

Mīr ‘Alī Shēr Qāni’ on Shāh ‘Abd al-Latīf Bhitā’ī

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Scion of a distinguished family of Qadis of Shirazi origin, Mir ‘Ali Sher Qani’ (1140-1203/1727-89), is one of the most prolific and versatile writers of Sindh.¹ His progenitor, Qadi Sayyid Shukr Allah, together with his followers, was the first person of this family who emigrated to Sindh from Herat during the reign of Mirza Shah Beg Arghun (926-930/1520-1524) and rose to the position of *Shaykh al-Islam* under the latter’s successor, Mirza Shah Hasan Arghun (930-962/1524-1555). Sayyid Shukr Allah’s son, Mir Sayyid Zahir al-Din left behind two sons, namely Sayyid Shukr Allah II and Sayyid ‘Abd al-Rahman. Born in 1140/1727-28 at Thatta, Mir ‘Ali Sher Qani’ was descended from the former in the following order _ ‘Ali Sher Qani’, son of Mir ‘Izzat Allah, son of Sayyid Muhammad Kazim, son of Sayyid Muhammad Muqim, son of Mir Zahir al-Din II, son of Sayyid Shukr al-Allah II, son of Mir Zahir al-Din I.

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1 For his life, works and family background, see Mir ‘Ali Sher Qani’ Tattawi, *Maqālāt al-Shu‘arā’*, ed. Sayyid Husam al-Din Rashidi, Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1957, Introduction, pp.iii-xxx, Persian Text, pp.531-646; Mir ‘Ali Sher Qani’, *Tuhfat al-Kiram*, Urdu tr., Akhtar Radawi, Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1959, “*Musannif Mir ‘Ali Sher Qani’ ki Sawanih-i-Hayat*” by Sayyid Husam al-Din Rashidi, pp.1-88, Text, pp.591-606; Zahur al-Din Ahmad, *Pakistan mein Farsi Adab*, vol.III: 1119-1259 AH, Lahore: Idarah-i-Tahqiqat-i-Pakistan, Punjab University, Lahore, 1977, pp.650-81; Mir ‘Ali Sher Qani’ Tatawi, *Mi‘yar-i-Salikan-i-Tariqat*, ed. Sayyid Khidar Naushahi, Islamabad: Iran-Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies, 2001, pp.45-65.

By the time of Qani‘’s birth, Shah ‘Abd al-Latif (1101-1165/1690-1752) had already seen around forty springs of life, and at the time of his departure from this world to the heavenly abode, Qani‘ was, by the lunar computation, around twenty five years of age. Qani‘’s retentive memory and precocious nature are amply testified by the fact that by the age of twelve, he had already put together his first *Diwan* comprising some 8,000 verses, though, in subsequent years, he did not find it worthy of preservation. A young contemporary of the Shah as he was, whatever little information Qani‘ left behind about that revered saint in his works — *Maqālāt al-Shu‘arā‘* (compiled in 1174/1760-61), *Tuhfat al-Kirām* (compiled in 1181/1767-68) and *Mi‘yār-i-Sālikān-i-Tarīqat* (compiled in 1202/1787-88) — constitutes the earliest first-hand recorded evidence about the life and achievements of the Shah and hence, its significance cannot be overemphasized. An annotated English rendering of the relevant extracts from the aforementioned three books of Qani‘ follows:

(I)

‘Abd al-Latif²

Sayyid ‘Abd al-Latif generally known as Tārik³ — May Allah sanctify his secrets!— [is] one of the grandsons⁴ of Mir Sayyid

2 *Ibid.*, pp.428-29.

3 One who abandons the world, an anchorite, a hermit. In the original Persian text this word has been misread as “*Tabāruk*” which means being exalted, pure and holy, and is generally applied to God only.

4 His genealogy is as follows: Shah ‘Abd al-Latif, *son of Sayyid Habib Allah, son of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Quddus, son of Sayyid Jalal Shah* (cf. Ghulam Rasul Mihr, *Ta‘rikh-i-Sindh*, Vol.VI: Kalhorah Period, Part II, Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1958, p.1069, fn.1, where his name is erroneously recorded as Sayyid Jamal Shah) son of Sayyid ‘Abdal-Karim. See Muhammad Raza bin ‘Abd al-Wāsi‘, *Bayān al-‘Arīfīn wa Tanbīh al-Ghāfilīn*, being a record of the utterances of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Karim Shah Bulri (944-1032/1538-1623), Sindhi translation, with introduction and explanatory notes by Abd al-Ghaffar Soomro, Hyderabad Sind: Auqaf Department, Government of Sindh, 2002, Annexure containing a versified account of Shah ‘Abd al-Latif’s life by Faqir Salih Muhammad, in Persian, p.10.

