistance by the people of Bengal and the broader Indian subcontinent against the injustices, exploitation, and oppression perpetrated by British imperial governance. Among the noteworthy movements were the Balakot War (1831), the Sepoy Rebellion (1857), the Indigo Rebellion (1859–1860), the Anti-Partition Movement of Bengal (1905–1911), the Khilafat Movement (1919–1924), the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922), various anti-British revolutionary movements, the Chittagong Armoury Raid led by revolutionary Surya Sen (1930), the Peasant Rebellion and Tebhaga Movement (1946), the Bengali Language Movement (1948–1952), and efforts to promote communal harmony against British divisive policies. In these struggles, people from Bengal's Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities actively participated alongside other subcontinent regions, demonstrating solidarity against British colonialism. Of particular note are the Balakot Movement, the Sepoy Rebellion, and the Khilafat Movement, where Muslim groups in Bengal, especially Sufi-centered organisations, played a crucial role in mobilising Muslims against the British Empire. These movements highlight the profound socio-political activism in Bengal and underscore the significant contributions of Sufi leaders and other communal groups to the broader anti-colonial efforts in the Indian subcontinent.

The role of the Sufis of Bengal in resisting British rule, from the Sepoy Movement to the Khilafat Movement, was crucial and commendable. The Sufi scholars of Bengal made extraordinary sacrifices, engaging in relentless struggles to free their homeland from the chains of British imperialism. Many Sufi scholars were executed by hanging, sentenced to life imprisonment, or subjected to severe torture in British prisons.<sup>1</sup> Libraries in Bengal and Delhi were set ablaze and destroyed. Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (d. 1762), the renowned Sufi scholar, was the first to observe the growing influence of the East India Company, its expanding network, and its insidious conspiracies across the Indian subcontinent.<sup>2</sup> With remarkable foresight, he devised a comprehensive plan to counter and resist these developments. He outlined a detailed strategy for implementing this plan. He encouraged the people of India to fight against the oppressive regime that deprived them of their fundamental rights, advocating the use of force when necessary.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, his eldest son, Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlawi (d. 1824), and Bengal's Haji Shariatullah (d. 1840) declared British India to be Darul Harb (land of war). He pronounced that waging jihad against the British was a religious obligation.<sup>4</sup>

During the first century of British rule, Sufi scholars played a pivotal role in leading anti-British movements. In 1803, when Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlawi issued a fatwa against the British in Delhi, it sparked widespread resistance among the people, including in Bengal, where Haji Shariatullah organised a movement against British rule. Similarly, when Syed Ahmad Barelvi (d. 1831), a follower of Shah Waliullah, was preparing for the Battle of Balakot against the British, Nisar Ali Titumir (d. 1831) in Bengal, inspired by Syed Ahmad, led the resistance against the British by establishing the Bamboo Fort. These movements challenged British authority and created significant religious and social upheaval. Although the British later weakened the Sufi scholars through severe oppression, persecution, and conspiracy, thereby limiting their direct political influence, they played a vital role in society for the next ninety years of British rule. Even though they were not at the forefront of political leadership, their influence as a social force remained strong. During this period, the renowned Sufi scholar and disciple of Syed Ahmad Barelvi, Maulana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri (d. 1873), devoted himself to spreading Islam throughout Bengal. Maulana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri endeavoured to establish an Islamic state by training Muslim youth in Islamic education and culture. The renowned Pir of Furfura, Hazrat Maulana Abu Bakr Siddique, who played a crucial role in the Islamic renaissance in Bengal, continued the Balakot-centered Islamic movement in the region. In a subsequent phase, Munshi Mohammad Meherullah (d. 1907) made significant contributions to the propagation of Islam by countering Christian missionary activities.<sup>5</sup> However, this article aims to provide a detailed account of the movements led by Sufis in Bengal against the British.

1 Mohammad Aminul Islam, "Contribution of Alem Samaj in the Anti-British Freedom Struggle", *Daily Inqilab* (10 May 2024), 7.

2 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury et al, "A Critical Analysis of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent", *Sufiyye* 15 (December 2023), 23-62.

3 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi and the Conclusive Argument from God," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 4/3 (2024), 267-270.

4 Aziz Ahmed, "Şah Veliyullah Dehlevî'nin Dîni ve Siyâsi Görüşleri," çev. Kadir Özköse, *İslâmî Araştırmalar Dergisi* 14. 3-4 (2001), 536-541.

5 Necdet Ayhan, "İslam Tasavvufunda Hint Tesiri İddiaları Üzerine Bir İnceleme," *Mecmua* 12 (2021), 177-198.

## 1. METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In preparing this article, all available literature concerning the various movements led by Sufis in the Bengal region—specifically books, articles, essays, magazines, and newspapers in Bengali, English, Hindi, Turkish, and Urdu—has been meticulously analysed.

A qualitative research methodology has been employed to accomplish the article's goals effectively and comprehensively evaluate relevant academic literature from domestic and foreign sources. Furthermore, this article has been accessed online libraries within the specified geographical area to acquire pertinent information.

In the book *"The Role of Muslims in the Anti-British Freedom Struggle,"* Satyen Sen highlights the role of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent's resistance against British rule. While he discusses various movements of the time, such as the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the Deoband Movement, the Swadeshi Movement, and the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements, he does not delve deeply into the impact of these movements in Bengal. Moreover, he gives little attention to the movements led by Sufis in Bengal, such as the Sannyasi Rebellion, the Bamboo Fort resistance, and the Faraizi Movement.<sup>6</sup>

Zulfikar Ahmad Qismati authored a book titled *"The Struggles of the Ulama in the Azadi Movement (Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika)."* Although the book is concise, it provides readers with a broad overview of the bloody struggles of the Ulama from the British occupation of Delhi up until August 1947. While Qismati generally analyses the various movements led by the Ulama, he does not extensively examine those led by the Sufis in Bengal.<sup>7</sup>

Maulana Fazle Haq Khairabadi authored a book titled *"Assawratul Hindia (Azadi Andolon)"* regarding the Sepoy Rebellion. In this book, Khairabadi called upon people from all walks of life in the Indian subcontinent to join the uprising and resist the growing dominance of the British. He led this rebellion and issued a fatwa declaring it obligatory to take arms against the British. Later, the British government sentenced him to life imprisonment and sent him into exile, where he was eventually killed. In the book, Khairabadi primarily inspired the Muslims of the subcontinent to unite against the British, emphasising the significant contributions Muslims have made throughout history as a free and sovereign nation.<sup>8</sup>

In an article titled *"Impact of Islamic Revival and Reform in Colonial Bengal and Bengal Muslim Identity: A Revisit,"* Asim Roy primarily sheds light on the identity of Bengali Muslims. He discusses the Islamic dynamics of the reform and revival movements in Bengal, the revival and solidarity of the Muslim political community in Bengal, the process of Islamization, and the identity of Bengali Muslims, as well as the underlying functional unity within the divided Islam in Bengal, organised into various chapters. However, his article does not explicitly address the influence and movements of the Sufis in Bengal.<sup>9</sup>

Richard M. Eaton authored a book titled *"The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760,"* explaining how Islam was introduced to Bengal. He discusses the state of the Bengal region before it was conquered by the Turkish general Ikhtiyaruddin, including the Sufis present at the time, as well as the region's economy, social conditions, and culture. In subsequent chapters, Eaton also addresses the state of Bengal during the Mughal Empire. However, he does not delve deeply into the movements and influence of the Sufis in Bengal in this book.<sup>10</sup>

Although there is a wealth of literature available on the contributions of the Ulama in the anti-British independence movement across the Indian subcontinent, there is a notable scarcity of literature explicitly addressing the anti-British movements led by Sufis in the Bengal region.

