



## **Biographical Encyclopedia of SUFIS – South Asia**

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### **Qazi Qadan**

(1436A.D. – 1551A.D.)

"The world of daily life which the wide-awake, grown-up man who acts in it and upon it amidst his fellowmen experiences within the natural attitude as a reality."

This prefatory quote provides a sure solid ground to take off to the mystical domain of Sindhi poetry by Qazi Qadan (1463-1551). At the time, when the Indian sub-continental Sufism is looked at from a purely Islamic point of view in some scholarly debates, the debates not unlike others under-taken in the past to islamise it, the extract helps us to view the Sindhi Sufi poetry (for that matter, any religious-mystic or secular-poetry) in its "reality" grounded in the common, day-to-day experience of the people themselves.

A people or a society is held together by its individuals in their collective consciousness, or collective conscience, as manifest in a particular set of moral and social ideas. The individuals who represent their society in its inborn, natural attitudes on life, or sometimes in their original thought constructs-original yet well-integrated into the life-experience of the people around-are great; all others go to make such greatness. Qadi Qadan was one such great man of his times, in Sindh.

The first-ever historical reference to him was made by Mir Muhammad Ma'sumi, a chronicler, in his *Tarikh-i-Ma'sumi* written in Persian in 1600, when he (Ma'sumi) was about 65 years old. Besides being a younger contemporary to him, he belonged to the same place Bakhar in Sindh, to which Qadi Qadan belonged. In his *Tarikh*, he does not talk of Qazi Qadan as a poet; he describes him as a Qazi.

A religio politicl personage. At one place he says, "Qazi Qadan ibn Qazi Sa'id ibn Zainud-Din Bakhar was famous for his piety, continence and knowledge of *tafsir*, *Hadith* and *tasawwuf* (Sufism). He became the disciple of Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri (d. 1505). He was appointed Qazi of Bakhar and the adjoining places by Mirza Shah Husain and exhibited an astute sense of justice tempered with compassion in deciding the disputes relating to *Shari'ah*. His unshakable faith in Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri brought on his head the criticism of the Ulama of the day...He continued to hold the post of Qazi to a ripe old age when he resigned. The year 958/1551 saw his death."

After five or ten years (because the dates are not precisely established), we come across another reference to Qazi Qadan in Maulvi Muhammad Ghausi's *Gulzar-i-Abrar*, a book (also in Persian) containing biographical notices of the celebrated Muslim saints and Sufis. The book was composed between 1605 and 1610. Its Urdu translation appeared by the title *Azkar-i-Abrar*, the accounts of the pious, from Ujjain Malwa in 1911. This work *Gulzar-i-Abrar*, and not the later work *Bayan al-Arifin* written in 1630, was the first work which referred to Qazi Qadan as a poet.

The *Qazi Qadan Jo Kalam*, ed Hiro Thakur, hereafter abbreviated as QQJK, in its pp. 55-6 wrongly observes, it was the *Bayan al-Arifin*; obvilously, the QQJK is not conversant with *Gulzar-i-Abrar*, or its Urdu translation *Azkar-i-Abrar*. The *Gulzar-i-Abrar* says about Qazi Qadan, "After accomplishing his formal education, he lost interest in it. He sought to solve the problematic of the material world through change in moral outlook. He succeeded in this by overcoming his *nafs* (desire) and gained insight in the reality of things.

Here are some of his sayings constituting the essence of his teachings which he put into verse in his native tongue Sindhi:

- I. The Study of the Prophetic Tradition, Hanifi Law and Arabic Grammar never brought to my mind the aroma of gnosis; what I sought I found beyond this world.
- II. All the languages negate You (OGod!) by the word "Ia", but You are out to prove Yourself.
- III. What does "Ia" negate, when nothing except Truth?
- IV. If we consider deeply, then the One we seek is we ourselves.

He has written more thing of this kind than can be described here. But the beauty of every piece comes out in the style peculiar to the language in which it is written. A translation cannot retain the beauty of the original. Shaikh Ibrahim Sindhi whose tomb is to the north of Burhanpur was one of his devoted associates."

Mian Muhammad Raza alias Mir Daryai Thattawi's Bayan al-Arifin (written in 1630) makes a mention of the fact that Qazi Qadan lived for a brief time at Dar Bela (now Dabthro) in Bakhar and there he came into contact with a *faqir* who drew him to the path of *haqiqah* (the Supreme Reality). The work also contains Qazi Qadan's seven *baits* along with those by Shah Abdul Karim.

The later work Tuhfat al-Karim (written in 1767-68) throws light on Qazi Qadan, his predecessors and successors and affords us an important insight into his family tradition. It places his great-great grandfather Qazi Abu-al-Khair among the grand old men of Uch, a great seat of Sufi learning in the medieval Sindh. He along with his family moved to Bakhar, where he died.

