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# Sayyed Shahzaman and his son Abdullah

## Early History of Jawar Sayyed Bari and its Langar Khana

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### INTRODUCTION

I have tried to write the story of my ancestors in this booklet, looking at them primarily as human beings rather as saints without human failings, and therefore my account will perhaps differ from possible others, and might even make some of my relations unhappy, but I have done my best to find everything that I could about their inspirational lives and write the truth as I saw it to the best of my ability. The story is based on documents I have gathered over the last ten years, the search ending in December 2014. In these pages, I have also investigated, the contradictions that I found in my source documents, which I have tried to resolve with a view to extracting the truth, wherever it was possible to do so. Therefore this narrative could be of particular interest to a thinking mind.

I am much indebted to the book of my nephew Ashraf which is a great work that he has published, and is referenced in the text below as **sources "A"**. I recommend everyone to read his book, even though I have pointed out some very minor discrepancies in it. The book has many interesting details on Pirdada's life, such as his sleeping arrangement, his keeping of a needle and thread in his house (for repairing damaged clothes), an earthenware water pitcher with water from rivers which he used to drink, and so on – none of which have been captured in my narrative, but all of them are true as I remember them. There are also many other interesting aspects of Pirdada's life which can be found only in his book. Thanks again to Ashraf for this book. My narrative, which is more analytical, is based largely on the two manuscripts referred to below as M and R. For manuscript M, I thank my cousin Manu Bhai Sahib, who gave it to me long ago, and for manuscript R, I thank its scribe whose name is likely to be Rojoni Kanto Sheel and also my nephew Rifat who found it recently in my Pirdada's house and sent it to me. These sources have been more fully described at the end of this book under a section called Sources, placed before the Appendices. The reader may find it useful to browse through this Sources section before starting on the main text for a clearer understanding of the material presented below.

There were times when I thought I might not be able to complete this work. Now that I have completed it, I am most grateful to God. However despite my best efforts to eliminate them, I suspect some English language errors, mostly perhaps typos (I am a very bad typist), are still left in this work. My apologies for these, but if you happened to notice any such errors and email them to me, I shall be most obliged.

As mentioned above, there are three Appendices presented at the end of the main text after the section on Sources:

**Appendix A** lists our Sayyed Ancestry

**Appendix B** contains a list of the scanned files that I have created from the Bengali source documents R and M (see below), and also two copies of *Tatthyabhash*, one is the scan of the printed version and the other is the scan of a handwritten version, both of which are of course in Bengali. I thought of translating *Tatthyabhash* into English, but I am not sure I am up to it, nor can I think of anyone who would benefit from my English translation.

**Appendix C** discusses the contradictions I found in A, M and R, some of which have been discussed in the main text below. It is hoped that someone in Jawar, perhaps my nephew Ashraf, will study this Appendix C now or in the future with a view to reconciling the contradictions I have highlighted.

**If you succeed in producing a Bengali Translation, then drop the Apprndices B and C from that translation, as they would be unnecessary.**

**Dedication:** This booklet is dedicated to all those who are at present or would be in the future interested in the lives of Shah Sufi Sayyed Shahzaman and his great son Shah Sufi Baba Ajab Shah Sayyed Abdullah of Jawar.

Finally some Bengali words: In Bengali, the great grandfather is barababa, a grandfather is dada, father is baba, a paternal uncle is chacha, any male cousin of one's grandfather is also a dada, as any male cousin of one's father is a chacha, while any female cousin of one's father is a fufu. Any male cousin of oneself is a brother (Bhai), any female cousin is a sister (an older sister is often addressed as Bubu). Bara is senior such Barachacha, Barafufu, Barabhai, etc. And similarly for the mother's side, which I shall explain as and when necessary. Lastly I have used BD for Bangabda (Bengali Calendar) and CE (Common Era), formerly AD, for Gregorian Calendar.

# SHAH SUFI SAYYED SHAHZAMAN IBN SHAMS

This is the story I gathered from various pieces of Bengali notes in my possession. The main sources: a written manuscript, which Manu Bhai Sb (Sb is short for Sahib) gave me long ago, referred to below as M. Much of it is identical with the document of Rojoni Kanto Sheel, referred to below as R. The differences will be mentioned in due course. I have also consulted Ashraf's book, referred to below as A, but it contradicts with M and R in many places, as mentioned above. In these contradictions I have assumed M and R as more reliable. I have also heard stories in my childhood about my Barababa (great grandfather) from my Pirchacha, which has some contradictions with M and A, which I have pointed out in the relevant places. Observe that professionally I am a scientist, who is naturally reluctant to accept stories as true without real evidence. Therefore in several places I have analysed events and expressed scepticism about their veracity.

The exact year of Shahzaman's birth is not known – it is assumed in M to be around 1790 CE, and in A to be around 1796 CE, but neither explain how they came to their differing assumptions. He was born in a Sayyed and Pir family in a village called Kenray (with a nasal pronunciation of the letter *n*), 12 miles north of Tupai (or Tupee) near Peshawar, both Kenray and Tupai lying on the bank of the river Indus. Tupee is a city on a mountain shaped like a tupee (i.e. a cap), and is distinguished at present by its well-known technical university. Shahzaman's grandfather Marwan (or Mardan) was the 39th descendant of Khalifa Ali and Fatima, through their son Imam Hussain. He had two sons: Shams and Hussain Shah. Shams had three sons: Muhammad Zaman, Shahzaman and Mir Zaman, and two daughters, while Hussain Shah had a son Fazal Shah, as shown in the table below for the Shahzaman and Fazal Shah branch. If Hussain Shah, Fazal Shah or Ahmad Shah had other children, this has not been recorded in my source document.

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 40. Shams                      | 40. Hussain Shah   |
| 41. Shahzaman                  | 41. Fazal Shah   |
| 42(a). Ahmadzaman (1846-1908)  | 42. Ahmad Shah<br>(Tirmizi Quom, 1342 al-Hijri, 1923 CE)<br><br>We do not have the names of any<br>other members of this branch. |
| 42(b). Badiuzzaman (1847-1910) |  |
| 42(c). Abeduzzaman (1850-1927) |  |
| 42(d). Daughter (1852 - ? )    |  |
| 42 (e) Abdullah (1854 - 1941)  |  |

Shahzaman settled in Jawar, Kishorganj, from 1260 Bangabda (1854/55 CE). The death-dates of my grandfathers were given to me by Ashraf.

We do not know what happened to Shahzaman's siblings. The fact that his uncle's (Hussain Shah's) descendants have been listed, but no mention had been made of the children of his own siblings (Muhammad Zaman and Mir Zaman) might mean that all his siblings perished possibly in the flood (see below), along with their children if any. I also do not understand what does Tirmizi Quom 1342 AH mean? It could be that this branch was the only surviving closest relations of Shahzaman, and was known as the Tirmizi Quom, in 1342 AH (1923 CE). Is 1923 the year when Barachacha and Fufa visited that area in search of our ancestors? If not then why 1923 is mentioned there? Did Barachacha and Fufa meet Ahmad Shah (above) and or his descendants? It is said that they (Barachacha and Fufa) went to the local Government office there, which kept record of Shahzaman's ancestry for the correct distribution of *ushr-e- Ali* (see below) and in that office they registered Shahzaman's descendants in Jawar, but they did not say if they had met any blood relation there. I suspect they did not. Finally we have no other names nor any address of any of our blood relations there. It is strange, but Barachacha

himself told me (I was then a school boy) that “I have established a link for the future generations – the rest only God knows”.

As Sayyeds, the family used to receive 1/10 of the produce of the local people as *ushr-e- Ali* (one-tenth as the share of Ali. The Arabic term *ushr* means one-tenth from the Arabic word *Ashara* (ten). The collection of *ushr-e-Ali*, had two consequences for the family: (i) their list of ancestry was kept by the local authority (to distribute *ushr-e-Ali* and to avoid disputed claims), and (ii) the family was reasonably well-off. Because of (i), it was possible for my Barachacha and Fufa to trace the ancestors when they visited that area perhaps in 1923. By the way, the Aga Khan also gets a similar one-tenth from his followers, which these days he spends, as I understand it, for the services of his world-wide community. He is very rich and hence does not need any *ushr-e-Ali* for himself.

Sham moved from Tupee to Kenray where he was the local *amir*, and where Shahzaman was born and lived with his father. Shahzaman's first marriage produced a son who was named Ahmadzaman, but both the mother and the son died shortly afterward. His second marriage also produced a son, but both perished in an unprecedented flood in the river Indus in around 1836 CE, during the reign of *Amir* Doost Muhammad Khan (1826-39, 1843- 63) of Afghanistan who controlled the Peshawar area as well. The river was dry for six-months, but suddenly one day following a torrent of rain over some weeks, a huge volume of water came down the river bursting its banks, and carrying away everything in its sway (perhaps like the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 26 December, 2004 – I was in the Tsunami area in Sri Lanka on that horror day). Hearing of the flood, but not realising its speed and extent, Shahzaman sent his family to a nearby high ground and he himself went to gather the goats they kept. But he was swept away by the flood. He lost consciousness, which he regained after a few days, when he found himself lying near a riverbank but in a faraway place. It took him some days to regain his physical strength, before he could return to his home to look for his family. When he came home, he saw only devastations all around, but no living creatures – the houses were gone, as were the people and animals. After months of futile search he concluded that they all were washed away by the flood along with everyone else in that area. However, in the Pirchacha's story, Shahzaman escaped the flood by climbing a very high tree, and was not washed away unconscious. [My comment: What happened to his two brothers and two sisters? We hear nothing of them in his narrative. Also in the original story I have heard from Pirchacha, it was only his wife and son who died, no mention was made of his parents].

He was at that time (1836?) about 40 or 46, depending on which birth year one accepts. Losing wife and son twice in succession, he became a changed man. He lost interest in this life and decided to live like a wandering Sufi, visiting holy places, such as Mecca and Medina. With this intention, he left home for Kabul, where he met a blind Pir, named Ghaus-e-Azam Hazrat Akhand, who used to teach in a mosque. Although blind, this Pir was renowned for his spiritual attainment. Shahzaman became his disciple and started serving him as his khadem. Being satisfied with the piety and devotion of Shahzaman, the Pir granted him *khelafa* (permission to act as a Pir). Shahzaman then decided to resume his journey to the holy places and went to his Pir to bid goodbye. It is said that the Pir was so accomplished that he could read peoples' minds and therefore there was no need to speak before him. Following the custom, Shahzaman set before the Pir without saying anything. The Pir read his thought correctly but advised him to go to Bengal instead, where he would have four sons and a daughter, and that one of the sons would be a great Sufi. But Shahzaman repeated his original wish and the Pir again advised him to go to Bengal. After three times, Shahzaman accepted the advice. [This is what I have repeatedly heard about this encounter of Shahzaman with his blind Pir from my Pirchacha in my childhood]

Following this advice, Shahzaman left Kabul for Bengal, visiting on the way, Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Ajmir etc before reaching Calcutta, where he took shelter in the Bara-Masjid (the grand mosque). He attracted attention at the mosque, not only because of his physique (7½ ft tall, slim and handsome), but

also because his piety, wisdom and religious knowledge. Apart from his native tongue Pashtu, he knew Urdu, Farsi and Arabic, which he started teaching at the mosque. At that time, Calcutta was not as urban as it is today – occasionally wild animals used to stray into the city from the wilder south – the Sundarban area. It is said that when a man-eating tiger appeared in the neighbourhood, Shahzaman killed it by a single-shot. His fame spread [I heard the tiger story from Pirchacha many times].

