

Shah-i-Hamadan and Iqbal

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Amir Kabir Sayyid Ali Hamadan (1314-1385) and Allama Mohammad Iqbal (1877-1938) were social thinkers and reformers of great stature. A detailed study of their lives highlights the contribution they made in the service of Islam. Living in two different socio-religious environments, they adopted a highly individualistic approach to bring about social changes in their society.

An initial comparison of their lives brings to the face a few interesting facts. First that Shah Hamadan had migrated from Iraq to make Kashmir the focus of his social reforms, while Iqbal's ancestors had migrated from Kashmir and he made Kashmir and the sub-continent of India as the focus of his social attention. Secondly, we find Shah Hamadan's family tree rooted in Hazrat Ali. He was a Hussaini Sayyid by birth, seventeenth in descent from him.¹ Iqbal, on the other hand, was a commoner but took pride in the fact that, despite being from Brahmin ancestry, he was well versed with the tradition of *Rum* and Tabrez. He invites our attention to this fact in this couplet:

میرا بنگر کہ در ہندوستان دیگر نے بنی
برہمن زادہ رمز آشنائے روم و تبریز است

(Gist: You will not find the like of me in India, who, despite having a Brahmin descent is well informed about the teachings of Maulana Rum and Shah Shams Tabraizi).²

Thirdly Shah Hamadan being a sufi of great spiritual eminence, preached Islam mostly in keeping with the sufi

tradition, while in the enlightened age of logic and rationality, Iqbal followed the philosophic tradition. He thus admits:

نہ با ملا نہ با صوفی نشینم
تو میدانی کہ من آنم، نہ اہم
نویس اللہ بر لوح دل من
کہ ہم خود را ہم او را فاش بینم

(Gist: I am neither a *mullah* nor a *sufi*, I only want to rationally know myself and my God).³

Fourthly, Shah Hamadan wrote in prose, and out of the over 100 books credited to him, only one, the famous *Chahel Asrar* in verse. On the other hand, Iqbal was a poet, and only one his works, the famous '*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,' is in prose.⁴

Finally, alongside general reformation, the Shah laid stress on the conversion of Hindus into Muslims, while Iqbal worked for the rejuvenation of the downtrodden Muslims in the subcontinent. Both of the course adopted different strategies.

Shah Hamadan, who had travelled all the way from Iraq to Kashmir, commenced his social reformation with the primary focus on the rulers, the sultans and men of influence in the area. He very correctly appreciated that if the ruling class was brought on the path of righteousness, the masses, who invariably conform to the religious practices followed by the ruling elite, would automatically embrace Islam. He strongly believed in the fact that:

الناس علی دین ملوکہم

(Gist: People follow the religion of their Kings).⁵

Consequently, most of his works, such as *Zakhiratul Maluk*, *Aqbaat and Marratul Taabaeen*, etc. concentrate on instructions to the ruling elite reminding them of the need to develop a God-fearing personality, ensure justice, uphold truth and wholeheartedly pursue philanthropic works for their masses. He advised them to come down with a heavy hand on anti-social

elements and release the masses from the clutches of dishonest and greedy state officials.⁶

He even wrote a number of books on the request of the ruling elite. *Zakhiratul Maluk* was one of them which was exclusively compiled for the rulers of Kashmir.⁷ *Risala Behram Shahia* was written on the request of ruler of Bulkh and Badakhshan. *Aqbaat-i-Hakim-i-Kashmir* is addressed to Sultan Qutabuddin and so on.⁸

Iqbal is highly appreciative of this well thought out approach of Shah Hamadan in contacting the ruling elite for the purpose of propagating Islam. He thus compliments him:

مرشد معنی نگاہان بودہ ای
محرم اسرار شاہان بودہ ای

(Gist: He was the spiritual guide of rulers and knew the secrets of the art of governing).⁹

Not only that, Shah Hamadan also established personal contacts with the rulers through letters¹⁰ and reminded them of their responsibilities towards their subjects. He adopted a direct and firm style unambiguously inviting them towards the good and the noble.

He brought home to them that they were individually accountable for their deeds to God Almighty and answerable to Him on the day of Judgement.¹¹ They had to therefore conduct their state affairs with that responsibility in view.

