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Kaka Sahib - A Mystic in Mystery

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Hazrat Kaka Sahib Kasteer Gul was born on 30th Sha'ban or 1st Ramadhan, 983/1575 during the reign of Akbar.(1) His father, Bahadur Baba, also known as Abak Sahib, was himself a man of letters and great divine. He lived in a place some six or seven miles away to the south-west of the present village Ziarat Kaka Sahib.(2) It was a lonely place fit for divine hermits. It was here that Kaka Sahib spent his childhood in the company of a few but learned elders. Later on when people noticed his unmistakable greatness, the Khattak clans like Kanrha Khel, Amir Khel and Kati Khel flocked round his abode. Soon after Kaka Sahib shifted to yet a lonier place called Mela, but there too he was not left alone. The people of Spin Kaney, Manhai, Petao, Shahab Khel, Mehrajai and Bahadur Khel surrounded him. On way from Bahadur Baba to the present village of Ziarat Kaka Sahib, the ruins and relics of his old house and mosque can still be seen.

Kaka Sahib received his preliminary education of the Holy Quran from his own father Abak Sahib. He studied *Hadith*, in the school of Akhun-a-Din Baba, a religious scholar, who resided in the village presently known as Akora Khattak. Kaka Sahib respected all *Sufic* schools including the Suharwardi, Chishti, Qadiri and Naqshbandi *Silsilahs*.(3)

After the death of his father, Kaka Sahib became the spiritual guide of his people. People loved to spend their days and nights in his company listening to how the Holy Prophet and his companions led their lives. His character was one of sublime simplicity. Peace and love amongst people irrespective of caste and creed were his primary teaching. He laid a great stress on self-purification. It was the fruit of his ceaseless endeavours that the people who surrounded him tended to be more religious-minded than those whose geographical distance did not permit them into his company.(4) Their religious fervour was the result of his untiring efforts for the sake of propagation of Islam.

Another great service which Kaka Sahib rendered to his people was the unification of the warring Pakhtun tribes. Two tribes thus connected in spiritual

guidance to the same single personality of Kaka Sahib thought twice before overrunning one another. Once the news of a tribal hostility reached Kaka Sahib, he would send for both the parties and settle the dispute amicably through his arbitration. Never a tribe could dare violate the word of Kaka Sahib.(5) The rivalry between Yousufzais and Khattaks was a proverbial one but the former in the lifetime of Kaka Sahib would not dare lay hands on the latter as they did after his death. Owing to his greatness several tribes like Afridis and Aurakzai had, and still have, real respect for the descendants of Kaka Sahib. Whenever a dispute arises in the tribal territory the most influential members of the *Jirga*(6) are the Kaka Khels. In several cases people ask for their arbitration and even cases of murder are left to be decided through their adjudication.

This reverence and respect was not limited to the ordinary layman, rather scholars and persons like the great Pashto poet, Khushal Khan Khattak, thought it a great honour that their land was blessed with the shrine of Kaka Sahib. The great Khan regarded him his 'Pir' and guide. Several of his verses are full of love for Kaka Sahib. He says :

This blessing is enough for us that we have the Shaykh's shrine amidst us. The presence of the Shaykh's friends makes the mountains gardens.(7) Khushal Khan's brother, Jamil Khan, was also an ardent disciple of the Shaykh. On realizing that his shouldering of the political leadership of his tribe barred him from serving the Shaykh in a befitting manner, Jamil Khan went to the extent of abdicating his tribal chieftainship and waited upon the Shaykh with complete devotion.(8)

A marked characteristic of Kaka Sahib was his universal catholicism, so much so that even non-Muslim could find a refuge in his person. The moment a Hindu family entered the company of Kaka Sahib, it embraced Islam. In fact, Kaka Sahib believed in Islam as a religion of ease and not of torment as the ordinary theologians had made it look like. Amongst his people he made the teaching of Islam comprehensible and its application practicable.

Kaka Sahib died on Friday 24th Rajab, 1063/1652 at the age of 80 years.(9) Kaka Sahib was married into the Minhail clan of the Khattak tribe and had five sons, Azad Gul generally known as Zia-ud-Din or Shahid Baba; Muhammad Gul alias Haji Mohammad Baba; Khalil Gul generally called Mazarai Baba; Halim Gul alias Spin Baba and Najm-al-Din.(10) Most of the inhabitants of Ziarat Kaka Sahib are the descendants of Qiyas Gul son of Azad Gul. Eight leading families of Sarishta, Kaji Khel, Mir Kalami, Pir Sach, Baba Khel, Qiyas Khel, Qambar Khel and Naswarian claim descent from Qiyas Gul. Although they have a village of their own-Ziarat Kaka Sahib, Kaka Khels also reside in villages such as Hoti, Lundkhwar, Surkh Dheri, Mayar, Baghdada, Gumbat, Doaba, Agra, Jora, Dak Spin, Chauntra, Badhabher and also in Bajaur Agency.(11)