Near the mosque, there was a tobacco shop owned by one Nur Hussain (Nur Baksh in Ashraf's book) of village Gopdighi (Upozila Mithamoin) in the present-day Kishorganj District. The Sayyed Sahib became a close friend of Nur Hussain, and travelled to Gopdighi with him. There he lodged in the house of Fakir Mahmud, chacha of Nur Hussain. He liked the place and started a madrasa in a mosque, while boarding with Fakir Mahmud. He also began taking disciples as Pir, giving spiritual directions to the deserving ones. At that time he married a local girl. According to M, she was related to Nur Hussain, but A (Ashraf's account) does not mention any relationship with Nur Hussain. In A this girl lost her father earlier and was living with her brother Sadir Mia. She was educated and pious, so pious that she already memorized a third of the Quran. Thus Gopdighi became Shahzaman's home. During this period he for religious discourses used to visit places such as Kursha in the Upozila Nihli, and also Boulai (Sahib Bari) and Hoybatnagar (Dewan Bari) – the last two near the town of Kishorganj.

#### *First a small digression on Kabulis*

At that time (in fact until the creation of Pakistan in 1947) a lot of people from the Peshawar area used to visit Bengal – they were called Kabulis (i.e. from Kabul, although they were not usually from Kabul). They used to look for free boarding for a few days and some money in return for prayers. I think they continued to make such visits even after 1947, but in lesser numbers, until perhaps India introduced Passport Control. Rabindranath Tagore wrote a small moving piece, called "Kabuliwala", which was made into a small heart-rending film, in Bengali in 1957, and a Hindi version in 1961. In my childhood, groups of such Kabulis used to visit our house quite often, and they were treated with warm hospitality, because they came from our "original home". Pirchacha took special care of them (as I remember), and he used to meet them by themselves in the evenings, and gave them money generously. I remember once one of them was telling me that our relations in Tupee were asking about their "Naatis and Putis" (grandchildren and great grandchildren, i.e. my generation in Jawar), and sending their love to us through them (i.e. through these wandering Kabulis). I believed him, and felt very elated, without thinking that the cousins and nephews of my great-grandfather (of whom we would be Naatis and Putis) would have been long dead! If everyone in Kenray perished in the flood, then how could anyone in that area know of someone called Shahzaman who existed hundred years ago, and whose descendants now lived in a place called Jawar in Bengal? The idea that those Kabulis visiting us were from the Tupee area, let alone from the Kenray area, is most unlikely. Furthermore how would these Kabulis know who were our distant relations there, which even we ourselves did not know? Obviously they were telling tall stories to please us. For these same reasons I am skeptical about the truth of some of the stories (below) that some Kabulis apparently recognised Shahzaman as the holy man of Kenray in Calcutta.

Returning to the main narrative: at that time Hashem Ali Khan (Chand Mia) the son of Hashmat Khan of the Jawar Zamindar family was lodging at the Dewan Bari of Hoybatnagar for his study at Kishorganj. Through Chand Mia, his father Hashmat Khan came to know of the Sayyed Sahib whom he subsequently met. Hashmat Khan invited some Kabulis from the Tupee area on several occasions for the verification of the credential of the Sayyed Sahib, which they not only confirmed, but they also in addition, displayed a great reverence for the Sayyed Sahib, declaring that his family was the great Sayyed and Pir family of their area. I have a feeling that this story in M is a fabrication for reasons given earlier. This story implies that many Kabulis from the Tupee area used to visit the Kishorganj area and therefore Hashmat Khan could ask them. The fact that I have never heard of visits of Kabulis from the

Tupee area does not by itself invalidate that claim, but it creates doubts in my mind, coupled with my earlier question: How would they know Shahzaman? It is possible that Shahzaman told his story to them in Pashtu and they believed him, but in that case this is not an independent verification.

However, Hashmat Khan was so convinced by the genuineness and piety of the Sayyed Sahib that he invited him to settle in Jawar, and gave him a Bari and lands as Pirpal (free from land-taxes) in around 1260 Bangabda (1854/55 CE), according to *Tatthyabhash*, the philosophical work of Pirdada. Following *Tatthyabhash*, I have taken Hashmat Khan as the Zamindar who brought us to Jawar, rather than Abdul Hamid Khan of Jawar, mentioned in A, unless Abdul Hamid Khan is another name of Hashmat Khan.

According to M, it was 1847 not 1854/55, when Shahzaman moved to Jawar. M asserts that Ahmadzaman the eldest son of Shahzaman was born in 1846 in Gopdighi, and the remaining children were born in Jawar. The next son Badiuzzaman was born in 1847. On the other hand according to A. all his children were born in Gopdighi, and they moved to Jawar in around 1865, a claim that of course contradicts *Tatthyabhash*. Since *Tatthyabhash* bears the name of my Pirdada as the author, I shall take its assertion that the family settled in Jawar in around 1260 BD as the truth. Observe that *Tatthyabhash* written in 1911 (1318 BD) is the earliest authentic document available.

Returning to Shahzaman's other sons, one of them, namely Abeduzzaman (my own grandfather) was dark-skinned, which apparently upset Shahzaman, who said: "How can it be? A Sayyed cannot be black. Black signifies Hell. A Sayyed does not go to Hell, nor can Hell-fire touch or burn him". He then decided to make a test with earthly fire, by placing a burning charcoal on a palm of the boy Abeduzzaman to see if the charcoal burnt his palm. Shahzaman was apparently satisfied with the result. This story I have heard many times from Iman Bubu and also from some other relations, such as my fufus, but I remember only Iman Bubu more vividly. Iman was the daughter of the younger sister of my father, whom I last met in 2010, when she was 91 (born in 1919 or 1920). Abeduzzaman died in 1927. Iman Bubu used to tell this story with relish, mimicking my great grandfather's broken Bengali. I do not know if she had heard this story from Abeduzzaman himself or from others. Because of his dark complexion, he was used to be called Kala (Black) Sahib. However, this story has two points for me (which I have tried to explain below with some light-hearted humour):

- (i) Shahzaman believed himself to be a real Sayyed, otherwise he could not have contemplated subjecting his son to such an ordeal. In other words, Shahzaman did not fake himself as a Sayyed, he believed he was. This gives me some reassurance on my ancestry. On a lighter note, it is obvious that he did not read the book the History of Bengal, written by his own great grandson in 2014. If he did, he would have found that the independent Sultan of Bengal, Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519), the creator of the Golden Age in Bengal, was a black Sayyed (Bengali mother) – Hussain Shah had published his Sayyed genealogy in a stone inscription. He was the father of Sulatn Mahmud Shah, who authorised the Mosque in our Masjid Bari in 1534 CE.
- (ii) My great grandfather did not even study modern genetics. Gregor Mendel (1820-1884), a Christian monk, demonstrated that if you inter-breed two types of pea-plants, one short and one tall, then 25% of the resultant plants would be tall, another 25% short, and the remaining 50% would lie in the middle. Thus with a dark-skinned mother (I assume my great grandmother was dark in complexion), the Mendel's prediction has been confirmed by my ancestors, that one of the four sons was black in complexion. Obviously if Mendel just studied my ancestors, he would have had no need to laboriously breed peas which he could have happily eaten instead. But I suppose monks do not like eating too many peas or too much of anything.

Much of the above description, except the story of Abeduzzaman's complexion, is taken from M. But in A, Shahzaman entered Calcutta tired and exhausted and took rest in front of the shop of Nur Bakhsh (Hussain), who saw some Kabulis who were passing by stopped and paid obeisance (kadambuchhi – touching the feet of) to that tired man at his shop door. On inquiry, the Kabulis told Nur Bakhsh that this was a great man of Tupee – again this story does not seem believable to me, for reasons given earlier. On the other hand, it is of course possible that Shahzaman told the Kabulis of his antecedents at which the Kabulis paid him obeisance – but this does not constitute independent evidence. According to A, Zamindar Abdul Hamid Khan of Jawar was visiting Gopdighi on business by boat, when he met young Abdullah (age apparently between 8 and 10) who impressed him so much that he inquired and subsequently met the father Shahzaman of whom he had already heard about from Chand Mia (see above). It was this Abdul Hamid Khan (not Hashmat Khan) who invited and brought Shahzaman to Jawar. In that case, allowing for a few years of negotiation, it would be around 1865 (when Abdullah 11) before the family could have moved to Jawar. But as stated earlier, I have accepted 1854/55 as the date, following *Tatthyabhash*.

As I have written in my history of Jawar, it was once a Regional Capital of the Bengal Sultanates, and what we call the Masjid Bari was the residence of the Governor, where a mosque was built in 1534 CE. There were two stone inscriptions in that mosque which recorded the establishment of this mosque in AH 941 (1534 CE) in the reign of Mahmud Shah the last independent ruler of Bengal, before the country was made part of Shershah's Indian Empire. This mosque was destroyed along with the houses there in a big earthquake in perhaps 1778 (Bengali year 1184), after which the Zamindar family was broken up the main branch moving to West Jawar, as stated in the introduction. The two stone inscriptions were subsequently placed and can be seen now in the present-day three-domed Zamindar Bari mosque in West Jawar, completed in 1877. This Masjid Bari area was given to Shahzaman as Pirpal, where he settled and he became the Imam of, what I assume to be the successor mosque. Shahzaman was later invited to be the Imam of the newly constructed three-domed mosque in West Jawar. He and his family then moved to West Jawar in the present location, while still retaining the possession of the Masjid Bari area.

We can now examine the question when did Shahzaman resettled in our present Bari in West Jawar? He was invited to be the Imam of the Zamindar Bari mosque completed in 1877. According to Ashraf (page 25) he died before completing his move to West Jawar. Here I would argue that this statement can hold, only if he had died in 1878 (one year after the construction of the mosque), but not if he had died in 1899 (22 years after the completion of the mosque). There is another point which confuses the situation. In M, Pirdada lost his mother in *his small (the Bengali word "olpo") age*, when he was taken care of by his kindly brothers (page 8 in M). What is *small age*? If it is 18, then his mother died in 1872, but her grave is in our present Bari, which would imply that Shahzaman not only took possession of our present Bari, but also buried his wife there in 1872, five years before the completion of the mosque in 1877.

Instead of 18, if Pirdada was 20 when his mother died, then his mother would have been buried in West Jawar in 1874, three years before the completion of the mosque. Such an early move is of course possible, but I find it strange that Shahzaman had moved to West Jawar to become the Imam of the mosque three years (let alone five years) before its completion, and in that case it could not be true that he did not have enough time to complete his move to West Jawar before his death in 1878. The question then is how much reliance should one place on the meaning of the word "small age" in M, or in the truth of the statement in A that he did not complete his move before his death? I do not know, but observe that neither M nor A offers any evidence in favour of their differing assertions that one can check. Finally, if he was invited to be the Imam of the Zamindar Bari mosque, why then this Imam was

not offered, after his death, to one of his sons, who were very learned and revered. May be it was offered, but we have no record.

Without any *ushr-e-Ali* money in Bengal, Shahzaman had to live from his own resources, which was meagre. As he did in Calcutta and Gopdighi, he started a madrasa in the Jawar mosque to teach Islamic languages. He also accepted an increasing number of disciples in Jawar, as his reputation as a great Sufi and Pir spread rapidly. Thus a part of his income came from teaching and another part from the donations of his disciples. Life was hard, but he was a simple person who led a simple life. In my childhood I heard stories that he would often cut wood from trees and carry the load on his head, but as he would pass the Zamindar Bari, the Zamindar would immediately stand up in respect. Another story was that when he would go to a Bazar, he could be seen head and shoulder above the others, as he was more than two-foot taller than other Bengalis in the Bazar. [These two stories I heard in my childhood from very old Jawar people, who used to talk about him in our Bari]. I know he was tall, as I have measured his grave in Sekandarnagar. The outside length of the grave is 17 ft, and the inside length 13 ft, which is consistent with a person 7½ ft tall. The inside length of this grave is astonishingly one-and-half times longer than other graves there.

