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existence and eternal soul having no visible form or figure. These not only hold Friday sacred, but also showed some respect to western direction that Muslim also revered as *Qiblah*.¹⁶

The above mentioned new religious practices of *pirism* took the road of extension by inclusion of the innovations like reverence of the footprints of Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and reverence for *Panch Pir* (the five Pirs).¹⁷ Shariatullah movement considers all believes and practices of *pirism shirk* (polytheism).

Muslim society at that time was also victim of many *Bid-at* (innovations) rites and ceremonies. Muslims had not only adopted the dowry system, but they were also frowned at widow marriage. Dancing and consumption of wine was part of their festival practices.¹⁸ They not only participated in Purana-inspired religious processions, but also started planting banana tree around the residence of the girls that was menstruated first time.¹⁹ They forgot the message of Islamic equality and brotherhood under the impact of the Hindu caste system. The situation of Bengali Muslim society became worst when Muslims not only got divided on the basis of their lineage, but also started to adopt Hindu inter caste marriages rules to preserve their identities. This resulted in the dichotomy of *ashraf* and *atraf* on the basis of ethnic origin. The former claimed to come from central Asia, Afghanistan, Persia, Arabia, and North India while the latter were indigenous converters. The immigrant Muslims were hardly prepared to admit these indigenous converters to a position of equality. Hence, these converted people faced the same aggression of social customs, tribal restrictions, and unchangeable rules of marriage and inheritance even in the Muslim society. The stratification of

16 A fixed direction that a Muslim should face to perform his prayers.

17 Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteen Century)*, 34-41.

18 Shamim Akhtar, *Faith and Philosophy of Islam* (Delhi: Klapaz Publications, 2009), 142.

19 Iftekhar Iqbal, "Between Puritan Islamic and Syncretistic Muslim Tradition in Bengal: An Ecological Perspective on Fariazi Movement," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* 8(2011): 65.

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the Bengali Muslim society on the ethnic and cultural basis divided the society into Arab or *Azam* on the top of the social ladder who restricted themselves to marry others. The next group consisted of the genuinely *Sharif*, who had contracted marriages with non-*Sharif*. Third category included who were the products of mixed marriages, but succeeding in contracting marriages with the daughters of genuine *Ashraf*. The fourth category was those who were non-Arabs immigrants to Bengal and contracted marriages with local converters. Lowest in the social scale were those local converters who failed to establish connection with the recognized *ashrafs*.²⁰ Beside these religious issues the political and social conditions of the Muslims were deprived by the taxes. All these matters motivated Shariatullah to set in motion his movement to regenerate the Muslim society.²¹

Therefore, Shariatullah sets the criteria of Quranic authority and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad to check all these anomalies. This reform movement insists that mere belief in God is not enough unless it is associated with complete adherence in the unity of God. This can be achieved only by negating all kinds of association and partnership with Him. Shariatullah's interpretation appeared antagonistic with the contemporary Bengali interpretation of the *Tauhid*. Contemporary Bengali interpretation of *Tauhid* had accommodated many practices of *pirism* (*per* worshipping).²²

He declared a shrine based rituals incompatible with Islam.²³ He denounces and abolishes all popular un-Islamic rites and ceremonies like servile devotion to the Prophet (P.B.U.H) or to the *pirs*, holding of the *urs* (death anniversary of *pirs*),

20 Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 a Quest for Identity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 8-9.

21 Akhtar, *Faith and Philosophy of Islam*, 142.

22 Faisal, *Haji Shariatullah's Faraizi Movement History-Da'wah and Political Ideology*, 122-23.

23 Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah Jihad in South Asia* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 138.

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and participation in *Muharam*. In the domain of the social plane, he denounces the caste prejudices because it is contrary to the spirit of the Quranic brotherhood of the Muslim nation. He emphasizes on equality of all the members of the Muslim nation despite of their professional and ethnic background. He rejected the superstitious practices like the rites of *Chatti* (6th day ceremony) and *Chilla* (the period between the first and the fortieth day after the birth of a baby).²⁴

The Shariatullah message of religious purification was bi-dimensional as he was aware of the inseparable correlation between Islamic tenets and Islamic society. The existence of the former in the absence of the latter was impossible. So, he emphasizes the revival of the Muslim identity by a molding Bengali Muslims life according to Islamic teachings that will eradicate all innovation. He starts his mission with the “call to return to the *Faraiz* (the obligatory duties of Islam), especially the profession of faith (*kalimah*), attending daily prayers (*salat* or *namaz*), fasting in Ramadan (*sawm* or *rozah*), paying the poor tax (*zakat*) and pilgrimage to Makkah (*hajj*). Along with these rites Shariatullah stressed on the principal of *Tauhid* (monotheism).”²⁵

