

Of Sufism and Mysticism: A Case study of the Hazrat Baba Naseeb-Ud-Din-Gazi

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Abstract

The rise of Islamic civilization coincides strongly with the spread of Sufi philosophy in Islam. The spread of Sufism has been considered a definitive factor in the spread of Islam, and in the creation of integrally Islamic cultures, especially in Asia between the 13th and 16th centuries. Sufism produced a flourishing intellectual culture throughout the Islamic world, whose physical artifacts are still present. In many places, a lodge known variously as a *Zaouia*, *Khanqah* or *tekke* would be endowed through a pious foundation in perpetuity *waqf* to provide a gathering place for Sufi adepts, as well as lodging for itinerant seekers of knowledge. Sufism or *tasawwuf*, as it is called in Arabic, is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. The substance of Sufism is the Truth and the meaning of Sufism is the selfless experiencing and actualization of the Truth. The practice of Sufism is the intention to go towards the Truth, by means of love and devotion. This is called the *tariqat*, the spiritual path or way towards Allah. The Sufi is one who is a lover of Truth, who by means of love and devotion moves towards the Truth, towards the perfection which all are truly seeking. As necessitated by love's jealousy, the Sufi is taken away from all except the Truth. One of the most important doctrines of Sufism is the concept of the "Perfect Man" *al-Insan al-Kamil*. This doctrine states that there will always exist upon the earth a "*Qutb*" - a man who is the perfect channel of grace from God to man and in a state of *wilayas* sanctity, being under the protection of God. This paper is an attempt to understand the coming of Islam in Kashmir with special reference to the role of a Sufi saint, Hazrat Baba Naseeb-Ud-Din-Gazi in disseminating the message of Islam in Kashmir and the construction of hundreds of Masjids through popular bhandas.

Introduction

While the fascinating valley of Kashmir was yet under the rule of the Hindu, Lohara dynasty and Kalhana was giving his final touches to his monumental history, the *Rajatarangini*, North-west India was witnessing the end of an era. The old order was changing rapidly with the advent of Muslim rule. Though the Islamic movement was of relatively recent growth, it was yet powerfully forcing itself on the ancient and the firmly established social and religious institutions of the country. There was clashing of fundamental convictions, a conflict of realism with idealism, of the material with the visionary, of the concrete with the abstract. New values were being set up in art and literature and a chain of action and reaction resulted in a slow and imperceptible synthesis of the two fundamentally opposite culture.

Perhaps the best example of this synthesis is provided by medieval Kashmir which, as mentioned earlier, come under the influence of the new religion peacefully and was spared the violent birth pangs that ushered in the new order in the rest of the country. For over two centuries following Mahmud Ghaznavi's expeditions to the north and west of India, Kashmir sealed itself up behind its mountain ramparts, secure against the attacks of

the zealous armies of Muslim invaders. But cultural influences and ideas could not be shut out, how so ever high the enclosing walls might be. Islamic missionaries and adventurers carried the teaching of the new religion in the valley. Most of these missionaries belonged to one or the other of the order of Sufis from Persia and Bukhara. How these saints and their teachings influenced the already rich cultural heritage of Kashmir will be clear from a reference to the development of Sufism and its propagation in the valley by devoted and selfless missionaries.¹(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994).

The middle of fourteenth century was a period of religious and moral ferment in Kashmir.²(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994).The new religion (Islam) entered the valley in this form, being carried there by enlightened Sufi's like the Bulbul Shah with their humanistic approach to religion. They found a ready and sympathetic response from the Kashmiri's already permeated with the teachings of mystic saints and seers. It was during this period of religious ferment that a need had been felt for a new approach to religion embracing all creeds and castes and appealing to the heart rather than head. Thanks to its rich religious and philosophic traditions, Kashmir rose to the occasion and produced a number of mystics and saints who by their teachings and their lives of complete self-abnegation were the living embodiments of true religion and morality.³(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994).The cultural heritage of a country secures sustenance from the philosophy of life nurtured by its people from the time man awoke to consciousness of self and sprit. In our valley⁴ (K. L. Kalla: 1997) Baba NaseebUd-Din-Gazi⁵(Iqbal Ahmad: 2007) projected such human values so dear to Kashmiri's from the dawn of our history.⁶(K. L. Kalla: 1997).