He taught his own children Arabic, Farsi and Urdu. They all were very pious. Ahmadzaman married at Alamshri, Badiuzzaman a daughter of the Bhuyan Sahib of Belonka, Abeduzzaman a daughter of the Mir Sahib of Hoybatnagar, and Abdullah another daughter of the Bhuyan Sahib of Belonka. The first wife of Ahmadzaman died after the birth of Abdur Rashid (my Fufa), and then he took a second wife, who became the mother of my Rushni Chacha (whom we called Amma Chacha). The first wife (daughter of Mir Sahib of Boulai?) of Abeduzzaman died childless and then he married second time at the village called Arullya. After the death of his wife, Abdullah did not marry second time (see later). The daughter of Shahzaman was married to Sayyed Rezwan Ali of the Sekandarnagar Sayyed family. Their son Manzil Mia, who apart from being a cousin, was also a close friend of my father, and to me he looked like my father. I remember one day (before the death of Pirdada) when we all of the Jawar Sayyed family were invited by Manzil Chacha – I was about 5 or 6. After the big mid-day feast I was lying on a folding camp-bed under a shady tree on that warm sunny afternoon, and Manzil Chacha walking around serving everybody paans, sharbats and the hukkah (tobacco). He was the last of the male line of his family.

#### Death of Shahzaman

Shahzaman went to Sekandarnagar to see his sick daughter, but he himself fell ill and died shortly afterwards. According to M (page 22), Shahzaman was born in 1197 BD [1790 CE] and died at the age of 88 in 1285 BD [1878 CE], which contradicts document A which gives 1796 as his date of birth and 1899 as the year of death at the age of 103. While we have no way of knowing which one (1790 or 1796) was his correct date of birth, we have enough material in our hand to ascertain whether he died in 1878 or 1899. It was the Ashraf's account (that he died in 1899 at the age of 103) which I have heard in my childhood and saw it written in my father's notebook, where the birth and death ages of close family members were recorded. I cannot find that notebook anymore. Nevertheless I shall analyse events and show below that 1878, rather than 1899, makes more sense as the year of his death, in addition to my earlier conclusion that the statement in A that Shahzaman did not complete his move to West Jawar before his death can be sustained only if he had died in 1878.

His son-in-law Rezwan Ali buried Shahzaman in their family Gurustan, the Sekandarnagar Dargah, but not inside the Dargah wall (as he was not a family member) but outside it, attached on the south-west corner of the Dargah wall. I have visited his grave with my children and measured its size, given earlier. His daughter survived that illness, but died a few years later. She was buried at the eastern side of the



Dargah. I have not seen her grave, but apparently the inscription on the grave-wall reads: "Sister of the Pir Sayyed Abdullah of Jawar" in Farsi. This interests me, as this implies that the inscription was written when my Pirdada was very well-known, otherwise it would have the name of her husband, her father or her eldest brother – perhaps I am wrong. Manzil Chacha's mother was 26 in 1878. If she had died shortly after the death of her father in 1878, then Manzil Chacha would have been much older than my Fufa who was born in 1888.

It is said in M that Pirdada Abdullah married after the death of his father, and lost his wife when he was between 30 and 35. In that case the date of Shahzaman's death has to be in 1878, since Abdullah would have been 45 in 1899. Furthermore, as argued also later, Abdullah established his link with Moulana Abdul Aziz (MAA) of Baniachong before his marriage, but it would be most unusual if Pirdada was addressing MAA as father while his own revered father Shahzaman was still alive, the father to whom he was devoted. Also, it is inconceivable that the father passed his khelafa to his son Abdullah, when the son was following another Pir, namely MAA. It would make more sense to think that he was following MAA for spiritual guidance because his own father was no longer alive to give him the guidance. In that case the date of 1878 as the death date of Shahzaman makes more sense. Why then we all heard that Shahzaman had died at the age of 103? Could this have been a mistaken perception of the age of a very old man? I do not know, but I have used the death date of Shahzaman as 1878 below, otherwise I cannot make sense of the time-line of the events described.

# SHAH SUFI BABA AJAB SHAH SAYYED ABDULLAH

## A LIFE IN MYSTICISM

I have presented for convenience the life of my Pirdada in four partly overlapping sections: The first section on his early life covers the period from his birth up to the death of his father Shahzaman in 1878, followed by the second section on his search for a Sufi path which includes his interactions with his Pir Moulana Abdul Aziz (MAA) and continues until MAA's death in 1908. The third section describes the development and management of the Langar Khana, while the final section on his later life, which runs largely concurrently with his Langar Khana activities, presents important aspects of his Sufi personality.

### Early Life

A lot of reverential stories have grown up around the children of Sayyed Shahzaman as regards their honesty and piety. Here is one of them. Ahmadzaman went for a dinner invitation, perhaps by a disciple at a place some six miles away. When he was returning home, a storm was about to brew up. So he broke off a branch from a tree there and used it as a stick. When he reached home at around 10 pm, he remembered that he did not take permission of the owner of the tree for that branch. He immediately left home, went to the owner and asked for forgiveness, and then returned home, when it became early morning. Such was his honesty. I remember my Fufa the eldest son of Ahmadzaman, who was exactly like his father in piety and honesty. In our family I know we have been always told to be honest, to have integrity and to keep our words, with examples from our ancestors to reinforce these qualities. There are also miracles people used to associate with them, which I however find hard to believe, and hence omitted from this narrative. One thing that I know about miracles is this: the further you move away in time and in distance from the supposed event, the more fantastic become the miracle. I guess the belief in miracles is an expression of veneration for the person. I have something more to say on miracles later, but I should return now to the life of Abdullah, starting with a clarification of his name.

It is sometimes claimed that Abdullah was originally called Arifuzzaman, the name "Abdullah" was given by his Pir Moulana Abdul Aziz (MAA). I have not seen any assertion either in A, M or R supporting this claim. Instead the documents R and M go on a long way to state that Shahzaman himself chose the name Abdullah, with a further elaboration in M that Shahzaman had a dream that strongly urged him to name the boy Abdullah. His (i.e. Abdullah's) Pir MAA used to address him as "Baba Ajab Shah", not Abdullah.

In both document R and M, the names of Shahzaman's sons are listed as: Shah Sayyed Ahmadzaman, Shah Sayyed Badiuzzaman, Shah Sayyed Abeduzzaman and Shah Qutubuzzaman Sayyed Abdullah. The Arabic word Qutub has two meanings: (i) it's a pivot which implies a leading position, and (ii) closest position to God for a Sufi to reach, and in this sense Qutubuzzaman will mean someone who has reached the closest position to God as a Sufi and who remains at that position at all time. It is clear to me that the term "Qutubuzzaman" was added for Abdullah to express reverence, to give him a higher status as he was, already a famous Pir, when this document was written (1920?). I am convinced that his name was not Qutubuzzaman, but Abdullah. Observe also that the name Pirdada himself used was Sayyed Abdullah as inscribed on his copper *badna* (water pitcher used for washing), which I have seen and still exists in his house for all to see.

The children of Shahzaman were well-educated in many languages as stated earlier. This statement apart, I do not have any details of their education, except for Abdullah – the youngest. He lost his mother when he was very young, but the father taught him the Islamic languages (usual Arabic, Farsi and Urdu). At about the age of 12, Abdullah became well-versed in the Farsi literature, and started composing Farsi verses. By then he had mastered the well-known Farsi classics, such as Gulistan and Bustan of Sufi Sheikh Saadi (1210 – 1291 CE). He entered Damiha High School to learn English. Damiha is five miles away from Jawar, a distance that he walked twice a day to attend the school [Tarail was nothing much in those days, in fact it was created a Thana Headquarter far later in around 1909] – see Jawar Village in my Memoirs]. He was a good student, keen on languages. Subsequently he moved to the famous Rameshwar High School at Kishorganj (15 miles from Jawar). I could not find any trace of a Rameshwar High School in Kishorganj, except for a Ramananda High School, established in 1861, and which still exists, now as the Government High School (see my Memoirs). Hence I think that M might have meant Ramananda, when it said Rameshwar. Observe that I studied at the Azimuddin High School in Kishorganj and I knew the Ramananda High School, as an excellent school.

In the entrance test for that school Abdullah did so well that the teachers admitted him to class VII, rather than class VI he applied for. There he learnt Bengali and English. He stayed at Kishorganj during the week days, but went home (Jawar), with all his books, every Saturday after school hours, returning to the school every Monday morning before the school started, thus doing a 15 miles journey each way (I guess by then there was Rail connection between Kishorganj and Nilganj, the latter is 5 miles from Kishorganj and 11 miles from Jawar). When he reached class VIII, he apparently had a change of mind and gave up school to enter a madrassa at Pakundia (10 miles in the opposite direction from Kishorganj, 25 miles from Jawar), to improve his Islamic education, particularly of Arabic and Farsi. My source documents M and R do not mention any role of his father in these educational changes. Abdullah soon learnt how to translate the Quran. He became well-known in the Kishorganj literary circle for his Farsi verses, even at that young age. He wrote two books of Farsi verses, but he declined an offer of publication, since publication could give him the sin of pride, which he wanted to shun. [I have seen his Farsi verses in my childhood in Barachacha's house, but I do not know what has happened to these since then]. Apart from his knowledge of Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, and Bengali, it is said, Abdullah also had a working knowledge of English.

Manuscript M says that the young Abdullah was very restless, and that it was difficult to imagine that such a restless boy would one day become such a great Pir and Sufi, but it does not elaborate on what is meant by this "restlessness". However, young Abdullah also displayed great qualities in dealing with people, such that everyone trusted and respected him. He used to listen to people without interrupting, was very intelligent and bright, and very keen on new knowledge. Another passion he had is to buy captured birds that were sold in the market and then to set them free into the sky. I have heard this many times, and we children knew that we were not allowed to keep caged birds or to catch or hunt birds.

In his youth, he also started acquiring spiritual knowledge from his father. He studied books of philosophy and different interpretations of the Quran. Later he left Kishorganj for home, where he needed to earn his living, since the income from land was miniscule. I think this happened at his age of 24 in 1878 when his father died. It is said that before his death, Shahzaman gave Abdullah the khelafa of Pirship, i.e. to act as Pir as the successor to his father. I have some queries on the transfer of Pirship. For example, did it create any resentment among the elder brothers who were thus superseded as the main Pir by the youngest brother Abdullah? I remember the shock and unhappiness when Pirdada in his death-bed selected my chacha Is-haq as the successor, rather than my Fufa Abdur Rashid who was expected to succeed by everyone. However, the resentment, as I remember on Pirchacha's succession, was very hush-hush. After all my Fufa was a true Sufi who accepted everything from God

as blessing and his wife my Barafufu was a devout person and sister of my Pirchacha. As described in my Memoirs, Barafufu was so pious that she even stopped crying at the death of her little son Sufi Mia, since such crying is viewed as an inability to accept God's Will. I am getting too far ahead – back to Pirdada.

Abdullah continued to live as a member of the family of his eldest brother Ahmadzaman. I assume the house occupied by Shahzaman became the house of his eldest son Ahmadzaman and later latter's eldest son my Fufa. Therefore Abdullah's meals would have come from this house (inheritor of his father's house) before his marriage and also after the death of his wife, as it was until his death in 1941. He adopted my Fufa as his son, not in any formal way, but I have heard in my childhood that Fufa was his adopted son. So Fufa's house was the hub of activities as I remember from my childhood, my Barafufu as the gentle lady presiding over both piety and fun, with both prayers and laughter – an abode of peace and happiness that I remember. Pious old women from around us used to sit around Barafufu and sometimes her daughter Gulman, as they read and translated into Bengali from Farsi and Urdu religious books. Ah, I am going too far ahead again. I must return to the current.

## In Search of a Sufi Path

Returning to the story, the Pirship gave Abdullah a source of income in the form of donations from his disciples (murids, also called sagreds). There are two kinds of donation: (i) a pure charity in the way of God and (ii) *sadaqat* (*sadaqa*), that is when a person promises to donate some money or a thing for a specific reason, e.g. for recovery from an illness, or escape from a danger etc. A Sayyed can use for him/her-self only the pure donation, but not the *sadaqa*, which must be given away to other needy people or causes. This rule on donation was instituted and followed by Pirdada and has been adhered to by all his successors and indeed by all members of the Sayyed family. I understand that in Arabic the term *sadaqa* could mean any religious donation, and in that case, in our family this term was used in a special way as described above.

