

Life and the religious thought of Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth of Shattari Silsilah



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ABSTRACT

The Shattari silsila of Sufism made its inroad into India from the late 15th century under the leadership its founder Shaikh Siraj al-din Abdullah Shattar. However, the order became popular among the masses of the Indian sub-continent under the charismatic leadership of Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth of Gwalior. He spread the ideal of shattari's into the region of Gujrat Malwa, and Deccan. Probably Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth was the only Sufi saints who tried to understand the ideals of Hindu Yogis. Unlike the popular Chisti saints of the day, the Shaikh did participate in the political affairs of the States. It was by his help Babur was able to secure the fort of Gwalior. The Shaikh maintained a cordial relation with both emperors Humayun and Akbar, however, Akbar's inclination towards the teaching of Shaikh Salim Chisti made the shaikh withdraw from the Mughal imperial capital Agra to Gwalior. The Shaikh was as pious as humble, as Mullah Badauni noted that the Shaikh made no distinction between the masses and nobles. Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth was one of the forerunners in the science of exorcism. This paper aims to shed light on various aspects of the teaching of Shaikh

Muhammad Ghawth and his relationship with the ruling class of the day.

KEY WORDS

Shattari, Silsila, Sufi, Khanqah, Khilafat Namah, Yogi

INTRODUCTION

Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth of Gwalior was one of the most influential figures among Shattari silsilah of Sufism. As the author of *Gulzar-i-Abrar* noted, it was because of his tireless effort the 'Shattari baby grew into manhood'. His knowledge of mysticism, his humble character, and his care for people made the Shattari silsilah one of the popular silsilah of Sufism. People from both Hinduism and Islam respected his teaching. From the early age of his life, Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth was interested in Sufism. He became a disciple of Shaikh Zahur Hamid at a very early age, it was under his instruction Shaikh Ghawth proceeded towards Chunar¹ to live in seclusion and devote his time to studying spirituality. The Shaikh continued to live in Chunar for more than thirteen years. During his stay in Chunar, the Shaikh live under severe austerities. As Mullah Badauni noted, the

¹ **Chunar** is a city located in Mirzapur district of Indian state of Uttar Pradesh

Shaikh subsisted on the tree leaves at that time (Badauni, pp. Vol III, 4). It was there, in the jungle of Vindhychal he made contact with Hindu Yogis, these events played a significant role in shaping his religious thought. Although some Muslim mystics before him tried to make contact with Hindu yogis (Sijaji, 1884, pp. 84-85), he was more successful in this matter than others. Probably he was the only Sufi saint who became very close to Hindu yogis. During these days he codified the teaching of his spiritual master Shaikh Zahur, titled as Jawahir-i-Khamsah. Shaikh Ghawth presented his work to his master after Shaikh Zahur's return from Bengal, the Shaikh was very pleased with him, but also didn't want him to spend his rest of days in seclusion (Badauni, pp. Vol III, 4), thus he instructed him to settle in Gwalior and live among the masses (Jawahir-i-Khamsah, p. f. 267).

Teaching and religious views of Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth

Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth was a man of very liberal views, his mind was free from sorts of bigotry and religious fanaticism. He treated both Hindus and Muslims with the same respect and courtesy. When the Shaikh visited the imperial capital Agra in 966 A.H./1338 A.D. Mullah Badauni was studying there, upon hearing the Shaikh's presence in Agra, Badauni wished to visit the Shaikh and pay his respects but he abandoned this thought when he discovered that The Shaikh stood up in honor of every Hindu who came to visit him (Badauni, Vol III, 5). It was too much for an orthodox like Badauni. However, Badauni came into contact with the shaikh one day when he saw him riding through the Bazar (Badauni, Vol III, 5). As Badauni describes a huge crowd surrounded the shaikh and the shaikh was busy returning the salute of the people and he made no difference among people whether they were Hindu or Muslim, and he was widely popular among the masses. The famous musician of Akbar's