Iqbal's target, on the other hand, was the common man and not rulers. In India the ruler was the English colonialist who had done everything possible to destroy Muslim culture after quelling the 1857 evolution.¹² Being from the Christian faith, his inbuilt hostility for Islam precluded any effort by Iqbal to propagate Islam at the level of the ruling elite.

Iqbal, therefore, out of necessity, had to address his message to the common man. The crux of his message being to fortify the individual and the societal ego which had hitherto been neglected. He thought the deterioration of the Muslim ego to be the primary cause of Muslim decline, both as individuals and as a society. He thus wrote:

تو اپنی خودی کو کھو چکا ہے کھوئی ہوئی شے کی جستجو کر

(Gist: You have lost your ego which you must rediscover).¹³

And warned the Muslim societies that:

ہوئی ہے زیرِ فلک امتوں کی رسوائی خودی سے جب ادب و دیں ہوئے ہیں بیگانہ

(Gist: Societies in the past have suffered humiliation because their culture did not cater for the fortification of their ego).¹⁴

In keeping with the aforesaid situation, letters to Iqbal letter¹⁵ are replete with inquiries from contemporary intellectuals as to how to steer Islam in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere so that it was able to regain its lost prestige. His larger aim envisaged binding the Muslims together so that they could hold their own as individual countries as well as amongst the comity of nations.

Shah Hamadan directed his attention on the Kashmiri masses but in a different manner. He brought alongside him a group of about 700 preachers and tradesmen.¹⁶ Once on the ground, they were not only expected to be self-sufficient and earn their own living through cottage crafts, but also transferred their technology to Kashmiri converts. This was done to relieve the Kashmiri masses of the strangulating economic hold which the Hindu money-lenders had come to acquire over them over the centuries. Once they were economically independent, and thus self-reliant, they were automatically free to pursue their new faith with a free conscience.

The primary reason for the difference in the strategies of the Shah and Iqbal can be explained by the type of socio-political situation prevalent in their time and their areas. During the 14th century, Hindu society in Kashmir had become divided into water-tight compartments due to the caste system which had

become more rigid, and the tyranny of the Brahmins over the Sudars and the untouchables had grown to an intolerable extent.¹⁷ This division promoted political disunity and paved the way for political conquests by foreigners. In this state of affairs, the spirit of equality, toleration and social justice propagated by Muslim *sufis* began to attract a large number of oppressed Hindu masses towards Islam which helped in creating a new society in the country.¹⁸

the socio-political environment in Iqbal's time in India in the 20th century was however vastly different. The English colonialist who was much more clever and shrewd than the rulers and sultans in Kashmir had methodically subverted the symbols of Muslim culture by creating terror in the Muslim ranks.¹⁹ Any approach to his sense of justice and fairplay would have been simply futile. To start with, Iqbal, therefore addressed his message to his own people, the Muslim masses.

It would therefore be seen that both the Shah and Iqbal showed great understanding of the political situation in their own areas and respectively adopted a most well thought-out and suitable approach to accomplish the task in hand. The Shah worked on the psyche of the ruling elite and Iqbal used the psycho-therapeutic method to treat the Muslims of the intellectual and spiritual aches they had developed as a result of the hostile treatment meted out to them by the British and the Hindus. In their own situations, the Shah had emerged as a psychiatrist and Iqbal as a God-send, a psycho analyst for dealing with the ills of their people.

Although their strategies differed according to the requirement of their target areas, their main thrust was on man, whether he was a ruler, a sultan in Kashmir or a commoner in India. The native was thus the focus of their attention and the object for arousing his dormant energies for self-development.

In this regard, both held similar views, that man was made up of two elements i.e. the body and the soul. Just as bodily disease required specialist and specific prescriptions, the spiritual diseases also needed specific approach for the cure of the soul.²⁰ In the treatment of the two, both gave preference to the spirit over the body, and resorted to Quranic injunctions as the only effective cure. The only difference was that the Shah

adopted the *sufi* way to develop the moral aspect of man while Iqbal used the theosophic method.