At that time he also started teaching Arabic and other languages in some schools in the area. It seems he taught at Gajindrapur (about a mile west of Jawar) and Thaneshwar (some 10 miles from Jawar), where he had disciples. However he refused to take any money from the private pupils, of whom he had many. During this period he still continued to attend the literary gatherings (mainly Farsi) at Kishorganj, Boulai and Hoybatnagar, on a regular basis, as he continued to compose verses in Farsi. He soon earned the reputation as an outstanding Farsi poet of the area, but as mentioned earlier, he refused offers of publications of his Farsi poems.

As I have stated before, I believe that Pirdada's contact with Moulana Abdul Aziz (MAA) began only after the death of Shahzaman, when Pirdada needed Sufi guidance, a guidance that he lost after the death of his father. I should mention here that in Sufi-ism a truth-seeker needs a Sufi master to guide him in the right direction, otherwise the seeker can get lost or end up in a wrong place [see in my Memoirs the entry on my Pirchacha on Sufi guidance, or lack of it]. As for my Pirdada, to start with he might not have been looking for someone to guide him, but as the event unfolded, he soon realised that he needed MAA to guide him, MAA appearing in his life at the right moment of his need. Recall, Abdullah was around 24 or 25 at that time and still unmarried.

In the village of Baniachong of Hobiganj (Sylhet) there was an well-known Sufi, named Khuda Baksh who was succeeded by his accomplished son Moulana Abdul Aziz (MAA). Subsequently MAA became a murid (disciple) of also Moulana Keramat Ali, who often lived in a cave at the Lauragor Hill situated after the Lauragor Bazar (north of Shunamganj on the Assam border). As it happened, MAA often visited his disciples at Thaneshwar, where he met young Abdullah. In another account, MAA met

Abdullah at Sekandarnagar where he (MAA) had also disciples he inherited from his father Khuda Bakhsh. Both the accounts could be true. Either way, young Abdullah entered into discussions on philosophy and some other spiritual topics with MAA, of the Sufi *Tariqa of Nakshibandia Mujaddadia*, a *Tariqa* that practiced silent dhikr (i.e. silent chanting of God's name and attributes). The interactions between them deepened, and MAA started visiting Abdullah at Jawar as well at the invitation of the latter. During this period Abdullah also travelled to many Sufi shrines such as Shah Sultan of Madanpur (some 15 miles from Jawar) and Shah Jalal in the Sylhet city, often with MAA.

*Chilla*: Chilla is a period of continuous prayer alone for a fixed period of days. Abdullah used to do chilla often, when he would pray day and night in his house, without getting out except for physical essentials such as washing etc. He would cook himself a small amount of rice, and would eat only a tiny amount, before getting into prayers again. Sometimes he used to do chilla for 40 days at a time. He found the advice of MAA on chilla invaluable, and gradually started to follow MAA's advice, until one day when he decided to become MAA's murid (disciple). For this ritual, he travelled to Baniachong for MAA who then accepted Abdullah as his murid in the *Nakshibandia Mujaddadia Tariqa*. MAA used to address Abdullah as "Baba", and sometimes as "Baba Ajab (incredible) Shah", as mentioned earlier. In turn Abdullah used to call his Pir MAA "father", and his wife "mother", a reason why we (my cousins) all refer to MAA and his wife as Barababa (great grandfather) and Barama (great grandmother). After his acceptance of MAA as his Pir, he gave up his teaching at Thaneshwar and returned to Jawar to attend to his growing number of disciples. Abdullah also visited many other places with his Pir, including Moulana Keramat Ali at Laur, where there was a discussion of the marriage of Abdullah, in which MAA assured him of his blessings and Moulana Keramat Ali promised to attend the wedding, as I read in M, which further claims that Moulana Keramat Ali did actually attend the wedding, but in disguise such that nobody could recognise him – just the kind of assertion the sceptics would laugh at. My question is that if they had such a discussion, how should others know about it for it to be written in M, given that Pirdada did not talk much about himself? I do not know. It does however imply that Abdullah married after he became a murid of MAA.

As indicated earlier, Abdullah married the younger daughter of Belonka Bhuyan Sahib after his return from his visit to Moulana Keramat Ali. According to M, she was an educated and a devoted wife, very religious and knowledgeable. After three or so years of marriage, she gave birth to a son but soon both the mother and the son died. Abdullah was about 35 in age at that time, in which case the marriage took place around 1886 or so, some 8 years after the death of Shahzaman in 1878. Abdullah decided against remarriage.

Here are some of my observations on our family history. We seem to know least about Badiuzzaman. Given that Badiuzzaman, an elder brother married the elder sister of his wife, I expected to hear of a closer relationship between the families of the two brothers, Badiuzzaman and Abdullah, but the latter lived, after the death of his wife, with the eldest brother saintly Ahmadzaman, not with Badiuzzaman. I sometime ask myself: was there a rift between Abdullah and Badiuzzaman, which impacted on the next generation? The children of Ahmadzaman and Abeduzzaman were close to each other and also to Pirdada (as I have seen and as I know), but the sons of Badiuzzaman, Abdul Huq and Rafiuddin were distant from those cousins and also from Pirdada, as I remember. Incidentally they (i.e. Abdul Huq and Rafiuddin chacha) also married at the Belonka Bhuyan Bari, in fact the two daughters of the brother of their mother.

One can argue that our relationship with my Fufa Abdur Rashid (the eldest son of Ahmadzaman) had to be closer, since he married the elder sister of my father. Also my Barachacha (Sayyed Shamsuddin) and Fufa were close friends as was well-known and as I have also witnessed [Recall they went together to Tupai in search of our ancestors]. But this does not explain the differences that I have noticed and

understood. It was the sons of those two brothers Ahmadzaman and Abeduzzaman (say the nephew-set1) who always seemed to work together for my Pirdada, whereas my chachas Abdul Huq and Rafiuddin (the nephew-set2) were very remote.. When Pirdada gave some agricultural land (the Bhati Jomi – sold now) verbally to the nephew-set1, they accepted it without demanding any official transfer by registration. To ask for registration was deemed demeaning to the saintly status of Pirdada. When another piece of agricultural land (Gandabpur, also sold by now) was thus given to the nephew-set2, they demanded it to be properly registered. The land registration officer was brought in from Kishorganj or from somewhere else, and the transfer deed was registered, to the unhappiness of my Pirdada. I have heard this story many many times in my childhood. But I think that the nephew set2 can legitimately argue that they had complete trust in their Pirchacha, but it was the other cousins of whom they could not be so sure of.

The grave of Badiuzzaman who died in 1910 is not in our Masjid Bari Gurustan, although that of Ahmadzaman who died in 1908 is. However the grave of Osiuzzaman, son of Badiuzzaman, who died in 1908, is in the Masjid Bari. So, perhaps there were other reasons as to why Badiuzzaman was not buried in the Masjid Bari. Just the same, whatever it was or it was not, the other sons of Badiuzzaman (our Huq chacha and Rafiuddin chacha) and his only grandson Ezaz Mia were all buried in the Masjid Bari. I must mention here that Ezaz Mia (Ezaz Bhai) was very close to each one of us, nobody can be a better cousin than he was. I think Ezaz Bhai had a very special quality of deep friendship for all of us (see also my Memoirs).

Returning to the main narrative, MAA used to stay in Jawar quite often with his wife. Abdullah “Baba Ajab Shah” became their son, and as they had no children, we became their family. Apparently his wife was a great cook, who taught many types of cooking to our family members, perhaps to the wives of my grandfathers and later to my chachis. Observe that she regularly visited Jawar to see her “son” even long after the death of her husband. It is said that Pirdada used to organise her Jawar trips even when he was 80, which would imply that she visited us perhaps even in 1934. Returning to MAA, in his last visit to Jawar, he fell ill within a few days of his arrival and he died unexpectedly. Apparently the weather was too atrocious to carry the dead-body to Baniachong or to even to send someone to Baniachong on that day to inform the people there of his death. Thus he was buried in Jawar in our Gurustan. According to M, he died on the English date of 1913/9/6 when he was just a few years over 60, both the date and age I contend to be wrong, as I think he died much earlier perhaps in 1908, as discussed below.

#### Confusions on dates

I found most dates cited are confusing, inconsistent and contradictory. So I do not know what to believe. For example, M gives a precise date for the death of MAA as 1913/9/6 (English date M says), and states that he was just a few years over sixty. But Abdullah, born in 1854, was 59 then. Since MAA adopted Abdullah as his son, the age difference has to be much greater than just a few years. This date has another problem. If this death-date is true, then the great philosophical work of Abdullah *Tatthyabhash* appeared in 1911 two years before the death of his Pir MAA in 1913, and yet this work made no reference to MAA who would have been alive in 1911. In the Sufi tradition, such a reference to one’s living Pir is mandatory. Just read the *Masnavi* of the great Sufi Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273), who has dedicated everything to his Pir Shams Tabrizi (1185-1248). Therefore the date of 1913 has to be wrong.

According to A (page 29), MAA died in 1902, but in another place (page 71), A says he was born in 1823 and died in 1908 (at the age 85). So there is a contradiction in A. Surely he did not travel to Jawar (a long distance from Baniachong) at the age of 85 and suddenly fell ill and died. However, this is

possible for him to travel at the age of 85, if his health was generally robust. It is also possible that he was born later than 1823 (assuming it was 1832, miswritten as 1823), but died in Jawar in 1908.

In the Masjid Bari Gurustan, Sayyed Ahmadzaman and Osiuzzaman were buried in 1908 CE. Now, if MAA died in 1902 and still buried in the Masjid Bari, then the Gurustan was ready for burial in 1902, unless he really died in 1908. If MAA died in 1902, then his grave would be the first one in our family Gurustan when he was not a family member. It does not make sense that Masjid Bari was decided to be our Gurustan by the sudden death of someone who was not a member of our family? Remember in 1902, all his elder brothers were alive and therefore Pirdada was not the head of the family. So we have to believe that all of his brothers just agreed for the first grave to be for someone who was not a family member. Note even in 1908, two elder brothers of Pirdada were alive, but by then Masjid Bari had been agreed as our family Gurustan, since two of our family members were also buried in the same year (but I do not know if before or after the death of MAA). I can no longer make any sense of some of the dates and ages I find in M or A. I leave it to my nephew Ashraf to throw more light on it. I am told that the dates inscribed in these tombs are usually too faint to decipher, assuming that the dates were correctly recoded in the inscriptions to start with, since I have been warned that dates in some legible inscriptions are wrongly recorded.

## The Langar Khana

It is a common tradition to provide the hospitality of meals and overnight shelters to the disciples who come to visit their Pir. However, as he was often travelling around before his marriage, I assume he had hardly any guest (*mehman*) who needed food and accommodation. If there were some, they perhaps ate in his brother's house. Once married he was more settled in which time his wife cooked for the mehmans, and after her death perhaps again his brothers' wives attended to the mehmans. It is said when he was once away to Baniachong to see his Pir MAA for a few days, some guests arrived at home, who were looked after by his wife with food and shelter even though her resources were scant. On return Abdullah was amazed by his wife's resourcefulness. However, when the visitor number increased, he asked some of his favourite disciples to stay in his house as khadem to look after other visitors, thus starting the Langar Khana, even though financially his situation was very meagre at that time. I have heard from Imam Bubu and others that in their childhood there was a small Langar Khana, run by only one or two khadems, including someone called Safar Ali, of whom I have heard nothing more.

I think my Pirdada became more well-known after the death of MAA, particularly at the time of writing the *Tatthyabhash*. The publication of *Tatthyabhash* his philosophical work in 1911 to answer some queries from a Hindu gentleman established him not only as a great Pir but also as a great philosophical thinker. Gradually his reputation grew further, among not only Muslims, but also Hindus. He was also given a great respect at home. I have heard stories from Iman Bubu and others how Kala Sahib (i.e. Abeduzzaman), who died in 1927 (or 1929), used to speak respectfully of his younger brother, addressing him as Chota (Junior) Sahib, rather than by name Abdullah which an elder brother would normally do (i.e. addressing by name).