Apart from these reformations Shariatullah infused the spirit of *Jihad* (Holy War) against the foreign rulers. He once declared that it was obligatory on Muslims to wage war against aggressors though no war was waged during his life.²⁶

Although *Faraizi* reformist activities cannot be ignored, but it became suspicious firstly, due to its doctrine of suspension of *juma* and *eid* prayers by declaring India *dar ul harb* (house of war) as long as it was ruled by non-Muslims

24 Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteen Century)*, 54-55.

25 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 19.

26 Farhat Tabassum, *Deoband Ulema's Movements for the Freedom of India* (New Delhi: Jamait Ulama-I-Hind, 2006), 13.

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(Britishers).²⁷ Secondly, *Faraizis* also separated their mosques from other traditionalist and hot debates were conducted by their opponents.²⁸ Thirdly, They adopted the non-participatory policy towards the funeral prayer (*janaza*) of those Muslims who were not punctual in their observation of *salat*. The *Faraizis* were bitterly criticized by Maulana Karamat Ali²⁹ and his followers. They dubbed *Faraizi* as the *Kharijis* of Bengal.³⁰

Thus, two opinions were prevailing in Bengal regarding them; some considered them the revivalist of Islamic spirit while other tag them the title of extremist. The apparently two opposite opinions regarding *Faraizi* movement are due to the different interests of the respective Muslim classes. *Faraizi* movement criticizes the *pirism* because these reformers consider *pirism* not only doctrinal but also the economic exploitation of the masses by the *pirs*. In the doctrinal side the *Faraizi's* believes that the distinction between the veneration and actual worship is hardly clear in the mind of the average Muslim. This belief of the *Faraizi's* makes them to denounce such practices, without paying any heed to whatever the intentions devotees have.³¹ While on the economic and social side *Faraizis* were against the material benefits and lucrative trade of *pirs* like selling the amulets and charms. In doing so, these spiritual guides not only attained the social status and religious functionalists but undisputedly swayed over the social and religious life of

27 Juan Eduardo Campo, "Encyclopedia of Islam

"(New York: Facts On File Library of Religion and mythology, 2009), 226.

28 Sheikh Muhammad Akram, *Mooj E Kausar* (Lahore: Nazim Adara Saqafat-e-Islamiyah, 2003), 59.

29 Maulana Karamat Ali was the founder of a puritanical Islamic movement and termed his doctrine Taaiyuni movement. He denounced music, Muharam's tazia, urs and fatiha. In contrast to Raraizi and wahabism he declared that India was not Dar ul harb.

30 Faisal, *Haji Shariatullah's Faraizi Movement History-Da'wah and Political Ideology*, 124.

31 Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 a Quest for Identity*, 60-61.

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common man. Reformist not only intends to curb their undue influences, but also tries to re-establish the direct contact between man and God.³²

The emotional attachment of the average Bengali Muslim to his *pir*, living or dead and his faith in his immense miraculous powers was so deep and pervasive that no amount of denunciation could undermine his devotion.³³ The strength of such institution could be determined from the fact that the *Faraizi* reformers were absorbed in the course of time. Not long after the death of the Haji Shariatullah his son Dudu Miyan allowed himself to be referred as *pir*.³⁴

Mullahs and *pirs* were not opposed to all that the reformists stood for. In fact, these *Mullahs* and *pirs* wanted to eradicate or modify some of the well-known practices, such as the celebration of *Muharram* and the Hindu festivals. Their principal opposition to the reformist propaganda was directed against the reformists' moves to undermine some of the established religious institutions from which they derived their livelihood.³⁵

The traditionalist opposition grew in intensity, especially when their religious leaders, the *Mullahs* and *pirs*, came under sharp criticism from reformist.³⁶ While on the other side these reformist got supported by the derived classes of the masses. The reason of this fame and popularity of the *Faraizi* movement was connected with its twofold objectives: protecting Muslims from Hindu *Zamindars* and to secure justice for Muslims masses.³⁷ Dudu Mian (son of Shariatuulah) consolidated the Muslim peasantry around an agrarian ideology that land

32 Ibid., 60.

33 Ibid., 61.

34 Ibid., 62.

35 Ibid., 65.

36 Ibid., 54.

37 Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, "The Roots of Bangladeshi National Identity: Their Impact on State Behaviour," (2009): 3.

