

Shah Husain and the Malamatiya Sufi Tradition

Fateh Muhammad Malik

According to Ali Hujwiri, self-blame and blame of mankind against the sufi *mālamat* is a kind of spiritual food relished by the friends of God. Outwardly it is an infliction, a source of torment but inwardly it is rewarded with Divine approval. The *mālamat* is the delight of the saints of God, because it secures nearness to Him. The *malamati* sufi rejoices in this state quite opposed to a common man who rejoices in worldly affairs and popularity. So the *Malamatiya* sect of sufis is one which does not act according to the established norms of orthodox sufis.¹

The cultural significance of the sudden and spontaneous transformation of Shah Husain² (1539-1599), in the year 1575, from a sober theologian into an intoxicated sufi poet, is not yet fully explored. This event in the life of the patron saint of Lahore is celebrated every spring as *Mela Chiragan* (festival of lights) at his tomb at a popular level. He is acknowledged as the first and the foremost person in the Punjab, who has inaugurated the *Malamatiyaya* sufi tradition as well as originated the poetic tradition of the use of local folk romances for the transmission of universal sufi message. But the roots of his spiritual experience are still to be traced.

This abrupt and profound change in the life of Husain occurred at the age of 36, when he was known as Shaikh Husain because of his learning and piety. Pir Muhammad's *Haqiqat al-Fugara* is the earliest known biography of Husain in Persian

and a sensitive soul amounts to an open revolt against the spiritual bankruptcy of the self-seeking court theologians wielding ruthless power and immense prestige.

Mukhdumn ul-Mulik Abdullah Sultanpuri (d. 1581) served as the chief court theologian for a considerably long period extending from Hamayun to the Pre *Din-i-Ilahi* phase of Akbar rule. This period coincides with the emergence of the *Mahdawi*³ and the *Roshni*⁴ movements of the revival and reform aiming at the rediscovery of the pristine purity of Islam. The founders and the followers of these movements believed, among other things, in equal distribution of material belongings among the members of the *daira* (group) and practiced, in the words of Annemarie Schimmel, 'religious Communism'.⁵ These remarkably honest and sincere champions of true Islamic ideals and practice in Muslim India, were mercilessly persecuted. Some, like Syed Muhammad (1443-1505) were banished from state to state and finally hounded out to Central Asia, others like Alai (d. 1550) were flogged to death and still others like the leaders of the *Roshnia* movement were slain in the battlefield by Moghul army. These popular spiritual movements were crushed for political reasons by imperial might with a religious sanction accorded by Makhdum ul-Mulk and coterie of court theologians.

While concluding a detailed and well-documented account of the persecution of the learned and the pious in his *Tazkira*, Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad has made a mention of Makhdum ul Mulk's incredible wealth. But what is more incredible is the manner in which he used to guard his wealth. Maulana Azad tells us that he used to gift his wealth at the start of Ramadan and at the end of each year, his wife used to transfer the same to him. On the basis of this hypocritical play with the words of scripture, Mukhdum ul-Mulk used to save the *Zakat* money. This was the man under whose leadership the religious establishment of the empire was busy, since decades, in torturing and humiliating, banishing and killing the people of real spiritual eminence for thoroughly materialistic considerations.

year 1575. Right at this moment two rival groups of theologians were competing with each other in making Islam subservient to the personal whims and dynastic ambitions of the emperor. This unscrupulous competition encouraged Akbar to arrogate himself to the near prophetic status, with the proclamation of the *Din-i-Ilahi* (the divine faith) in 1579.

The reaction against the so-called Divine Faith provided a fresh impetus to the centrifugal tendencies from Bengal to Kabul. In order to check the seething discontent in the Punjab and to crush the *Roshnia* movement in the adjoining Pushtun areas Akbar had to shift his headquarters to Lahore in 1582. Thus, Husain's city became the imperial capital for the next sixteen years.

Referring to Akbar's religious curiosity Syed Muhammad Latif has stated that :

It was during his stay at Lahore that Akbar appeared to have introduced the principles of religious toleration. Religious discussions were held in the *Ibadat Khana* on Sabbath evenings, at which learned men were invited to attend. The emperor and the grandness of the empire were present at these meetings. Abul Fazal started the questions and expounded the views of his master. The King's court was the resort of learned men of every creed, who came from various countries and were admitted to converse with him. Profound points of science, the subtleties of revelation, curiosities of history, and the wonders of nature were freely discussed. The King listened with majestic gravity to all that was said, and passed through the most diverse phases of thought, adopting all sorts of religious practices and sectarian beliefs. Two buildings were erected outside the city of Lahore for the purpose of carrying on religious controversies. One of these, called Khyrpura, was intended for the Muhammadans, Jews and fire worshippers, and the other, called Dharampura, for the Hindus.⁶

It becomes an intriguing question that in this climate of intellectual liberty, cultural pluralism and religious tolerance, why Akbar had imprisoned Shah Husain under the pretext of

jected the illustrious scholar Mulla Abdul Hakim of Sailkot (d.1663), who later became *Shaikh-al-Islam* of India, saying; "do not put me to shame. You are a Mulla, I cannot accept you in my circle". The accepted once had to shave off their beards and to sip the wine as a mark of initiation.