For the Hindu guests, an Ashram was established with a Brahmin cook in what we called Nayabari (New Bari). I remember the Brahmin cook Sham Chand (short for Chandra) who was a colourful figure in the Ashram, with his plumb body and cloak covered with sandal-wood stamps, of Hindu symbols (I think with some Sanskrit words), as devout Brahmins do, especially when conducting Hindu Pujas. He also used to walk, like devout Brahmins, holding in his right hand what is called a thrishul, which is like a metallic stick, with its head branching into three (thri), symbolising Hindu deities. Hindu guests including professional and middleclass Hindu gentlemen (such lawyers and zamindars) would also eat and sleep

in the Ashram. If any middleclass Hindu came with families and stay for a few days, which some of them did, then their wives and children would stay in Barachacha's or Fufa's house like family members, sleeping and eating there. Their stay as I remember was always a source of great fun for all of us (playing many family games together) – we used to look forward to their next visits.

In the Nayabari, close to the Ashram, there was a beautiful flower garden, developed and cared for by my Amma Chacha, the younger brother of my Fufa and the father of my younger cousin popular Mujahir Mia. Amma Chacha was very popular among us the nephews and nieces (see my Memoir). It was a largish squared garden handsomely fenced with a beautiful arched entry-gate, the arch decorated by eye-catching flowering creepers. The garden had in it many kinds of flowers, some exotic, among them beautiful large fragrant roses. I remember how Amma Chacha looked after this garden painstakingly and how he used to germinate rose shrubs from cuttings. We children used to roam inside the garden enjoying the flowers, particularly in the early morning which was the best time to be mesmerised by the bloom. Amma Chacha told me once that in seasons, he would pluck the best rose and present it to Pirdada (his chacha), who used to love flowers, particularly the beauty of roses. Pirdada would typically hold a rose in his hand, cover it with a fine muslin and then smell it, so that small insects if any inside the rose, were not disturbed. That was my Pirdada – a true Sufi.

I am sure that Langar Khana grew gradually, with big growth perhaps taking place during the last 8 to 10 years of his life. The reason for my speculation can perhaps be understood from what I am writing here. The earliest well-known khadem I have ever heard about is Haji Zohuruddin Munshi of midJawar. He was tall and charismatic with a white pagri. I remember him commanding reverence and speaking with guests with authority and with a lot of Sufi stories. His youngest daughter Amina was my class-mate in the Jawar Primary School. She married our Karim Bhai (see my Memoir) and came to see me in 2010, when I was in Jawar. Zohuruddin Munshi was succeeded by Dagu Bhai (Haji Mujibur Rahman, see my Memoir), who was an educated and a highly respected person, usually addressed by the khadems as the Ustad Sahib, as he used to teach religion and Arabic to them. The shopping manager was Liaqat Ali for many years, but after he left, Iman Ali took his place, much later by Fazar Ali (1950s). I did not hear about any other great figures holding those positions before them. I remember the construction of the extension of what was called the Lomba (meaning long) Ghar to accommodate more overnight guests – we children used to go up to the flat corrugated tin roof of that extension by climbing the beetle-nut trees there (I was the most inept climber – Ezaz Bhai showed a lot of patience in teaching me how to climb).

Keramat Ali, whom we children used to address as uncle, was the chief chef in much of the busiest period of the Langar Khana, and left it perhaps in the 1950s to spend more time with his growing family in the East of Jawar. His nephew who is also a great chef came to cook for my guests in 2010 during my Jawar visit. Keramat Ali told me that the average number of guests was between 1500 and 2000 in the late 1930s, the largest number of guests they ever had was around 2100 Muslims and 1200 Hindus, with a total of 3300 guests who ate on that day in the Langar Khana. He further told me that once he could not sleep for several nights, as the guests were arriving hungry from distance places, one batch after another until the morning hours. He had to cook throughout each of these nights, without rest. Observe that many guests (say from Assam) would come by rail to the Nilganj Rail Station late at night, and then walk 11 miles to Jawar. They all knew that they would have a meal at the Langar Khana, however late. Observe also that many of the guests were local people who came for a short time and departed without eating..

Pirdada used to manage the Langar Khana very carefully, covering both finance and day to day management. His policy was to spend all the money given by the sagreds within 24 hours, some of it paid the Langar Khana expenses, and the remainder went into charity, while he himself led a simple



ascetic life, as stated earlier. There were perhaps 30 to 40 khadems, looking after about an average of 1800 guests (requiring meals) daily in the late 1930s. Some of the khadems were from Jawar, many from Chhanati, but many more from farther afield. Some of the Jawar and Chhanati khadems did not stay in the Langar Khana overnight, but others had to and did (e.g. Keramat Ali had to stay overnight, as he was the main cook). Many people used to donate trees as fuel for the Langar Khana cooking. There was a special large boat that would bring the woods from those donated trees in the rainy seasons. Special khadems would travel in that boat, chop the donated trees, cut them into smaller pieces and then bring to the Langar Khana, to be stored for future use. I think Abdul Majid of Chhanati who later served as Pirchacha's helper in place of Dagu Bhai was one of those boatmen. He came to see me in Jawar in 2007, aged 85 and nearly blind, to ask for my permission to be buried in the Masjid Bari.

Meals were served twice a day, first in the midday after the Zuhr prayer and then in the evening after the Isha prayer. Discipline at the Langar Khana was very strong, no khadem was allowed to eat until the mehmans were served, and Pirdada himself would come to the kitchen to taste the food before serving it to the mehmans. I remember this custom, and I even remember once Pirdada tasting. This custom of tasting food and serving meals twice a day was continued under Pirchacha and the subsequent successor Pirs. The khadems had to follow strict disciplines, being liable to be dismissed instantly if they failed, such as eating before the mehmans were served. The only person, who could take away and got away with whatever he considered to be the best bits in the cooked meats before any food was served to the mehmans, was our indomitable Bayyu (dear brother), father-in-law of Amma Chacha.(see my Memoir for stories of him and of some other incredible characters, as I remember).

Pirdada met his guests twice daily, first after the midday meal before the Asr prayer, and second time in the evening before the Isha prayer. In addition, he also had some one-to-one private meetings with some guests, usually in mid-morning or after the Isha prayer. He just instinctively knew the right words to satisfy every guest (see in my Memoir how my sceptic Naana (father of my mother) became a fervent devotee of my Pirdada). He advised his murids on how to lead life in the "Straight Path" (the Quran), always in prayer, also in a way that nobody has a legitimate grievance against you. He warned his murids not to be attracted by the Western culture, which he feared would bring only unhappiness. Pirdada used to look after the wellbeing of every khadem, including their religious and spiritual developments, all of them being encouraged to undertake religious study every morning with Dagu Bhai as the Ustad, and Bengali & Arithmetic lessons in the evening offered by my father.

I should perhaps mention about how he treated the women murids, since I have seen in Dhaka (when I lived there) a lot of Pirs would stay in big houses, and men and women would sit tightly around the Pir who would be reclining on a big carpet. Some of the women sometimes would sit touching the Pir and on occasions massaging the Pir's extended legs and sometimes sobbing over his legs and arms, which I considered appalling and scandalous. In our case, Pirdada always sat separately for both men and women. In the men's case the audience would be given in the Alaper Ghar, where he would sit on a prayer carpet (legs folding backward) on the chouki there, while the men murids on floor mats at a small distance away. Several pagris would be unfolded and strung together to make a long rope for the murids to hold for the *Bayet* (the religious ceremony of becoming a murid of a Pir). When he saw the women visitors, he again sat on a low stool at the back of his house and the women on floor mats. He never touched anyone, not even the money donated by the murids, the money being accepted on his behalf by a khadem. The only link the women had is holding the long pagri during *Bayet*. The practice of my Pirdada is of course followed in the same way by the successor Pirs.

Khatm-i-Yunus: It is a special prayer in which a good number of people have to participate, the prayer ending with a sacrifice of a cow. One or two such Khatm-i-Yunus were held every Friday, which were continued in the earlier years of Pirchacha's time. The food would be beef [curry], lentil, rice and a

special runny sweet called *shashni* (eaten sometimes with some rice). The cooking was done in the Women's Bari of the Langar Khana where there were two huge *chulas* for cooking big pot. I remember one Khatm-i-Yunus in which Pirdada went to taste the food before it was served as was the tradition. On that occasion as I was listening, he asked the cook to add a little more salt. I went to my mother who wanted to know the details of what Pirdada said (in fact everyone, all my chachis, fufus, etc, always wanted to know what Pirdada said or did). There used to be so much meat cooked that some of the cooked meat curry of the Khatm-i-Yunus was distributed to our houses as well.

Source documents M and R, do not give much information on, how the Langar Khana was physically extended, who was the person who designed these extra houses, who designed the toilets, who established the Langar Khana Grocery Shop (which existed at the side of the Nayabari Flower Garden before the Hindu Ashram), how Alaper Ghar for example came into existence, who produced all the evening lamp-posts everywhere in the Langar Khana area, who designed the water works or, who indeed contributed lands for the extension of the Langar Khana. At one point, R states that Babasahib (i.e. Pirdada) once asked his nephew Sayyed Shamsuddin to buy some items, including a plot of adjacent bari, but R made no further mention of Barachacha, nor did it give any further information on that plot of land, which could have been our Nayabari, but we do not know. However, one thing we knew, as we have been told in our childhood, is that the Women's Bari (where women guests used stay and where the food for Khatm-i-Yunus was cooked), including its pond, was donated by Shahid Mia of Shudi, the father-in-law of Gulman Dadu and grandfather of our Faruq, who also came from a branch of our Zamindar family, which perhaps explains why he had property in Jawar.

Knowing Barachacha and of his leadership in our Bari, I am sure he was responsible for all the Langar Khana developments listed above. In fact I cannot conceive of anybody else more capable than him in executing those tasks. I wonder if Pirdada himself proposed any specific extension and improvement. It could be that Barachacha proposed to Pirdada some ideas of extensions and improvements which he carried out if Pirdada agreed, since I have heard that Pirdada did not usually enter into any detailed discussions, certainly not any long discussion, into these earthly matters – he would more often listen to a suggestion in silence and then end it with a simple Yes or No. I have also heard that Barachacha (in fact all his nephews) revered Pirdada so much that he would not discuss anything directly with Pirdada – he would instead send his work overseer Iyad Ali Morol (of Chhanati) with a proposal to Pirdada, and Iyad Ali would then return with a Yes or No answer (see also my Memoir). This indirect form of communications reminds me of Prince Charles communications with his mother the Queen.

I believe the water-work was designed and implement with the help of my Hasu Maamu (uncle Hassan, my mother's first cousin) from Fatehpur who was a District Officer responsible for installing tubewells etc. The water-work was operated by a manual pump attached to a tubewell to raise water into a higher up large concrete water-tank from which the water flowed through underground pipes into a number of standing water-pipes (including one standing pipe at the Langar Khana kitchen), the waterflow in each standing pipe being controlled by a water-tap. For us and for most of our guests, it was amazing at a time when most Bangladeshi villages did not even have a tubewell. I remember it was fun for us children to pump water into the tank. Needless to say that there was never any shortage of volunteers to work on that pump. This system broke down in the late 1940s, when no replacement pump could be found, as the spare parts disappeared after the end of the British Raj. A few years later that tubewell ran dry, when a new tubewell had to be installed near the Langar Khana kitchen.

## Later Life

This section which runs mostly concurrently with his Langar Khana activities, focusses primarily on his Sufi personality, covering topics such as his life in the family, invitations he attended, his total submission to God's Will and equal treatment of all, his inquiring mind, his spiritual conversation, his prayers with silent dhikr and my comments on miracles, concluding in a subsection on his last days.

