

THE CROW EATERS: AN ANALYSIS

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(Bapsi Sidhwa is a renowned Zoroastrian novelist. She writes about social issues, satirises and scoffs gently at human foibles. Her novels 'The Crow Eaters', 'The Bride', 'Ice-Candy Man' and 'An American Brat' are on various topics yet inextricably intertwined. In both 'The Crow-Eaters' and 'The Bride', partition of the sub-continent has been an important theme, but not the shaping force of either novel. In her third novel, 'Ice-Candy Man' partition is the shaping force. 'An American Brat' is a sequel to 'The Bride', which is a true picture of tribal society. Bapsi Sidhwa has established herself as Pakistan's leading English-Language novelist.)

Sidhwa's early novels, as Anita Desai has accurately described, are 'a passion for history and for truth-telling.' 'The Crow-Eaters' is a satire on the early 20th Century Parsi society in India and Pakistan. The novel gives an elaborate account of Parsi (Zoroastrian) religion, customs, rituals and views.

a. Parsis: their history and customs:

In this regard, in the introduction to this novel, Dr. Javed Iqbal writes:

'Who are Parsis and what is Parsi culture? We have a rather sketchy knowledge of them. They are known to us only as the small group of people who worship fire, do not allow conversion to their faith, rarely marry outside their community, expose their dead to the sun on the 'Towers of silence' and have always been distinguished for their wealth as well as their beneficence by founding or maintaining hospitals, schools, and other such institutions.'

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Sufi saint of Baghdad, Shahab-ud-Din Zakaria". In Multan, the foundation of this order or *Silsila* was laid down by the Sufi Saint Baha-ud-Din Zakaria".⁽¹⁴⁾

E-D. Maclagan has given the details in the following words: "The lower part of the tomb is in square of 51 feet 9 inches. This is surmounted by an octagon, about one-half of the height of the height of the square, above which there is a hemisphere dome. The greater part of the building is a mass of white plaster; but on the eastern side there are still existing some fairly preserved specimens of diaper ornament in glazed tiles."⁽¹⁵⁾

According to Cunningham there is only one other specimen of the architecture of this exact period, and that is at Sonapat.⁽¹⁶⁾ The shrine of Bahawal Hakk is enlivened at times by the visits of bands of pilgrims from Sindh and elsewhere who march in with flags, crying out in chorus: "Dam Bahawal Hakk! Dam Bahawal Hakk!"⁽¹⁷⁾

The shrine of this great saint has been revered both by the Muslims and non-Muslims as J.Royal Rose berry III writes:

"Many Hindus venerated Muslim saints. Mulraj's mother made offerings at the shrine of Bahawal Hakk, praying, "that her son might not only conquer the English, but afterwards the Sikhs and become King of the Punjab"⁽¹⁸⁾

It is evident from the above statements that contribution of Hadrat Baha' al-Din Zakariyya to Islam has been acknowledged even by non-Muslim writers.

Allah's mercy be upon him.

Zakariyya, a native of Multan. He went to Baghdad and attached himself to Shihab-ud-Din Suhrawardi, the founder of the order, who as himself a contemporary of 'Abd-ul-Qadir Jilani, the founder of Qadiri Order. In A.D. 1266 he died at Multan, where his tomb is greatly revered" ⁽¹¹⁾

Besides orientalist some non-Muslim historians of the sub-continent have also mentioned this great Sufi in their books. Among Hindus, Dr. Tara Chand has written about Baha' al-Din Zakariyya in his book "Influence of Islam on India Culture". ⁽¹²⁾

K.S. Lal in his book "Early Muslims in India" writes about this saint as follows:

"The founder of the Suhrawardi *Silsila* was Shaikh Shahab-ud-din Suhrawardi. He directed his disciples to work in India. The most prominent among these was Shaikh Baha-ud-din Zakariyya of Multan. Baha-ud-din Zakariyya was born at Karor in 1182-83 and after a long sojourn of many important centres of Muslim learning, he settled down in his Khanqah at Multan where he died in 1262 after half a century's work. The credit of organizing the Suhrawardi order in India belongs to him. He did not believe in poverty or torturing the body. He lived a comfortable life and emphasized and practiced the external forms of Islam Bahauddin Zakariyya did not shun wealth; in fact he accumulated it. He also mixed freely with *sultans* and practiced politics. It is said that he was the richest Muslim saint of medieval India". ⁽¹³⁾

Some Sikh historians have also highlighted the achievements of Zakariyya Multani. For instance, Dr. Fauja Singh of Punjabi University Patiala (India) writes:

"By and by, at Multan and Uch, permanent seats of learning associated with the names of *Pirs* and *Fakirs* were established. Among them, the Suhrawardi order was the most prominent. The Original founder of this branch was

He also holds the view that, the Suhrawardiyyah order was carried to India by Baha' al-Din al-Multani'.⁽⁸⁾

Anne Marie Schimmel has undertaken research work on Islamic mysticism and has written a number of books on this subject. She writes:

"And even greater Suhrawardi impact on Muslim religious life was made by Baha' ud-Din Zakariyya Multani (d.Ca.1262 A.D), contemporary of Farid-ud-din Ganj-e-Shakar..... And he was willing to mix freely with members of the ruling classes just as Abu Hafs Umar Suhrawardi himself had served the Caliph an-Nasir"⁽⁹⁾

Dr. Schimmel has also given the details about Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariyya. She writes:

"He went to the central Islamic lands to study Hadith, and when he finally met Abu Hafs Suhrawardi in Baghdad, this teacher found him ready as dry wood to catch fire. Returning to Multan, Baha-ud-din soon gained many followers, although his lifestyle differed considerably from the austere, God-trusting, yet emotionally charged atmosphere of his Chishti neighbours. His *Khankah* was well run: he had fixed hours for reception..... Baha' ud-Din Zakariyya accepted government grants and cooperated with those rulers whom he found acceptable, following with Najib-ud-din Suhrawardi the Koranic device: 'Obey God and His Prophet and Obey those with authority among you (Sura 4/59). Thus, he cooperated with Ilutimish as his successors cooperated with Feroz Tughluq"⁽¹⁰⁾

Murray T. Titus, while writing about Shaykh Baha'al-Din Zakariyya says:

"Following the appearance of the Chishti order in India, the next *Darwish* fraternity to be introduced was the Suhrawardi order, which was sponsored by Baha'ud-Din

different parts of the world. While describing the preaching of Islam in India he has admitted:

“The conversion of the inhabitants of the western plains of the Punjab is said to have been effected through the preaching of Bahawal Hakk of Multan and Baba Farid al-Din of Pakpattan, who flourished about the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries”⁽⁴⁾

L.Bevan Jones of the Baptist Missionary Society in his book “The People of the Mosque” has acknowledged the services of Baha’ al-Din Zakariyya for propagation of Islam. He writes:

“This (Suhrawardi) order was founded by Dia-ul-Din Abi Najib Suhrawardi, who died in A.D. 1167. It was introduced into India by Shaikh Baha-ud-Din Zakariyya of Multan, a disciple of Shaikh Shihab-ud-Din, who succeeded the founder. Baha-ud-din died in 1266. His tomb in Multan is greatly revered. His spiritual descendants are active and successful propagandists of Islam.”⁽⁵⁾

J.Spencer Trimingham wrote about this mystic as follows:

“The Suhrawardi *Silsila* spread in India as a distinctive school of mystical ascription to be one of the major *tariqa*.....The chief propagandist in Sindh and Punjab was another disciple, Baha ad-din Zakariyya (A.D.1182 – 1268), the succession continuing in the same family.”⁽⁶⁾

Famous orientalist A.J. Arberry has also paid tribute to him. He writes:

“Shihab al-Din wrote many books, large and small, the most famous and influential being the *‘Awarif al-Ma’arif* which became fundamental text book of the order. His teaching was carried to India by Baha’ al-Din Zakariyya of Multan, and therefore found immediate acceptance.”⁽⁷⁾

Hadrat Baha' al-Din is such saint who has been equally revered both by the Muslims and the non-Muslims. A number of Orientalists and indigenous non-Muslim writers have mentioned him in their books. Homage paid by the Christians, the Hindus and the Sikhs to this mystic is reflected from the following paragraphs.

E.d. Maclagan, Settlement Officer, who compiled "Gazetteer of the Multan District" in 1901-02 writes about Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariyya as follows:

"Shaikh Baha-ud-Din Zakaraia, otherwise known as Bahawal Hakk, was, according to Abdul Fazl, "the son of Wajih-ud-din Muhammad b. Kamal-ud-Din Ali Shah and was born at Kot Karor near Multan in A.H. 565 (A.D. 1669 - 70). His father died when he was a child; he grew in wisdom, and studied in Turan and Iran. He received his doctrine from Shaykh Shihab-ud-Din Suhrawardi at Baghdad, and reached a degree of vice-gerent. He was on terms of great friendship with Shaikh Farid Shakarganj, and lived with him for a considerable time. Sheikh Iraki and Mir Husayni were his disciples. Bahawal Hakk was for many years the great saint of Multan, and has still a very extensive reputation in the South by West Punjab and in Sindh His death is thus described Abdul Fazl: "on the 7th of Safar A.H. 665 (7th November 1266), an aged person of grave aspect sent in to him a sealed letter by the hand of his son Sadr-ud-din. He read it and gave up the spirit; and a loud voice was heard from the four corners of the town: "Friend is untied to friend" (*Dost ha dost rasid.*)⁽²⁾

Sir Lepel Griffin has given an account of Shaykh Baha' al-Din in "Punjab Chiefs" and has praised his piety due to which a large number of people embraced Islam and became his disciples.⁽³⁾

Professor Sir Thomas Arnold a teacher of Allama Muhammad Iqbal at Government College Lahore, in his book entitled "The Preaching of Islam" has elucidated how did Islam spread in

Homage Paid to Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariyya by Non Muslim Writers

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Islam was propagated in Indian sub-continent by saints who had either migrated here from Islamic centres or had been trained by the spiritual guides of different Sufi orders residing in Islamic lands. These mystics belonged to Naqshbandi, Qadri, Chishti, and Suhrawardi Orders. The preaching efforts by Sufi saints resulted in the conversion of a large number of people to Islam. Among such mystics Hadrat Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariyya Multani, occupy a remarkable place. He dedicated the whole of his life for the preaching of Islam.

This great Sufi was born at Kot Karor near Multan in 566 A.H. He was a lineal descendant of Asad, the son of Hashim, the great-grandfather of the Holy Prophet (Upon whom be peace and greeting). His father died when he was twelve years of age. After completing his study of the Holy Qur'an according to its seven methods of recitation at Kot Karor, he visited the great centres of Muslim learning in Khurasan, Bukhara, Madinah, and in Palestine. He learnt Hadith with an eminent traditionist, Shaykh Kamal al-Din Yamani at Madinah and he was employed as an attendant at the mausoleum of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) for 5 years. After visiting the graves of the Israelite Prophets in Palestine, he reached Baghdad and became a disciple of Shaykh Shihab al-Din, Suhrawardi. At that time he was, as his master said, 'a dry wood ready to catch fire', and so after seventeen days' instruction, the latter appointed him his successor and ordered him to set up a Suhrawardi Khankah in Multan. He complied with the order of his master and worked in Multan for more than half a century and died in Multan on 7 Safar 661/21 December 1262. ⁽¹⁾

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