The Advent of Sufism in Kashmir

It was thus fortunate that Islam entered Kashmir from central Asia, the land which owed so much to Kashmir in the realm of art and philosophy. The first name associated with the propagation of the new faith of whom we find a record in the annals of Kashmir, was Bulbul shah. He appears to have deeply impressed the people, his methods of preaching and persuasion, at a time when the fortunes of the ruling dynasty were in the melting pot and the people were passing through a period of political instability, heavy taxation, and crushing burden of feudalism. Above all, he was responsible for initiating the new ruler in to the fold of Islam and thus elevating it to the status of state religion.Bulbul shah is said to have visited Kashmir during the time of king Suhadeva, the predecessor of Rinchin. He was a widely travelled Musavi Sayyid from Turkistan, and was a disciple of Shah Niamatullah Wali Farsi, khalifa of the SuharwardiTareeq or school of Sufis founded by sheikh Shihab-ud-din Suharwardi.⁷(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994)Suffice it to say here that with this first success of his mission, Bulbul shah acquired great influence in the valley and very soon he effected the conversion of Rinchin's brother in law and commander in chief and several others to his creed. The first mosque was built at the place now called

¹ P. N. K. Bamzai, *Culture and political History of Kashmir* Vol. 2, M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1994,pp. 533-34.

²*Ibid*, p. 549

³*Ibid.*, p. 550.

⁴ K. L. Kalla, *Eminent Personalities of Kashmir* (ed.), Discovery Publishing House, Delhi, 1997, p. 66.

⁵Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Heritage Tourism*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2007, p. 119.

⁶ K. L.Kalla, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁷P.N.K. Bamzai, *op. cit.*, pp. 535-36.

Bulbul Lanker, below the fifth bridge in Srinagar. Bulbul shah died in 1327 AD and lies buried near the mosque.⁸(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994).

But the most prominent among the Sufi missionaries are Sayyid Ali Hamdani who “by his learning, piety and devotional, is said to have made 37,000 converts to Islam” known in Kashmir as Shah-i-Hamdan. He may well be said to have practically established Islam in Kashmir and laid its foundations well and true. The great Sayyid, also known as *Amir-i-Kabir* or the great Amir,⁹(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994) accompanied by 700 more Sayyids¹⁰(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994) entered Kashmir in 1372 AD when sultan Shihab-ud-din was the reigning king.¹¹(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994). A leader of the Naqashbandiya order of Sufis founded by his contemporary Khawaja Mohammad Baha-ud-din Naqashbandi (1319-89) of Bukhara. Sayyid Ali Hamdani attained great influence over the ruler.¹²(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994). Some of his followers visited the remote corners of the valley and by their religious discourses effected the conversion of a large number of people to Islam.¹³(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994) Sayyid Ali Hamdani’s deep scholarship and his spiritual attainments were responsible for the furtherance of the conversion of the valley to Islam goes without saying. He came into contact with the popular¹⁴(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994) Sufi saint sheikh Nuruddin, and had long discourses with him on spiritual and philosophical subjects.¹⁵(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994). In 1387 on account of his ill health he left the valley. While in Pakhli in Hazara district he passed away. His disciples carried the dead body to Khotan where it lies buried.¹⁶(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994).

After the death of Syed Ali Hamadani a number of Sufi’s came to Kashmir and his work was continued with great vigour by his disciples.¹⁷(P. N. K. Bamzai: 1994). Among these Sufis the most prominent was his son Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, Sheikh Hamza Makhdum and Baba Daud Khaki. Hamza Makhdum, was originally rooted in the Kubrawi tradition.¹⁸(Mohammad Isaq Khan: 2002). The principle centre of the Kubrawyyas was Kashmir, the order introduced there by Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani.¹⁹(S. A. A. Rizwi: 2005). Baba Daud Khaki was undoubtedly the most distinguished disciple of Hamza Makhdum under whose care he devoted himself to practicing *tasawuf*.²⁰ He

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 536.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 536.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 537.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 537.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 537.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 537-38.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p 538.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p 538.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p 537.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p 539.

¹⁸ Mohammad Isaq Khan, *Kashmir’s transition to Islam*, Monahar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2002-03, p. 145.

¹⁹S. A. A. Rizwi, *The Wonder that was India*, Vol. 2, Picador of pan Macmillan Ltd., London, 2005, p. 247.