## 2. THE BRITISH ARRIVAL, CONQUEST, AND RULE IN BENGAL

In the late sixteenth century, English traders arrived in India. In 1601, with the approval of Queen Elizabeth, 100 traders invested £30,000 to establish a commercial enterprise in the Indian subcontinent under the name of the East India Company, setting up its main centre in Bengal. The Company was primarily engaged in trade for nearly one hundred and fifty years. However, as the Mughal Empire's foundation weakened after the reigns of Aurangzeb and Moazzam Shah, leading to political instability and fragmentation into smaller states, the East India Company began to reveal its true intentions and intervened in Mughal affairs.<sup>11</sup>

In 1757, the British forces engaged in battle against Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula at Plassey. Due to the treachery of Siraj-ud-Daula's commander, Mir Jafar, Siraj-ud-Daula was defeated, and the British took control of Bengal. Subsequently, in 1764, Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula was defeated by the British at the Battle of Buxar, resulting in the British controlling Bihar and Bengal. By 1792, the British had also conquered Mysore following the death of Sultan Tipu. Punjab fell under British control in 1849. Similarly, Sindh, Assam, Burma, Oudh, Rohilkhand, South Doab, Aligarh, North Doab, Madras, and Pondicherry came under British rule. Eventually, Delhi also came under the control of the British East India Company,

6 Satyen Sen, *The Role of Muslims in the Anti-British Freedom Struggle* (Dhaka: Shabshaili Publications, 2022), 3-13.

7 Zulfikar Ahmad Qismati, *Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika* (Dhaka: Professor's Book Corner, 2000), 9.

8 Moulana Fazle Haq Khairabadi, *Assawratul Hindia (Azadi Andolon)*, trans. Mohiuddin Khan (Dhaka: Madina Publication, 2006), 8.

9 Asim Roy, "Impact of Islamic Revival and Reform in Colonial Bengal and Bengal Muslim Identity: A Revisit." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 22 (1999), 39-77.

10 Richard Maxwell Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier, 1204-1760*, Vol. 17 (California: Univ of California Press, 1993), 137.

11 Muhammad Nasihudin Ali, "Religious System in the Mughal Empire during the Period of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb," *International Journal Ithya'Ulum Al-Din* 25.1 (2023), 61-68.

reducing the Mughal Empire to a nominal existence.<sup>12</sup>

The end of the Mughal Empire was marked by the deposition of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II, in 1857—the British employed brutal oppression and exploitation to seize these territories. In 1858, the British government dissolved the East India Company and took direct control over the Indian subcontinent. Annie Besant wrote in her book that the British East India Company waged war not with soldiers but through traders. England did not conquer India with its sword but through manipulating Indian factions, bribery, conspiracies, deceit, and ultimate double-dealing, pitting one faction against another. As these factions were engrossed in mutual conflict, the British opportunistically occupied the Indian subcontinent.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE BRITISH BY THE SUFIS OF BENGAL

The British East India Company's rule over the Indian subcontinent, spanning nearly two centuries from 1757 to 1947, was marked by extensive exploitation and systemic oppression of the Muslim population. In response to these injustices, Sufi scholars in the Bengali region played a pivotal role in organising and leading a series of resistance movements against British colonial authority. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the various movements initiated by these Sufi scholars in the Bengali region, examining their strategies, impact, and the broader socio-political context within which these struggles unfolded.

#### 3.1. The Sufis from Bengal in the Battle of Balakot Against the British

Numerous Sufi scholars in the Indian subcontinent organised various movements against the British. Shah Abdul Aziz, a prominent Muslim thinker and the son of the renowned Sufi scholar Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, was the first to issue a fatwa declaring British-occupied India as 'dar al-harb' (the land of war), equivalent to a declaration of jihad against the British. This fatwa spread rapidly across the country, reaching every city, port, village, and town.<sup>14</sup>

In 1818, Maulana Syed Ahmad Barelvi, Maulana Ismail Dehlawi, and Maulana Abdul Hai Budhanvi formed a group to raise religious and political awareness against the British. By 1820, Barelvi led a jihad from Punjab, but the pro-British ruler opposed the movement despite Barelvi's offer of cooperation and resource-sharing.<sup>15</sup>

In 1831, Syed Ahmad Barelvi was martyred on the battlefield of Balakot. Despite his death, his followers did not lose heart; instead, they continued to wage guerrilla warfare against the British across various regions. Syed Ahmad Barelvi's followers and other freedom fighters played a crucial role in preparing the battlefield and the populace for the uprising of 1857.<sup>16</sup> Many Sufi scholars, Ulama, dervishes, and revolutionaries from Bengal joined the fight against the British during this period. Under the guidance of Syed Ahmad Barelvi, various Sufi scholars in Bengal led different movements against the British on multiple fronts.

Among the notable Sufis from the Bengal region was Maulana Ghazi Imamuddin Bangali (d. 1859), who made significant contributions to the anti-British Balakot movement. A prominent leader in the struggle for independence or jihad against British rule in the Indian subcontinent, Maulana Ghazi Imamuddin Bangali was a renowned scholar, dervish, and warrior. He was severely wounded in the Battle of Balakot and attained the revered status of a Ghazi.<sup>17</sup>

Born in 1788 in Hajipur, Noakhali of Bangladesh, Imamuddin completed his primary education in Noakhali before pursuing further studies in Dhaka and eventually moving to Delhi. He studied under the prominent scholar and Sufi Shah Abdul Aziz at the Madrasa-e-Rahimiya. Shah Abdul Aziz was also the mentor of Syed Ahmad Barelvi, with whom Imamuddin formed a close connection.<sup>18</sup> Imamuddin met Syed Ahmad Barelvi in Delhi, who became his disciple. He maintained a close association with him through various journeys, campaigns, and struggles until the Battle of Balakot in 1831. His participation included a notable visit to Kolkata in 1822 and subsequent Hajj pilgrimage.

Following the martyrdom of his mentor, Syed Ahmad Barelvi, in the Battle of Balakot, Imamuddin returned to Noakhali, Bangladesh. Throughout his life, he was crucial in inspiring and organising the devout people in the greater Noakhali, Lakshmipur, Chittagong, and Comilla regions in their resistance against British rule.<sup>19</sup>

Another significant Sufi scholar from Bengal involved in the Battle of Balakot was Sufi Noor Muhammad Bangali (d. 1858). He was one of the foremost Sufi saints of his time and a dedicated freedom fighter. Noor Muhammad was an armed combatant in the jihad movement that swept across Bengal and the Indian subcontinent during the 19th century. He was a khalifa of Syed Ahmad Barelvi and remained his companion in struggle and devotion until the latter's death.

In 1826, Noor Muhammad joined the resistance against British and Sikh rule in Peshawar, Mardan, and Punjab, participating in key battles, including the Mayer's Battle (1830) and the Battle of Balakot (1831). After settling in Mithanala, Mir-

12 H. Hilal Şahin, "Hindistan'da İngiliz Tahakkümünün Siyasi Ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Sonuçlarına Dair Genel Bir Değerlendirme (1658-1947)", *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations* 5/1 (January 2024), 45-56.

13 Our Islam 24 (OI2), "Historical Role of Scholars in Independent India" (Access 11 May 2024), 7.

14 Chowdury et al, "A Critical Analysis of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent", 23-62.

15 W. Kesler Jackson, *A subcontinent's Sunni schism: The Deobandi-Barelvi dynamic and the creation of modern South Asia* (New York: PhD Thesis Syracuse University, 2013), 187-211.

