



## The Quest of *Waqfs* During the Muslims Rule in Bengal

**Dr. Mahboob Alam**

Visiting Faculty in the Post Graduate Department of History at Behala College and Scholar of Islamic History and Culture.

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

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Research Paper

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### ABSTRACT

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The foundation of *waqf* emerged with the advent of Islam commenced by the Prophet Muhammad, followed by his companions and promulgated across the world. With the penetration of Islam in India, the aims and objectives of the *waqf* also promoted and paved the way to build common platform between the people irrespective of castes and creeds in the society. During the ages of Delhi Sultans, Bengal Sultans, their *wazirs*, *subehdaars*, *karkun* etc largely developed the schemes of *waqfs*. Besides its religious function, they extended its boundary in the social, cultural and economic fields across the country. However, some light has been shown in this regard in an article entitled “The Quest of *Waqfs* during the Muslims Rule in Bengal” is hereunder as follows.

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### Introduction

*Waqf*, the Islamic endowment, has its root from the Arabic word *waqafa* means the permanent dedication of own assets for the sake of Almighty and for the cause of Islam. The system for the establishment of *waqf* deliberated and conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad to promote the *sadqah* i.e. charity. The institution of *waqfs* are comprising of *masjid*, *idgah*, *maktab*, *madrasah*, *danishgah* (college), *danishqadah* (university), *khanqah*, *imambargah*, *maqbarah*, *qabristan*, *yatimkhana*, *shefakhana*, *musafirkhana*, *kutubkhana*, agriculture and non-agriculture land, tanks as well as landed estate etc which a pious Muslim assigned and endowed to get

benefits in *aakhirat* or on the Day of Judgment. The system of *waqf* promulgated by the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad and reached in the Indian sub-continent particularly through the mighty hands of *ahl-e-suffa*<sup>1</sup>, and later promoted by the sultans and emperors across the country. Sufi-saint of the concerned period propagated and preached the Islamic teaching as formulated and propounded by the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad and offered their duties for the service of the mankind. It was their efforts that Islamic teaching earnestly achieved the success across the country.

In Bengal, the Arab Muslims had already been arrived in order to promote their business transaction before the expedition of Malik Bakhtiyar Khalji through the river in the *khithah* or region of Shatijam situated at Chittagaon and Samandar at the mouth of the river Meghna. It is ascertained by the two coins of Abbasid era, excavated from Paharpur denotes 172 A.H correspondences to 788 C.E during the reign of the Caliph Haroon-al-Rashid and second from Mainamati denotes for the year 247-48 A.H correspondence to 861-862 C.E during the reign of Caliph Muntasir Billah.<sup>2</sup> *Tabqat-i-Nasiri* informed that when Malik Bakhtiyar Khalji embarked into the region with his eighteen horsemen, the people of the region could not realize that whether they might be horse seller or invaders and silently entered into the city. The event revealed that the Muslim traders from Arab, Persia Iraq, Samarkand and Bukhara etc had their correspondence and communication with Bengal for their business transaction before the invasion of Malik Bakhtiyar Khalji in Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

Later, the *Qafelah*<sup>4</sup> of *ahl-i-suffa* or sufi-saint arrived for the propagation of Islam in the Indian sub-continent even in Bengal. Ultimately, with the spread of Islam, social and cultural nature of the religion also extended across the country. These sufi-saint achieved progress to win the heart of the people by their activities for the sake of humanity and mankind irrespective of castes and creeds. They established their own *khanqah* and assigned them as *waqf* for the cause of Islam. In this regards, they played significant role to create a bridge between the people to get them assembled at one platform as



the symbol of unity. The *khanqahs*, sometime, is said to have performed the role of *musafirkhana* or guest house, *dar-al-khairaat*, house of the benevolence, *dar-al-shefa* or hospital. Scholars and the travelers during period were given much importance. They offered to stay in the *musafirkhana* during their journey. The people belonged to the poor and needy section of the societies was received their monthly allowances from the house of the benevolence and in case of their medical treatment, they were given free service from *dar-al-shifa*. Tradition revealed that the earlier sufi-saint who arrived in Bengal was Shah Sultan Rumi in Mymensing in the year 1053 C.E and was Shahid Baba Adam who became martyr being persecuted by Raja Ballala Sena in Bikrampur, Dacca, in 1119 C.E.<sup>5</sup>