court Tansen is said to have become his disciple and he was also buried near the tomb of the shaikh given their close relationship. The Shaikh had a very humble personality, he was free from material desire and spiritual arrogance. He never refers to himself as 'I' but always prefers to call address himself as '*this humble self*'. His belief in Sufi pantheism was unshakable, he believes that whenever one starts to assert their identity, then the person had denied the divine unity. The Shaikh believed that men are the reflection of the image of God. He often quoted, "*He created man after his own image*". This was fundamental to the Shattari doctrines, The Shattari believed as Sott A. Kugle put forward, "*the heaven, the universe, and the terrestrial world came into creation through series of emanations from the primal being, which is God*" (KUGLE, 2003)

Critics have often criticized The Shaikh as a man ignorant of proper knowledge, The author of Iqbal Namah describes him as an illiterate person. But the Shaikh was well versified in mystic ideology. Some of his works, *Jawahir-i-Khamsah*, *Bahr ul- Hayat*, *Khalid-i-Makhzan*, *M'airaj Namah*, *Awrad-i-Ghawthiyah*, and *Kiaz-u'l-Wahdat*, shows us his profound knowledge in mystic ideology. His famous work *The Jawahir-i- Khamsah* (the five jewels) is the gist of his spiritual master Shaikh Zahur Hamid. The *Jawahir-i- Khamsah* is divided into five chapters (*Khamsah*), which describe the pathway to worship God.

- (1) On the worship of God
- (2) on the ascetic life;
- (3) on exorcism,
- (4) recital of God's praises;
- (5) on the acts of those followers of the true path who have attained knowledge.

The *Jawahir-i-Khamsah* not only deals with mystic ideology but also describes mystic practices in detail. The Shattari's of later days has

been treated as their *dastur*. It was altogether different from earlier Sufi literature produced in the Indian Subcontinent. The *Jawahir-i-Khamsah* didn't interpret *Tasawwuf* in terms of higher ethical value, but it interprets in terms of miracle, talisman, and supernatural performance. The Shaikh noted, "All those who want to learn strange and rare sciences like arithmetic, astrology, biology, astronomy, nature of trees, chirping of birds, the art of making amulets, should practice this" (*Jawahir-i-Khamsah*, p. f. 81). His other works, i.e. *The Khalid-i-Makhzan*, *M'airaj Namah*, and *Awrad-i-Ghawthiyah* mostly concerned with supernatural sciences. The *Awrad-i-Ghawthiyah* is mostly concerned with tantrism, it describes The Shaikh as more of a Hindu Yogi than a Sufi mystic. These books highly revered the practices of Hindu yogis.

The Shaikh also has some knowledge Sanskrit language (*Gulzār-i-Abrār*, p. f. 193), which he most probably learned from Hindu yogis during his days of Chunar. He translated the Sanskrit work *Amritkunda* into Persian titled as *Bahr-ul-Hayat*. However, as he didn't have the access to the original text of *Amritkunda*, thus according to Carl W. Ernst "his "translation" of the *Amrtakunda* text is a work framed in terms of the Islamic traditions, studded with quotations from the *Qur'an* and *hadith*" (Ernst, 2016). The Shaikh's admiration for the Hindu Yogi is visible from *Bahr-ul-Hayat*, as he observed, "Their religious leader (imam) is *Gorakh*, and some say that *Gorakh* is an expression for *Khizr* (peace on our Prophet and on him)" (*Bahr al-hayat*, p. 66). The text *Amritkunda* was known to Indian Sufi before the time of Shaikh Ghawth (Rizvi), but he was the one who applied his knowledge practically.

Shaikh's relations with the ruling class

The Shaikh had to face persecution in his lifetime for his teachings which irked many orthodox ulema's and nobles alike, and his popularity among the masses always fueled this fire.

