Mawlana Khalid Kurdi: The link between Delhi and the World

Mawlana Khalid Kurdi, an Alim-Sufi who travelled from Kurdistan to Hindustan in search of a spiritual master, later proved instrumental in propagating Sufi Naqshbandiya-Mujaddidi order. This article throws light on the great Alim-Sufi of 13th Century hijra.

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Originally written on March 13, 2007

Mawlana Khalid Kurdi, known as Reviver (Mujaddid) of the 13th Century Hijra, was from Iraqi Kurdistan. His importance, in the context of South Asia, lies in the fact that he was the one who spread the Mujaddidi Order of the Naqshbandi School of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi to Indonesia in the east, the Arab World and Turkey in the heartlands, and Europe and North America in the west. One can call it one of those inexplicable decisions of unseen agents of fortune and fate or a feat of mysterious esoteric power of men who otherwise appear no different from other ordinary persons walking by a street. Both issues are beyond the purview of a biographer, even though such enigmas always cause stirs in the deepest recesses of human brain. Ordinarily one is entitled to ask, or at least wonder, why a person from Kurdistan traversed thousands of miles all the way from northwestern Iraq to northwestern India to meet one Abdullah ad-Dehlawi aka Shah Ghulam Ali to get training in the realm of mysticism. Was there any dearth of Sufi shaikhs in Iraq, Ash-Sham or Arabia nearer home? No, there were many shuyukh but then Khalid Kurdi was nobody's fish and ultimately he was directed by three persons at three different times and places to go to Delhi, even though he was already ordained in the Qadiriya Order in 1806 in Makkah Al-Mukarramah when he was 27 years old, by Shaikh Muhammad Al-Kuzbara, an Alim of Hadith.
On his visit to Madina Al-Munawwarah during his pilgrimage in 1220h/1806ce, Khalid al-Kurdi, still felt the need for further training in Tasawwuf. In Madina he met an unknown shaikh at the gravesite of the Rasool-Allah, sall-Allah-u alaih-i wa sallam. The shaikh directed him to go to Makkah. He returned to the holy city where near the Ka'aba he met another unnamed shaikh. Mawlana Khalid wanted to be his disciple, but the shaikh said, "O my son, your treasures and the keys to your heart are not in these parts, but in India. Your shaikh is there. Go there and he will show you what you have to do". The shaikh in Makkah did not tell Khalid Kurdi where in India to go and whom to meet. So he returned to Damascus and resumed his teaching job.

Sometime later he visited Sulaymaniya, in Kurdistan, where in his endless search for a perfect guide, he met Mawlana Mirza Rahimullah Beg Al-Maruf, also known as Muhammad Ad-Darwish Azimabadi, one of the khulafa of Qutb al-Azam, Abdullah Ad-Dehlawi, or Shah Ghulam Ali. He told Khalid Kurdi "there is one perfect shaikh, and scholar.... Come with me to his service in Jahanabad" (Delhi). Mawlana Azimabadi also said that before he left Jahanabad, Shah Ghulam Ali told him: "You are going to meet someone, bring him back with you".

Khalid Kurdi moved to India in 1224h/1809ce. En route to Jahanabad, one day in Lahore, he met Shaikh Qazi Sanaullah Panipati Naqshbandi, the author of Tafseer-I Mazhari. That night he had a dream. Qazi Sanaullah said it was a sign to move on to Shaikh Abdullah ad-Dehlawi. The whole journey took about a year. Khalid Kurdi says that 40 days before his arrival in Jahanabad, Shah Ghulam Ali told his followers, "My successor is coming". Mawlana Khalid attained khilafat in five months stay at Shah Ghulam Alis khanqah-madrasa in Delhi. He was made a khalifa in five orders: Naqshbandiya, Qadiriya, Kubrawiya (of Shaikh Najmuddin Kubra which is a branch of the Qadiriya as well as Owaisiya Orders), Suhrwardiya and Chishtiya through Abdullah ad-Dehlawi, Jan Janan to Shaikh Ahmad al-Faruqi Sarhindi.
Shah Ghulam Ali also authorized him to teach all sciences of Hadith, Tafseer, Tasawwuf, and the daily awrad. His greatness can be assessed from the rare distinction of being the founder of the Khalidiya Order within the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Silsila. Mawlana Khalid’s Dutch biographer, Martin van Bruinessen of Utrecht University, says that his *ijaza* had "explicit instructions from his master to spread the Naqshbandiya in the Ottoman Empire".