16 OI2, "Historical Role of Scholars in Independent India", 7.

17 A.S.M. Atahar Uddin, *Gazi Maulana Imamuddin Bangali* (Dhaka: Madina Publications, 2006), 11.

18 Uddin, *Gazi Maulana Imamuddin Bangali*, 13.

19 Dr. Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Sufism, Modernisation, and Social Transformation: The Impact of Twelve Awliya in South Asia's Coastal Region of Chittagong", *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12/1 (March 2025), 285-306.

sharai, he focused on spreading Islam and advocating resistance against British colonial exploitation in Bangladesh.<sup>20</sup>

Under Noor Muhammad's influence, significant Islamic revivalist movements emerged in various regions from Feni to Chittagong. Additionally, other Sufi scholars from Bengal, including Mawlana Wares Ali Bangali, Munshi Amin Uddin Ahmad, Sheikh Burhanuddin Bangali, and Aleem Uddin Shaheed, also participated in the Battle of Balakot and made crucial contributions.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.2. The Fakir and Sannyasi Rebellion Against the British in Bengal

The Fakir and Sannyasi Rebellion refers to the anti-British uprisings led by Fakirs (Muslim ascetics) and Sannyasis (Hindu ascetics) in Bengal during the late 18th century (1760-1800). This movement, which involved Muslim Fakirs and Hindu Sannyasis, was a significant resistance against British rule in the Indian subcontinent. The principal leader of the rebellion was a Fakir of the Madariya Sufi order, Syed Badiuddin Qutb-ul-Shah Madar, who was the founder of this order. Other notable leaders included Bhojpur Brahmin Bhavani Pathak and Devi Choudhurani. The rebellion created a considerable stir in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>22</sup>

The rebellion began around 1760 and lasted for more than four decades, marking the beginning of British resistance in Bengal. The organiser and leader of the Fakir and Sannyasi Rebellion was the Sufi ascetic Majnu Shah (d. 1792), who succeeded Shah Sultan Hasan Surya Burhan as the leader of the Madariya Sufi order in Bihar in the mid-18th century. Majnu Shah was politically aware and viewed the British as foreign occupiers. Asit Nath Chandra noted, "Although Majnu Shah's rebellion was unsuccessful in his time, it can be considered a precursor to the later organised struggle for independence."<sup>23</sup>

Majnu Shah's disciples, including Musa Shah, Chirag Ali Shah, and Bhavani Pathak, were key figures in the rebellion. The Fakirs, followers of the Madariya Sufi order, and the Sannyasis, Vedantic Hindu Yogis from the Giri and Puri sects, resided in Khanqahs and Ashrams, armed and united in their resistance against the British.<sup>24</sup>

The religious practices and rituals of the Sufi Fakirs and Yogi Sannyasis showed considerable similarities, which facilitated their unity against British rule. This shared spiritual and cultural background played a supportive role in their collective resistance to British authority.

Several factors contributed to the Fakir and Sannyasi Rebellion. The British rulers showed no respect for religious customs and rituals in Bengal. The local population supported the Fakirs and Sannyasis, who maintained their Khanqahs and Dargahs. The British government, viewing these practices as unauthorised and illegitimate forms of revenue collection, imposed prohibitions on such donations. Additionally, the new land laws introduced by the East India Company prevented the Fakirs and Sannyasis from establishing settlements in various regions.

Most Fakirs and Sannyasis were armed with sticks, spears, and daggers and often operated in groups. The Company's administration, aiming to control these groups outside its authority, devised various strategies and increased surveillance of their movements. Consequently, the Fakirs and Sannyasis initiated a movement against the British rulers. This rebellion gained widespread support among the distressed farmers and labourers who suffered under the new land revenue policies and burdensome taxation imposed by the British.

Numerous clashes occurred between the Fakirs-Sannyasis and the British forces over time. Notably, in 1771, a significant confrontation took place at Ghoraghat in the then-Bogra district, where approximately 150 Fakir warriors led by Majnu Shah were martyred in a battle against the British forces. This incident incited widespread anger among the people of Bengal, which later manifested in conflicts, particularly in the regions of Natore and Rangpur.<sup>25</sup>

In 1773, Fakir warriors killed British commander Edward in Mymensingh, and in 1776, Officer Robertson was severely wounded by Fakir gunfire. Fakirs and Sannyasis joined the 1782-1783 Rangpur rebellion.<sup>26</sup> After Majnu Shah died in 1792, his nephew Musa Shah led the movement until around 1800, diminishing British control.

### 2.3. The Bamboo Fort Movement Against the British

Among the patriots who took up arms in the struggle to eradicate oppression and exploitation in Bangladesh, Titumir (d. 1831) stands out as a notable figure. Titumir, whose real name was Syed Mir Nisar Ali, was an Islamic scholar, Sufi, and anti-British revolutionary. He is renowned for his Bamboo Fort (Baser Kella) movement against the landlords and the British.<sup>27</sup>

The people of Bengal were suffering under the exploitation and tyranny of Marathas, revenue collectors, and oppressive British landlords and indigo planters. Bengal's economic, social, and political conditions had deteriorated to ruin. Hindu

20 Sharif Muhammad, "Amar Balakot-Sangrami: Maulana Ghazi Imamuddin Bangali of Noakhali", *Monthly Al Kawsar* 9/4 (2013), 3.

21 Sheikh Zebul Amin Dulal, *Chetnar Balakot* (Dhaka: Professor's Book Corner, 2003), 29-31.

22 Jamini Mohan Ghosh, *Sannyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Publication, 1930), 21.

23 Asith Nath Chandra, *The Sannyasi Rebellion* (Calcutta: Ratna Prokashani, 1977), 101-105.

24 Smritikumar Sarkar, "Revisiting the Early Anti-colonial Rebellions in Bengal and Odisha, 1760-1856," *Indian Historical Review* 49.1\_suppl (2022), S9-S31.

25 Rajat Kumar Ray, "Colonial Penetration and the Initial Resistance: The Mughal Ruling Class, the English East India and the Struggle for Bengal 1756-1800", *The Indian Historical Review* XII/1-2 (1986), 70.

26 Faiz Alam, *Samrajyer Drstite Phakir Sannyasi Bidroh: Kayekti Upeksita dik, Uttar Upanibesi Man* (Dhaka: Sanbed, 2006), 92-93.

27 Ali Riaz, "Islamist politics in Bangladesh: The nature, scope, and the pathway, Fifty Years of Bangladesh" (UK: Routledge, 2023), 235-252.

landlords imposed various forms of oppression and discriminatory measures on Bengali Muslims. For instance, Muslims had to pay taxes for wearing a beard, constructing mosques, and even having their hands cut off for slaughtering cows. In response to this dire situation, Titumir organised a mass movement against these exploitative landlords and deceivers posing as revenue collectors and indigo planters. He was the first to declare independence against Hindu landlords and British domination in 1825.<sup>28</sup>

Titumir's movement was organised. On behalf of the severely oppressed populace, he submitted written petitions to the British East India Company administration, providing evidence of the local landlords' and indigo planters' atrocities. In response, Hindu landlords such as Krishna Dev Roy (Purnea), Kali Prasanna Mukhopadhyay, Ramnarayan (Taragunia), and Gauri Prasad Chowdhury (Nagarpur) conspired to attack Titumir. Demonstrating bravery and skill, Titumir repelled this coordinated assault.

After defeating the landlords, Titumir sought to establish an independent Islamic state across parts of the 24 Parganas, Nadia, and Faridpur districts. However, as Titumir became more active in his Islamic movement, he encountered increasing opposition. During this period, Bengal and the entire Indian subcontinent were under British control, with both British oppression and Hindu landlord exploitation persisting. Defeated Hindu landlords convinced the British imperialists that Titumir was a traitor aiming to expel both the British and Hindus and establish an Islamic state in Bengal. Consequently, the British authorities took various measures to suppress Titumir. In response, Titumir mobilised his forces to drive the British out and revitalised their commitment to the struggle for independence, resolutely aiming to restore Bengal's freedom.<sup>29</sup>

In 1822, Titumir travelled to Mecca to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. He met the renowned Islamic scholar and Sufi Syed Ahmad Barelvi there and became his disciple. Syed Ahmad Barelvi advised Titumir to return to Bengal and undertake various measures against the British. Following his return from Hajj, Titumir began strengthening the faith and convictions of Bengali Muslims while also working to empower them economically and socially before calling them to jihad. He was known for his compelling oratory skills and travelled extensively throughout Bengal to raise public awareness.

Around 1827, Titumir initiated a movement against landlords and British colonial rule, rallying impoverished farmers from his village. His speeches and campaigns sparked unprecedented enthusiasm. His fundamental agenda included strict adherence to religious principles and unity against injustice. His calls encompassed the renovation of dilapidated mosques and the establishment of regular prayers, discouraging Muslims from contributing to Hindu religious funds or participating in Hindu rituals, avoiding shirk (associating partners with God) and bid'ah (innovation in religion), encouraging the use of Muslim names, and rejecting the veneration of saints and graves.