²⁰Tasawuf is a branch of Islamic knowledge which focuses on the spiritual development of the Muslims so long as it remains within the guidelines of the Shariah and emphasises the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.

served his preceptor with great humility and, consequently was appointed his khalifa by Hamza Makhdoom even during his life time.²¹(Mohammad Isaq Khan: 2002).

Baba Naseeb-ud-din Gazi, His Life and Teachings

The most reputed saints of the Suharwardi Rishi syncretism phase to have done a good deal of work for seeking practical conversions during the late sixteenth and in the early seventeenth century in Kashmir was ²²(Mohammad Ashraf Wani: 2004) Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi born in 1569 AD in Sialkot (Pakistan) was a born Saint and distinguished Educationist. Due to his missionary zeal he left his native place and came to Kashmir and devoted himself for the cause of Islam. When he arrived Kashmir, he followed the Sufi saint Baba Daud Khaki.²³(Iqbal Ahmad: 2007). Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi like his spiritual preceptor Baba Daud Khaki, was greatly influenced by the Rishi movement. Like Baba Daud Khaki who mostly subsisted on wild vegetables, Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi adopted vegetarianism and celibacy. However throughout his life, he remained socially active, moving from one village to another in order to consolidate the foothold gained by the Rishi saint Sheikh Nuruddin among the folk. He went as far as Ladakh and Karnah in the North-West and the Pirpanjal pass in the south. During his travels he also met the Rishi's, and it was under their influence that he dedicated himself to the cause of poor ²⁴(Mohammad Isaq Khan: 2002) for which he earned the title, *AbulFuqara* (father of the poor). In his work for creating an ambience in the true sense Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi was supported by his devoted followers numbering three to four hundred.²⁵(Mohammad Ashraf Wani: 2004). He reached to the corners of the valley and carried with him the message of Allah and his Prophet. He also constructed more than one thousand Mosques in Kashmir.²⁶(Iqbal Ahmad: 2007).

It is significant to note here that it was through Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi's interpretation of Sheikh Nuruddin's sayings that the teachings of Islam spread down to the social ladder. He is still remembered among the common folk for utilizing the services of the Bhandas for the wider dissemination of Islamic teachings. The traditional performances of the Bhandas at the shrine of Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi on the eve of his anniversary not only remind us of their association with the saint but also of the broadening social horizon given to the process of Islamization by even a Suharwardi Sufi and the *Dhambaliis* being celebrated every year in the month of June in the Bijbehara town where he is buried in the shrine.²⁷(Mohammad Isaq Khan: 2002).

Dhambali Festival

²¹ Mohammad Isaq Khan, *Kashmir's transition to Islam*, Monahar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2002, p. 149.

²² Mohammad Ashraf Wani, *Islam in Kashmir*, Oriental Publishing House, Srinagar, 2004, P.75,

²³ Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Heritage Tourism*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2007, p. 119.

²⁴ Mohammad Isaq Khan, *Kashmir's transition to Islam*, Monahar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2002, p.155.

²⁵ Mohammad Ashraf Wani, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²⁶ Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Heritage Tourism*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2007, p. 119.

²⁷ Mohammad Isaq Khan, *Kashmir's transition to Islam*, Monahar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2002, pp. 155-56.

Kashmir is the land of fairs and festivals and people here have their own way to celebrate them. Most of these festivals are associated with the saints and mystic of this land as birth days and anniversaries called *Ursor warusin* the local parlance is annually celebrated occasion at the Muslim shrine.²⁸(Iqbal Ahmad: 2006).One such saint who's *Urs* is still celebrated in a unique style and with full traditional order is Baba Naseeb-ud-din Gazi at Bijbehara. The saint is titled as *AbulFuqara* (Father of the Poor). The poor people known as *Fuqara* are associated with the shrine of the saint. They came to the shrine in groups and pay homage to their peer by performing *Dhamali*.The saint worked and cared for the poor throughout his life. Legends goes that in his *Darbar* daily thousands of poor were served food and other necessities and whenever he was out, he was accompanied by thousands of followers. Where ever he reached his followers used to beat drums to call people for construction of mosques and other public works.