Sultan Ibrahim Lodi had tried to win the Shaikh's blessing with gifts but the relationship between them couldn't be good because the Sultan had imprisoned and executed many important nobles who were on good terms with the Shaikh. It was his popularity among the people of Gwalior which made him an enemy of Tatar Khan Sarang Khani, the Afghan chieftain of Gwalior. After Babur's victory in Panipat, he turned his attention towards Gwalior and the Shaikh helped him with everything under his disposal. Tatar Khan Sarang Khani initially resisted the Mughals, but when the Rajputs pressed hard against Gwalior he offered to submit Babur voluntarily, seeing the imminent danger to his power. To receive his surrender Babur sent Khwajah Rahim Dad, and Shaikh Guran. However, Tatar Khan was not true to his intention, and he shut himself in the fort citing security reason. Observing the situation Shaikh Ghawth sent a message to the commander of the Mughal force, Rahim Dad "Get yourselves into the fort somehow, for the views of this person (Tatar Khan) have changed, and he has evil in his mind" (Ahmad, pp. 22-23). Rahim Dad was quick to heed the advice of the Shaikh and then he sent a message to Tatar Khan for his permission to stay inside the fort as he didn't feel safe living outside the fort. Tatar Khan then permitted Rahim Dad to enter the fort with a limited number of soldiers. Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth then secretly instructed the doorkeeper of the fort, who was his disciple to open the gate and let Mughal force enter the fort (Ahmad, pp. 22-23). Beaten by the Mughal strategy Tatar Khan then submitted to the Mughal force.

Shaikh Ghawth's role in the capture of the Gwalior fort made him popular with the Mughal, Emperor Babur had a very high opinion about him. Even when Babur was angry with Rahim Dad's inappropriate behavior, he forgives him on Shaikh's plea (Babur, pp. Vol III, 690). Emperor Humayun also regarded the Shaikh in very high esteem. Humayun was interested in

exorcism for which he was interested in the Shaikh's teaching. According to Mullah Badauni "Humayun had the greatest faith in and attachment to these two saints so much so that there were very few that ranked with them in estimation. From these venerable men, he learnt the science of exorcism" (Badauni, pp. Vol III, 4)

After Humayun's defeat at the hand of Sher Shah, the Shaikh had to face the displeasure of Afghan's due to his close relationship with the Mughals (Manaqib-i Ghawthiyya, p. 64). To avoid the harassment from Sher Shah, the Shaikh migrated to Gujrat (Badauni, Vol III, 4). In Gujrat, the Shaikh became popular with the common masses and nobles alike, which irked the orthodox ulema's of the court and they were waiting for an opportunity to vilify him, and when the Shaikh completed one of his famous work *Mairaj Namah*, they grab this opportunity to get rid of him. The *Mairaj Namah* was a refutation of one of the controversial doctrines of the *Shattari Silsilah*. According to the *Shattari Nabuyat* (Prophethood) and *Walayat* (Sainthood) are the same and in this book The Shaikh claimed to have performed the journey of *Miraj* like The Prophet. In *Mairaj Namah* he describes his journey vividly, he said that on his journey to heaven he met four pious *Caliphs*, but didn't talk to them, he then marched forward and met with *Faristas* (angels) who had books in their hand, upon further proceeding he met with The Prophet. The *Shattaris* had accepted this but most of the *ulemas* refused to do so. Many *ulemas* of Gujrat condemned the contents of the book as heretical. One of the famous *ulema* of that time, Shaikh Ali Muttaqi² issued a fatwa against the shaikh a marked him as a polluter of the faith who deserve execution. The situation became so dire that the matter had to be referred to the Sultan Mahmud of Gujarat, the Sultan leave the matter with Shaikh Wajih- Alavi to resolve it. However, after careful