In protest of the oppression of Hindu landlords, Titumir and his followers adopted a distinctive garment called "tah-band" instead of the traditional dhoti. He vehemently opposed the discriminatory practices imposed by Hindu landlords, such as the "beard tax" and mosque taxes. The core message of Titumir's religious exhortations emphasised compliance with the directives of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) in all aspects of life.<sup>30</sup>

Titumir's clashes with local British landlords and colonial rulers intensified over time. Previously renowned as a formidable wrestler, Titumir trained his followers to become skilled and prepared for armed struggle. By 23 October 1831, due to repeated attacks and oppression by the local landlord on the people of Sarfrazpur, Titumir and his followers abandoned the area and sought refuge in Nariakelbari. There, faced with continuous attacks from all sides, Titumir fortified his position by constructing the famous bamboo fort, or "Bamboo Kella."

He refurbished an abandoned mosque in Nariakelbari, establishing five regular daily prayers. Under his leadership, the people of Nadia and several districts of 24 Parganas united against the British colonial rulers.

On 29 October 1831, Landlord Krishna Dev Roy launched a massive attack on Nariakelbari with an army of over a thousand soldiers. Titumir prepared his followers for self-defence to protect their lives, which led to the widespread renown of the Bamboo Kella fort. During the attack on Nariakelbari, Krishna Dev Roy himself was killed, and the forces led by Alexander, the English commander, retreated. Approximately 500 of the landlord's troops were killed, and the English forces faced a significant defeat. Commander Alexander narrowly escaped with his life.

Following the defeat of the landlord's army, pressure on the British government to act against Titumir increased. Christian missionaries, landlords, and indigo planters persistently raised complaints, prompting the British government to decide on a renewed military campaign against Titumir.

On 1 November 1831, under the command of Major Scott, British forces laid siege to Nariakelbari. Engaging in battle with Titumir's troops using extensive ammunition and firearms, the British faced fierce resistance. Despite Titumir's fearless defence, the British artillery eventually destroyed the Bamboo Kella fort. On 11 November 1831, Titumir attained martyrdom while bravely facing the British forces. His fellow fighters and companions also became martyrs. Approximately 250 soldiers were captured by the British, and Titumir's capable commander, Ghulam Masud, was imprisoned and later executed. Eleven others were sentenced to life imprisonment, and 128 received various prison terms. Additionally, 225

28 Ummah 24 (U24), "Shaheed Titumir: Ingrej Khedao Andoloner Mahan Sadhintakami Bir" (Access 12 May 2024).

29 Mallarika Sinha Roy, "The Forgotten History of Our Times: Revisiting Utpal Dutt's Titu Mir in Contemporary India," *Theatre Research International* 48/3 (2023), 264-283.

30 U24, "Shaheed Titumir: Ingrej Khedao Andoloner Mahan Sadhintakami Bir".

of Titumir's followers faced multiple forms of imprisonment following unjust trials. British forces set fire to local homes and publicly burned the bodies of Titumir and his companions to prevent them from being honoured as martyrs.<sup>31</sup>

#### 2.4. The Faraizi Movement Against the British

Among the significant independence movements in Bengal, the Faraizi Movement led by Haji Shariatullah (d. 1840) stands out. The Faraizi Movement, emerging in 19th century Bengal, was initially aimed at religious *ihya* (reform). Over time, it evolved to include socio-economic reforms. The distinguishing feature of Haji Shariatullah's movement was his focus not on confrontation with the British but on encouraging Muslims to preserve their identity through religious purification during a challenging period under British rule. Although the Faraizi Movement started with religious *ihya* objectives, it became a peasant movement.<sup>32</sup>

In 1799, Haji Shariatullah travelled to Mecca, where he became a disciple of the renowned Sufi, Tahir Sombol, adopting the Qadiri Sufi order. He returned to Bengal in 1818. Faced with the harsh exploitation and oppression by landlords and indigo planters under British rule, Haji Shariatullah initiated the Faraizi *ihya* movement in 1818. The movement aimed to address the exploitation of peasants by tyrannical landlords and indigo planters. Its core objectives were to restore social life according to the principles of the Quran and Sunnah and to impart the message of self-empowerment.<sup>33</sup>

The Faraizi Movement, named after the Arabic word 'Fard' for obligatory religious duties, gained immense popularity across Faridpur, Dhaka, Barisal, and Comilla in Bengal. Haji Shariatullah emphasised the observance of essential Islamic responsibilities such as performing the five daily prayers, giving 'Zakat' to alleviate poverty, fasting during Ramadan, and performing the 'Hajj'. His focus on these obligatory practices led to the movement being widely recognised as the Faraizi Movement.<sup>34</sup>

Haji Shariatullah regarded British rule in Bengal as detrimental to the spiritual lives of Muslims. His *ihya* movement eventually evolved into a widespread anti-colonial mass movement. Considering the subcontinent under colonial rule as a "Dar al-Harb" (land of war), Shariatullah issued a fatwa declaring that Friday and Eid prayers should not be observed under British rule. In response, the British government categorised the Faraizis as a rebellious group. In 1837, landlords accused Shariatullah of attempting to establish a separate state and lodged numerous legal cases against him. Subsequently, in 1839, Shariatullah faced multiple arrests by the police.<sup>35</sup>

Following the death of Haji Shariatullah in 1840, his only son, Mohsinuddin, also known as Dudu Mia, was declared the leader of the Faraizi movement. Dudu Mia played a significant role in resisting British rule by fighting against the Indigo planters and British authorities. He was involved in various clashes with British landlord forces and engaged in conflicts with the Sikdar family of Kanai Pur and the Ghosh family of Faridpur. In one such conflict, Madan Ghosh was killed. Consequently, Dudu Mia and 117 other Faraizi activists were arrested, with 22 individuals sentenced to seven years of rigorous imprisonment by the district judge.<sup>36</sup>

#### 2.5. The Anti-British Movement of the Furfura Peers

The Furfura Peers, led by Pir Abu Bakr Siddique of Furfura Sharif, played a crucial role in Bengal's anti-British resistance and Islamic revival.<sup>37</sup> Inspired by Syed Ahmad Bareilvi's 1831 rebellion at Balakot, Siddique emerged as a prominent religious leader, establishing Furfura Darbar Sharif and spearheading the expansion of Islamic education.<sup>38</sup> Under his patronage, over 1,100 madrasas and 700 mosques were founded across Bengal and Assam, reinforcing Islamic scholarship and activism.<sup>39</sup>

Siddique's influence extended into politics, where he initially led the Bengal Provincial Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind but later founded Jamiat Ulema-e-Bengal and Assam due to ideological differences with the Congress.<sup>40</sup> He was instrumental in the Khilafat Movement, mobilising funds for Ottoman Muslims and shaping the political landscape of Bengal.<sup>41</sup> His staunch commitment to Shariah-based governance led him to engage with key figures like Mahatma Gandhi, C.R. Das, and Maulana Mohammad Ali, asserting that Islamic principles were paramount in any political alliance.<sup>42</sup>

Beyond politics, Siddique combated Bid'ah (innovations), shirk (polytheism), and cultural encroachment, establishing Anjuman-e-Waizeen to promote religious reform.<sup>43</sup> His literary contributions, including support for publications like

31 U24, "Shaheed Titumir: Ingrej Khedao Andoloner Mahan Sadhintakami Bir".

32 Tariq Omar Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute and Peasant Life in The Bengal Delta* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 49.

33 News 24 (N24), "Haji Shariatullah, the great hero of the Faraiji movement" (Access 15 May 2024).

34 Sufia M Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, And Language in An Islamic Nation* (North Carolina: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2006), 53-54.

35 Shiping Hua, *Islam and democratization in Asia* (Aligarh: Cambria Press, 2009), 160.

36 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, *Bangladesh'te İslâm ve Tasavvuf* (Ankara: Ankara Kalem Neşriyat, 2023), 125-126.

