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Kharaqani in the Sufi Literature of the Sub-Continent

Dr. Shoaib Ahmad

Department of Persian Language and Literature,
Oriental College, University of The Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

shuaib.persian@pu.edu.pk

Abstract:

The Sub-continent is a vast region with one thousand years golden history of Sufism and its humanitarian traditions in the area. The Sufi writers and poets of the Sub-continent produced a great treatise which is really an unavoidable chapter in the world wide history of Sufi literature. Shaikh Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani's charismatic personality and his attractive sayings are also high lighted in the Sufi literature of these countries. This paper shows how scholars and intellectuals portrayed him in their works.

Keywords: Sub-continent, Shaikh Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani, Sufism, Sufi literature, Tasawwuf

Shaikh Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani (352/963-425/1033) is one of the greatest Sufi masters of the history of Tasawwuf. His extra ordinary spiritual powers, unique sayings and impressive teaching methodology attracted the best saints and scholars of his age and they were all praise for him from the core of their heart and soul. His contemporary Sufi authors and poets started to record some aspects of his life and teachings in their works, subsequently this literature became a scholarly tradition. And the rich Sufi literature, produced in different times, areas and languages became a reliable source of Kharaqani's teachings. This conscious or un-conscious practice was very successful and the fame of Kharaqani is alive even today as it was during his own age.

The Sufi scholars of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent also followed the same tradition and in its continuation they repeated some information regarding Kharaqani's life and some of his prominent sayings in their works which are found in the form of books, poems, letters and discourses.

Shaikh Ali bin Uthman Hujwiri (d. after 1089) is the pioneer in the field of Kharaqani studies in the Sub-continent. His great book *Kashf al-Mahjub* was written in Lahore. In that book Hujwiri has given a brief note on Kharaqani. Probably, this is the first material in black and white, written in the Sub-continent. Hujwiri says that Kharaqani was a matchless master, the prestige of the time, one of the greatest and oldest Sufis, and who was praised by all friends of Allah. Hujwiri narrates that Shaikh Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair visited Kharaqani, with whom he had many high and delicate discussions on all branches of knowledge and skill. When Sheikh Saeed tried to seek Kharaqani's permission to go back, Kharaqani replied: "I have selected you as my deputy"¹. Hujwiri states that abu Saeed was completely silent in the presence of Kharaqani



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and uttered nothing, except when he was questioned. When Kharaqani asked him as why he was so quiet, he replied to this: “One narrator is quite enough regarding an ocean”(2).

Hujwiri writes: “Master Abu al-Qasim Qushairi told me “when I visited Kharaqani, my power of speech was lost and I had no words to utter, it was all due to the divine hold of Kharaqani. So much so, that I thought I had lost my spiritual position”(3).

Hujwiri ends the note by quoting two of Kharaqani’s sayings. Again Hujwiri praises Ahmad, son of Kharaqani, and says that Ahmad is a true successor of his father (4). This comment shows that Hujwiri had some close meetings with Kharaqani’s son, Ahmad, and was impressed by his nobleness. Hujwiri’s note on Kharaqani is very brief, as pointed out earlier, but at the same time it is very important. These short comments are trend setter and later Sufi authors used this information in their works. Moreover, *Kashf al-Mahjub* has been translated into many global and local languages, because of which information on Kharaqani widely spread in all Sufi circles through these translations. The *Mathnavi* of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) is another great book that became a major source of Kharaqani studies in the Sub-continent. It inspired several generations of the Sufis and religious scholars all over the Sub-continent and was equally appreciated and welcomed by almost all intellectual circles of the area. Many scholars produced its translations and commentaries in more than ten local languages. Some of its inspiring poetic translations are also available in different languages of the Sub-continent. More than one hundred local poets also produced their poems in Persian and other languages, following the module and the teachings of the *Mathnavi*(5). As we know, the *Mathnavi* contains some tales about Kharaqani and his sayings as well. The translations and commentaries of the *Mathnavi* introduced Kharaqani and his teachings to their readers. The *Mathnavi* is no doubt one of the major sources because of which the interest of the common people increased in this area, and towards Kharaqani and his teachings.

It is pertinent to mention another important factor that Kharaqani is one of the masters of golden chain of Naqshbandiyya Sufi order. The Naqshbandiyya is one of the major orders working in the Sub-continent. In this way all Naqshbandi Sufis are keen to know about the life and teachings of Kharaqani. So many biographical books on the Naqshbandi Sufis have been written by local authors that contain biographical notes on Kharaqani and introductory notes regarding his teachings. During the last few centuries many Sufis of the Sub-continent visited Kharaqani and some of them mentioned the details of their travel, the situation of Kharaqani’s tomb and some information about his life and thought.

A short mathnavi named *Faqr Namah* is attributed to Kharaqani. It is very popular in the Sub-continent. Its twenty manuscripts are available in different institutional and personal libraries of Pakistan(6), which indicates its wide popularity, but it is clear that Kharaqani is not



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its author and it is authored by an unknown Sufi poet who definitely belongs to some centuries later than Kharaqani's period. Its sub-topics, terminology and poetic style confirm that its attribution to Kharaqani is false and unacceptable (7).