analysis of the content of *Mairaj Namah*, Shaikh Wajih-ud- Alavi find it a very excellent work on spirituality, and he then tore the fatwa of Shaikh Ali Muttaqi (Badauni, Vol III, 45). Surprised by Shaikh Wajih-ud- Alavi's action, Shaikh Ali Muttaqi tore his clothes and present himself before Shaikh Wajih-ud- Alavi and said, "How is it that you assent to the spread of heresy and schism in the faith?" (Badauni, Vol III, 45), Shaikh Wajih-ud-Alavi calmly replied "We follow the letter and the Shaikh the spirit (of religion). Our understanding cannot reach his perfections and (even) as far as the letter of the law goes no exception by which he could be pronounced blame-worthy, can be taken to him" (Badauni, Vol III, 45). This incident as noted by Badauni increased the Shaikh's popularity throughout Gujrat. The Shaikh now concentrated on spreading his teaching throughout Gujrat. He established a Khanqah in Ahmadabad which became famous as Daulat Khanah (Gulzār-i-Abrār, p. f. 88), he also established a mosque inside it, which late became famous as Ektoda, i.e., one turrent mosque. The mosque, which survived long after the death of the Shaikh was mentioned in the Archaeological Survey Report of 1824 as Daulat Khanah Mosque. In the open space to the north of the mosque, the tomb of the wife and two sons of the Shaikh's were located.

Although the Shaikh was highly revered throughout Gujrat, he did not wish to stay there after the restoration of Mughal power in Hindustan. After Humayun's victory over the Sur's the Shaikh begins preparation for his journey to Delhi, however, he only could reach Delhi after the death of Humayun by accident. Due to his contacts with Emperor Babur and Humayun, Emperor Akbar showed great respect to the Shaikh. Witnessing the Emperor's respect towards the Shaikh Badauni noted, "While at Gujarat he had by means of inducements and

² Shaikh Ali Muttaqi was one of the most influential saint and scholar of 15th and 16th century

incitements brought the emperor at the beginning of his reign, entirely under his influence as a teacher" (Badauni, Vol II, 65). The Shaikh visited the imperial capital Agra in 1558 A.D., Emperor Akbar himself went out to receive the Shaikh (Badauni, Vol II, 34). This kind of respect of the emperor towards the jealousy of orthodox ulema of the court, most influential among them was the *Sadr-u's-Sadr* of the Empire Shaikh Gadai (Badauni, Vol II, 34). According to Badauni Shaikh Gadai's displeasure with the Shaikh was because of his jealousy, hypocrisy, and envy towards the Shaikh. To vilify the Shaikh in front of the Emperor, Shaikh Gadai used the same tactics used by the ulema of the Gujrat, he started a vicious campaign against the Shaikh on basis of his work *Mairaj Namah*.

Bairam Khan, The *Wakil-us-Sultanate*, and the *ataliq* of the emperor falls for this propaganda and didn't receive the Shaikh in a courtly manner. However, the Shaikh did discuss some of his observations mentioned in his *Risalah* with Bairam Khan, which didn't fit in with the latter's belief. Thus, Shaikh Gadai's agenda gains the sympathy of Bairam Khan. When the Shaikh became aware that he is the object of the enmity of the most powerful man of the Empire, the Shaikh retired to his native place Gwalior. However, Emperor Akbar wasn't happy with the departure of the Shaikh. As Firišta noted, "*Due to the retirement of Shaikh Ghawth to his native town Gwalior Akbar was annoyed with Bairam Khan*" (Firišta, pp. Vol II, 323). To avoid further bitterness with both the Shaikh and Emperor Akbar and to make amends with the Shaikh Bairam Khan gave the Shaikh one crore tanka as maintenance allowance (Ahmad, pp. Vol II, 142). The *Zakhirat-u'1-Khawanin* also mentioned that jagir worth of 9 lacs was bestowed on the Shaikh.