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belonged to God. He further motivated them to reject the collection of rent or levying taxes because it was against the divine law.³⁸ He bitterly criticized the contribution of the money by Muslims to Hindu *pajas* (worships) and ceremonies and declared these Muslims contributors as *kefir* (infidels).³⁹ He tried to maintain cohesive forces among his followers by the construction hierarchical village organization. On the top of the hierarchy was Dudu Mian, who possessed the designation of *Ustad* and at the bottom was *Khalifah* at the village level. The responsibilities of *khalifah* were diverse that included the calling of people to fundamental teachings of Islam, construction of mosque (with appointment of Imam), conducting marriage and funeral, building schools, maintaining peace etc.⁴⁰ Beside this system Dudu Mian also managed to organize an army of several thousand militant peasantry to resist the Hindu *Zimandar* and Indigo Britisher planters.⁴¹ That threatened the superior positions of wealthy landlords and money lenders.⁴² The endeavors of *Faraizi* movement regarding religious reformation and peasantry awakening consciousness did not go unhampered. Hindu and British indigo planters smelled the danger for them in the growing unity of the peasant and *Faraizis*. They planned to take maximum advantages of the adversaries between the *Faraizis* and traditional Muslims for their own benefits. In the end due to Hindus, British indigo planters and the opposition to the Traditionalists *Faraizi* movement failed to maintain its position in Bengal. The popularity of this movement was affected by the rise of modernism in the Bengal that dominated this Islamic revivalism. The modernism thus succeeded in

38 Śekhara Bandyopādhyāya, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2004), 163.

39 Nurul Hussain Chowdhury, "Faraizi Movement and Zamindars of Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Story of a Peasant Movement," *Journal of International Studies* 9(2013): 119.

40 Akhtar, *Faith and Philosophy of Islam*, 144.

41 David Westerlund Ingvar Svanberg, ed. *Islam Outside the Arab World* (Oxon: Routledge, 1999), 219.

42 Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 a Quest for Identity*, 50.

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replacing this revivalist attitude within Muslims with rational and scientific attitude.⁴³

Faraizi movement with all hindrances succeeded in instilling the spirit of Islam in Muslims by eradicating Hindu rituals and ceremonies from Muslim Bengali society.⁴⁴ They achieved their mission by mobilizing Bengali Muslims masses through preaching true Islamic teachings.⁴⁵ He approached his audience effectively through Bengali language as a medium of education and communication rather using Urdu, Arabic. Their efforts became fruitful when in *Faridpur* district the Muslims not only refrained from having musical parties, but also avoided the company of those Muslims who played music.⁴⁶ Beside this movement, it failed to get the support of *Hanafi* Muslims. Firstly, it appeared to them a form of *Wahhabi* movement who had rejected the popular religious practices of *pirism*. Secondly,

This movement enjoyed mass support of peasantry class who were consciously groomed by the movement to fight for their rights against the oppressive landlords. Latter, movement employed group formation strategy for organizing the villagers into a circle of 300 to 500. As the focus of this movement was to purify Muslims society from Hindu ritual and ceremonies, but movements were never hostile towards Hindu peasantry class. On the other hand, this deprived Hindu was also supporting the movement against Hindu landlord and Britishers.⁴⁷ Movements continued its agenda of the Muslim reform movement until the early

43 Khan, "Fara'idi Movement," 125-35.

44 Abdul Ali Achakzai, *Roza Tareekh Islam Wa Islami Tahreeken* (Quetta: Maktaba Waliyah, 2012), 243.

45 Taj I. Hashmi, "Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh: Genesis, Dynamics and Implications" in *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia*, ed. Satu Limaye, Robert Wirsing, and Mohan Malik (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), 43.

46 Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Power, Politics and the People: Studies in British Imperialism and Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 427.

47 Stuart Rutherford, *The Pledge: Asa, Peasant Politics, and Microfinance in the Development of Bangladesh* (New York: Oxford Press, 2009), 9.

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20th century, but it ceased its political activities after the imprisonment of Dudu Miyan at the great uprising against British rule.⁴⁸

In the end it can be concluded that the role of *Faraizi* movement as first Muslim reform movement cannot be denied although its scope was local. The movement not only succeeded in reviving the doctrine of *Tauhid* but also accomplished its goal of instilling inclination of Muslims towards fundamental Islamic prayers. Movement's bi-dimensional strategy also brought fruits in purifying Muslim Society from Hindu beliefs and rituals. Beside this *Faraizi* as a religious movement failed to get the support from traditionalist Muslims due to Sunni Muslims suspicions regarding this movement. Firstly, it appears to them a *Wahhabi* movement in disguise of *Hanafites* and secondly, their religious leader's pīrs and *Mullahs* opposite *Faraizi's* vehemently. Though *the Faraizi movement* was launched as a religious reform movement, but latter it also assumed the role of a revivalist peasantry movement. This movement not only succeeded in united peasants through its agrarian theology and system of *Khalifah* but also equipped peasant to fight for their rights against *Zamindars* and Britishers.