The lines of saints and divines sometimes get shrouded in mysteries for several ostensible reasons. This is what happened with Kaka Sahib. Who was Kaka Sahib? is still controversial amongst rival parties. The big question that leads to doubting the very descent of Kaka Sahib is not without political implications and was first raised with remarkable candidness by a certain section of the descendants of Kaka Sahib himself. Thus the question whether Kaka Sahib was a Sayyid, i.e., a descendant of the Holy Prophet, was used by them as a political lever against their own Kaka Khel opponents. This proved a big blow to their recognised religious status which they had even enjoying for centuries amongst other Pakhtun sections of the region. They were believed to be true Sayyids. This claim of noble descent received a great shock, if it was not shattered altogether. The use of "Sayyid" appendage to the names of Kaka Khels is a very recent phenomenon.(12) It was not in use in the early Mughul period. However, during the last few years of the Mughul dynasty and in the beginning of the British *Raj* there came into notice certain individual Kaka Khels using the word 'Sayyid' besides 'Mian' and 'Shah' before and after their names.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Taj Mehr Sama, "Ziarat Kaka Sahib", *Pakistan*, Pakistan Study Centre, University of Peshawar, No. 7, Spring 1983.
2. The village Ziarat Kaka Sahib is situated at the right side of Peshawar-Nowshera Grand Trunk Road, six miles towards South-West. A metalled link road runs to the village. It was first constructed during the British *Raj* in 1942 and was later on improved upon by the late Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan. The village is separated from the North-Eastern Nowshera by a small barren land which, amidst surrounding greenland, looks like a desert. The link road, like a tide, runs up and down through this small desert. The village, surrounded from all sides by hellocks with sparing greenary, is a virtual dale. After walking through the desert one enters the village always with a sigh of relief. The people of village Ziarat Kaka Sahib economically are collectively well off. Their economic prosperity is due to their commercial genius as they do not own large agricultural lands. The people of Ziarat Kaka Sahib are really blessed, if not chosen, ones. The inhabitants of other villages surrounding them look upon them with great honour and respect. This is because of the fact that still they are looked by other people as their spiritual mentors.
3. Sayyid Sayyah-ud-Din, *Tadhkira-i-Shaykh Rahamkar*, Lyallpur, 1964, p. 26.
4. Afzal Khan Khattak, *Ta'rikh-i-Murassa*, Peshawar, n.d., pp. 563-65.
5. *Ibid.*

6. *Jirga* : literally council of elders. *Jirga* is just like Parliament or National Assembly. It exercises both executive and judicial roles and settles all dispute pertaining to the distribution of land, property, blood feuds, blood money and other important affairs on the basis of conventions, traditions and principles of Justice. Normally it consists of elders, and the leading *Maliks*. There are no hard and fast rules for the selection of *Jirga* members. All elders are considered eligible for its membership and each one of them has a right to speak and freely express his opinion. *Jirga* assembles in a *Hujra* or a village mosque or in an open field outside the village under a shady tree.
7. Khushal Khan Khattak, *Firaq Namah*, quoted by Afzal Khan Khattak, p. 1310.
8. Interview with *Raj Wali Shah Khattak* of Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar (1-5-1986).
9. Afzal Khan Khattak, quotes Khushal Khan Khattak, *Tarikh-i-Murrassa*, p. 589, as :

چوشداد جهان شیخ دین رحمکار
رجب بود و جمعه به سه و سه هفت
چو تاریخ فوتش بجستم ز عقل
چنین گفت با ما که با فقر رفت

When the divine Rahamkar departed from this world. It was Friday, the 24th of Rajab.

When I requested my intellect to supply a chronogram of his death. It replied that he went with spiritual poverty.

10. Sayyah-al-Din, *op.cit.*, p. 137.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 221-246.
12. Sayyah-al-Din pleaded for the Sayyid origin of Kaka Sahib. Contrary to him, many authentic original works like that of Shams-ud-Din's, *Munaqib-i-Shaikh Rahamkar* (manuscript) pp. 18 and 42; Afzal Khan Khattak's *Tarikh-i-Murrassa* (Peshawar, n.d.) pp. 262-63 and many modern writers like Sarfaraz Khan Uqab Khattak in his *Tarikh-i-Khattak* (Peshawar 1965) p. 213; Mir Rahman Ghazi Babur in *Sayyid Rahamkar*, (Peshawar, 1952) p. 16 describes him as Khattak.