However, the emergence of earlier *waqf* in Bengal has been revealed with the blessing advent of famous celebrated Sufi Hazrat Makhdum Jalaluddin Tabrizi, who arrived in Bengal between 1195 to 1200 C.E.<sup>6</sup> The earlier accounts of the Shaikh may be ascertained from the primary source like *Sekha Subhodaya* which was written in the Sanskrit language by Halayudha Mishra, a renowned minister of the king Laxmana Sena. The source is only account that elaborately deals with the life and activities of the Shaikh during the period concerned. Dr. Muhammad Enamul Haq is said to have reported that having seen the *karamaat* or miracles of the Shaikh and his activities in support of the poor and needy, the ruling King Laxmana Sena and his minister Halayudha Mishra became devotees of the Shaikh but they remained under their own religion. Raja had great respect on the Shaikh. He honored him with large numbers of assignment of tax free land for horizontal service of the humanity and sanctioned landed estates to build a *masjid* and a *khanqah* in the city of Panuda. The *Tazkirah-i-Awliyah-i-Hind*, is said to have reported that when the Shaikh arrived in Bengal, people welcomed him warmly with due respect and a *khanqah* was built and assigned as *waqf* in honour of the Shaikh Tabrizi. Sometime after his settlement in Pandua, Shaikh Tabrizi also purchased landed properties for the plantation of gardens and dedicated them as *waqf* for the maintenance of *muqim* or the residents, travelers, poor and needy as well as for the observance of other religious and charitable purposes.<sup>7</sup> He did his service till his death for the



sake of Almighty and for the cause of humanity and even after his death, the people irrespective of castes and creeds find their desires fulfill in his *asthana*. An event which may be narrated here in connection with Sultan Ali Mubarak Shah, the foster brother of Sultan Haji Ilias Shah that on returning by his journey, Ali Mubarak became tired and took rest under a shady tree, went into asleep, dreamt an aged person appeared before him introduced his name as Hazrat Shah Makhdum Jalal-Al-Din Tabrizi, and predicted him that, “we bestowed upon you kingdom, of Bengal. But you should build for us a shrine in the *muqaam* or the particular place”. Ali Mubark acknowledged the saying and agreed to build a shrine in honour of Shaikh”.<sup>8</sup> With the blessing of Shaikh Tabrizi, Ali Mubark Shah entered into the success and became the independent Sultan of Sonargaon region. But he forgotten the promises of the Shaikh and indulged into pomp and glory as well as in intoxication. One night, he dreamt old aged person again appeared and asked him “Ali Mubarak you have obtained the kingdom of Bengal but forgotten my bidding”. On very next morning the Sultan went to the *muqam* in search of the particular place, found it and constructed a shrine thereon in accordance of his oath and assigned it as *waqf* in honour of the Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi.<sup>9</sup>

However, the Bengal sultans, the Mughal viceroy of Bengal, independent *nawabs*, *nawab nazim* of Murshidabad even the British empire in India grants various forms of *waqfs* in honour of the shrine of Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi. The *waqf estate* named *Bais Hazari Waqf Estate* having twenty two thousand acres of *la-kharaj* or tax free land which still exists, registered and enrolled under the domain of the West Bengal State *Waqfs* Board vide enrolment case no.798 under the management of the *mutawalli* of the *waqf* estate. The *mutawalli*, since the creation of the *waqfs*, have been performing his duties in accordance of the *wasihat*, the last Will, of the Shaikh and still today poor and needy used to get free feeding and other religious and charitable purposes as *sadqah* used to observe<sup>10</sup>.