Once Pirdada was ill for some weeks, when he gave khelafa (permission to act as Pir) to his able nephew Abdur Rashid to stand in for him. Again no date of this has been given in R. Another person Pirdada gave khelafa to is Moulana Abdur Rahman of Challish-Kahonia (Union Raipur, Upozila Barhatta, Dist. Netrokona). He apparently knew English, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu and Hindi and of course Bengali – he had a good handwriting and therefore he often acted as the scribe for the letters of Pirdada. After he got khelafa from Pirdada, he as expected, left our Langar Khana to act as Pir in his home area. Although I do not remember seeing him in later years (perhaps because I used to be away in schools), I understand, he continued to visit us occasionally (as would be expected) during Pirchacha's time and later. He died at home unmarried in 29 Ashar, 1359 BD [Sept 1953]. I remember him only from my childhood as a slim tallish longish-black-bearded person in white pajama and punjabi, wearing a green pagri, as against Pirdada's rose-coloured pagri. By all accounts, he was an accomplished Sufi.

### *Life in the family*

When at home (i.e. not out on invitation), Pirdada took his meals, like his nephews, twice a day, in the morning around 9 am and in the evening after the Asr prayer, perhaps after the Maghreb prayer in the winter when the days were short. In our childhood, we had been always told that eating too many times a day is not loved by God; eating once a day is better than eating twice a day, but certainly not three times a day. When at home, his meal would be prepared in Barafufu's house and taken to his house in my childhood by several of my female cousins from among Ayesha Bubu, Hamida Bubu, Rukia Bubu, Suraiya Bubu, and also Amrut (the daughter of Gulman Dadu and elder sister of Faruq), with a procession of dishes. According to Rukia Bubu he was very jovial and laughed a lot with these grandchildren.

I do not remember seeing Pirdada having meals with other relations, such as my chachas, not even on Eid days. In fact I have never seen him in a company of any of them – which to me was strange. If any of my chachas wanted to see their revered "Chacha Sahib" (Chacha saab for short), they would go to his house, and sit very politely on the floor and state with great reverence what they had in their minds, and return with a Yes or No answer – there never were any long detailed discussion on any earthly topic, according to Rukia Bubu. But I think this reverence was the behavioural norm in our family in those days, as I have seen my father's excessively reverential attitude towards his elder brothers.

I remember Pirdada as a light-skinned tall and slim person with a medium-long white beard and long hair (babri – I think the Prophet had a babri). He used wear unstitched white clothes and a rose coloured pagri (in my mind I can still see the pagri on his head, with three turns on one side of the head and two turns on the other side). He always kept his back and chest covered under a thin white cloth (like a chador), a practice that apparently has a mystic significance and was followed (along with the wearing of unstitched white clothes) by both Pirchacha and other successors. I suppose a vest could have covered the chest and the back, but a vest was considered as stitched. I did ask Danu Bhai Sahib when he was the Pir on the significance of keeping chest and back covered, he replied that it was the tradition and hence he followed it. Pirdada used *kharam* (wooden sandal) at home (like the rest of us at the time) and I guess leather sandal for walking to invitation places. I do not remember if he used a stick, but I think he wore glasses. By the way, he preferred herbal medicine (including Ayurvedic medicine) to Western medicine.

His bath was a grand affair. As I remember it, the area in front of his house would be cordoned off with removable fences. Lots of warm water would be brought in from the Langar Khana kitchen. He would stand or sit on a low stool, and he would then start his bath of at least one-hour duration, Daggu Bhai helping and water flowing out over the whole front of his house. I remember this very vividly. I also remember Pirdada's smoking hukkah, one ordinary hukkah of coconut shell to be smoked through a hole at the bottom part and another of brass to be smoked through a long winding pipe, both prepared for smoking by Daggu Bhai. My brother used to say that smoking could not be haram, for if it was, our Pirdada would not have smoked. On smoking, my Barachacha, Pirchacha and Fufa to my recollection did not smoke, my father did. My brother and most of my cousins gave up smoking at some point in their lives.

### *Invitations (Dawats)*

Pirdada was often out on invitation on foot, usually accompanied by a khadem, perhaps Daggu Bhai or Shuruz Bhai (see below), or someone else. He accepted invitations even to Hindu houses, where Hindu Brahmin would line up to eat his leftover as prashad (food blessed by God) as they do with the offerings they make in their pujas. Some orthodox Muslims criticised Pirdada for eating in Hindu houses. His reply was very simple: If you go up and look down, first you would be able to distinguish between men, women, animals and houses, shrubs and trees. As you go higher and higher these distinctions would become blurred, and higher still you would not be able to distinguish at all. God is very high up. This was his answer, which I have heard many times in our Bari, an answer that I appreciated very much as I grew older. In the rainy season he would go to invitations by boat to places far away from home, some 30 miles or further away, but he would always return home in the evening (sometimes in the early hours of the morning, if the distance was great) to sleep in his own bed. He had a boat with four rowers and one head to steer the boat. This head in our time was Shuruz Ali of Chhanati (Shuruz Bhai to us), who continued in this role also with Pirchacha. He had a *maina* bird in his house which I with Mati Bhai and Sabud Mia used to go to see.

We all knew that once Pirdada's boat on returning home from an invitation got sunk in a freak storm. Shuruz Ali told me that he was the head boatman, and that when he went inside the submerged boat to find Pirdada, he found him sitting and praying. He asked Shuruz Ali to take him back to the house where he had this invitation. After reaching the house, Pirdada got out of the boat and went into a prayer in that house. After the end of this relatively long prayer, he returned to the boat and resumed his boat journey home. In the boat he told them that he forgot to pray for his host as he was in a kind of hurry, and therefore he had to return to that house to do the prayer. I think following this incident, we all of the Sayyed family were instructed by our chachas, that if invited we must not forget to pray for the host before leaving the host's premise. Pirdada subsequently gave that boat away to my Fufa (we then used to call it Fufa's boat), and he built a slightly larger one for his journeys. I have of course used both the boats, Fufa's boat with Fufa, and the other one with Pirchacha, Danu Bhai and Manu Bhai, but I do not know what has happened to them in the more recent years. One of the rowers in Pirchacha's time under Shuruz Ali's steering, was Muhammad Ali of Chhanati, my classmate in the Jawar School. He came to see me in Jawar in 2010, and I understand he has now performed the Hajj – what a beautiful news.

### *Submission to God and Equality for all*

Pirdada believed in total submission to God's Will in the Sufi tradition. Whatever good or bad happens, it comes from God and hence must be accepted with grace. It reminds me what I read about Rabia Basri (717 – 801 CE), who used to say that if she were ill, she would love that illness as well, since it was from

God. That was the nature of total submission to God emanating from my Pirdada. If someone is bad or behaves badly with him, then it is God's Will, which he as a Sufi must accept calmly without disliking that person – it is up to God to punish that person, if God wishes it. Another principle he followed was that everyone who comes before him must be treated with care, compassion and generosity, without any distinction between men and women, rich and poor, Hindus and Muslims, religious and non-religious, the pious and the sinners, thieves and honest persons, etc. This was the instruction to him from his Pir MAA as stated in R and he followed it without fail. Pirdada repeated this belief many many times in discussion meetings with his close disciples.

#### *An inquiring mind*

Pirdada lived a very simple life, embodying the principle of plain living and high thinking. Perhaps the inquiring mind that he had is the reason why we had so many books in our Bari, and why we used to subscribe to newspapers (a rare activity for a village, particularly in those days), that I remember. We also used to get to the monthly English periodical *Islamic Review* published from Woking, Surrey, England. This explains two things for me: Pirdada must have known enough English to read it and secondly he was a liberal Sunni Muslim, since that the *Islamic Review* was an Ahmadiya publication. According to my source R, this magazine was used to be read and discussed periodically with Pirdada by his close disciples. We also had two English translations of the Holy Quran, one by Allama Yusuf Ali (Sunni), and another by Muhammad Ali (Ahmadiya). He was keen on news with a lively interest in the World news – the main vehicle was the Weekly Bengali newspaper from Calcutta called the *Muhammadi* (of Moulana Akram Khan). Fazlu Bhai used to read it to Pirdada, and he (Fazlu Bhai) once told me that after one week on an 8-page newspaper, there was nothing much left out of it that he did not read to Pirdada, including even the advertisements. After Pirdada was satisfied, the newspaper went round to his nephews, as I remember my father reading it, and telling us what was happening in the country and around the world. Pirdada was particularly interested on the news of the Second World War and predicted that the British would win, and that Hitler would die, but not at the hands of his enemies, the Allies. I remember I heard of this prediction before we learnt about Hitler's suicide years later (note my Pirdada died in Feb 1941). We continued to receive the *Muhammadi* until its publication in Calcutta ceased a few years after the Partition of India in 1947.

#### *Pirdada's spiritual conversation*

Pirdada sometimes used to converse with his close disciples, as mentioned in my source R. I often wonder how source R got its information. It could be that R got it from Moulana Abdur Rahman. Note no date or time or duration was given in R.

In these conversations Pirdada would start thus: If one wishes to know God All Mighty (Khuda-Ta-ala), it is not necessary for him to travel far, and then he would describe the human development process from before the birth. He discussed the development of every organ and function very methodologically, which impressed me deeply about his flawless knowledge, and clarity of expression with logical steps demonstrating the magnificence of God, in the way the Quran asks us to think, reflect and believe, and in the same way perhaps Einstein would have described his belief in a Creator-God. While Einstein would have examined the stars and galaxies, my grandfather examined the human body which the non-scientists around him could understand – I am sure Einstein would have approved of my grandfather analysis. As a scientist friend of mine said: one has to admire your grandfather's deep thinking and intellectual ability, particularly when he lived in a remote part of rural Bengal and when did he did not have the advantage of knowing about the Theory of Evolution, let alone modern genetics.

Pirdada would continue his conversation thus: If every knowledgeable person examines his own creation, then very easily he will understand that even before his birth, his body, shape, head, hands, legs, fingers, toes, ears, eyes, mouth, lips, tongue, stomach, the breathing mechanism – all were formed, and continue to be developed by the actions of majestic God. He gave many examples of the developments in each stage, concluding that only an intelligent entity, we call God, could have done it so perfectly. My Pirdada's descriptions were scientifically correct. From the human body, he gradually moved his discussion to the earth, sun, moon stars and so on, concluding with the wonders in the creation. Some of this has been presented in a summarised form in his philosophical work "*Tatthyabhash*" [Hints to the Reality]. It is easy to visualise the listeners being mesmerised by his words, with a feeling of deep Godliness.

### *His prayers*

Pirdada conducted his five daily prayers usually alone in his house – I have never seen him or Pirchacha on *jamat* in the Alaper Ghar, but then my not-seeing is not a proof of anything. For the Jummah prayer, he attended the Zamindar Bari mosque, perhaps later also the Chhanati mosque. There was once a major unpleasant clash between us and the Zamindar Bari, centred on the status of our Sayyed Bari and Barachacha's election into the Jawar Union Board, which brought the people of Chhanati very close to us, as described in my Memoir. I am not sure but it could be that after that incident, Pirdada started going to the Chhanati mosque for the Jummah prayer. In my childhood we always, including Pirchacha, went to the Chhanati Eidgah for Eid prayers, but some of us sometimes went to the Zamindar Bari mosque for Jummah. However, these days things have gone with the wind, the Zamindar Bari is now an uninhabited area, their descendants live in cities, and if any of them ever visit Jawar, they apparently stay in our Bari, with some of my relations. The Jawar three domed mosque is still there, where I prayed Jummah in 2010 under the present Imam, a nephew of Dagu Bhai and a devotee of Pirdada.

Returning to Pirdada, he did not subscribe to the Sufi group-dhikr, nor to the use of music in dhikr or in prayer. He also regarded shrines as unIslamic and forbade the creation of a shrine at his tomb. As for his prayers, his was silent *dhikr*, and alone – his mind (and even the body) disappearing into what is called God-consciousness, i.e. being unaware of anything else but God's presence. I have once heard my Chachi, the wife of Chacha Abdul Huq and niece of Pirdada's wife, telling my mother (her best friend) that she once one evening entered Pirdada's house inadvertently and found him lying on the floor semi-conscious (as it seemed to her) but every part of his body vibrating with dhikr in unison, as if dhikr was emanating from every muscle in his body. She immediately left the house, closing the door behind her. What she witnessed was I believe from all that I read over the years, the most exalted, the highest, state of Sufi engagement with God, in which self is "annihilated" (self disappears) in God-consciousness, the state that only a few Sufi can ever reach, the state which my Pirdada evidently reached. Pirdada prayed like this throughout nights.