Tehreafter, Qazi Qadan's forefathers came to be known as *Bakhari*, or of Bakhar. Since, they lived also at Thatta and Sewhan, the sometimes are called Thattawi and Sivastani. Qazi Qadan's daughter Bibi Fatima, a Rabi'a of her time, knew the whole of Qur'an by heart. Her son (Qazi Qadan's grandson) Mian Mir of Lahore was Dara Shikoh's preceptor.

All the present-day descriptions of Qazi Qadan and his great poetry rest on such source books as mentioned above and also on the internal evidence obtained from his works. The individual scholarly readings of the two evidences-external and internal-partly explain some variance in these descriptions. For instance, the historical fact that Qazi Qadan, whom Jam Nando, the Samma ruler of Sindh, had appointed as Qazi and also the keeper of the Bakhar fort, failed to defend the fort against the invading army of Shah Beg (the Arghum Amir of Qandhar who had been defeated by Babur in his homeland in 1517) and quietly (or, peacefully) gave the keys of the fort to Shah Beg in order to save the people from the possible bloodshed has been interpreted as an act of treason against one's own country.

One may look at this historical event from another point of view: Qazi Qadan loved his people and did not send them to the altar of slaughter by the alien sword, he stood for non-violence in the best tradition of the land (here it may be recalled, the Arab's also had the initial victory over Sindh in 712 owing to this attitude on the part of some Buddhist Governors of the Sindhian forts). For that purpose, one may have a closer look at the great role played by Qazi Qadan during the days Thatta was in the siege laid by Shah Beg in 1520, and Jam Firuz, successor to Jam Nando, fled from Thatta, helplessly.

The Tarkhan Nama (written in 1654-55) describes it copiously: "Thatta was given up to plunder till the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month (December, 1520), in the course of which the inhabitants were treated with merciless severity and many of them were carried into captivity. The holy text, "surely when kings enter a village they destroy it," was fully exemplified in this instance.

At last, at the strenuous exertions of Qazi Qadan, a most distinguished scholar (who had by that time left Bakhar and come to live in Thatta), these outrages were put to an end to, proclamation was made to the effect that the people of the city were to remain undisturbed" (observation in the bracket mine.)

Thus, we see, Qazi Qadan was an influential man of his times. Though a Qazi, a dispenser of the Islamic Law, in the beginning, he rose to be a great Sufi. The fast-changing political scene in Sindh the transfer of power from the native Samma rulers Jam Nando and Jam Firuz to the alien Arghun Amirs Shah Beg and Mirza Shah Husain during his life-time-changed his outlook on life a great deal. The cruel ways of the world made him look "beyond the world" and turned him, an Islamic scholar, into a Sufi poet.

A man of justice (adal), he now looked for God's grace (fazi). According to the *Bayan al-Arifin*, a *dervish* of Dar Bela had initiated him into a new spiritual lore. Qazi Qadan could see that he who failed to establish a sense of generativity fell into a state of self-absorption and self-conceit and in which he would only look for the fulfillment of his personal needs. There came in his life a time for reflection and also for integration with the people at large and not with individuals –be they the rulers of the land.

Not only he himself, his daughter Bibi Fatima and his grandson (through her) Mian Mir also took to the path of Spiritual Unity. Mian Mir was one year old, when his grand-father Qazi Qadan died; thus, he had the privilege of having his grandfather's blessings, physically too. During his grown-up age, he was, as we know, so much known for his syncretic thought that he became the price Dara Shikoh's friend, philosopher and guide, and was invited by the Fifth Sikh Guru to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple at Amritsar.

Qazi Qadan paves the way for the Sindhi Sufi poets of the later times. As is evident from the following chapters we find many an echo of Qazi Qadan's verses in those of Shah Abdul Karim and Shah Abdul Latif. He greatly influenced the two poets and, through them, others in the Sindhi poetic tradition. The later poets made more explicit use of Sindhi folk-tales like Sasui Punhu, motifs like spinning and dying and images like boat and swan. In fact, Qazi Qadan provides a great link in the history of Indian Sub-continental Sufism, which is essentially monistic, from the days of Abu Ali Sindhi Sufi, the instructor of Bayazid Bistami (d. 874) to this day. It is the peculiar chemistry of the soil that makes the Indian Sub-continental Sufi poetry distinct from purely Islamic Sufi poetry, if any, elsewhere.

The present writer is of the view that Sufism as Islamic mysticism is a contradiction in terms, for the Sufis have never had a comfortable place in Islam, and that Indian Sufism in the broad framework of Bhakti Movement is one of the finest expressions of Indian composite culture.

Now let us look in the light of the sociology of knowledge at the reality, and also at the "super-natural" reality viewed from that reality, in its Sindhi particulars as expressed in the poetry of Qazi Qadan.

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