Simultaneously, Malik Bakhtiyar Khalji succeeded to establish the Muslim rule in Bengal in the beginning of the thirteen century. He was a man of the pious nature. He performed *sadqah*, the charity,

in support of needy and poor, He established numerous religious, charitable and educational institutions for the sake of Almighty. He constructed large numbers of *madrasah* as *waqf* for the sake of education and learning. He established hostels and dedicated these as *waqfs* for the *muta-allimun* or student, who flocked there to complete their studies under the guidance of the well trained *modarris* or teachers. Bakhtiyar Khalji also constructed *musafirkhana* for the facility of the travelers. For the sake of his subjects, he founded a new city, named it Gaud and declared it his *dar-ulkhilafa* or the capital city. He constructed roads and bridges as well as military out posts in different *qasbah* or the jurisdiction of his regime<sup>11</sup> as *waqf* for the welfare of his subject. During the reign of Sultan Iwaz Khalji, the system of the *waqf* was frequently followed. A *waqf* inscription of *khanqah* has been discovered from a place of *Sian* which is located in Birbhum district of West Bengal, denotes for the year 618 A.H correspondence to 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1221 C.E during the reign of Sultan Iwaz Khalji. The inscription has six lines writings, wherein in the fourth and half of the fifth line it is clearly mentioned that the *khanqah* is assigned as *waqf* for the *ahle-al Suffa*.<sup>12</sup>

Besides, *wazirs*, *subehdar*, and government officers also took keen interest for the assignment of the *waqf* in their respective regions. The most celebrated were Khan-i-Khannan Feroz Aitigin Al-Sultan and Khan Muhammad Zafar Khan, both of them were *subehdars* during the regime of Sultan Rukhn Al-Din Kaikas, son of Sultan Bughra Khan (1290-1301). Feroz Aitigin built two *masjids* one at Deokot (Gangarampur) in Dinajpur district dated of 1<sup>st</sup> Muharram 697 A.H/ 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 1297 C.E as inscription speaks, whereas other at Lakhisarai in Monghyr district of Bihar as *waqfs*<sup>13</sup> and Zafar Khan, who was one of the pious and humble persons, established the celebrated *Tirbeni Madrasah*<sup>14</sup> and a *masjid* in the Hooghly district, endowed them as *waqfs* for the sake of education and for the sake of Almighty as *waqf-i-Lillah*. An inscription which is found in the said *masjid* informed that the endowment was founded in the year 698 A.H /1298 C.E even a *kursinamah* i.e. family register of the *khadims* or caretakers of the said *masjid* is mentioned therein<sup>15</sup>. Madrasah which was founded by Zafar

Khan was named by him as *Daar-ul-Khairaat* i.e. house of the benevolence, as *waqf* for the religious, charitable as well as for the education purposes, where the students were complete their education and free meal and other charitable activities were being performed as per instructions of the *waqif*, or donor. After the death of Zafar Khan, a mausoleum was constructed in his honour on his grave by the Sultan Shams-al-Din Feroz Shah in 713 A.H/1313 C.E<sup>16</sup>.

The Iliyas Shahi dynasty also took enormous measures for their philanthropic as well as religious and charitable activities. Sultan Iliyas Shah (1345-58), who was the founder of the Ilias Shahi dynasty and seemed to be first Sultan or emperor in the country, who performed Haj, used the title of Haji and well-known in the history as Haji Ilias Shah. He was the great patron of learning and culture and had faith and respect upon the sufi-saint of the time. An inscription dated 2<sup>nd</sup> of *Shaban* 743 A.H/ 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1342 C.E<sup>17</sup> which has been discovered from a *masjid* at *Beniapukur* of Park Circus area in Calcutta, reported that Haji Iliyas Shah built a large *masjid cum madrasah* as the centre of learning in his capital and assigned it as *waqf*, where *muta-allimun* or students from the different parts of the regions flocked there for acquisition of knowledge and learning under the supervision and guidance of the able *mudarris*. During his reign, the celebrated Sufi Shaikh Akhi Siraj-al-Din, one of the disciples of Hazrat Shaikh Nizam-al-Din Awliyah, of the Chishti *silsilah* (order) and his spiritual successor Shaikh Ala-ul-Haque Pandvi and Shaikh Biyaabaani, were settled in Ferozabad<sup>18</sup> i.e. Pandua and received respect and higher status under the patron of Haji Iliyas Shah who allotted *la-kharaj* land for the maintenance of their *khanqahs* as *waqfs*. Sultan Ghiyas Al-Din Azam Shah, son of the Sultan Sikander Shah and grandson of Sultan Iliyas Shah surpassed all of his predecessors in his philanthropic activities. He established large numbers of *madrasahs* under his regime as well as outside India as *waqf* for the education as well as promotion of learning in his regime. The Sultan allotted huge grants in forms of *waqfs* for the up keep and maintenance of the *madrasahs* .<sup>19</sup> He had credit for the construction of the two famous *madrasahs* on the holy lands of Arabia, one in Makkah near *Umm-i-Haani* gate and other in