### *Miracles*

Document R stated that the western neighbour of Pirdada used to persecute him severely. That neighbour and all his family members died of cholera (implication being that they died of cholera because of their persecution of my Pirdada), except one boy, who then sold the land (his bari) to the Pirsahib and left. My Barachacha apparently bought the land on behalf of the Pirdada. No names have been given nor the land identified, nor any notion of the year of purchase indicated – so the story cannot be checked. I have a problem with this story of someone persecuting Pirdada and dying because of it. Our neighbours were ordinary poor Muslim peasants. How could any one of them persecute the great Pir Sahib, who was revered even by the Zamindar of these peasants? And then the implication of cholera as punishment which would be unthinkable in my Pirdada's Sufi love for all people. It is this kind

of stories which makes me dubious about the truth in these narratives in R. Further west of our Bari, there was a Hindu property which was sold to us – it is unimaginable that one of the poor Hindus, who used to revere Pirdada as a demigod, would ever oppress Pirdada. Our Hindus still regard our Bari as a holy house.

Document M has many pages on miracles. It narrates a miracle in which a man with smallpox got immediately cured by the touch of Kala Sahib (not Pirdada, but his brother Abeduzzaman). If this is true, then why one of our relations died of smallpox in Kala Sahib's time? Why miracle did not work? My father Kala Sahib's son had also a severe attack of smallpox in his youth. Why Kala Sahib's miracle did not cure his son in the earlier stage of that horrible disease? Document M describes many miracles on Pirdada, all equally unconvincing to me.

I have been told repeatedly by Rahat Khan of East Jawar (the Chief Editor of the famous Bengali Newspaper Ittefaq) that when he was a small baby he was seriously ill, and no medicine could cure him. Then his mother threw him at the feet of my Pirdada who was passing by. Pirdada lifted him up, and then he became cured. [Rahat had heard it from his mother he said to me]. If this event is true, was it a miracle? I leave it to the others to judge, except to say that our Prophet said he did not do any miracle, the Quran was the miracle. Another point: When I was studying in the Mymensingh Zilla School (1951-53) the Hindu Brahmin Sanskrit teacher of the school used to invite me to his house to eat *Payesh* (a sublime type of rice pudding) and he used to tell me of many miracles of my Pirdada, which I could not believe. When I came home on vacation I asked my Barachacha who simply replied "I have never heard of them". So I stop here on miracles.

#### *Pirdada's last days*

Pirdada had diabetes, and he died at the age of 87 after 10-15 days of illness at 8 am on Tuesday 10 Falgun, 1337, 25 Feb 1941. During the early part of his illness Fufa was away, but every time Barachacha asked permission to send a man to bring Fufa home, Pirdada said NO. He appointed my Pirchacha. rather than the expected Fufa, his successor and then permitted Fufa to be brought home. One person who suspected this change was my father who noticed Pirdada spending a lot of time with Pirchacha for a while before his illness, as he confided to my mother (who told me). However, I remember that during this illness he was lying on a mat on the floor of his house, and a lot of water was poured over his head for days. Many people collected the drained water in bottles as medicine. On one of these days he did *bayet*, with a long pagri, one side going to the back of the house which was held by all our female relations, including my mother with my 10-month old sister Khukomoni in her arms, and the other side of the pagri going to the front of the house where all our male relations and hundreds of others joined in. I also remember he died surrounded by all his nephews (Fufa has returned by then). By the way, Pirdada had a pet cat, which became visibly forlorn and disoriented after his death and died I think within 9 days of his passing away.

I have described in my memoirs, the people, interesting personalities, atmosphere, environment, daily lives and events in the Langar Khana, including the life and death of Pirdada, and those of my Chachas (Barachacha, Pirchacha, Fufa) in more details, as I remember.

End

## SOURCES

My sources are hand-written barely readable old Bengali notes, as mentioned earlier. Some of these written notes were found by my nephew Rifat in Pirdada's house in 2014, written perhaps around 1920 by someone called Rojoni Kanto Sheel (RKS), and therefore referred to here as document R [R for Rojoni]. A Brahmin Mathematics PhD student from West Bengal studying at Keele in 2014 told me that Sheel was a common surname used to be taken by scribes in Bengal. Since then I have come across several other people also called Sheel. I noticed Rojoni Kanto Sheel's name and the year 1920 on two separate pages in document R, but R does not say if RKS was the scribe, or if it was written in 1920, which is further complicated by the fact that some parts clearly have different Bengali hand-writings, leaving aside the Farsi poems included there – but then I understand that in those days some Hindu scribes used to know Farsi, Farsi being the state and cultural language of India for many centuries, abandoned by the British as the state language of India in around 1830 [You can read about Jawaharlal Nehru (later Prime Minister of India) debating in his youth with his father Motilal (one-time President of the Indian Congress) in family gatherings on the correct interpretation of some Farsi verses]. Document R gives an introduction on Shahzaman and then continues on Pirdada's life, including some material on Pirdada's Pir Moulana Abdul Aziz (MAA) of Baniachong and his instructions to my Pirdada, which Pirdada followed throughout his life, such as to treat all human beings, irrespective of their religion, equally as everyone is equal before God [see the detail also later]

The bulk of Sheel's manuscript focusses on Pirdada, describing how great and saintly he was. R includes many miraculous stories both on MAA and Pirdada. For example, it claims that MAA knew before his last journey to Jawar that he would die there and he apparently warned his wife about this. Similarly, I found many stories about Pirdada as unbelievable. The Farsi poems in R could have been from Pirdada himself, but R does not (if R was indeed the scribe of these poems) say who the author was. Could it be that some of these writings were done by Moulana Abdur Rahman of Challish-kahonia (mentioned earlier), the famous disciple of Pirdada, who used to act as the Chief Khadem? I do not know.

There were also some Bengali poems and a short play (all on Sufi ideas but includes a dialogue with a British Army Officer). These were written in a different handwriting, some of which look like the handwriting of my Pirchacha as I remember it from my childhood, but there is no way I can be sure of. As I remember, Pirchacha used to write thick beautiful letters, for which he would typically cut off the tip of a new nib (to make thick letters) before dipping it in the ink-pot, which I have observed him doing many times. In my childhood on school holidays, I often used to sit in the Pirchacha's small house and watched him working, such as writing letters, or dictating letters to his scribe Nazar Ali, who was the manager of the Langar Khana grocery shop next to the Ashram. However returning to RKS, I do not know who his source was, nor do I know to what extent R is authentic, but I assume RKS wrote what he had heard circulating about Pirdada and his Pir MAA at that time in our Bari.

The second document I have got is the manuscript given to me by Manu Bhai Sahib, referred to earlier as document M (again I do not know who the scribe was, but I do not think it was Manu Bhai Sahib himself). While the Sheel's document stated that Shahzaman settled in Jawar probably in 1260 BD (1854/55 CE) as in *Tatthyabhash*, M is emphatic that all the children of Shahzaman from 1847 CE onward (i.e. except the eldest who was born in 1846 in Gopdighi) were born in Jawar – clearly a contradiction. However, apart from some dates, which M has provided, much of both the documents (i.e. M and R) appeared copies of each other, sentence by sentence, except that R gives some details on MAA and the Langar Khana, absent in M; but R stops abruptly on those details, perhaps implying missing pages. Given this identity, it could be that M was created from R, since my hunch is that R was really written in 1920 and hence the earlier document of the two, but I have no strong evidence for this



hunch. However I have found many exaggerations, apart from some inconsistencies in M. Furthermore, Manu Bhai Sahib was not a reliable person, in my experience. He tended to exaggerate things out of his reverence in order to make it look better for people he revered, such as my Barababa (Shahzaman), Pirdada or Pirchacha. For example, he claimed that my Pirdada knew even Sanskrit, implying that his (Pirdada's) knowledge of Sanskrit came through a miracle. On the other hand R suggested that the Prophet himself probably imparted deep (Sufi) hidden knowledge directly to his descendant my Pirdada.

The third source for me is Ashraf's book, published by my nephew Ashraf in 2013, referred to earlier as A, for which he deserves much credit. I congratulate him on this. However, I do not know what his main source was. If it was his father (i.e. my Danu Bhai, the younger brother of my Manu Bhai), then I assume Danu Bhai got his material from his father (i.e. my Barachacha). In that case both the brothers should have the same story, especially since I personally knew Manu Bhai was collecting bits and pieces on our ancestry for a long time. Yet the two accounts differ widely on the life of Shahzaman. Although I was always much closer to Danu Bhai, I never knew he was collecting any information on the life of my Barababa (i.e. Shahzaman) or Pirdada, but of course my lack of knowledge proves nothing. On the whole, there is no way for me to know which version is correct in those details. Some of the dates given in A are internally inconsistent and some are plainly wrong, all of which, I am sure, are due to printing errors, since most of the correct dates that I have used were confirmed to me by Ashraf. Finally, I again congratulate Ashraf for printing that book.

Ashraf's book has many stories and dates, but with much contradictions, and many unlikely events. The book's assertion that Shahzaman was the Imam of the old mosque in the Masjid Bari could not possibly be true, since by then it was 300 years old. I have seen one 300-year old mosque in Sonar Gaon, Bangladesh, which was very small, and structurally unsafe (and therefore not in use), because of poor construction material (brick and quick-lime) and Bangladeshi weather, unlike the Jame Masjid in Delhi or the Badshahi Masjid in Lahore, which are stone-built. I have also been told by Rifat that he had seen a document which claimed that the mosque was destroyed by a big earthquake in perhaps around 1184 BD (1778 CE) at least 60 years before Shahzaman's arrival in Bengal. He further told me that after that earthquake the main branch of the Zamindar Bari settled in its present location in West Jawar. There were three other smaller branches, one went to Dhala (1½ mile north of Jawar), another to Kaluma (1 mile east of Dhala), and the third to Fatehpur (4 miles Northeast of Jawar, passing Kaluma on the way). Rifat's source, as he told me, is a nephew of Rahat Khan (the Editor-in-Chief of the prominent Bangladeshi daily newspaper Ittefaq), who came from the same family as that of our Zamindars. However, I have searched in vain to find any record in our Zamindar Bari on their ancestors, on the mosque and on any historical record of Jawar. I also contacted Rahat Khan himself, who after one month's of trying various sources, including grandchildren of Zamindar Abdul Hakim Khan, drew a blank. He said that he was truly ashamed that he could not supply me with any information – he could not even confirm or deny his nephew's story. However, according to A, the present Jawar mosque in the Zamindar Bari was built in 1877 CE, and the present Masjid Bari mosque in 1897. By the way, our West Jawar branch produced further branches over time: apart from the main branch in our present Zamindar Bari, three other well-known branches are (i) our Mia Bari in West Jawar, (ii) the ancestor of our Rahat Khan (above) in East Jawar and (iii) the ancestor of my nephew Faruq of Shudi.

A possible 4th source could have been Prof Abdul Ghafur of Bogra (my Bogra Dulabhai – the husband of Hamida Bubu) who compiled partially the life-story of my Pirdada, which I saw and read in around 1948, when Pirchacha (his father-in-law) was alive – in fact I think it was Pirchacha who asked him to write it. However I do not know what happened to that manuscript. In addition to these sources, there were also times when I have heard anecdotes from very old people of our area who used to gather in the Langar Khana compound, and exchanged stories of what they remembered of Shahzaman Sahib from their childhood, or what they were told by their parents. It was from such stories that I knew that

Jawar belonged to Badla Thana before Tarail Thana was created. Finally, *Tatthyabhash*, the philosophical work of Pirdada. Since it says that the family settled in Jawar in 1260 BD (1854/55 CE), I take it to be the most authentic source, as it was authored by Pirdada himself.