Some important books with short comments on their contents about Kharaqani are as under:

1- Shaikh Zia al-Din Nakhshabi (d. 751/1350), a prominent intellectual and poet of the Chishtiyya order quotes two sayings of Kharaqani in his famous book *Silk al-Suluk*. Most probably his source is Attar's *Tazkirat al-Auliya*. First saying is that Kharaqani requested Allah to favor him in two ways. First, he said: 'do not send the angel of death to me; otherwise a trouble would be created between us. Because you gave me the life not he. So I shall give my life to You not to him'(8). The second saying is: 'sometimes the closeness becomes a distance'(9).

2- Amir Khurd kirmani (d. 770/1368), a Chishti Sufi-writer authored the first *Tazkirat al-Auliya* in the Sub-continent. The name of his book is *Siyar al-Auliya*. It contains the biographies of the Chishti Sufis and it is considered the most authentic record of the author's period (10). Amir Khurd writes that Shaikh Nizam al-Din Auliya (1238-1325), the founder of Chishti Nizami Sufi order, narrated in one of his discourses that how some merchants had a safe trade-journey due to the blessings of Kharaqani. They were advised by Kharaqani to recall and enchant his name and some of them were protected by doing the same while the others were killed. Shaikh Nizam also quoted his source as *Tuhfat al-Barat* by Shaikh Majd al-Din Baghdadi(11). This long story enjoys a vast fame and all the biographies of Kharaqani mention it with a great zeal and zest and it is repeatedly found in most of the Sufi books.

3- Shaikh Sharaf al-Din Yahya Manyari (1263-1381) is a very famous Sufi of Firdosiyya order in the Sub-continent. The collections of his thought provoking letters and discourses are highly appreciated in all Sufi orders. In a letter, Manyari quotes that Kharaqani was asked: "what is your opinion about Junaid and Shibli while Junaid came to the world in the state of consciousness and left in the ecstasy and Shibli came and left in ecstasy"? Kharaqani replied: "If Junaid and Shibli were given a new life and questioned how they came and left, they would be unable to describe." At the same time an angel said to Kharaqani: "O the Shaikh! You are right. They would be unable to explain because one, who recognizes Allah, cannot recognize something else"(12). This dialogue is also found in Kharaqani's biographies with minor changes.

4- In the discourses of another famous Chishti Shaikh Sayyid Muhammad Gisudaraz (1321-1422) the story of the travelers and merchants is reported with some elaborations (13).



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5- Sayyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani (d. after 1436/1437) was a prominent Chishti Sufi. In his discourses he refers again and again to Kharraqani. About ten times he has narrated Kharraqani's sayings and some of the events of his life. He says: "Kharraqani was Ansari's master and a disciple of Abu al-Abbas Qassab. Kharraqani was an illiterate person and used to say 'Anta Mashuki' (أنتَ ماشوكي) instead of 'Maashuqi' (معشوقی), but he was one of the greatest Sufis" (14). Here are two points worth mentioning: first that Kharraqani's original words are in Persian not in Arabic, and the second point is that all old and authentic sources record that it was nearly a habit of Kharraqani, he used to say to different Sufi visitors - the exact translation of his words are, "O! I am your Mashuq (beloved)". Kharraqani's pronunciation of 'Ain' (عين) was just like that of 'Alif' (الف). As he was unable to pronounce 'Al-Hamd' in Arabic style (15). Simnani quotes Kharraqani's saying regarding 'Fana' and 'Baqa' (16), Abu Saeed's visit to Kharraqan with some exaggeration (17) and Qassab's saying that Kharraqani should be his true successor (18).

6- Hamed b. Fazl Allah Jamali (d.1536) was a Suhrawardi Sufi, poet, author and traveler of Islamic world. He visited Kharraqan and Bistam during his long journey. Jamali compiled biographies of Sufis named *Siyar al-Arifin* in which he tells that Khwaja Moeen al-Din Ajmiri (1139-1236), the founder of the Chishtiyya order in the Sub-continent, visited Kharraqan and this was Kharraqani's year of death (19). This statement is incorrect because Shaikh Ajmiri was born about a century after Kharraqani's death. Then Jamali states that Kharraqani and Abu Saeed both found the company of Shaikh Naser al-Din Astarabadi and they both used to feel honor that they loved Astarabadi and got the chances of his company (20). Jamali did not mention the source of this information!

7- Imam-i Rabbani, Mujaddid-i Alf-i Sani, Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi (1564-1634) is very well known Sufi and scholar. His Persian letters are master piece of the Sufi literature produced in the Sub-continent. In his 152nd letter, he narrates the famous story of the visit of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi to Kharraqan. Shaikh Sarhindi criticizes a part of Kharraqani's known saying. He says that there is no division in the service of Allah and that of the Holy Prophet; both are same (21).