Madinah near *Bab-al-Salam* which are still exist. These were assigned as *waqfs* for the education wherein Islamic law (*shariah*) was taught in accordance of *Maliki* thought<sup>20</sup> and earned the fame with the name of *Madrasat-al-Bangala*<sup>21</sup>. The Sultan had heartily respected Hazrat Shaikh Alaul Haque who at once banished from Ferozabad (Pandua) to Sonargaon owing to jealousy of Sultan's father Sikander Shah. Sultan Azam Shah recalled the Shaikh from Sonargaon where the Shaikh spent two years of his life of banishment. He regretted on behalf of his father and honored him with grants of *waqfs* for his contribution for the service of humanity and for the maintenance of his *khanqah*.<sup>22</sup> With the allotment of grants, the Shaikh rapidly embarked into his philanthropic activities. He maintained his large *khanqahs* (both in Pandua and Sonargaon) wherein he performed his benevolent activities like distribution of food, lodging for students and other social and cultural activities were performed for the sake of mankind and earned great reputation and respect across the country.<sup>23</sup> Shaikh Alaul Haque Pandvi was succeeded by his worthy son named Nur Qutub-Al-Din Alam (d-1416) as his spiritual successor, who received early education alongwith his childhood friend Sultan Ghiya Al-Din Azam Shah under the guidance of Shaikh Hamid-al-Din Nagore, later supervised and guided by his father to complete *Eilm* or knowledge and ascetic qualities. He, after his father's death, continued their missionary zeal till his death, smoothly maintained *madrasah* and *khanqah* in Ferozabad (Panuda) by the grants allotted by the Sultan Ghiyas Al-Din Azam Shah and even after the death of Sultan he performed as political leader as and when required for the sake of country while Raj Kans or Raja Ganesh usurped the *musnud* of Bengal and placed his son Jadu alias Jala-Al-Din Muhammad to the throne.

Probably, the activities of Shaikh Nur Qutub Alam was not remained with his benevolence works, it is revealed that he also took initiative measures in the political affairs of the country. Sultan Jala Al-Din Muhammad, son of Raja Ganesh ascended to the *musnud* of Bengal by the blessing of Shaikh Nur Qutub Alam. The new Sultan had heartiest respect upon the Shaikh. Like other Sultans, he also assigned numerous grants as *waqf* for the maintenance of the *khanqah* and *madrasah* of the Shaikh



wherein the celebrated sufi-saint taught Islamic preaching and learning .<sup>24</sup> Having the *waqf* grants, Shaikh Nur Qutb-i-Alam maintained his ancestral *khanqah* and performed his sufi activities with high reputation. Besides, he was championed in the literary filed. He wrote various books but the remaining are *Anis-al-Ghuraba*, *Munis-al-Fuqara* and *Khanwada-i-Chistiyah*.<sup>25</sup> The *maktubat* of the Shaikh entitled *Ain-al-Aashqin* has been preserved in the *Subhan Allah* collection in the Maulana Azad Library, in the Aligarh Muslim University.<sup>26</sup>

An *waqf* inscription from the *asthana* of celebrated sufi, Shaikh Shah Jalal of Sylhet has been discovered, which is said to have reported that Sultan Yusuf Shah established a *danishgah* or college, named it *Darasbari* , the place of learning, and a *masjid* as *waqfs* in 884/1479 C.E in honour of the Shaikh. The college received its fame across the country, where *muta-allimun* from the different parts of the country used to attain the college to receive education in logic, arithmetic, medicine alchemy, geometry, astronomy and *Islamic laws* were being taught under the guidance and supervision of the able teachers of the time.<sup>27</sup>