In the method prescribed by the Shah, the devotee submitted himself to self-realisation and purified himself through *zikh*.²¹ In this regard he laid down ten basic principles of human conduct. These had to be acquired by a devotee by constant *zikh* so that he was able to realize his self and achieve the desired proximity to God. These principles were: Knowledge, politeness, charity, piety, courage, justice, truthfulness, forbearance, nobility and faith, a perfect development of which attributes was attained in the personality of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and other prophets.²² The Shah did not stop here. He also highlighted seven basic evils which make a ruler to go astray oblige him to do injustice to his subjects. These are: High-handedness, cruelty, enmity, malice, rebellion, hatred and miserliness.²³ Unless a ruler got rid of these bad traits, he was unlikely to tread the path of righteousness.

Further, to attract the masses for the purpose, the Shah resorted to building *Khanqahs*²⁴ which provided a rallying point for both the common people and the elite. He worked them out so well into the social life of the masses that they became part of their daily routine. Their purpose was to discipline the inner life of a devotee. They served as propagation centres for Islam, although subsequently they came to be abused and could only inculcate passivity amongst the devotees, which Iqbal has strongly condemned.²⁵ These *Khanqahs* however, did initially attract one and all to come and receive blessings from the *sufis* and caused a revolution in the lives of the masses, in the sense that the message of freedom and equality in Islam was completely different to what was preached and practised by the Hindus. All visitors lived, slept and ate together. This was a unique demonstration of the Islamic idea of *Tauhid* as a working principle in the social life of the people.²⁶ In this way the Shah along with other *sufis* contributed greatly to liquidating the social, ideological and linguistic barriers between the various groups and levels of the people and helped to develop a common culture outlook.²⁷

Iqbal also laid unequivocal stress on developing the moral aspect of man as laid down in the Quran. He thus preached:

گر توی خواهی مسلمان زیستن نیست ممکن جز بقراں زیستن

(Gist: It is impossible to live as a Muslim without taking guidance from the Quran).²⁸

But in his interpretation of the Quranic directive, he goes much beyond the Shah and lays much greater emphasis in sharpening the creative faculties of man, which can only be accomplished by creating ever fresh objectives and ideals, and mustering the assistance of action, struggle, creativity and the force of love to achieve them.²⁹ Iqbal, therefore, would want man to look far beyond just purifying his own soul and become a dynamic and useful member of the society. He wanted him to participate actively in the creative activity of God. According to him both man and the universe are in a state of evolution and man has to work as a co-partner with God to accomplish the completion of the universe.³⁰ Man must, therefore, create desires and ideals and undertake the struggle to attain them so that in the process he contributes to the creative activity of God. He highlights this in the couplet:

ما ز تخلیق مقاصد زنده ایم از شعاع آرزو تابنده ایم

(Gist: We live by the purposeful achievements of our desires and ideals).³¹

زندگی در جستجو پوشیده است اصل او در آرزو پوشیده است

(Gist: The reality of life lies in seeking the accomplishment of desires).³²

According to Iqbal, therefore, in addition to ethics, it is movement and activity that helps man to self realize himself. For him rest only makes for rust.

ز شرر ستاره جویم ز ستاره آفتابے سر منزله ندارم کہ بمیرم از قرارے

(Gist: From the spark to the star and from the star to the sun. I live because of movement. Inaction spells death for me).³³

In Iqbal, the stress on traits such as action, struggle, creativity and love is in much greater prominence than in the Shah who chose to concentrate primarily on the moral aspect of man through *ziker*.

In this process of self realization both the Shah and Iqbal however recognize the imperativeness of the spiritual guide. The Shah stresses upon the necessity of a guide (*Murshad*) through his verse addressed to *Hazrat Ali*:

ای علی رو نظری کن ز سر صدق و صفا
کہ بجای نرسد بی نظر پیر، مرید

(Gist: O Ali, be kind to bless me, for a devotee reaches nowhere without the guidance of the spiritual leader).³⁴

Similarly, Iqbal also advises man to take instruction from a spiritual guide.