Another biographer, Shakely Farhad, notes in an article published by International Journal of Kurdish Studies in the January 2005 issue, that "as far as Kurdistan and the Kurdish Naqshbandis are concerned, almost all of the studies have tended to focus ... on Mawlana Khalid Shahrazuri (1193/1779-1242/1827), the eponym and founder of the Khalidiya suborder."

In the years between his return to Iraq in 1811 and his death in 1827, Mawlana Khalid lived consecutively in Sulaymania, Baghdad and Damascus and appointed at least 67 khulafa in different parts of the Ottoman Empire, among Kurds, Turks and Arabs. He became the most remarkable disciple of Shah Ghulam Ali, notes van Bruinessen in his article, "Kurdish Ulama and their Indonesian Disciples". He adds that the Mujaddidi Silsila spread through Mawlana Khalid as he sent his khulafa everywhere, from Hijaz to Iraq, from Ash-Sham (Syria, Palestine, modern Jordan, Lebanon and Israel) to Turkey and Cyprus, from Iran to India and Transoxania.

Shakely Farhad says that development and the spread of teachings of the Naqshbandiya Order in Kurdistan "were, to a great extent, identical to mainstream Sufi views established and/or reestablished by Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi (1564-1624) and his successors. It was therefore quite natural that Mawlana Khalid would represent the ideas and teachings of his masters in the subcontinent". But it is also true that Mawlana Khalid was not simply one of the hundreds or perhaps thousands of deputies who were initiated, trained and instructed by Shaikh Abdullah Dehlawi,
also known as Shah Ghulam Ali, (d.1240/1824). He was for several reasons, exceptional, in position, qualities and abilities'.

On the authority of *Yad-I Mardan*, by Mudarris Abd al-Karim (Mala) (vol. 1, pp. 32), Farhad refers to a letter of Shah Ghulam Ali to Mawlana Khalid Kurdi, reporting the farewell conversation between the master and the disciple: "After staying one year in the Khanqah in Delhi, Shah Ghulam Ali, instructed the Mawlana to return to Kurdistan. Prior to leaving, they engaged in an interesting conversation. Lastly Shah Ghulam Ali asked him: 'What else do you want?' Mawlana replied: 'I want the deen (faith) and I want the dunya (world) to strengthen the religion'. The shaikh told him: 'Go, I gave (bestowed on) you the whole of it'."

Mujaddidi influence reached Indonesia, Malaysia and other countries of Southeast Asia through Mawlana Khalid Kurdis khalifa, Abdullah Al-Arjinjani, also a Kurd. He was posted in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, where he and his successors, according to van Bruinessen, attracted a large number of disciples among the Indonesians who would visit the holy city every year for Haj. The first well-known Indonesian affiliated with this branch of the Naqshbandiya Order was Ismail Minankabawi (of the Minangkabau ethnic group in west Sumatra), who was a disciple and deputy of Shaikh Arzinjani, and his successor Sulayman Al-Qirimi.

Today, Naqshbandiya-Mujaddidiya-Khalidiya Order is also active in the United States, based in Fenton, Michigan, where since 1991 it is being led by Shaikh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, who studied medicine in Louvain, Belgium, with a degree in Islamic sciences obtained from Damascus, Syria. Shaikh Kabbani is khalifa and son-in-law of Shaikh Nazim al-Haqqani Qubrusi (from Cyprus), a Naqshbandi master spreading the Mujaddidi Order in the United States. Since 1991, he has established over 15 centers of the Naqshbandi Order in North America. He travels to many US cities and towns, according to their official website, "visiting mosques, churches, synagogues, and temples. Through him, more than 10,000 Americans have entered the fold of Islam and have taken initiation in the Naqshbandi Order".
Interestingly, in England one prominent disciple of Shaikh Nazim al-Haqqani is Yusuf Islam, the former pop singer Cat Stevens, himself being a Cypriot (Greek). A descendant of Hazrat Uthman Ibn Affan, the third Guided Caliph, Mawlana Khalid Kurdi belonged to the Jaf tribe of Kurdistan. He was born in 1779 (or 1776) in the village of Karada near Sulaymaniya. According to van Bruinessen and Shakely Farhad, he was born in the town of Shahrazur which, van Bruinessen says, has produced a large number of Kurdish Ulama and Sufiya. Shahrazur is in the region in Iraq that includes Kirkuk and Sulaymania; most of the Kurdish Ulama belonged to an ethnic sub-group living in that region, called Gurani, like Shaikh Ibrahim al-Kurani (1615-1690) whose books are widely read in Indonesia. Another distinguished Gurani is Mawlana Khalid, adds van Bruinessen.