The Sultans of Hussain Shahi dynasty surpassed the Iliyas Shahi dynasty. Sultan Ala-ud-Din Hussain Shah, who was the founder of Hussain Shahi dynasty, was a great patron of sufi-saint and art and literature. Languages like Arabic, Persian, Bengali and Sanskrit works made great progress and numbers of literarily works translated during the regime. For the promotion of education and learning, Sultan established a large *madrasah*, named it *Belbari* and assigned it as *waqf* for the sake of the education and learning particularly to impart education in Persian and Bengali languages.<sup>28</sup> During his regime Shah Qutubuddin Haqqani, an eminent sufi of the time, compiled a book entitled the *masalik-ul-mamalik* on mysticism in Persian language. *Reyaz-us-Salaatin* informed that the Sultan also established *masjids* and *musafirghanas* different places of his regime. He also had respect upon the Shaikh Nur Qutub Alam and bestowed huge land as *waqf* grants and assignments in honour of the Shaikh. He assigned several villages as *waqfs* for the maintenance of the *khanqah*, *musafirkhana* of the Shaikh Nur



Qutb Alam and used to visit every year to pay homage to the shrine of the holy Saint.<sup>29</sup> On the other hands, his trustworthy son Sultan Nasib Shah popularly known as Nusrat Shah established *Bagaha Madrasah* as *waqf* for the education and learning where advanced learning in Perso-Arabic as well as in Bengali used to impart. Besides, other subjects like logic, arithmetic, medicine alchemy, geometry, astronomy etc were being used to teach there.<sup>30</sup>

The Mughal supremacy began new trend for the religious grants of *waqfs* in Bengal. The establishment of political authority as well as cultural progress in new forum surfaced the beginning of new era under the Mughal *nizamate* of Bengal. The Mughal viceroys of Bengal earned fame for difference types of experiments in the field of economical progress in new *subah*. Although, the *bandobast* of Todar Mal left no stone for the enhancement of economical strength of the country but the implementation of the new assignment of *waqfs* grants paved the way for the prosperity in the religious as well culture filed. The grants of *waqf* provided financial assistance not only for the sake of *ulemas*, Muslim scholars, religious preacher, poor, needy but the other communities were also obtained benefits through the ages. The grants of *waqfs* also enhanced the prestige and honor of the awardees for their assignments. In the field of education and learning, *waqfs* played imperative role for the development of the societies on the equal ground irrespective of caste and creeds and these *waqf* grants helped scholars, historian chroniclers of the time in the field of historiography. All these assignments were designated as the *la-kharaj* i.e. free from any taxation as *waqfs* in order to generate income and provide the beneficial support for the concerned assignment. Numerous institutions of *waqfs* likes *masjid*, *idgah*, *madrasah*, *khanqah*, *musafirkhana*, *caravanserai*, *imambarah*, and shrines of the sufi-saint etc were frequently constructed and grants of *waqf* were assigned for the up keep and maintenance of such religious and public institutions at large. Apart from these grants, new assignment in the names of *madad-i-mash*, *wajh-i-maash*, *aiyema*, *al-tamgha* etc were introduced during the Mughal *nizamate* of Bengal in particular form and in categorically.



Under the *nizamate* of Prince Shah Shuja one of the sons of Emperor Shah Jahan, took keen interest for the development of socio-culture and religious progress in Bengal. He patronized sufis-saints and their shrines particularly *Shash Hazaari Waqf* Estate at *Jannatabad* (Gaur) and *Ferozabad* (Pandua) which has great importance in the history of the Sufism in Bengal. The Prince had faith and respects on *ahl-e-suffah* particularly his attachment with sufis of the abandoned *darl-ul-khilafah* of Bengal. It is prominent in the district of the present Maldah that when the Prince Shuja arrived in Gaur offered his *fatehakhawani*, the praise in honour of the Prophet Muhammad as well as for the sufi-saints of the said *khittah*, origin, and had wishes before the shrines. After fulfillment of the desires, he declared the *shahi farman* in order to grant *madad-i-maash* as *waqfs* in honour of the said shrines comprising of the *Makhdum Akhi Seraj Al Din*, *Shaikh Alaul Haque Pandvi* and *Nur Qutb-i-Alam*. The grants is said to have confirmed by the *Padshah Shahjahan* in accordance of lunar calendar dated 25<sup>th</sup> days of *Shaban*, 1058 A.H<sup>31</sup> for the up keep and maintenance of these shrines. *Shahzadah Muhammad Azim-us-Shaan*, a grandson of *Padshah Aurangzeb* and eldest son of *Prince Muhammad Muazzam Bahadur Shah*, had patronized shrines, *khanqahs* and *madrasah* of the sufi-saints of the time. A celebrated sufi-poet *Ibrahim Saqqah* popularly known as *Pir Bahram Saqqah* who was contemporary of *Padshah Jalauddin Muhammad Akbar*, settled in the district of *Sharifabad* (Burdwan) flourished most probably in the fifties of the sixteen century. His shrine was gathered by the large numbers of devotees. *Shahzadah Muhammad Azim-us-Shaan* assigned the religious grants of *waqfs* for the preservation of the shrine of the *Saqqah* as well as for its maintenance. The *waqf* estate of *Pir Bahram Saqqah* still exists in *Burdwan*, is maintained under the supervision of the *State Waqfs Board* of *West Bengal*. Devotees across the country irrespective of castes and creeds flocked and gathered there for the fulfillment of their desires and offered their *nazr-e-aquidat*, presentation, in honour of the saint.<sup>32</sup>