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48 Campo, "Encyclopedia of Islam", 226.

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**Role of *Faraizi* Movement in Revival of Muslim
Identity and Peasantry Consciousness
(in Nineteenth Century Bengal)**

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Abstract

Bengal is the land of a pluralistic society from time immemorial and in nineteenth century this land was the seat of religious diversity and interaction. These encounters took multidimensional tracks; the first track emerged as the result of melting of individual religious identities into a syncretical form of religion. This first track was substituted by the next track of the reawakening of individual religious identities that culminated in the nineteenth century Bengal in the form of social-religious reform movements. Among these movements *Faraizi* movement was the first Muslim reform movement that was commenced by Haji Shariatullah. Following questions which will be addressed in this regards are that, what were the ecological stimulus nineteenth century Bengali society that gave birth to this religious reform movement? What strategy was adopted by the movement for reviving Muslims identity? By whom and why *Faraizi's* were given the name *Kharijis* of Bengal? Why this movement was opposed by traditionalist Muslim while supported by deprived Muslim masses? What role was played by this movement in reviving Peasantry consciousness in nineteenth century Bengal? Was this movement succeeded in attaining its goals?

Key Words: Haji Shariatullah, *Fariz*, *pirism*, Peasant.

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Faraizi movement was not only considered to be the first among the reform movements of nineteenth century Bengal but also appeared as a first organized reform movement of India. It was a religious-political, socioeconomic and cultural movement launched by Haji Shariatullah in 1818.¹ This movement was universally and indigenously fabricated. In a universal perspective it could be classified with other religious revivalist's movements like *Wahhabism* of Arabia, *Salafyah* movement of Egypt, *Sannusiyah* movement of Libya, *Fulani* movement of Nigeria, *Paduri* movement of Indonesia and *Triqah-i- Muhammadiyah* and *Ahl-i-Hadith* movements of subcontinent.² These movements contributed the conceptual, symbolic and intellectual framework of this revivalist scheme.³ Indigenous aspect of this movement seemed to take its motivation from the threat that the clear demarcating between Islam and other indigenous religions was melting gradually. Haji Shariatullah tried to revitalize Islam with Islamic spirit of Quran, *hadith* and *Sunnah*.⁴ But the socioeconomic crisis of the Bengali society in nineteenth century broadened its indigenous span. Now this religious reform movement worked not only for religious revivalism, but extended its program to protect the Muslim community from the socioeconomic oppression of the European Indigo planters and Hindu Banyans.⁵ The founder of this movement, Haji Shariatullah was born in 1781 A.D. at Shumail⁶ in the house of Abd al Jalil Talukdar who was not a man of great means. He died when Shariatullah was

1 Muhammad Ahsanullah Faisal, *Haji Shariatullah's Faraizi Movement History-Da'wah and Political Ideology* (Dhaka: Shariatia Library, 2010), 10.

2 Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, "Fara'idi Movement," *Islamic Studies* 9:2(1970): 1.

3 Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, vol. 3 (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18.

4 Ibid.

5 Khan, "Fara'idi Movement," 124-26.

6 It is a village in the Madaripur but latter on transferred to the district of Faridpur in 1837A.D.

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hardly eight years old. Thereafter his uncle Azim ud Din became his custodian. His early life was emptied of proper education. When he became twelve he ran from his uncle's house in Calcutta, where he fortunately met Mawlana Bisharat Ali. He was a teacher of the holy Quran who enrolled Shariatullah in Quran classes. The completion of the reading of the Holy Quran made Shariatullah to proceed to Phurphura⁷ to take lessons in Arabic and Persian languages on the advice of his teacher. Within two years he attained considerable fluency and thence proceeded to his other uncle in Murshidabad who was attached to the Murshidabad court. His uncle company proved beneficial for him as he refined his Arabic and Persian languages under his guidance for one year. Then his uncle decided to visit his native village Shamail with his wife and Shariatullah. On the way they met a boat disaster and Shariatullah had to bear the burden of his uncle and aunt's death. This calamity made Shariatullah to abandon the idea of visiting his native village. Shariatullah decided to go to his old teacher Mawlana Bisharat Ali who had decided to migrate to Makkah due to his intense disgust for British regime. Shariatullah also wished to accompany him. They both set out for Arabia about 1799.⁸