This great Kurdish scholar and spiritual guide, sometimes also known as Mawlana Khalid Baghdadi, died on 13 Dhul Qi'da, 1242h/1827ce in Damascus. More than 300,000 people stood for the funeral prayer behind Shaikh Aman Abidin. Mawlana Khalids khalifa in Damascus, Shaikh Ismail Shirwani, led a second janaza prayer at the gravesite for those who could not attend the first funeral congregation.

Commenting on his reference to being a Baghdadi in some instances, Shakely Farhad thinks that this appellation is for political reasons - to obliterate his Kurdishness - rather than to underscore his association with Baghdad where he did not live long enough to deserve this appellation.

Khalid Kurdi’s early teachers were Shaikh Abdul Karam al-Barzinji and Shaikh Abdur Rahim al-Barzinji. In Sulaymania he studied mathematics, philosophy, and logic. Then he came to Baghdad and studied "Mukhtasar al-Muntaha fil Usul", an encyclopedia of the Principles of Jurisprudence (Usul al-Fiqh). He also studied the works of Hafiz Ibn Hajar Asqalani, Mawlana Jalaluddin Suyuti, and Haythami. He memorized the Qur’an as well as the Tafseer of Baydawi. He also attained expertise of high order in Fiqh. Then he moved to Sanandaj, another city in Kurdistan, where he
studied mathematics, engineering, astronomy, and chemistry. His teacher in these disciplines was Muhammad al-Qasim as-Sanandaji. In 1213h/1798ce, Mawlana Khalid Kurdi took charge of the madrasa of his teacher, Shaikh Abdul Karam al-Barzinji, where he taught modern sciences, "verifying delicate equations of astronomy and chemistry".

Mawlana Khalid Kurdi left writings in Arabic, Persian, his mother tongue Kurdish and his tribal tongue Gurani, which in his time was still the literary language of southern Kurdistan.

The following is the Naqshbandi Silsila of Mawlana Khalid Kurdi.

1. Muhammad Rasool-Allah, sall-Allah-u alaih-i wa sallam
2. Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, radi-Allah-u anh-u
3. Salman al-Farsi, radi-Allah-u anh-u
4. Qasim Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abu Bakr as-Siddiq
5. Ja'afar as-Sadiq Ibn Muhammad al-Baqir
6. Tayfur Ba-Yazid Bustami
7. Abul Hasan Ali al-Kharaqani
8. Abu Ali al-Farmadi
9. Abu Yaqub Yusuf al-Hamadani
10. Abul Abbas al-Khadr
11. Abdul Khaliq al-Gajdwani
12. Arif ar-Reogri
13. Khwaja Mahmud al-Anjir al-Faghanwi
15. Muhammad Baba as-Samasi
16. Saiyid Amir Kulal
17. Muhammad Bahauddin Naqshband (Bukhara)
18. Alauddin Bukhari al-Attar
19. Yaqub Charkhi
20. Mawlana Ubaydullah Ahrar Samarqandi
21. Muhammad az-Zahid
22. Darwish Muhammad
23. Muhammad Khwaja Akmangi
24. Muhammad Baqi-Billah
25. Ahmad al-Faruqi Sarhindi, Mujaddid Alf Thani
26. Muhammad Masoom ibn Ahmad Sarhindi
27. Muhammad Saifuddin al-Faruqi al-Mujaddidi
It may be noted that the Naqshbandiya-Mujaddidiya-Khalidiya Silsila spread to the West - Europe and North America - through the successors of Ismail Muhammad Shirwani, the khalifa of Mawlana Khalid Kurdi based in Damascus, while in the East, particularly in Southeast Asia, the order was taken by the successors of Mawlana Khalid's another khalifa, Abdullah Affandi al-Arzinjani, who was based in Makkah.

Qasim Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abu Bakr as-Siddiq was maternal grandfather of Imam Jafar as-Sadiq ibn Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir Hazrat Qasims daughter, Farwah, the great-granddaughter of the first Khalifa Ar-Rashed, was married to Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir, the fifth Shia Ithna-Ashari imam.

Author Profile

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