In spite of his apparently outrageous behaviour, he was regarded as a deeply respected saint of his times. A story narrated by Haji Yaqub to the author of *Haqiqat-al-Fuqara* illustrates the popular image of Husain. Haji Yaqub had resided in Makkah and Madina for long. There, he noticed a young man absorbed in constant devotional prayers on the Shrine of the Prophet in strict conformity with the laws of *Shariah*. After some years when he visited Lahore, he was astonished to see the same person, with a flask of wine in hand singing and dancing in the streets, in a delightful company, 'who is tramping so blatantly our religious norms'? "He is Husain", retorted the passer-by, 'the lover of God and the *Faqir* of the prophet". Many miracles such as transporting a person from Lahore to Ganges or to China, in the twinkling of an eye, are attributed to him.⁸

Among the sober sufi Orders *Naqshbandis* continued to remain more devoted to Husain. Abdul Fateh Badakhshi, a disciple of Khawaja Masoom Sarhindi has observed in *Miftah al-Arifin* that:

شاه حسین لاہوری عالم بود۔ ناگاہ جذب الہی در رسید۔ در کوچہ و بازار
ریش تراشیدہ و قوالاں ہمراہ گرفتہ و شراب بر ملا نوشیدہ
و مست پائے کوباں و رقص کنال می رفت۔ اگرچہ در ظاہر
شریعت شریف مخالف داشت، اما علماء و مشائخ با
وے سرے نیاز داشتند۔ در زبان ہندی مے گفت شاعر:

مرا اگر مظلای طعنه علمائے نبودی اکثر بر گور شیخ حسین می ر قسم
و استمداد او ارواح وی می جستم

'Had I not been afraid of the propaganda of the Ulama, I would have been often visiting the grave of Shaikh Husain in order to seek blessings from his soul'.¹⁰

This veneration of Shah Husain by the members of the most bowbounded of sufi orders, reminds me of an observation by J. Spencer Trimingham:

Of the later orders the *Naqashbandia* is especially associated with the *Malamatiya* tradition with *Tasawwuf*. *Naqashbandis* practice the personal recollection (*dhikr-i-khafī*), have no public *dhikr*, and we may recall their injection about solitude in crowd (*khilwat dar Anjuman*).¹¹

More than this surface resemblance, Shah Husain's creative genius bears a deeper imprint of the *Naqashbandia*. During his memorable *Suhbat* (intimate conversation) with his beloved disciple, Madho, he made him understand the inner meaning of the concept of 'solitude in crowd' and directed him to seek ultimate reality by adopting the career of an ordinary member of the working class:

ظاہر	در	لباس	دنیا	دار
باغش	در	اساس	فقر	بکار
کہ	بہ	تحصیل	ساز	مایحتاج
نشود	ہم	چو	ساعات	محتاج
بہر	خوردن	اگر	بجوئند	نان
جوئند	از	چاکری	سبب	بہ
نہ	شیند	گوشہ	چوں	فقرا
در سفر	جستجو	کند		خودرا

the manifold joys of the union, he sings of the mysteries of separation and the intense loneliness of longing heart:

میں بھی جھوک رانجھن دی جانا نال مرے کوئی چلے!
 پیراں پوندی نتاں کردی جاناں پیا اکلے
 نیں بھی ڈونگھی، تہ پرانا، شیناں پتن ملے
 جے کوئی خبر متراں دی لیاوے، ہتھ دے، دیواں چھلے
 راتیں درد، دیساں درماندی، گھاؤ متراں دے اکلے
 رانجھن یار طیب سیندا میں تن درد اولے
 کسے حسین فقیر نمانا، سائیں سنڑے گھلے
 میں بھی جھوک رانجھن دی جانا، نال مرے کوئی چلے

Travellers, I too have to go;

I have to go to the solitary hut of Ranjha,

Is there anyone who will go with me?

I have begged many to accompany me and now I set out alone,
 travellers!

Is there no one who could go with me?

The river is deep and the shaky bridge creaks as people step on it,
 And the ferry is known haunt of tigers.

Will no one go with me to the lonely hut of Ranjha?

During long nights I have been tortured by my raw wounds.

I have heard that He in his lonely hut knows the sure remedy.

Will no one come with me, travellers?

(Translation: Najm Hosain Syed)

Annemarie Schimmel has regarded Shah Husain as the originator of tradition of using stories of folk romances in the context of mystical thought and experience in the classical poetry of Pakistani language. Here too he has alluded to the popular motifs of *Hir* and *Ranjha*. *Ranjha*, the beloved, is calling from his solitary hut situated far beyond the river and *Hir*,

"Says Husain, the lonely Faqir: Destroy the imperial might!"

Here we see the transformation of the *Malamatiya* into the *Naqshbandi* striving to realise his spiritual ideal into the political struggle for the salvation of mankind.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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 جے کوئی خبر متراں دی لیاوے، ہتھ دے، دیواں چھلے
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