The saint after even after the passage of centuries is revered and people have got deep attachment with his glorious shrine at Bijbehara. Hundreds of devotees visit his shrine daily. A heavy rush of devotees is seen during the *Urs* days, usually in the month of June every year. The annual *Urs* is celebrated on the pattern of a *Mela* (Festival) popularly known as *VyejbearMela* in local parlance.The poor and deprived tribes called *DhamaliFaqirs* who consider the saint as their *Abu* gathered here in various groups and pay homage to their peer by performing *Dhamali*. They came here with a traditional *Alam*(Flag). The *Dhamalifaqirs* from *Zalura*, *Charar-i-Sharif* are considered the seniors and hence the *Alam*rests with them. Different groups of the tribe have got their areas surroundings the historic town and they reach to their respective areas few days before the commencement of the *Urs*and perform dances which they consider as their traditional duty and they take pride in performing their duties.The performance of *Dhamali*during the *Urs* days of the saint is centuries old and the festival is unique and most popular one. Dozens of groups comprising hundreds of artists from *Zalura*, *Wathura*, *Waripora*, *Panzgam*, *Divsar*, *Nobal*, *Akingam*, *Mohripora*, *Nagabal*, *KellarMaspora*, *Parigam*, *KalishshahSahab* and other several places gather in the *Bijbehara* town and perform the *Dhamali*. A massive demonstration of the traditional dances is held on the 12th of June every year in the premises of the shrine of *Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi*. The *Dhamali* Dancers arrive at the shrine bear footed wearing traditional green and yellow dresses. Some are also seen wearing turbans where the whole contingent beats Drums while one of them carries the *Alam* (flag) identifying their areas. It is silence all along the ground except the sounds of Drum beating and *Dhamalies*leaping and jumping. Dancing to the hilt, several dancers go so deep that they later fall unconscious.

There are few dancers who actually do not belong to the tribes of the *faqirs* but had a great regard for the *Dhamalies*. *Mohammad Akbar Dar* of *Uranhal*, *Anantanag* who used to accompany the *ChiyenEdigam* group of *DhamaliFaqirs*do so for several years on the advice of his parents. Accordind to himhis mother had no baby; she did not leave any *Peer* or *Faqir* to acknowledge his favour. She then came to the shrine of *Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi* during the *Dhamalifestival* and sought the blessings of the *DhamaliFaqirs*. She was heard by God and awarded with a son who is before you. There are other people

²⁸Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Archeology*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2006, p. 211.

also who have similar tales to tell. One can watch parent's temporarily giving their infants in *Dhamali Faqirs* lap to seek the blessings of the Baba. The *Dhamaliis* followed by prayers. The *faqirs* mainly pray for adequate rainfall and sufficient crops. The show continues up to till every group attends *Khanqah* and seeks the blessings of the Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi.²⁹ (Iqbal Ahmad: 2006).

Under the influence of *Rishi* Saint Sheikh Nuruddin's teachings Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi urged the people to despise riches lest these should destroy their possessors. The verses of Sheikh Nuruddin, mostly those sayings where he enjoins the believers to undertake public charities for the gratuitous relief for the distressed, find a prominent place in Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi's work *Nurnama*. It is claimed that *Nurnama* was composed after two centuries of death of Sheikh Nurudin Noorani. Since various available manuscripts of these texts have been written in Persio- Arabicscript, these are yet to be deciphered. Loving kindness towards the poor, inspired no doubt by Sheikh Nuruddin's verses, was the chief preoccupation of Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi. It was indeed his concern over the exploitation of the poor and the resultant concentration of money in fewer hands that determined his attitude towards the rich.³⁰ (Mohammad Isaq Khan: 2002).

Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi was an outstanding scholar of Persian language, theology and mysticism and had made a keen study of Kashmir's history and literature. In his *Tazkire Mashaikh Kashmir* (anthology of Kashmiri saints) he has given life sketches of eminent Rishi's of Kashmir, including saints of other mystic orders. However, his *Nurnama* is an exclusive work on the Sheikh Nuruddin.³¹ (G.N. Gouhar: 2008). A close perusal of Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi's *Nurnama* gives us a clear picture about his earnest attempt to bring home to his readers that Sheikh Nuruddin's words and deeds were rooted in the *sunna*³² and the *sharia*. He makes his account of the historical facts concerning the life of Sheikh Nuruddin conform to the ideals of *sunna* and the *sharia* turning them into examples to be followed by *Saliks* for whom the *Nurnama* was written.³³ (Mohammad Isaq Khan: 2002). Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi spent his last days at Bijbehara where his soul left for Heaven at the age of 82 years in 13th Muhhram 1047 Hijri and was buried at Bijbehara town, and the shrine was raised over the grave.³⁴ (Iqbal Ahmad: 2007).