Upon arrival on Gwalior, The Shaikh built a Khanqah and spend most of his time in *sama* (Badauni, pp. Vol III, 5). In the meantime, Emperor Akbar visited the Shaikh to get some

oxen from the Shaikh which he procured from Gujrat (Mubāarak, Vol II, 68). The Shaikh presented the emperor some of his finest bulls with other valuable things together with halwa and creams. During this time the Shaikh asked the emperor whether he had chosen his spiritual teacher or not. Upon receiving his reply as no, the Shaikh stretched his hand towards the emperor to become his *pir* and said, "*From this moment I am your spiritual teacher*" (Mubāarak, Vol II, 68). The emperor pretended that he wasn't able to understand the Shaikh because the emperor didn't want to become the *murid* of the Shaikh, because the emperor had no special attachment towards the teaching of the Shaikh (Mubāarak, pp. Vol II, 68).

In the meantime, there was a conspiracy under-going to displace Bairam Khan from his powerful position in the court, and the Shaikh's bitterness with the Khan-i-Khanan Bairam Khan was well known, thus the adversaries of Bairam Khan tried to enlist the Shaikh on their side. Khafi Khan writes that -- "*Maham Anka, Adham Khan Koka and Ahaad Khan, son-in-law of Maham Anka, conspired and went to Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth, explained to him their seditious plan and sought his co-operation*" (Khafi, pp. Vol I, 143). However, the Shaikh refrained from taking any part in it.

Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth however later on became embroiled in a serious conflict with another famous Sufi saint, Shaikh Salim Chishti, who was highly revered by the emperor. Contemporary historians noted that the conflict was regarding nothing but jealousy. The conflicts reached that level that it included disciples of both sides which made the whole atmosphere toxic. Regarding it, Badauni noted that "*On the whole there was less of snobbery among the spiritual successors of Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth than among those of Shaikh Salim, though each sect decried and sought to ruin the other*" (Badauni, Vol II, 139). However, his opponents could never get rid of him for good

because according to Carl W. Ernst "*Muhammad Ghawth.... was an extremely influential and powerful man, and he emerged unscathed from the attempts of his opponents*" (Ernst, 1999).

Even after all those controversies the Shaikh never refused to help Emperor Akbar in time of need. The Shaikh played a very critical role during the conquest of the Chunar fort. The man in charge of the fort, Fattu was a decuple of the Shaikh. Akbar recognizing the importance of the Chunar fort sent Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth with Asaf Khan to Chunar for a peaceful transition of the fort to the Mughals. Fattu obeyed the Shaikh's wish and surrounded the fort to the Mughal peacefully. For his service, Fattu was sent to the Emperor and the Emperor was awarded high favor (Badauni, Vol II, 63).

CONCLUSION

The Shaikh died at Agra on Ramadan 17 of 970 A.H./ 1362 A.D. at the age of eighty, however, two contemporary works, *Akbar Namah* and *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* says that the Shaikh had died at Gwalior. But Mullah Badauni concurs differently, according to Badauni, The Shaikh had died at Agra but buried at Gwalior. We must give precedence to Mullah's account over the other two on account of his relations with the son of Shaikh Dia-ullah.

To spread the *Shattari* ideals into the subcontinent the Shaikh Muhammad granted Khilafat Namah to his disciples belonging from every part of the subcontinent, however, he concentrated his effort mostly on the area of Gujrat, Malwa, Khandesh, and Deccan. Probably the Shaikh chose this area because those places were outside the influence of other Sufi orders. The Punjab and Sindh were already under the influences of *Suhrawardi* silsilah, while most of northern India was under influence of *Chishti* silsilah. But the area covering Gujarat, Khandesh, and Malwa has not yet come under the influence of any other Sufi silsilah. It was for that reason The Shaikh chose to establish most

of his famous at Ahmadabad, Boroda, Burhanpur, Champanir, Jsuaod, etc. Many famous Sufi saints in the Indian Subcontinent were known for their religious thought. Shaikh Muhammad Ghawth stood among them on account of his personality, his closeness with both the ruler class and the masses. His understanding of the mystic method of Hindu *Yogi's* made him distinguished from others. It is because of his charisma and connections he was able to spread the Shattari ideals among the Subcontinent and was able to ward off the wrath of the *ulema* class.

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