کیا پیدا کن از مشیت گلے بوسہ زن بر آستان کاٹے

(Gist: If you wish to self realize yourself, seek guidance from a spiritual guide).³⁵

He endeavours to convince us with his personal example, and admits that whatever stature he had attained in the world was primarily the result of the guidance acquired from the writings of Maulana Rum:

پیر روی خاک را اکسیر کرد از غبارم جلوه با تعمیر کرد

(Gist: Rumi has made me excel others. He has helped me gain great stature through his guidance).³⁶

من که مستی با ز صہبایش کنم زندگی از نفس ہایش کنم

(Gist: I, who drink from his decanter, in fact, live my life with his breaths).³⁷

Both the Shah and Iqbal however, without doubt, stress Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) to be man's ideal. The difference was that the Shah looked at the life of the Prophet (PBUH) through the spectacles of ethics and morality, while Iqbal, in addition to that, also advocated theosophy, with a harmonious mix of theology, rationality and dynamism, encompassing all the perceivable aspects of human life. He thus stresses:

عصفتنیؐ برسال جھولیش را کہ دین ہمہ اوست
اگر بہ او نرسیدی تمام بولہبی است

(Gist: True Islam lies in emulating the Prophet (PBUH). An act other than that is but going astray).³⁸

Both are also in agreement that, as directed by the Quran, a Muslim society requires a band of selfless men to undertake the task of inviting people towards the good and shunning the evil (7:181). Iqbal refers to such men as 'self-concentrated' individuals. These are the individuals who are spiritually liberated, dynamic, most loyal to the word of the Quran and are firmly anchored in the classical Islamic value

system. These are the individuals who, through their preaching and persuasion, emit goodness and attract others towards it.

In this context, both the Shah and Iqbal are known to have charged themselves with the above task, and undertook *jihad* against the evil elements of the society of their times. In the *Zakariatul Maluk*, the Shah writes that the ruling elite, fond of worldly things, tuned against him and resorted to punishing him. He bluntly refused invitations from many rulers aimed at reconciliation and compromise.³⁹ One of the rulers is believed to have decided to make him ride a red hot metallic horse, if he did not mend his ways, but the Shah did not sway.⁴⁰ Alongside his preaching, he followed a masterly strategy. It was to keep moving and never to be stationed at one place for too long. He is also believed to have told Amir Taimur to his face that he was a lame dog and then recited Ali's maxim:

الدنيا جيفة وطالبها كلاب ○

(Gist: This world is like a dead animal and those who show their fondness for it are to be equated with dogs).⁴¹

Amir Taimur, scared of the Shah's truthful ways, ordered his exit from Khatlan.⁴² Iqbal also makes a mention of his *jihad* against the evil-ridden society of his time and writes;

ظلم علم حاضر را نکستم
 رودم دانه و دامش گستم
 خدا داند که مانند برائیم
 به نار او چه بے پروا نشستم

(Gist: I destroyed the trap that the modern materialistic culture had set up for me. God alone knows that I jumped into this fire as fearlessly as prophet Abraham in the fire of the pharaoh).⁴³

At another place he says:

چو روی در حرم دادم ازال من
 از او آموختم اسرار جاں من
 بہ دور فتنہ عصر کسں او
 بہ دور فتنہ عصر رواں من

(Gist: Like Rumi, I also gave the message of God to the people. The services rendered by me in the modern times are therefore, analogous to those of Rumi during his times).⁴⁴

So both the Shah and Iqbal advocate *jihad* which Iqbal undertook by word of mouth and the Shah by physically participating in it. That is why Iqbal is highly impressed by the Shah's practical ways and has used most befitting adjectives to describe his personality. He has affixed compliments such as *Saiyyidus-Sadaat*, *Salar-e-Ajam*, *Memar-e-Taqdir-Umam*, *Murshid-e-Khitta-e-Minoonazir*, *Shah-e-Darya-Asteen* and *Mard-e-Iran-e-Saghir* and so on, with his name.⁴⁵

Each title, when analysed, is fully supported by full blooded activity and historical evidence that entirely justifies its use by Iqbal.

In fact it was as a result of the multi-dimensional personality of the Shah that, in his famous work '*Javaidnama*', Iqbal, during his imaginary celestial journey, meets the Shah at the sixth firmament (Paradise) and wants him to clarify a few metaphysical questions.