Architecture of the Shrine

The shrine of Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi located in Baba Mohalla Bijbehara exhibits a wonderful architectural evidence of its glorious past. The plinth of the shrine is square in shape, made of locally found stones, which have been joined together with plaster. The

²⁹ Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Archeology*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2006, pp. 211-14

³⁰ Mohammad Isaq Khan, *Kashmir's transition to Islam*, Monahar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2002, p. 157.

³¹ G.N. Gouhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2008, p. 13.

³² Sunnah and Sharia are the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which he himself practised during his life time and which is to be followed by the Muslims in true letter and spirit.

³³ Mohammad Isaq Khan, *Kashmir's transition to Islam*, Monahar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2002, p. 158.

³⁴ Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Heritage Tourism*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2007, p 119.

grave of the Saint is in the central chamber house.³⁵(Iqbal Ahmad: 2006).The central chamber housing, the burial of the saint is raised of the bricks and wood. The pillars imposed over the verandah; around the central chamber support ceiling as well the roof of the shrine.³⁶(Iqbal Ahmad: 2007).The exterior of the main chamber carries Holly sayings in beautiful calligraphic style. The whole structure is covered by low pyramidal roof built in three tiers, with differing size in each successive tier. It is mostly made of metal sheets. An octagonal steeple of Ahrami order is raised over the top of the roof which in turn is covered with silver type object, called Minar. The shrine faces south and in front of it is the most famous mosque, Khanqah of the town. This is also considered to be the oldest one in the town.³⁷(Iqbal Ahmad: 2006).

Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that under the influence of Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi the Rishi movement entered in a crucial phase. Although Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi never claimed to be a Rishi, in actual practice he seems to have chosen Sheikh Nuruddin as a model of personal piety and conduct. It is of significance to note that unlike Sheikh Nuruddin he toured different parts of the valley with the purpose of creating *Sharia* consciousness among people who, in spite of their professed faith in Islam, were wedded to the traditional religious culture. The undertaking of the repairs of the Mosques in several villages was important steps in the direction of creating an Islamic ambience in a true sense.³⁸(Mohammad Isaq Khan: 2002).

Conclusion

The present paper tries to highlight in nutshell the advent of Islam in Kashmir and the role of various Sufis in general and that of Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi in particular where in the study highlighted the role of Baba Naseeb-ud-Din Gazi in the dissemination of Islamic teachings among the masses though the Bhands of beating the drums. The Sufi saint after inviting the attention of the masses in a unique style and therefore seeks the help of the people for the construction of Mosques and other public works. However with the passage of time this drum beating has turned into a Mela (festival). But the main objective of the Baba Nasib-ud-Din Gazi behind this was the spread of Islam among the masses. Therefore careful study of his massage is the need of the hour and the way he devoted his life for the cause of Islam rather than celebrating festivals on the Urs days of Baba Nasib-ud-Din Gazi.

The saints like Baba Nasib-Ud-Din Gazi are attracting hundreds of devotees who are coming daily to his shrine. The present paper has tried to highlight in brief the early life and Baba Nasib-Ud-Din Gazi. Much can be indeed said on his work as a poet and more, perhaps, on his work in the spiritual realm. But at a time when the world was suffering from social, political and economic conflict, but he made efforts in removing the difference between man and man. As long back as the 16th and 17th century he preached non-violence, simple living and high thinking and thus he became Gazi for Muslims and

³⁵Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Archeology*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2006, p. 47.

³⁶Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Heritage Tourism*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2007, p. 119.

³⁷Iqbal Ahmad, *Kashmir Archeology*, Gulshan Publications, Srinagar, 2006, pp. 47-48.

³⁸ Mohammad Isaq Khan, *Kashmir's transition to Islam*, Monahar Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2002, p. 159.

his message was taken up by the likeminded popular Sufis. Therefore he established a tradition of harmony and tolerance which is our priceless heritage. It is thus which we owe largely to Baba Nasib-Ud-Din Gazi.

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