8- Khwaja Baqi Bi Allah (1563-1603), the renowned Naqshbandi Sufi and master of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi, was a very good poet. In his collective works there is a short Persian mathnavi named *Ganj-i Faqr*. There he has some refined verses in the praise of Kharraqani (22).

9- The unfortunate Mughul crown prince Dara Shikuh (1615-1659) records that his master Miyan Mir Qadiri Lahori (1531-1635) used to repeat a saying of Kharraqani: "He who does not exist is a Sufi" (23). Again he quotes Kharraqani's saying regarding the uselessness of the desire of Khizar's company, for the reason that those who enjoy the direct company of Allah, do not like anybody even if it were Khizar (24).



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10- Another Persian biographer Abd al-Rahman Chishti (1596-1683) gives a relatively detailed note on Kharraqani. He consulted Jami's *Nafahat al-Ons*, *Maqamat* of Abu Saeed and *Maqamat* of Kharraqani i.e. *Nur al-Ulum*. He mentions that Abu al-Muzaffar *Turk Tusi* was Kharraqani's master, Tusi was a disciple of Abu Yazid Akki, Akki was a disciple of Muhammad Maghribi and Maghribi was a disciple of Ba Yazid Bistami(25). The author does not give his source.

11- Mir Ali Shir Qani' Thathawi (d. 1784) in his Persian biographical book on the Sufis writes a brief note on Kharraqani, giving Kharraqani's three sayings. Other information given by him is just a repetition (26).

12- Shah Muhammad Sulaiman Taunawi (1770-1850) was a great Chishti Nizami Shaikh. More than seven collections of his discourses are available(27). In one of his discourses it is recorded that he stated as: "One day the mother of Shaikh Abu al-Hasan Kharraqani was going on her way. A higher ranked Sufi was standing there and he was continuously looking at her. That pious lady questioned him: "why are you looking at me while you are not my Mahram?" The Sufi replied: 'I am not looking at you at all. I am just looking at the son whom you are going to give birth soon, he is the pole of the age and the world would be blessed by his Faiz!' And after some period Kharraqani was born."(28).

13- A later biography of Sufis mentions Kharraqani many times. The author Muhammad Shuaib (d. 1823) quotes the chain of Kharraqani's order, some of his sayings and a tale of Rumi's *Mathnawi* regarding Bistami's love and praise for Kharraqani (29).

14- *Tazkirat Makhzan al-Gharaib* is an important Persian biographical source about Persian poets. It was written in 1804. The author mentions Kharraqani as a Sufi poet and gives some Persian poems attributed to him. That verses are not composed by Kharraqani. It also includes some information about Kharraqani's life and teachings. It quotes some of his sayings as well. The author gathered this information from Attar's *Tazkirat al-Auliya* and Rumi's *Mathnawi* (30).

15- Another Persian biographical work named *Qasr-i Arifan* was authored in 1874. It also mentions Kharraqani several times, but there is nothing new in it (31).

16- *Tazkira-i Ghausiyya* is a popular book about the life and teachings of Shaikh Ghaus Ali Shah Qalandar Pani Pati (d. 1880). It shows that in some of his discourses Ghaus Ali Shah mentions some of Kharraqani's events such as his spiritual relation with Bistami and Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi's visit of Kharraqan (32).



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17- Dr. Zahir Ahmad Siddiqi is a famous contemporary scholar and most of his works are on Sufism. Prof. Siddiqi quotes Kharaqani again and again in one of his important Urdu books to elaborate the ideology of Sufis regarding almost all aspects of life(33). The author has consulted all old and authentic sources about Kharaqani and other Sufis. It is a good book for serious Urdu readers of Tasawwuf.

18- There is another authentic and valuable Urdu book on Kharaqani(34). Its author is Muhammad Nazir Ranjha, a contemporary Naqshbandi Sufi scholar and author of several books especially on Naqshbandiyya order. The book contains four chapters. Their detail is as follows:

Chapter 1: Detailed biographical information including Persian poetry attributed to Kharaqani. pp. 41-72

Chapter 2: Kharaqani's sayings and discourses. pp. 73-122.

Chapter 3: The Persian poems by different poets in the praise of Kharaqani, with Urdu translation. The poets are Attar, Rumi, Jami, Azar Bigdili, Karim Kisrawi Wajdi, Abd al-Rafi' Haqiqat, Hameed Hamed Tabrizi. pp. 123-166.

Chapter 4: Urdu translation of the *Nur al-Ulum*. pp.167-223.

The author included the scanned image of the only and one manuscript of the *Nur al-Ulum*. pp. 226-253. It is a well-written book. Its style is simple and easy to understand.

This was a brief outline of Kharaqani studies in the Sub-continent. Researchers should prepare a comprehensive bibliography of Kharaqani in the Sub-continent. I hope that a comprehensive study should be under taken, which would be a real and proper homage to a great Sufi like Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani.

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