37 M. A. Rahim, *Banglar Musalmander İtihas* (Dhaka: Ahmad Publishing House, 1994), 74.

38 Amalendu Dey, *Bengali Intellectuals and Separatism* (Kolkata: Bengal State Book Board, 1991), 46.

39 Wakil Ahmad, *Bengali Muslim Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1983), 1-50.

40 Vahit Gökteş - Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "An Evaluation of Mu'in Al-Din Chishti's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent: The Case of Chishti Tariqa", *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 31 (June 2023), 47-76.

41 Noor Ahmad, *Tehzeeqat e Chishti* (Urdu) (Lahore: Al-Faisal, Urdu Bazar, 2006), 31-34.

42 Kismati, *Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika*, 66.

43 Kismati, *Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika*, 67.

Muslim *Hitaishee* and *Musalem*,<sup>44</sup> were pivotal in shaping Muslim intellectual discourse.<sup>45</sup> He also facilitated Bengali translations of key Islamic texts, ensuring accessibility for a broader audience.<sup>46</sup>

His legacy continued through his disciples, particularly Peer Nesaruddin Ahmad of Sarsina and his son Peer Maulana Abdul Hai Siddique, who actively supported the Pakistan and Bangladesh Movement under Muhammad Ali Jinnah.<sup>47</sup> The Furfura movement's impact endures through its extensive network of madrasas and religious institutions, solidifying its role in the Islamic revival and anti-colonial struggle in Bengal.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.6. The Anti-British Movement of Sarsina Peers

The Sarsina Peers, led by Nesaruddin Ahmad (d. 1952),<sup>49</sup> played a pivotal role in the Islamic revival and anti-British resistance in Bengal.<sup>50</sup> As a disciple of Pir Abu Bakr Siddique of Furfura Sharif,<sup>51</sup> Nesaruddin became a prominent religious leader, establishing Sarsina Darussunnat Kamil Madrasa and numerous other Islamic institutions across Bengal to preserve Islamic identity and education.<sup>52</sup>

Nesaruddin Ahmad actively participated in anti-colonial movements,<sup>53</sup> notably the Khilafat Movement, urging the Muslim populace to support Islamic scholars in their resistance against British rule.<sup>54</sup> His 1946 Ulama Conference in Kolkata, under Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Bangala and Assam, pressured Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League to ensure that Qur'anic and Hadith-based principles would govern Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>55</sup> His delegation's efforts in the Sylhet Referendum were crucial in integrating Sylhet into the proposed Muslim state.<sup>56</sup>

Nesaruddin's intellectual contributions further reinforced the movement. His book *Khilafat Andolan Paddhati* provided a strategic framework for Islamic scholars leading anti-colonial efforts. Other works, including *Tariqul Islam* and *Radd-e-Badguman*, emphasised the necessity of Islamic governance and refuted misconceptions about Islamic traditions.<sup>57</sup> The Sarsina Peers' movement, alongside the Furfura Peers, significantly shaped Bengal's political and religious landscape, ensuring that the region's Islamic heritage remained resilient against colonial rule.

## 2.7. Peer Badshah Mia's Role in the Independence Movement

Abu Khalid Rashiduddin Ahmad (d. 1959), known as Peer Badshah Mia, was a prominent Islamic scholar, social reformer, and political leader. As the fourth descendant of Haji Shariatullah, he inherited the leadership of the Bahadurpur Ashtana and the Farazee movement, actively engaging in anti-colonial resistance. Travelling extensively across Bengal, he mobilised millions against British rule.<sup>58</sup>

A key participant in the All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference (1906) and a supporter of the Muslim League's formation, he played a significant role in strengthening Islamic nationalism. He also contributed to the Khilafat Movement (1921), where his anti-British activism led to arrest and imprisonment.<sup>59</sup> Despite attempts by the British to coerce him into political positions, he remained steadfast in his resistance, viewing politics as an inseparable part of Islam.

Peer Badshah Mia later supported Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Haq's Kisan Proja Party (1926) and was actively involved in the Pakistan Movement (1940s).<sup>60</sup> After independence, he worked for an Islamic constitution through organisations like Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam and Nizam-e-Islam Party, later opposing the Muslim League's deviation from Islamic principles.

Beyond politics, he prioritised Islamic education, founding Bahadurpur Shariatiya Alia Madrasa (1940) and encouraging the establishment of mosques, madrasas, and schools across Bangladesh. His legacy endures in numerous institutions bearing his name, reflecting his lifelong dedication to Islamic revival, social reform, and national liberation.

## 2.8. The Indian Independence Movement Against the British in Bengal

Among the prominent Islamic scholars and Sufis in Bangladesh, many actively participated in the independence movement against the British, particularly in the "Azadi Movement." Notably, Maulana Shamsul Haq Faridpuri, a disciple

44 Dey, *Bengali Intellectuals and Separatism*, 119.

45 Kismati, *Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika*, 68.

46 Ahmad, *Bengali Muslim Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 1–50.

47 Maulana Noor Mohammad Azami, *Hadiser Totto o Itihas* (Delhi: Bangla Islamic Academy, 1997), 1–50.

48 Kismati, *Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika*, 69.

49 *Jagonews24*, "Life and work of Allama Nesaruddin Rahmatullahi Alaihi" (16 May 2024).

50 Barisalpedia "Nesaruddin Ahmad (r.), Shah Sufi, (Pir Sahib of Charchina)", Access: May 18, 2024.

51 *Jagonews24*, "Life and work of Allama Nesaruddin Rahmatullahi Alaihi", 2.

52 Siraj Uddin Ahmed, *History of Barisal Division*, Vol. II (Dhaka, Bhaskar Prakashani, 2015), 37.

53 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "The Role of Political Parties in Bangladesh's July Revolution of 2024: Insights from Sufi Perspectives," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8/11 (2024), 2077-2093.

54 *DailyInqilab*, "The Contribution of the late Pirs of Charchina in spreading Islamic ideals is unforgettable-Pir of Charchina", (17 May 2024).

55 Kismati, *Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika*, 71.

56 Kismati, *Ajadi Andolone Alem Samajer Sangrami Bhumika*, 70.

57 Teachers Gov Bd (TGB), "Biography of Pir-e-Kamil Shah Sufi Nesaruddin Ahmed (R.)—The Founder of Sarsina Darbar Sharif" (Access 10 October 2024).

58 *Chandpur kantho*, "Badshahi has done the work according to truth and justice" (16 May 2024).

59 Abdul Jabbar Mia, *Introduction to Madaripur District* (Madaripur: Mrs Leena Jabbar, 1994), 164.

60 Mia, *Introduction to Madaripur District*, 165.

and follower of the renowned Sufi Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi<sup>61</sup>, played a significant role in the movement for the establishment of a separate Muslim state, Pakistan and Bangladesh. His father, Munshi Abdullah, was involved in the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, and his grandfather, Cherag Ali, participated in the Sikh-British anti-colonial movement led by Syed Ahmad Barelvi.

