

HĀJĪ SHARĪ'AT-ALLĀH

The Founder of the *Farā'īdī* Movement

(A.D. 1781—1840)

By

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Early Life :

Hāji Shari'at Allāh, the founder of the *Farā'īdī* movement of Bengal, came to prominence only after he started this religious reform movement about the age of 38<sup>1</sup>. He was born of a petty *Tālūkdār* family and hence did not claim a high or aristocratic birth. It is, therefore, not expected that his early life should have been recorded in a horoscope or family genealogy. Naturally, the chronology of his life has been a subject of endless controversy among scholars.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, a few fresh sources including one tomb inscription, two manuscript biographies—one in Bengali and another in Persian—and a number of printed Bengali *Puthis*,<sup>4</sup> which have fallen into our hands, have put us on a more advantageous footing to attempt a fuller account of his life.

<sup>1</sup> Hāji Shari'at Allāh was born in A.D. 1781 (see "Tomb Inscription of Hāji Shari'at Allāh", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Dacca, vol. III, 1958, p. 195), and started his reform movement in A.D. 1818 (see *infra*).

<sup>2</sup> See *J.A.S.P.*, vol. III, p. 187, foot note 4; J.E. Gastrell: *Geographical and Statistical Report of the Districts of Jessore, Fāreedpore and Backergunge*, Calcutta, 1868 (hereafter referred to as *Jessore, Fāreedpore and Backergunge*), p. 36, No. 151; and *Translation of Proceedings held in two cases tried in 1847 before the Session Judge of Dacca in which Doodoo Miyān and his Followers belonging to the Sect of Haqjees or Ferazees*, Calcutta, Military Orphan Press, 1848 (hereafter referred to as *Trial of Dudu Miyān*, p. 268, which confirms that the Hāji was a petty landholder and possessed a estate of his own.

<sup>3</sup> For an elaborate discussion of the controversies, see *J.A.S.P.* vol. III, p. 189f.

<sup>4</sup> These were recovered by the present writer in 1948 and 1949 and are preserved at the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Dacca.