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Evaluating the life and teachings of baba Nassib-Ud-Din ghazi

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Abstract

The philosophy of Sufism has been an essential part of Islam in the sub-continent and the rise of Islamic civilizations around the world has coincided with the Sufi traditions as well. The traditions of Sufism have remained an integral part of the spread of Islam and have led to the creation of Islamic cultures between 13th and 16th century in Asia. Various Sufi saints took the mantle of spreading the message of Islam to those areas where there was meagre or no followers of Islam. In this regard, the Sufi saint Baba Nassib-ud-Din Ghazi has played a vital role in the valley of Kashmir so far as the spread of Islam is concerned.

The paper is an attempt to evaluate the life and teachings of Sufi saint Baba Nassib-ud-Din Ghazi and how his teachings and life impacted the minds of common masses of Kashmir.

Keywords: Sufism, Islam, Kashmir, Baba Nassib-ud-Din

Introduction

One of the most reputed saints of the Suharwardi Reshi syncretism who is credited with the undergoing a lot of work for large scale conversions in Kashmir in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was Baba Nassib-ud-Din Ghazi. He was born in Sialkot (Pakistan) in 1569 AD. He was born saint and a great educationist. He left his native place, because of his missionary zeal, and came to Kashmir for the cause of Islam and for spreading the message of Islam to the common masses. After his arrival in Kashmir, he followed the Sufi saint Baba Daud Khaki and was greatly influenced by the Rishi movement. Throughout his life, he remained socially active and travelled through every nook and corner of the valley in order to consolidate the ground which was already gained by the renowned Rishi saint Sheikh Nuruddin Noorani. He devoted his life for the cause of poor and for this reason he earned the title.

Life and Teachings

Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi was born in 977A.H./1569 A.D. at Sialkot. He was the son of Mir Hasan Razi. Baba Nassib was undoubtedly a great Sufi of the Suharwardi order in Kashmir. He was always engrossed in deep meditation and constantly wore a musing expression. In several respects, he played a unique role in the socio-religious life of the Kashmiris. Baba Nassib got constructed many mosques and toilets in various districts and villages. He provided meals to the indigent. His affection for the mankind, as manifested in his benevolence, earned him the title Abut Fuqara or father of the destitute. In addition to launching a crusade for providing viable social services, he also embarked on a literary mission. He penned fourteen books. Among these, Zaruri Khurd is very popular. Matters relating to jurisprudence are expounded in it. Another work titled Nurnama is a pioneering treatise on the Rishi's. Occurrences in the lives of Shaikh Nuruddin Rishi and his khulafa are documented in it.

Sayings: The sayings of Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi are as follows:

1. Baba Nasib said that the grave depreciates the breadth of life.

If a wealthy person acquires information about the absolute certainty of death, he will forget all his worldly possessions. And if a poor man is made aware of the reality of death, he will

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cease to remember his own self.) Whoever perceives the divine, thoughts about one's wife and children obliterate. A self-obsessed person is accompanied by Satan. A person beside oneself with divine love is escorted by the Supreme Being. Humility is preferable to conceit. A moment's realization of the purpose of Creation is better than a thousand year's worship. A person acquainted with the Truth is worthier than thousands of abstainers. Baba Nasib likened such ascetics as sustained themselves only on a frugal diet of wild herbs, leaves and grass to donkeys and cows. Alternatively, men who gorged on delicious food were denounced as belonging to the category of wild animals like wolves and leopards. Here, Baba Nasib adopts this style of utterance as a metaphor for affluent man's obliviousness to poverty. Discernment of the Divine, according to Baba Nassib, is thus beyond the reach of exploiters of the weak. To live for the welfare of the needy is a virtue and a key to the realization of Truth. This ultimate Truth cannot be traded. The cognition of the Supreme Being cannot be traded and neither are pomp and riches of any help in the recognition of Truth.

Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi played a significant role in the social and religious history of Kashmir. His methods of disseminating knowledge about Islam were novel. It can be safely assumed that in several respects he excelled his contemporaries in widening the purpose and scope of Islamic knowledge in the Valley. His major contribution was to motivate the agriculturists and the lower sections of Kashmiri society to bring their social behaviour in consonance with the teachings of Islam. He engaged a band of bhandis (folk musicians). He went from village to village. Keeping in view the popularity of folk dancers among the villagers, his ingenious method of inviting the folk to his assemblage through the beating of drums often produced the desired results. The story did not end there. Wherever Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi stationed himself for a few days, provision was made for feeding the needy through a mobile langar (public kitchen). Significantly, about 300 to 400 disciples accompanied Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi during his missionary transit throughout the length and breadth of Kashmir. For these reasons Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi is remembered in several villages of Kashmir as a Sufi philanthropist. Wherever he went, he found a mosque and a bathroom. Even now there is no dearth of villages in Kashmir where a mosque is not named after him. Although he belonged to the Suharwardi order, he seems to have lived like a Rishi. He did not take meat and remained a vegetarian, notwithstanding the fact that several cows were slaughtered at his langar daily for feeding the poor. In several respects, Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi seems to have been greatly influenced by the teachings of Shaikh Nuruddin Rishi. So great was the influence of the mystic poetry of Shaikh Nuruddin on his mind that he often fell unconscious under its spell. There is every likelihood that during his discourses, he used Shaikh Nuruddin's poetry as vehicle for propagating the teachings of Islam in Kashmir. It follows that the Suharwardi order, as it developed in Kashmir represented the regional ethos. In this process Islam arose in Kashmir as a religion of love as well as a social force. This is also illustrated by Baba Nasibuddin's attitude towards the non-Muslims. A notable trait of Baba Nasibuddin's social demeanour was his excessively tolerant attitude towards the non-Muslims. Despite his rigorous adherence to the precepts of the Shari'ah, he visited the cremating grounds of the

Hindus and offered prayers to the departed souls. This strange practice became a matter of great concern among his associates. And when questioned about the same, his reply was in these words: "Whatever I behold is beyond your view. Many souls of such persons as outwardly died Hindus appear to me as those of believers. And some of them even say (to me): 'Your blessings mitigate our afflictions/ So, I never shirk from this beneficent act.'" From the above anecdote, one can sense the seminal impact of the teachings of Baba Nasibuddin on the folk. In fact, the religious environment in which Baba Nasibuddin played the missionary role was conducive to developing the mutual respect of the adherents of Islam and Hinduism for each other's religion. However, Islam being the dominant civilization was able to make its presence felt in all walks of the traditional Kashmiri society, thanks to the missionaries like Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi who had consecrated their life to popularizing the teachings of Islam at the societal level. This is obvious by the fact that the Brahmans of Kashmir neither played a creative role in response to the equalitarian teachings of Islam nor could they counter such surging ideas as an opposition group. Quite to the contrary, the Brahmans gave a tacit recognition to the spiritual authority of the Sufi and the shrines that evolved through periods of Islamic acculturation. Nothing explains this development in more objective terms than the silence of the Brahmans regarding some questions of critical importance related to their history and beliefs. Here it is important to focus on the ambience created by the folk themselves around the shrine of Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi. One may notice a grave in the close vicinity of the shrine. This is the alleged tomb of Lai Ded, revered by a small number of traditional Muslim women. No Persian chronicler or hagiographer, including even Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi has referred to it. Had it really been a tomb of Lai Ded, it would have become a popular centre of pilgrimage considering her representative character as a strong advocate of the underprivileged against the Brahmanic supremacy. There is no historical evidence to support the belief regarding the authenticity of the tomb of Lai Ded and still, surprisingly, such a myth got perpetuated around the shrine of Baba Nasibuddin. Noteworthy, the myth did not find a wide acceptance among the Muslims. During the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries the Valley of Kashmir experienced conversion to Islam in social rather than in mere religious terms. Thus the Kashmiri Muslim culture and the Pandit culture that evolved during centuries of interaction was the product of their social environments. This is the reason that the Kashmiri Pandits living in Bijbehara and around never raised any questions about the supposed tomb of Lai Ded despite the attempts by some Kashmiri Pandit scholars to resurrect her as the exponent of Kashmiri Saivism. Another reason that can be given for Kashmiri Pandit and Muslim writer's omitting mention of the tomb of Lai Ded is the cherished belief that she was above the formalities of either Hinduism or Islam. The basic idea about Lai Ded in Kashmir is that of a wandering woman saint saturated with divine love who would make no distinction between Hindus and Muslims on the grounds of religion. The point is that the Kashmiri Pandit culture and the Kashmiri Muslim culture, as it evolved over centuries, assumed varied dimensions essentially within the framework of Brahmanism and Islam respectively thereby comprising the Kashmiri culture. Therefore the Urs ceremonies connected with the shrine of Baba Nasibuddin

are reminiscent of the distinctiveness characterizing Islam in Kashmir.

Conclusion

Baba Nasibuddin Ghazi played a significant role in the social and religious history of Kashmir. His methods of disseminating knowledge about Islam were novel. It can be safely assumed that in several respects he excelled his contemporaries in widening the purpose and scope of Islamic knowledge in the Valley. His major contribution was to motivate the agriculturists and the lower sections of Kashmiri society to bring their social behaviour in consonance with the teachings of Islam. He engaged a band of bhandas (folk musicians). He went from village to village. Keeping in view the popularity of folk dancers among the villagers, his ingenious method of inviting the folk to his assemblage through the beating of drums often produced the desired results.

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