Maulana Shamsul Haq Faridpuri studied Hadith under prominent scholars at Darul Uloom Deoband, including Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, and Ejaz Ali. He also received Sufi initiations from Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani and Maulana Abdul Ghani.<sup>62</sup>

During the pre-referendum period in Sylhet, Maulana Shamsul Haq Faridpuri, along with Maulana Athar Ali, Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani, and Maulana Solaiman Nadvi, organised a massive movement through meetings and assemblies advocating for a separate Muslim state. Their efforts ultimately contributed to Sylhet's inclusion in Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

Muhammadullah Hafezzi Huzur (d. 1987), a distinguished Sufi scholar from Bengal and a Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's disciple, actively participated in the independence movement against the British, advocating for establishing a separate Muslim state. Hafezzi Huzur was a Bangladeshi Islamic scholar and Sufi politician. After dedicating his life to spiritual practice, knowledge acquisition, and educational expansion, he entered politics later in life. His political involvement is considered a significant event in Bangladesh's history of Islamic politics. He founded a political party named "Bangladesh Khilafat Movement" to establish the Caliphate and participated in two presidential elections.<sup>63</sup>

Maulana Siddique Ahmad, a prominent Sufi scholar from Chittagong, inspired participation in the independence movement, supported by influential figures like Maulana Abdul Wahab and descendants of Haji Shariatullah. They established Jamiyat-e-Ulama-e-Islam in Bengal, mobilising millions and contributing significantly to the creation of Bangladesh as a new state.<sup>64</sup>

### 2.9. The Anti-British Ottoman Khilafat Movement in Bengal

In 1914, the Ottoman Caliphate was threatened by Britain during World War I, leading to solid opposition from Muslims in the Indian subcontinent against the British government. At the outbreak of World War I, Britain, seeking to maintain access to its largest colony, India, began a vigorous conspiracy to seize Arab territories from the Ottoman Caliphate. To this end, Britain deployed skilled spies to incite anti-Caliphate sentiment in various Arab regions. Under the leadership of Colonel T. E. Lawrence, who was instrumental in spreading anti-Caliphate and Arab nationalist ideas, the Middle East was left in turmoil and division.<sup>65</sup>

Seeing the imminent danger to the Ottoman Caliphate, Indian scholars were profoundly alarmed and launched a determined effort to preserve the Caliphate. This relentless endeavour by Indian scholars to safeguard the Caliphate is historically known as the "Khilafat Movement."

During World War I, Indian Muslims supported the British with the condition of preserving the Ottoman Caliphate. After its defeat, fearing the loss of Mecca and Medina, they initiated the Khilafat Movement in 1919. This unified political and religious effort sought to protect the Caliphate, symbolising Ummah unity across India.

In the Indian subcontinent, several prominent scholars played a leading role in the effort to preserve the Ottoman Caliphate. Among them were Mahmud Hasan Deobandi, the then Vice Chancellor of the renowned Darul Uloom Deoband, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Shaukat Ali, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari.<sup>66</sup>

Mahmud Hasan Deobandi actively supported the Ottoman Caliphate during World War I, raising funds and sending students to Türkiye. He closed Darul Uloom Deoband to assist the Caliphate's war efforts, emphasising Europe's unified opposition to Islam and rallying Indian mosques to pray for the Caliphate's victory and Muslim triumph.

Another significant figure in the Khilafat Movement, Maulana Shaukat Ali, was asked why he included the name of the Turkish Sultan in sermons. He responded that the Ottoman Sultan was, at that moment, the Khalifa of the Muslims. Mahmud Hasan Deobandi dedicated all his efforts to protect the Caliphate from British imperialist conspiracies. He travelled to Hijaz and received a letter from the Governor of Hijaz requesting Indian Muslims to participate in the Khilafat Movement against the British government. This letter is historically known as the "Ghalib Nama."

Mahmud Hasan Deobandi faced severe British persecution for his support of the Ottoman Caliphate, culminating in his exile to the Maldives. Despite British pressure to issue a fatwa against the Caliphate, he refused, leading to his arrest by

61 Ömer Tay, "Eşref Ali Et-Tehânevî'nin 'Risâletü'l-katâif mine'l-latâif' Adlı Risâlesi Bağlamında Latâife Dair Görüşleri", *Mesned İlahiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 12/2 (Aralık 2021), 357-382.

62 Mufti Enayetullah, "Satynishta Alem Shamchul Haque Faridpuri", *Daily Samakal* (17 May 2024), 8.

63 Md. Morshed Alam, *Contribution of Muhaddis of Bangladesh in the Study of Hadith* (Dhaka: University of Dhaka, Department of Islamic Studies, PhD thesis dissertation, 2014), 118.

64 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Unveiling Sufi Legacies in Dhaka of Bangladesh: A Chronological Discourse on Islamic Heritage," *Ulumuna* 28/ 2 (2024), 585-619.

65 Yamen Safqat, "Khilafat Movement in the Subcontinent and Role of Islamic Parties in Post-1947 Bangladesh," *Safkat Monjur* (18 Mayıs 2024), 3.

66 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "The Influence of Sufi-Centric Movements on the Flourishing of Islamic Plurality in the Indian Subcontinent," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah dan Pemikiran Islam*, 26/2 (2024), 375-412.

Sharif Hussein in Mecca and subsequent handover to British authorities.<sup>67</sup>

The Khilafat Movement, a spontaneous anti-British campaign, gained momentum in Bengal, becoming the first unified Hindu-Muslim movement against British rule.<sup>68</sup> By countering British “*divide and rule*” policies, the movement played a pivotal role in bridging Hindu-Muslim divisions, leaving a profound impact on the region’s resistance efforts.

Among the prominent leaders of the Khilafat Movement in Bengal were several scholars and Sufi scholars, including Akram Khan, Muhammad Abdul Baki, Ismail Hussein Siraji, and A.K.M. Fazlul Haq. Akram Khan and Ismail Hussein Siraji conducted extensive tours across various regions of Bengal, organising Khilafat meetings in Dhaka and Chittagong.

Maulana Akram Khan, regarded as the pioneer of Muslim journalism in Bengal, was a key leader in defending Muslim rights under British rule. Viewing the press as essential for societal progress, he used newspapers as his primary tool for activism. A founding member of the All-India Muslim League (1906), Akram Khan played a vital role in the Bengal Partition Movement (1905) and the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements (1919–1924). Elected president of the All-India Khilafat Committee (1920), he mobilised public support across Bengal.<sup>69</sup> Despite British attempts to silence him through bribes and threats, he steadfastly opposed colonial rule through fearless journalism.

In 1915, Akram Khan began publishing a monthly periodical titled ‘*Al Islam*’ under his editorship from the Muhammadi Institution. On 14 May 1920, he launched the Urdu daily ‘*Zamana*’, with Akram Khan as the editor. The enthusiasm of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements marked this period. The primary intent behind the publication of ‘*Zamana*’ was to bring news of these movements to the Urdu-speaking population.

In December 1921, Akram Khan launched the daily ‘*Sebak*’. During this time, the country was heated with anti-British sentiments, and he regularly published anti-British news in this periodical. He was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison by the British government for publishing a provocative editorial titled ‘*Agrasar*’ in ‘*Sebak*’.

Maulana Akram Khan’s most notable achievement in journalism came with the publication of the daily ‘*Azad*’. ‘*Azad*’ was the oldest Bengali daily newspaper in Muslim Bengal, published at a historic juncture in the Indian subcontinent’s political movements, anti-colonial struggles, and the Muslim Renaissance.

In 1946, as the political currents in India took a new direction, Akram Khan initiated the publication of an English weekly, ‘*Comrade*’. Throughout his career, he published articles in various languages, including Bengali, Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and English, contributing significantly to the intellectual and political discourse of the time.<sup>70</sup>

Syed Ismail Hossain Siraji (d. 1931) was a pioneering figure in the Bengali Muslim Renaissance and a fervent advocate of anti-colonial resistance. Engaged in various political movements, he opposed British rule through literature, with his poetry collection *Anol Probaho* banned for its revolutionary message.<sup>71</sup> He was the first South Asian poet to demand independence and was imprisoned for his activism. Siraji also played a crucial role in the Khilafat Movement and contributed to Ottoman medical aid, documenting his experiences in *Turaska Bhraman* (1910). Additionally, he participated in the medical team sent from India during the Balkan War towards the end of the Ottoman Caliphate.<sup>72</sup>

Among the notable scholars from Bangladesh who participated in the Khilafat Movement were Bahadur Hemayet Uddin Ahmed, Maulvi Asgar Ali, Khan Bahadur Hashem Ali Khan, Wahed Raja Chowdhury, Sultan Ahmed Chowdhury, Majeed Ali, Syed Mohammad Hossain Chowdhury, Obaidul Gani Chowdhury, Uqeel Mofiz Uddin, Uqeel Syed Ali Hossain, Khan Saheb Hatem Ali Jamaddar, Gulishakhali’s Azahar Uddin Ahmed, Abdul Kader Lal Mia of Barguna, Abi Abdullah of Betagi, Patukhali’s Uqeel Fazlul Karim Fazumia, Uqeel Mohammad Akram Emad Muktar, Noor Ahmed Sikdar, Maulana Nasiruddin, Kolskathi’s Hashem Talukdar, and Syed Mohammad Afzal Muktar of Pirojpur.<sup>73</sup>

In addition, students and youth from Bangladesh actively participated in the movement. Notable figures among them included Aziz Uddin Ahmed, Abdul Wahab Khan, Syed Qutub Uddin, Muhammad Hossain Chowdhury, Mofazzel Haque, Abdur Razzaq Sikdar, and Syed Habibur Rahman.