His stay in Arabia constituted the period of his proper Islamic education that was comprised of three phases regarding his Islamic education. He spent his initial two years in the studentship of Mawlana Murad, who taught him Arabic literature and Islamic Jurisprudence. The second phase, which is the most important and longest phase constituted the period of fourteen years. During this phase, he took guidance from the Tahir Sonbal who taught him all branches of religious sciences including *Sufism*. The third phase begun, when Shariatullah got reluctantly

7 Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan, *History of the Fara'idi Movement in Bengal, 1818-1906* (Pakistan Historical society, 1965), 2.

8 Ibid., 2-3.

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permission from his teacher Tahir Sonbal to study the subtleties of Islamic ideals, probably due to the fear or disapprobation of rationalism. But it is still debatable that whether Shariatullah attended any regular course at the great University of al-Azhar. However, he spent long hours at the library of al-Azhar. Shariatullah went to Makkah to pay a short visit to Madinah with the intention to go back to Bengal for the propagation of Islamic doctrines. After twenty years Shariatullah returned home and started his *Faraizi* movement 1818 A.D.⁹ *Faraizi* movement began its new journey with great impetus¹⁰ after Shariatullah's second visit to Makkah with the blessings of his teacher Tahir Sonbal. This reform aimed to target the eradication of all innovations from Bengali society. This movement was transformed from religious reform movement to socio-political and economic reform movement¹¹ by his son Dudu Miyan (1819-62) after Shariatullah's death.

In nineteenth Century, Bengali society was the habitat of different religions; Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. The long contacts of Islam with other religions had facilitated the assimilation of many non-Islamic beliefs, warships and even festivals in Islam that were conflicting Islamic teachings. But it seems unjust if localized Bengali religion is considered only reason of innovations in Islam because Muslims immigrant imported many superstitions and innovations with themselves. Among these innovations *Sufism* could be placed on top in its far reaching influence and affect.¹² One thing is clear; however, that precise demarcation could be drawn between the early *Sufism* and later heterodox

9 Ibid., 3-7.

10 Ibid., 11-12.

11 Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal (Thirteen to Nineteen Century)*, 1st ed. (Calcutta: Ratana Prakashan, 1972), 57.

12 Muhammad Mohar Ali, *History of the Muslims of Bengal*, 1st ed., IB vols., vol. Survey of Administration, Society and Culture (Riyadh Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa'UD Islamic University, 1985), 800.

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mysticism. The early *Sufism* in Bengal was the complete reflection of Islamic teachings, without divorcing a single injunction of *Shariah*. Their Knowledge regarding Quran and ḥadith ranked them in the *ulama* of the first order, who devoted their lives to preaching and inculcating Islamic knowledge from mosques. From the sixteenth century onwards, the originality and purity of *Sufism* were contaminated by the influences of Hindu *yogis* and *tantrikism* that resulted in the heterodox mysticism, having an offshoot called *pirism*.¹³

Etymologically, the word *pir* means old, but in Bengali Islam it generally denoted the spiritual instructor (*sufi*) who is believed to have acquired super-human powers. He was considered to have the power of being present at several places at a time, relieved the poor, cured the patients and gave life to death, and predicted the future. These *pirs* used to live in a religious institution called *Khanqah*¹⁴ and after the death of a *pir*, he was usually buried in his *Khanqah*. Later on, these *Khanqahs* and tombs of the dead *pirs* became the places of pilgrimage, where pilgrims made offerings to living *pirs* or to the souls of the dead ones. But this concept was not Bengali in origin rather it came to Bengal from west through North India with the immigrants. These foreign ideas got firm roots in Bengal due to the prevalence of similar indigenous worshiping practices like *Chaityas* (*Stupas*) in Buddhism and identical ideas of *avatarism* in Hinduism.¹⁵ These overlapping ideas soften the land for introducing the new mystical cults like *Dharma* cult and *Satya Pir* cult. *Dharma* cult made its appearance in the 15th century by discarding the caste system. This cult emphasizes the equality of man and advocated the worship of *Dharama Thahura* that represents an all-embracing

13 Ibid., 802.

14 It is a persian word that denotes a building especially designed for the gathering of Sufi brotherhood and spiritual training of their students.

15 Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslim in Bengal (Down to A.D. 1538)* (Dacca: The Asiatic society of Pakistan, 1959), 162-65.