According to H.T. Sorley Shah ‘Abd al-Latif Bhita‘i “belong[ed] to a notable Alite Sayid family of Matiāri. Hence he was the scion of the most illustrious religious house of Sind tracing a connexion to Herāt. His ancestor in the fourth generation before him was the famous Sayid Abdul Karim (floruit circa A.D.1600) whose dargāh was at Bulrī in the Gūnī tāluka of the Hyderabad district and is still a great place of yearly pilgrimage for its Shāh Karim fair (mēro) held on the saint’s ‘urs’

'Abd al-Karim Bulri. The pen of this novice cannot adequately inscribe the miracles and unusual deeds of that Pole of the Age on the page of time. As far as his stature of Divine Friendship (*rutbih-ye-wilāyat*) was concerned, that possessor of Latif's⁵ glory, was indeed unparalleled in this later age. As his miracles and unusual deeds are already well known to the world and since the recording of every aspect of his personality would have required a separate volume, I have preferred brevity to prolixity. Situated in the village of Bhīt, in the environs of Hālakandi, his shrine is today the object of circumambulation by the men of God. A magnificent dome has been erected on his holy grave⁶ and the Raja of Jaisalmer has presented a kettle-drum to it. On the day of his departure from this world, many of his disciples passed away under the impact of this grief. Muhammad Panāh, pen-named *Rajā'*⁷ has composed a detailed account of this incident of which the following two hemistichs yield the date [of the death]:

Gardidih Mahw-i- 'ishq wujūd-i-latīf-i-Mir (=1165 Hijra)
(Love consumed the delicate body of the Mir)

Shud mahw dar muraqbih jism-i-Latīf-i-pāk (=1165 Hijra)⁸
(The body of the pure Latif was obliterated by meditation)

Although that decent personality was completely unlettered, yet the knowledge of the whole world was fully inscribed on the protected tablet of his heart. In fact, this couplet is redolent of his splendid personality:

day." *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit: His Poetry, Life and Times*, Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1966, reprint., pp. 171-72.

- 5 One of the Divine names, meaning elegant, graceful, courteous, delicate and slender.
- 6 The construction of the Shah's tomb was completed in 1167/1753-54 under the supervision of Sayyid Jamal Shah, a grandson of the latter's brother (*ibn-i-ibn al-akh*), who also succeeded him as a spiritual preceptor of his devotees. Annexure to the *Bayan al-'Arifin*, p.18.
- 7 For him, see *Maqalat al-Shu'ara'*, pp.224-32.
- 8 For more chronograms of his death, see Annexure to *Bayan al-'Arifin*, pp.11, 11b, 18, 19.

*Chū tīfl-i-ghunchih nādīdih dabistān**Bibar sī pārih-ye-asrār-i-Rahmān*

[Although as a budding child he never went to school, he had thirty chapters of the secrets of Rahman in his bosom]

Mirza Mughul Beg Arghūn whose daughter counted herself among the maidservants of his holiness, initially entertained extreme enmity towards the saint. When he died one of the disciples of the saint recited the following chronogram of his death in the presence of the Shah:

Būd khabīth (=1124 Hijra)

(He was a wicked person)

His holiness lost no time in forbidding him from uttering such words and instead suggested the following chronogram:

Yak Mughul bih būdih (=1124 Hijra)

(He was a Mughul)

God be exalted! The spurting out of the mouth of an unlettered person such distinct words without any forethought is nothing short of a miracle. I have included his account [in this book] simply for invoking the Divine benediction, so that this servant of the saints may also be rewarded with His blessings.

(II)

Bhit⁹

One of the dependencies of Hālakandī, Bhit lies 3 *kurōhs*¹⁰ from it in the direction of the ruins. One of its peculiarities is the revered grave and exalted tomb of Sayyid Shah ‘Abd al-Latif — May God have mercy on him. He is generally known as Tārik, son of Sayyid Habib Shah,¹¹ a progeny of the famous Sayyid ‘Abd al-

9 Mir ‘Ali Sher Qani‘ Tattawi, *Tuhfat al-Kiram*, Delhi:Matba‘-i-Nāsiri, 1304 Hijra, Vol.III, pp.152-3.

10 A road-measure of about 2 miles.

11 “Sayyid Habib Allah Shah, a progeny of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Karim Muta‘alwi was blessed with success in treading the path of his respectable ancestors. He was always engrossed in rapture and ecstasy. On his death, Muhammad Sādiq Naqshbandi composed this (chronogram): *al-maut ...*” *Mi‘yar-i-Salīkan-i-Tariqat*, p.677.