With the accession of *Nawab Murshid Quli Khan*, a great change happened under the *Mughal nizamate* of Bengal. The new viceroy was earned great fame and reputation by his moral character and

his service for the sake of Mughal rule in Bengal and earned the title of *haft- hazaar* as *munsab* for his remuneration. Padsha Aurangzeb had faith on him and entrusted him in order to take decision in pursuance of his verdict. When the Padshah died (1707 C.E), Murshid Quli Khan, like others, proclaimed his independent but owing to his good nature and character he still remained indirectly under the subjugation of the Mughal rulers of Delhi till his death and dispatched yearly contribution in honour of the *padshah* of the time . The benevolence activities of Murshid Quli Khan for the welfare of his subject surpassed him from other Mughal viceroys of Bengal. The Nawab had some of his *khas talluqas* which during his life time dedicated as *waqfs*. He constructed a treasury, a katra, a cathedral mosque, a monument, a reservoir and a large well and a tomb for him under the staircase. The *nawab* had no male issues, he nominated his maternal grandson Sarfaraz Khan as his heir apparent to the throne of Bengal as well as *mutawalli* of his *khas talluqas*.<sup>33</sup>

In pursuance of the rule and regulation as prescribed by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan , Sarfaraz Khan discharged his duty as *mutawalli* of the *khas talluqas* of *waqfs* of his maternal grandfather and remained aloof from the *musnud* of Bengal. Being provoked by his mother to take the charge of the administration of Bengal he neither claimed the throne nor objected his father Shujauddin Muhammad Khan who had declared as *nawab* of Bengal. Like his predecessors, Nawab Shujauddin Muhammad Khan also created *waqfs* during his regime in the *dar-ul-khilafah*. A record which has been discovered from the West Bengal State *Waqf* Board, speaks that Nawab constructed a *masjid* which still exists, well known by his name as Fazl-E-Khuda Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan Masjid.<sup>34</sup>

After the death of his father, Sarfaraz Khan ascended to the throne as the *nawab* of Bengal but was hunted with conspiracy of his own men and put to death. Mahabat Jung popularly known in the history as Alivardi Khan occupied the throne of Bengal and proclaimed himself as *nawab*, thus a new chapter begun in the history of Bengal with his ascendancy. He took various measures for the development of the state and enhanced the remaining prosperity of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. New



attempts were made for the encouragement of the education system in Bengal and large numbers of *maktabs* and *madarashs* were frequently constructed. For the up keep as well as expenditure, the *nawab* assigned the grants of *waqf* for the maintenance of such institutions. Particular records has been revealed in connection with the Endowment of Sitapur Masjid and Madrasah, situated in Hooghly district and its 2555 *Bighas* of lands as *waqfs* in heart of Calcutta including the Governor House or Raaj Bhawan, which was assigned as *waqfs* by Nawab Alivardi Khan by the royal *farman* written in Persian language.<sup>35</sup>

The system of *waqfs* promulgated by the sufi-saint, led by Sultans of Bengal, followed by the later Muslim ruler of the country adorned and promoted on the ground of various schemes in pursuance of the written forms of *farman*, *parwana* and *waqfnamah* which came into vogue and then followed by general Muslims at large. Some of the precious *waqfnamah* which still kepts together with the other historical inscriptions may be found in the different wings of government libraries as well as under the subjugation of State *Waqfs* Board of West Bengal.

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