The first question that he poses is regarding good and evil, that God has created evil but expects good from us. What was the need of this test and trial of man?⁴⁶

Back comes the Shah's reply that the collision with evil is a boon for man. Man is like a sword and Satan like a stone that is used to sharpen the sword. Confrontation with evil actually sharpens man's faculties and helps him fortify his ego. It is by confronting evil that one's dormant potentialities are aroused to fight satanic forces, and this ability to countering is in fact the zenith of man's purpose in life.⁴⁷

The second question that Iqbal puts to the Shah is regarding the philosophy of life. What is it? And how should life be lived?⁴⁸ The Shah explains that man comprises two elements,

the body (matter) and the soul (spirit). Matter is mortal and spirit is undying. Wise is the one who educates his ego and purifies his spirit rather than strengthen his body. Man must give preference to the spiritual over the material.⁴⁹

The third question is regarding the reality of governing.⁵⁰ Iqbal being a native of Kashmir, is overcome by emotion regarding the slavery of the Kashmiris whose ego and self-esteem have deteriorated because of persistent subjugation by the ruler, resulting in their inactivity and passivity. He asks why the people, despite their low level of poverty, have to pay revenue to a tyrant ruler.

Shah Hamadan answers this question with an awareness which reflects high realism. He says that whosoever gets to govern by power is entitled also to collect land revenue.⁵¹ Here we see a subtle pointer by Iqbal to the Kashmiris that they should acquire power which will entitle them to govern over their own country. He is obviously hinting at the regeneration of the traits of action, struggle, creativity and love (*jihad*) amongst them to emerge from their age-old slumber which had reduced them to the position of slaves and subjects. He indirectly advises them to fortify their egos to revolutionize their lives.

One would obviously like to know why Iqbal chose Shah Hamadan to answer these questions. There are many other characters in '*Javaidnama*' to whom they could have been posed questions. The fact of the matter is that the Shah had spent a lifetime fighting against the forces of evil. His whole life was an embodiment of struggle against anti-social and anti-God forces. It was the firmness with which the Shah tackled every situation he faced, that had most impressed Iqbal. Further, his truthfulness was beyond doubt. In one of his letters the Shah once wrote that even if the sky and the earth turned into fire, he would not be dissuaded from speaking the truth.⁵² That is why Iqbal found the Shah to be most appropriate to answer his questions.

We must remember that the Shah had spent 21 years in travelling many countries and inviting people towards Islam.⁵³ During these difficult years, he had practically faced evil forces and overpowered them through sheer will power. None else, except the Shah was more qualified in Iqbal's view to answer his questions pertaining to the struggle between good and evil, the philosophy of life and the facts about governing.

It will, therefore, be seen that there are many similarities in the lives and accomplishments of these two social giants. Both vastly influenced their respective socio-political environment — the Shah with the *sufi* tradition and Iqbal as a poet-philosopher. One laid new foundations of Islam in Kashmir while the other wrote extensively for the rejuvenation of Islam in the subcontinent in particular and the Islamic world in general. Given just those twenty years, during which the Shah resided in Kashmir, he was able to see the fruits of his efforts during his life. As Iqbal has observed, the power of thought had little influenced men, while religion had always elevated individuals and transformed whole societies.⁵⁴ How true this is about Ali Kabir Shah Hamadani.

Iqbal is highly impressed by the Shah's spiritual attainments, since he combined in himself a religious scholar and a saint, who is known to have converted about thirty seven thousand Kashmiris to Islam through his personal example and persuasion.

Iqbal on the other hand has no personal example to offer. He is critical of the overall passive religiosity of the East which he thought had become hollow and a life-thwarting force. According to him the realm of the spirit had to be rediscovered through a revolutionary and dynamic approach by fortifying the human ego and acquiring perfection.

Shah Hamadan, of course, lived to see the outcome of his efforts i.e. 37,000 converts, among other things, while Iqbal did not live long enough to see the emergence of Pakistan which he had proposed in 1930 as a part of his scheme for putting new life into Indian Muslims.