It seems that my source documents R and M were largely written without caring for dates on the events described. I have analysed some dates in those documents in order to come to some conclusions – I have succeeded in some cases, but failed in many others. I have further found that the tomb-inscriptions are generally illegible, and some cases where legible could be unreliable. I then thought of examining the land transfer documents, such as when the Masjid Bari was given to us, which I hoped would show the date when Shahzaman came to Jawar. But there were two problems: (i) I am told that the land transfer document was probably registered many years after the event as it was the common practice in those days, and (ii) all such original documents have been disposed off, after the creation of Bangladesh when all lands were re-registered with the existing landholders. Our own original copies, which I remember seeing in my youth, were also thrown away, it seems. I have also enquired about the Zamindar Bari archives, if any is kept. Again, they do not have any historical documents either, as mentioned above.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: JAWAR SAYYED FAMILY - A GENEALOGY

#### Prophet's QuraishAncestry

Abdul Mannaf

Hashem

Abdul Muttalib (10 sons)

Among them: Abu Talib and Abdullah

Muhammad Ibn Abdullah [The Prophet]

Ali Ibn Abu Talib [1st Imam]

1. Imam Ali Ibn Abu Talib married Fatima Binth Muhammad [1st Imam, d. 661CE]
2. Imam Hussain [3rd Imam, 680 CE] (the 2nd Imam was his elder brother was Imam Hassan)
3. Imam Ali Jainul Abedin [4th Imam] [d 714]
4. Imam Baqir [5th Imam] [d. 733]
5. Imam Jafar Sadiq [6th Imam] [d 765]
6. Imam Musa Kazim [7th Imam] [d 799]
7. Imam Ali [Ibn Musa] Rida (Rida is pronounced Riza in Iranian) [8th Imam] [d 818]
8. Muhammad Makki [according to history Muhammad al-Jawad al-Taqi [d 835] was the 9th Imam, Ali Rida had no other sons listed in the Encyclopedia I consulted, but encyclopedia usually lists only very important names, not all names. These Imams used to have many wives, four at a time, and many children, not all are listed. Both Imam Rida and Imam Taqi lived in Baghdad, not Mecca. Also Imam Taqi married a daughter of Khalifa Mamun. It may be Muhammad Makki was from a different lesser known mother. "Makki" might imply that he lived in Mecca.

#### [\*\*Other Imams

The 9th Imam as stated above was Muhammad Jawad al-Taqi [d. 835]. 10th Imam was Ali al-Hadi [d. 868]. The 9th Imam had only two well-known sons, the first one became the 10th Imam, and the second son was called Musa. The 10th Imam, was imprisoned by the Khalifa and died in prison.

Ali al-Hadi had three sons, Muhammad, Hasan al-Askari (11th Imam, died 874 in the same prison with his father) and Jafar. The 12th Imam was Imam Mahdi who was the son of Hasan al-Askari but nobody apparently saw him at all, and hence Hidden (or Ghaebi Imam). Some say he (Mahdi) was never born, since the father was always in the Khalifa's prison.\*].

#### Returning to our ancestor

9. Ali Makki [he was not an Imam]
10. Shah Mohammad Makki
11. Abdur Rahim
12. Amir Ali
13. Maqbool
14. Jalal
15. Naser Hasser
16. Hisham
17. Muhammad
18. Omar
19. Jafar

20. Usman
21. Ishaq
22. Mahmood
23. Amir Shah Abu Taraf
24. Ahmad Mustaq
25. Razzaq
26. Ahmad Bofa
27. Mohammed Nazar Box
28. Yussuf Nazar
29. Ahmad Nazar
30. Qamar Ali
31. Pir Ali
32. Mustafa
33. Qashem
34. Abdul Ghafur
35. Mian Mirashuddin
36. Haji Shah
37. Ali Shah
38. Hussain Shah
39. Marwan Shah (also known as Mardan Shah)
40. Sham: He had three sons:  
     Mohammad Zaman, Shahzaman and Mir Zaman.

#### 41. Shahzaman

Shahzaman came left his country aged 40 in around 1830 and settled in Jawar around 1855 CE.

Original Home: Village Kenray, near Topai (or Tupee), apparently between Attak and Peshawar District Peshawar, (now in Pakistan)

41. Shahzaman, who had four sons,

- 42(a) Ahmadzaman
- 42(b) Badiuzzaman
- 42(c) Abiduzzaman
- 42(d) Abdullah [He had no children]

Shahzaman also had a daughter, who was married to the Sayyed family of Sikandernagar, one and a half miles from Jawar. In the next generation (second generation in Jawar) there were the following seven male cousins (known as the seven):

42(a) Ahmadzaman

43(a) Abdur Rashid [3rd Pir, d. 1949].  
 He married his cousin Euhanes Banu.

43(b) Abdul Hamid.  
 Only two sons and a daughter are alive, the son Muzaher is married.

42(b) Badiuzzaman

43(a) Abdul Huq [no children]

43(b) Rafiuddin

Rafiuddin had one son, Abdus Salam (Ezaz Mia), and three daughters, Rabia, Razia and Manjur - all married. Ezaz has many children (ten or more), the eldest is his son Selim; Rabia and Razia have none, but Manjur has some. Selim became the Pir but he died a few years ago.

42(c) Abiduzzaman.

43(a) Shamsuddin (fourth Pir)

43(b) Euhanes Banu (daughter), married cousin Abdur Rashid.

43(c) Mohammad Ishaq (second Pir)

43(d) Ali Asgar Hussain (Siddiq Mia)

43(e) Akhtar Banu (daughter)

43(a). Shamsuddin (4th Pir), died in 1953 aged 63.

44(a). Azizur Rahman (Manu Mia - 6th Pir)

44(b). Amanul Islam (Danu Mia - 5th Pir)

He also had two daughters: Rukaiya and Khadija, both married with children.

Manu Mia succeeded Danu Mia as Pir after forcing the younger brother to give up in a dispute which continued for a long time. Manu Mia had two sons Abid and Arif, both now dead. The eldest son of Danu Mia is Ashraf.

43(b). Mohammad Ishaq (Second Pir), died in 1949, aged 53

44(a). Matiur Rahman (Mati Mia)

44(b). Abdul Malek (Sabud Mia)

Ishaq also had three daughters who were all older than the two sons and three daughters: Ayesha, Hamida and Suraiya.

43(d). Ali Asgar Hussain (Siddiq Mia), died in 1943 aged 42 (born 1901).

44(a). Adul Qayyum (Mubashsher Mia) born 1931, d 2002?.

44(b). Misbah Deen (Muzakker Mia)

44(c). Lutfunnessa (Safura, also known as Khukumani) (girl), born 1941.

Abdul Qayyum opened a pharmacy in Mohanganj, Netrokona.

Safura married Abdul Majid who was a teacher of English in the Mohanganj High School, but died young in 1987.

The children are:

44(a) Abdul Qayyum

45(a) Anwarul Hussain (Adnan)

45(b) Nahid (daughter)

45(c) Shahi (daughter)

45(d) Ripa (daughter)

45(e) Azharul Hussain (Faisal)

44(b) Misbah Deen

45(a) Rami Hussain Deen, born 1973 at Aberdeen, Scotland

45(b) Alvin Faisal Deen, born 1975 at Aberdeen, Scotland

44(c) Safura

45(a) Shamim (son)

45(b) Resu (son)

45(c) Moni (daughter)

45(d) Roni (daughter)

45(e) Ramen (son)

**End of Genealogy**

## APPENDIX B: List of scanned documents in memoirs2\mss.

Memoirs2\scanned-.../my-notes-rojoni.docx.

This file *my-notes-rojoni.docx* contains my notes of special info I gathered from document R, but absent in document M. I have incorporated this special info in my story of Pirdada, and hence this file *my-notes-rojoni.docx* can be thrown away.

### **The list and the description of files I have scanned.**

#### 1. tatthyabhash.pdf

Scanned version of the printed *Tatthyabhash*, printed by my nephew Shaukat from the handwritten version of my father's copy from my sister, but my father's copy is now lost – my sister says that my father's copy was never returned to her by Shaukat, who sadly passed away.

#### 2. rojoni-main.pdf:

This is the scanned version of document R, the main document of Rojoni Kanto Sheel, which I have used to describe the life of Shahzaman and his son Abdullah.

#### 3. manu-main.pdf

This is the scanned version of document M, the document I got from Manu Bhai Sahib, and used by me in the Pirdada's story

#### 4. manu-tatthybhash.pdt

This is the scanned version of the handwritten *Tatthyabhash* given to me by Manu Bhai Sb

#### 5. manu-miracles.pdf

This is the scanned version of the description of many miracles Manu Bhai Sb gave me. I found them unbelievable and hence I did not use them in my narratives of Pirdada

### **Further RKS**

RKS had many other notes, apart from *rojoni-main* that I have used Those other notes do not have page numbers, but written as in *rojoni-main*, on both sides of a sheet without any margins, without any topic heading and without any discernible continuity in the subject matter. The writing style is just rumbling, such that it is very difficult to determine the next page from the content (i.e. it is hard to see any continuity of the content from one page to the next). The paper is frail, torn in many places and with many holes, ink is smudged not only on the same side of a page, but also sometimes through onto the reverse side of a page, making it hard to decipher the writing. I have spent several months trying to read them and make sense of these rumbling pages, but I failed. Having realised that these frail pages will deteriorate fast in time, and therefore will be harder to read or even to scan in the future, I have got them scanned by the best scanning expert of old historical documents I could find, hoping that perhaps someone in the future in Jawar or elsewhere will be able to read and understand them. These pages are scanned in four bundles as:

#### 6. rojoni1.pdf

#### 7. rojoni2.pdf

#### 8. rojoni3. pdf

#### 9. rojoni4-poemsetc.pdf

This one *rojoni4-poemsetc* include a Sufi poem and a Sufi play in which a boy and a British Army Officer appear, but many pages are torn, unreadable and missing

## APPENDIX C: Some Issues for Ashraf to resolve

1. The term umr-e-Ali used in Ashraf's book could be wrong, it could have been ushr-e-Ali, the Arabic word ushr meaning one-tenth. The Bengali writing I have seen is unclear, and can be read either as ushr-e-Ali or umr-e-Ali. I have used ushr-e-Ali in my writing.

2. ASHRAF: Please check on the gravestones. For example the death dates of both your father and your Chacha is given as 1991, which cannot be true.

Also death of Sumiaya, daughter of Sayyed Muhammad Ishaq, do you mean my Suraiya Bubu. Are you sure her formal name was Sumayya?

Who is Fazlur Raman Choudhury? If he was our Fazlu Bhai of Dhala who used to live in our Bari (and who married my Suraiya Bubu), then he was much older than Manu Bhai, reportedly eldest of our cousins, in fact older than even Gulman Bubu (mother of Faruq) and hence he could not have been born in 1961, perhaps it was 1916. Please check.

Who is Jamrutunnesa Choudurani of Dhala who died in 1931? If she was the mother of your Dadu, then she was alive in 1931, and was alive when Pirdada died in 1941. I have seen her and we all loved her. She used to make for us in our kitchen her bharta of begun, alu, etc, (sometimes using forbidden Kacha marich) which we all relished, though I never liked her Kochu bharta, which used to irritate my throat. Remember she was a Fufu of my mother, and so whenever she came to see your Dadu (which was quite often), she would spend a few days in our house with my mother. However I do not know when she died, but it was after the death of my Pirdada, otherwise I could not have remembered what I have stated above. I know she wanted to be buried in the Masjid Bari, a reason why she made three marriage relationships with us, your Dadu, my mother and my Chota fufu. There are many other mistakes too many for me to list. But you Ashraf have done a great job in publishing the account, for which I congratulate you. Mistake is normal in any publication – important thing is to correct them.

In our ancestry you have also listed there a Sayyed Ramzan who died in 1973 – did you see him/her. I have never known any chacha or fufu called Ramzan. It is possible he/she died long before I was born, or when I was too young to remember anything and hence it cannot be 1973, but it could be 1937.