Participation in the Khilafat Movement subjected numerous scholars in Bengal to imprisonment and severe oppression at the hands of British colonial authorities. Despite these adversities, the movement played a transformative role in raising political consciousness among Bengali Muslims, fostering a collective identity rooted in defending Islamic values and institutions. It catalysed the emergence of Muslim nationalism in Bengal, uniting diverse communities in opposition to British imperial rule.

Bengali Muslims were central to the Khilafat Movement, engaging in significant political and social struggles that underscored their commitment to preserving the Ottoman Caliphate, symbolising the unity and sovereignty of the Muslim Ummah. However, the movement’s momentum began to wane following the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924, an event that marked a turning point in the movement’s trajectory. This development ren-

67 Nulibrary, “Describe the impact of Khilafat movement in Bengal” (18 May 2024), 2.

68 Nulibrary, “Describe the impact of Khilafat movement in Bengal”, 3.

69 New Nation, “Maulana Akram Khan: Pioneer of Bengali Muslim journalism” (19 May 2024).

70 Daily Star, “Alimuzzaman, the journalist Akram Khan was always in the people’s minds” (20 May 2024).

71 risingbd, “Ismail Hossain Siraji is the fire mantra of national awakening” (22 May 2024).

72 Jahidul Islam Sarker et al, “Turkey-Bangladesh Relations from a Historical Perspective: The Contribution of Siraj and Nazrul to The Turkish War of Independence,” *CenRaPS Journal of Social Sciences* 4/1 (2022), 56-72.

73 Mohammad Abdul Baten Chowdhury, Barisal in Anti-British Movement: 1905-1923, *Jagannath University Journal of Arts* 10/1 (2020), 158.

dered the Khilafat Movement's objectives obsolete, leading to its decline in Bengal and the broader Indian subcontinent. While the Khilafat Movement's immediate goals were ultimately unfulfilled, its lasting impact on Bengal's political and ideological landscape cannot be overstated. The movement strengthened anti-colonial sentiments and laid the groundwork for subsequent struggles that would shape the trajectory of Muslim nationalism in the region. Its legacy endures as a pivotal moment in the history of Bengal's resistance to colonial domination and the articulation of a distinct Muslim political identity.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.10. Kazi Nazrul Islam and the Anti-British Independence Movement in Bengal

Kazi Nazrul Islam (d. 1976) was a national poet and musician of the twentieth century in Bangladesh. His works are imbued with the principles of Islamic equality and brotherhood and Sufi thought. He composed hymns, nasheeds, Islamic music, and Shyama songs. Additionally, the ancient Persian literature, particularly the works of the great poets Hafiz and Omar Khayyam, profoundly influenced him. Nazrul translated 'Divan-e-Hafiz', 'Rubaiyat-e-Hafiz', and 'Rubaiyat-e-Omar Khayyam' into Bengali. Their intellectual and melodic traditions markedly influence his gajals and religious spiritual music. The impact of Sufism is also evident in his poetry and writings.<sup>75</sup>

During the British colonial era, the exploitation and oppression of Muslims, Hindus, and other communities in Bengal were rampant, with increased persecution of followers of Islam.<sup>76</sup> Nazrul voiced his solidarity with the oppressed and mistreated through his poetry and songs. He protested British oppression by performing songs and drumming at various locations. In his effort to halt British atrocities, he undertook a 39-day fast. Nazrul also took up arms against the British by participating in the Khilafat Movement. In 1922, the British government imprisoned him for sedition due to his book 'Anandamoyir Agaman'. He became known as a rebellious poet of undivided India under British rule.

Nazrul's opposition to the British is exemplified in his poem "Bidrohi" (The Rebel), written in the second week of December 1921 and published in the weekly magazine 'Bijli'. This poem encapsulates the voice and desires of the people and earned him acclaim across the subcontinent. Unable to tolerate British oppression any longer, he also composed the famous song "Karar Oi Louho Kopat" (The Iron Gate of Imprisonment), expressing his protest. His lyrics called for breaking the shackles of imprisonment and inspired people to challenge their chains. Nazrul struck a significant blow against the British Empire through his songs and poetry.<sup>77</sup>

Kazi Nazrul Islam not only enriched literature but also championed the cause of freedom fighters and accelerated the anti-British movement. As a poet, he demonstrated the capacity to inspire ordinary people, embolden freedom seekers, and incite rebellion. The rebellious poet Kazi Nazrul Islam is a testament to the power of poetry to galvanise and mobilise society. His exceptional poetry and songs inspired the Bengali nation immensely, from the anti-British struggle to the great Liberation War. For generations, his creative works have served as a source of motivation for many. While he was a proponent of equality and a revolutionary poet, he encouraged participation in the anti-British movement through his Islamic hymns, ghazals, and Shyama songs of Sufism.<sup>78</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Sufi movement in Bengal represents a profound chapter in the history of anti-colonial resistance in the Indian subcontinent. Inspired by Islamic values and a commitment to social justice, Sufi scholars and leaders played a pivotal role in uniting the masses against British imperialism. Movements initiated by luminaries such as Shah Waliullah, Syed Ahmad Barelvi, Shah Ismail, Titumir, and Haji Shariatullah were instrumental in mobilising widespread resistance. Through their eloquent rhetoric and steadfast leadership, the Sufis transformed religious principles into a powerful call for collective action, galvanising the oppressed to rise against tyranny.

The spontaneous involvement of Sufi scholars in landmark movements such as the Balakot War, the Bamboo Fort Movement, the Farazi Movement, and the Khilafat Movement underscored their unwavering commitment to preserving Bengal's socio-political and religious autonomy. The contributions of the Furfura and Sarsina Pirs, as well as the activism of Shamsul Haque Faridpuri, Hafizji Huzur, and the Sufi-inspired poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, further exemplify the dynamism of Sufi leadership during this turbulent period. Despite facing martyrdom, persecution, and imprisonment, these scholars and their followers laid the foundation for a burgeoning sense of Muslim identity and resistance, culminating in the eventual independence of Bangladesh.

Beyond resisting colonial oppression, the Sufis sought to establish a just and equitable society rooted in Islamic principles. Figures like Titumir and Haji Shariatullah led efforts to combat social injustices such as shirk and bida'ah while advancing religious and social reforms to empower the Muslim population. Their movements inspired generations of activists and continue to hold a distinguished place in Bengal's history.

This study not only highlights the significant contributions of the Sufi movement to the anti-colonial struggle but also underscores the need for further academic exploration of this vital yet under-researched field. By documenting the ef-

74 Yamen Safqat, "Khilafat Movement in the Subcontinent and Role of Islamic Parties in Post-1947 Bangladesh," *Safkat Monjur* (18 Mayıs 2024), 3.

75 Mujtahid Farooqui, "The influence of Persian literature and Sufism on Nazrul poetry," *iranmirrorbd24* (19 May 2024).

76 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Harmony Amidst Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism in Bengal Through the Lens of Sufi Heritage and its Envoys," *Hamdard Islamicus* 47/4 (2024), 33-57.