Karim [of Bulri]. Sayyid Habib Shah was a man of God. When he died, his date of death was discovered from *al-maut jisrun yūsil al-habīb ila liqā*,¹² *al-habīb*,¹³ i.e., Death is a bridge whereby a friend travels to meet a friend. As far as spiritualism (*wilāyat*) is concerned Shah ‘Abd al-Latīf was almost unparalleled in this age. The signs of his miracles and news of his unusual deeds are clearer than the sun. How much of it can be included in this brief [tract]? Although he was illiterate, God Almighty had inscribed all the sciences on the tablet of his heart. It is said that Mirza Arghūn Beg whose daughter was included among the maidservants of his holiness, initially entertained feelings of extreme enmity towards the Shah. When he died, one of the disciples of the saint recited in his august presence the following chronogram to mark the occasion: *Būd Khabīth* [He was a wicked person] [=1124].

Fragment

Shah Sāhib dhū al-mawāhib Sayyid ‘Abd al-Latīf
Ānkih qutb-i-waqt-i-khwūd būdast az mardān-i-Haqq
Chūn ze jam-i-Irjī’ī¹⁴ makhmūr-i-nūsh-i-wasl shud
Guft mulhim-i-ghayb sāl-i-rihlatash “Rizwān-i-Haqq”

[When the revered Shah ‘Abd al-Latīf who was blessed with Divine bounties and enjoyed the distinction of being the Pole of his time among the men of God, was inebriated with the wine of unity from the cup of *Irjī’ī*, an invisible inspirer indicated his date of death from the phrase: A blessing of God!] [=1165].

As soon as that accomplished saint heard the above chronogram about Mirza Arghūn Beg, he instantaneously forbade his disciple from uttering such words and instead advised him to say “*yak Mughul bih būdih*”, i.e., he was a Mughul. When calculated this phrase also yielded

12 Cf. *Maqalat al-Shu‘ara*, p.357, where instead of “*ilā liqā*” “*līliqā*” is recorded. While the former version of the chronogram yields 1155AH/1742-43 AD as the date of death of Shah Habib, according to the latter version the date comes down to 1144 AH/1731-32 AD.

13 It is generally considered a Tradition (*hadīth*) of the Holy Prophet (see *Maqalat*, p.357), but in all probability it is a saying attributed to the famous 3rd/9th century saint, Shaykh Yahyā bin Mu‘ādh Rāzī. See Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār Nīshābūrī, *Tadhkirat al-Auliya*, ed. Muhammad Isti‘lāmī, Tehran, 1346 Shamsi, where yet another version of it is recorded as *al-maut jisrun yūsil al-habīb ila habīb*. Isti‘lāmī counts it among the Traditions of the Holy Prophet. *Ibid.*, p.913.

14 Refers to the Quranic verse LXXXIX (*Al-Fajr*): 28.

exactly the same year [1124 AH]. In short, expression of such a thing from an illiterate person is nothing short of a miracle. The day he departed from this world, many of his grief-stricken disciples also passed away. Situated on that sandhill, his holy shrine is marked by a strange spirituality and serenity. A fine dome has been erected on his tomb and the Raja of Jaisalmer has presented a kettle-drum to his shrine. Both in the morning as well as in the evening, the place is characterized by an unusual spirituality, delight, serenity and a feeling of Divine presence. Presently Sayyid Jamal Shah is deputizing for that saint who¹⁵ was blessed with manifest and hidden miracles and his holiness's line of mystics (*fuqarā'*) has produced some famous deputies (*khulafā'*).¹⁶

(III)

The Model of the Mystics Shah 'Abd al-Latif Tarik¹⁷

Son of the aforementioned Sayyid Habib Shah. He made his debut as the quintessence of saints in Sindh in the twelfth century. Ridding himself of all worldly attachments, he quietly spent a long time in extreme spiritual austerities and was engrossed in meditation and ecstasy in vast wildernesses. Finally when recovered from this condition, he adorned the seat of mystic honour in a befitting manner and attracted a whole world into his devotion. Although he was unlettered, yet nothing in the world was beyond the ken of his knowledge and without having any formal education, he was blessed with Divine sciences.

On the day of his death, many of his disciples also passed away owing to the shock of his separation. Blessed with Divine grace and bounty, his tomb is well-known on the Bhit (*lit.* sandhill). The Raja of Jaisalmer presented a kettle-drum to his shrine. The place is marked by a wonderful spirituality and Divine grace. His mystic line abounds in accomplished saints.¹⁸ He died after 1160 Hijra¹⁹ and [after him] the mantle of guiding the disciples shifted to Sayyid Jamal Shah.²⁰

15 In the Urdu translation of the *Tuhfat al-Kiram* (p.79) this phrase has wrongly been made to qualify Sayyid Jamal Shah.

16 For the successors of the Shah, see Annexure to the *Bayan al-'Arifin*, pp.12-12b.

17 Original: Tārikī. *Mi'yār-i-Sālikān-i-Tarīqat*, pp.677-78.

18 See n.16, above.

19 1747 A.D. The exact date of his death works out to be 16 Safar 1165/4 January 1752. See Annexure to the *Bayan al-'Arifin*, p.11.

20 See n.6, above.