How beautifully Iqbal has acknowledged the spiritual eminence of the Shah and paid homage to him by saying:

یک نگاہ او کشاید صد گره
خیز و تیرش را بدل راسے بدہ

(Gist: One look from his resolves a host of problems. Rise and follow his teachings so that you are successful).⁵⁵

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Mohammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal (Persian)*, Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1973, p.405, hereafter referred to as 'Kulliyat (Persian)'.
3. *Ibid.*, p.930.
4. We have disregarded Iqbal's Ph.D. dissertation, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, which had mostly become outdated during his life time. The other two books, *Ilm-al-Iqtasad* and the *History of India* which he wrote together with a Hindu author were only text books and are not considered to contain his thought in any magnitude.
5. Sayyeda Ashraf Zaffar, *Amir Kabir Sayyid Ali Hamadani*, Lahore: *Nadwatul Mussanaffeen*, 1972, p.116, hereafter referred to as 'Amir Kabir'.
6. Hamadani, *op.cit.*, p.9.
7. *Amir Kabir*, *op.cit.*, p.118.
8. Saleem Chishti, *notes on Javaidnama (Urdu)*, Lahore: Ishrat Publishing House, 1956, p.1034.
9. *Amir Kabir*, *op.cit.*, p.120.
10. *Kulliyat (Persian)*, *op.cit.*, p.752.
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12. *Amir Kabir*, *op.cit.*, p.117.
13. Mohammad Aslam Syed, *Muslim Response to the West: Muslim Histography in India 1857-1914*, Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1988, pp.19-20, hereafter referred to as 'Muslim Responses'.
14. Mohammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal (Urdu)*, Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1973, p.351, hereafter referred to as 'Kulliyat (Urdu)'.
15. *Ibid.*, p.562.

16. Sayed Muzaffar Hussain Barni (ed.), *Kulliyat-i-Makateeb-i-Iqbal*, Vol. I & II (Delhi Urdu Academy, 1993), pp.412 & 627 respectively.
17. *Amir Kabir, op.cit.*, p.123.
18. E.C. Sachu, *Alberuni's India*, Lahore: 1962, p.23.
19. Hamadani, *op.cit.*, p.1.
20. Muslim Responses, *op.cit.*, p.27.
21. *Risala-e-Darwaishia* (hand written) p.248, quoted in Ali Kabir, *op.cit.*, p.173. For Iqbal's view see Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Sheikh Mohammad Ashraf, 1982, p.154, hereafter referred to as '*The Reconstruction*'.
22. In Sufi terminology, '*Zikr*' means the recitation of the Holy Quran as well as repetition of the names and attributes of God with tongue and heart; mostly in a congregational session and with greatest of concentration.
23. Sayyid Ali Hamadani, *Zakhiratul Maluk*, Lahore: p.69.
24. Hamadani, *op.cit.*, p.38. The medieval *Khankah* was the spearhead of Muslim culture.
25. *Kulliyat (Urdu), op.cit.*, p.680.
26. Hamadani, *op.cit.*, p.35.
27. *Ibid.*, p.117.
28. *Kulliyat (Persian), op.cit.*, 123.
29. *Ibid.*, pp.16-22.
30. Riffat Hassan, *The Sword and The Scepter*, Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1977, p.265.
31. *Kulliyat (Persian), op.cit.*, p.17.
32. *Ibid.*, p.15.
33. *Ibid.*, p.297.
34. Ali Kabir, *op.cit.*, p.172.
35. *Kulliyat (Persian), op.cit.*, p.18.
36. *Ibid.*, p.9.
37. *Ibid.*, p.9.
38. *Kulliyat (Urdu), op.cit.*, p.691.

39. *Khalasatul-Manaqib*, p.96.
40. *Amir kabir, op.cit.*, p.61.
41. *Ibid.*, pp.68-69.
42. *Ibid.*, p.67
43. *Kulliyat (Persian), op.cit.*, p.934.
44. *Ibid.*, p.938.
45. *Ibid.*, pp.746-747.
46. *Ibid.*, p.747.
47. *Ibid.*, p.748.
48. *Ibid.*, pp.753-754.
49. *Ibid.*, pp.751-754.
50. *Ibid.*, p.748.
51. *Ibid.*, p.751.
52. *Risal-e-Fatootia*, quoted in Ali Kabir, *op.cit.*, p.149.
53. Hamadani, *op.cit.*, p.9. Also see GMD Sufi *Kashmir*, Vol. I, Lahore: University of Punjab, pp.84-92.
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