77 Rezaul K. Talukdar, *Nazrul: The Gift of the Century*, 4th Edition (Dhaka: Muktochinta, 2023), 16.

78 Abul Khair Bulbul, "Rebel banner of British rule and Kazi Nazrul Islam," *Daily Sangram* (20 May 2024).

forts and sacrifices of Sufi leaders and their followers, this article aims to provide a foundation for future scholarship, ensuring that the legacy of these movements continues to inspire and inform the socio-political consciousness of the region.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu makale, Hint Alt Kıtası'nın Bengal bölgesinde, günümüz Bangladeş'i ve Hindistan'ın Batı Bengal, Tripura ve Assam eyaletlerinde Sufi liderlerin İngiliz sömürge yönetimine karşı yürüttükleri direniş hareketlerini tarihsel bir bakış açısıyla ele almaktadır. 18. ve 19. yüzyıllar boyunca Bengal, İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin etkisi altında toplumsal, kültürel ve dini değişimlere tanık olmuştur. Bu dönemde, Bengal'deki Sufi liderler, yalnızca dini rehberlik yapmakla kalmamış, aynı zamanda toplumsal ve siyasi direniş hareketlerinin liderleri olarak da ön plana çıkmışlardır. Makale, bu Sufi direniş hareketlerinin tarihsel bağlamda önemini ve Bengal halkı üzerindeki etkilerini kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Fakir İsyanı (1765), Seyyid Ahmed Barelvi'nin önderliğindeki Balakot Savaşı, Titu Mir'in önderliğindeki Bambu Kalesi Hareketi, Hacı Şeriyatullah tarafından başlatılan Faraizi Hareketi ve Hilafet Hareketi gibi önemli tarihsel olaylar, bu hareketlerin dinamiklerini analiz ederken odaklanılan ana başlıkları oluşturmaktadır.

İngiliz İmparatorluğu'nun Bengal üzerindeki yaklaşık iki yüzyıllık hakimiyeti, bölgedeki toplumsal yapıyı köklü bir şekilde değiştirmiştir. Bengal, Hindistan'ın en zengin ve gelişmiş bölgelerinden biri olarak, İngilizler tarafından büyük bir sömürge merkezine dönüştürülmüştür. Ancak, İngiliz yönetimi, bölgenin İslami medeniyetine, kültürel yapısına ve dini normlarına ağır darbe vurmuş, halkı ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel baskılarla sindirmeye çalışmıştır. Özellikle Doğu Bengal'deki Müslüman nüfus, İngiliz yönetiminin sert sosyal, kültürel ve dini baskıları altında kalmıştır. İngilizler, bölgedeki eğitim sistemini ve dini uygulamaları kendi ideolojilerine uygun hale getirmeye çalışırken, yerel halkın kimliğini de tehdit etmişlerdir. Bu süreçte, Bengal'deki Sufi liderler, halkın manevi yönlerini güçlendirerek, onların hem içsel hem de dışsal düşmanlara karşı direncini artırmaya çalışmışlardır.

Sufi liderlerin direnişi, sadece manevi bir hareket olarak sınırlı kalmamış, aynı zamanda toplumsal ve siyasi bir hareket olarak da şekillenmiştir. Makalede, Sufi liderlerin Bengal Müslümanlarını Ümmet kavramı etrafında birleştirerek, onları hem dini hem de siyasi bilinçle donatarak İngiliz sömürge yönetimine karşı harekete geçirdikleri vurgulanmaktadır. Sufi tarikatları, halk arasında manevi birliğin ve toplumsal dayanışmanın simgesi olmuştur. Bu liderler, toplumu organize ederek, dini direnişin ötesinde, aynı zamanda halkı siyasi bir bilinçle eğitmiş ve onları bağımsızlık mücadelesine hazırlamışlardır. Fakir İsyanı, 18. yüzyılın ortalarında başlayarak, İngiliz yönetimine karşı bölgedeki ilk organize direniş hareketlerinden biri olarak dikkat çekmektedir. Bu isyan, Sufi liderlerin ve halkın direnişinin bir sembolü haline gelmiştir.

Seyyid Ahmed Barelvi'nin önderliğindeki Balakot Savaşı, 19. yüzyılın başlarında Bengal'deki en önemli dini ve siyasi direnişlerden birini teşkil etmiştir. Barelvi, bir İslamcı direniş hareketinin önderi olarak, halkı Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun hilafetini korumaya yönelik bir mücadelenin savunucusu olmaya çağırılmış ve İngiliz sömürge yönetimine karşı birleşerek direnişi teşvik etmiştir. Balakot'ta Seyyid Ahmed'in hareketi, büyük bir direnişe dönüşmüş olsa da, bu savaşın sonunda başarılı olamamıştır. Ancak, başarısız olmasına rağmen, Balakot Savaşı, Bengal ve Hindistan genelinde İngilizlere karşı güçlü bir direnişin sembolü olmuştur ve bölgedeki halk üzerinde kalıcı bir etki bırakmıştır. Bu olay, halkın ve özellikle Müslüman topluluklarının sömürgecilik karşıtı duygularını harekete geçiren önemli bir dönüm noktası olmuştur. Seyyid Ahmed'in mücadelesi, bölgedeki diğer bağımsızlık hareketlerine de ilham kaynağı olmuştur.

Makale, Hacı Şeriyatullah'ın önderliğinde başlatılan Faraizi Hareketi'nin önemini de tartışmaktadır. Faraizi Hareketi, Bengal'deki sosyal ve dini yapıyı yeniden şekillendirmeyi amaçlayan bir hareket olarak, yalnızca İngiliz yönetimine karşı bir direniş olarak değil, aynı zamanda dini uygulamaların arındırılması ve Hindu toprak ağalarına karşı sosyal adaletin sağlanması hedefiyle de şekillenmiştir. Faraizi Hareketi, Bengal'deki halkın dini ve toplumsal yapısını yeniden düzenlemeye yönelik bir kalkışma olarak doğmuş ve bölgedeki halkın Sufi liderlerin önderliğinde sosyal ve dini reformlar yapmalarını sağlamak için geniş kitleleri organize etmiştir.

Titu Mir'in liderliğindeki Bambu Kalesi Hareketi, Bengal'deki tarımsal direnişi dini bir canlanma ile harmanlayarak, halkı organize etme konusunda önemli bir adım atmıştır. Titu Mir, halkı hem ekonomik sömürüye karşı hem de İngiliz yönetimine karşı direnişe çağırmıştır. Bu hareket, Bengal'deki köylülerin ve çiftçilerin toprak ağalarına karşı direnişini ve daha adil bir toplum inşa etme çabalarını simgelemiştir. Bu direnişin dini bir boyutu da vardır; çünkü Titu Mir, halkı dini inançları etrafında birleştirerek, sadece ekonomik ve sosyal adalet için değil, aynı zamanda dini özgürlükler için de savaşmıştır.

Hilafet Hareketi, Hindistan'daki en önemli pan-İslamik hareketlerden biri olarak, 20. yüzyılın başlarında özellikle Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun çöküşüne karşı bir tepki olarak doğmuştur. Bu hareket, Hindistan'daki Müslümanları hem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nu savunmak hem de İngiliz sömürgeciliğine karşı birleşmek için örgütlemiştir. Bengal'deki Sufi liderler, Hilafet Hareketi'ni destekleyerek, Hindistan'daki diğer Müslümanlarla birlikte İngilizlere karşı ortak bir cephe oluşturmuşlardır. Bu hareket, yalnızca dini bir tepki değil, aynı zamanda siyasi bir direniş hareketi olarak da şekillenmiştir.

Sonuç olarak, bu makale, Bengal'deki İngiliz sömürge yönetimine karşı Sufi önderliğindeki direniş hareketlerini derinlemesine incelemektedir. Sufi liderler, sadece dini bir rehberlik sunmakla kalmamış, aynı zamanda halkı sömürgeci güçlere karşı organize ederek Bengal'deki bağımsızlık mücadelesine önemli katkılarda bulunmuşlardır. Bu direniş, yalnızca dini ve manevi anlamda değil, aynı zamanda toplumsal ve siyasi düzeyde de önemli bir etki yaratmıştır. Sufi liderlerin, İngiliz sömürgeciliğine karşı verdikleri mücadele, Hint Alt Kıtası'ndaki daha geniş anti-sömürgecilik mücadelesinin önemli bir parçası olarak tarihteki yerini almıştır.