



## The Socio-Political Importance of Mir Syed

### Ali Hamdani' letters (Maktubat-i-Amir-e-Kabir); An Analytical Study

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For the guidance of common masses, religious preachers of Islam especially Sufis used to deliver Sermons (*Khutbāt*) but for the ruling class, they mostly prefer to send them letters in order to dissuade them from their wrong doings. The socio-political conditions of time also motivated Sufis to write letters to political elite in order to reform the social and political ethos of the Muslim community of their times. Mir Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani popularly known in Kashmir as *Amir-e-Kabir* and *Shah-i-Hamadan* is one of the great Sufi whose collection of letters—*Maktubāt-i-Amir-e-Kabir* is of tremendous importance in this context. The present paper is an attempt to demonstrate the history of letter writing in the Muslim world. Further, it will critically analyze letters of Mir Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani in order to evaluate his personality and missionary zeal.

**Key Words:** *Khutbat, Maktubat, Sultan, Socio-political Conditions, Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani*

## Introduction

Many Sufis came and propagate Islam in Kashmir, to name a few were; Bulbul Shah, Saiyid Jalal-ud-Din Bukhari, Saiyid Taj-ud-Din, Saiyid Hussain Simnani etc. But the one who lit the torch of monotheism was Mir Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani. He is considered as the real founder of Islam in Kashmir. His greatest contribution was the character building of the people to liberate them from the fear of the new system and their love for the older one. He, at the same time, scolded the contemporary rulers on their Islamic



activities. For their guidance, he addressed them in letters. Most of his letters depict the admonitions; he made for reforming the wrong doings of rulers of his time. There is not an ample amount of published literature available that discusses more about the letters of Hamadani. Most of the available literature is being analyzed without the framework of historical methodology. Prof. A.Q. Rafique, for the first time, has attempted and provided the annotated edition of letters along with an English translation. This present study doesn't claim, highly creative or new but surely an addition to all the available literature on the theme of *Maktubat-i-Amir-e-Kabir*.

### **Letter-Writing Tradition**

The tradition of letter writing is very old. It is hard to trace out the roots when letter writing exactly originated. The earliest extant letter, Prof. Rafique comments, is by a Roman Governor which lends some credence to the commonly belief that letter-writing started during the heyday of the Roman Empire, which encompassed much of the then known world stretching from the British Isles in the west to Constantinople in the east.<sup>1</sup> Today, we come across innumerable letters in all the elegant languages of the world that comprises letters concerning personal affairs of their writers and letters dealing with public affairs, religion, philosophy, history, art, politics and metaphysics. Indeed, there is hardly any sphere of human activity which does not find a place in these letters. However, in the Muslim world, the tradition of letter writing is quite old. Some extant letters of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are among the earliest specimens of letter writing in the history of Islam. These letters were sent by the prophet (pbuh) to kings, governors and tribal chiefs inviting them to embrace Islam in order that they might follow the right path, attain salvation and be rewarded by Allah. These letters are direct, forthright, brief and simple without frills and unnecessary embellishments<sup>2</sup>.

From there, the tradition continued and was inherited by the companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). They also wrote letters which are preserved in various authentic histories of Islam. During these days, Islam spread far and wide encompassing most of the known world. It became necessary for the caliphs to keep in touch with the far-

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<sup>1</sup> Rafique, A. Q., *Letters of Mir Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani—An Annotated Edition With English Translation and Historical Analysis*, Gulshan Books, Srinager, 2007, CF. 44, PP. 35-36.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., Ibn Jabir Tabari, *Tarikhu'l-Umam Wa'l-Muluk*, Urdu Tr., M. Ibrahim, Vol. I, pp. 461 ff.

flung provinces through their governors by corresponding with them regularly. These letters also dealt with various aspects of governance and administration<sup>3</sup>.

With the disintegration of the caliphate, the governors and military commanders became independent rulers. They assumed the title of sultan in their respective domains. Gradually, they drifted away from the right path and began to bypass the sharia. The Muslim rulers, comments Ghazzali, enjoyed the convivial evenings and were notorious for reckless<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, during the feasts, contrary to sharia, not only was wine served but “princesses and queens” were also “present at the banquets”<sup>5</sup>. The deteriorated condition of Muslim community troubled conscious Muslim preachers, especially sufis. They began to think about the re-establishment of Islamic glory. Prof. Rafique states,

Creative thinkers of Islam, especially the sufis conscious of their religious duties, set themselves the task of purifying the Muslim community and the state administration from the accretions which they considered unauthorized by the sharia. They believed that Muslims had lost original virtues because of the later innovations, and that if these were removed the old spirit could be revived again. They thought if the Muslim ruling class could be reformed, the Muslim could be saved from the further degeneration and the law of religion, justice and equity could be re-established<sup>6</sup>.

It is therefore, the ‘*Ulema*’ and the Sufis who considers themselves responsible for the propagation of Islam, began to admonish the Muslim rulers and other officials of the Govt in order to dissuade them from the wrong doings<sup>7</sup>. The Sufis did not mince words while depicting the plight of the people for they considered it their duty to portray reality as it existed.

For the guidance of general people, the sufis began to deliver *khutbas* (Manuals). *Mak-tubat* (Collection of letters) are written for individuals with specific purposes. There is a large corpus of letters, both in Arabic and Persian, written by ‘*Ulema*’ and Sufis, most of which are unpublished in manuscript form. These letters throw a great deal of light on the socio-political atmosphere of the times and socio-spiritual conditions of the peo-

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<sup>3</sup> Cf., Ibid, Vol. II, p. 461 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., Nizam-ul-MulkTusi, *Siyasat Nama*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., History of Central Asia UNESCO, Vol. IV, Part-I, P. 325.

<sup>6</sup> Rafique, Op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Contemporary social and political conditions even compelled Ghazzali to write letters to nobles and wazirs. Cf., Smith, *Al-Ghazzali*, pp. 21-22.

ple. Besides, the letters mirrors the personalities of the writers. The letters also gives us an insight into the minds of their authors and reveals their inner most feeling, mystical feelings and esoteric utterances.

Due to the efforts made by some modern scholars, letters (*Maktubat*) of some of the sufis have been brought to light. These letters have been translated into other languages including English. But still a large number of collections lie in manuscript form in different libraries of the world or private collections waiting for the attention of the scholars.

### ***Maktubāt-i-Amir-e-Kabir***

*Maktubāt-i-Amir-e-Kabir* are a collection of letters written by Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani throughout his life. These letters were written in Persian language. They were first published in 1328/1910 by Hafiz Muahammad Hassan. There is a slight difference among the scholars about the actual number of these letters including the addressees. In 1398/1977, Saiyid Ghulam Mustafa Andrabi published the letters along with an Urdu translation under the title *Maktubāt-i-Imam-i-Haqani*. It contains 18 letters including a letter in Arabic by Nur-ud-Din Ja'far Badakhshi to his preceptor, Saiyid 'Ali. Seven of these letters are addressed to anonymous persons, three to Nur-ud-Din Ja'far Badakhshi, two to Sultan Ala-ud-Din, and each one to Sultan Ghiyasu'd Din, Tughan Shah, Mirza Azka, Maulana Muhammad Khawarizmi and Sultan Qutub-ud-Din of Kashmir. These letters are an important source on the life and personality of Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani. Besides, these portray the image of medieval Islam in general. These letters reflect the author's concern about the contemporary degenerating society. It also describes the author's zeal for establishing Islamic laws.

The letters of Hamadani have been mostly utilized and analyzed without the framework of historical methodology. The view is being sated by Prof. Rafique in the following words;

Although in some modern writings references have been made to some of these letters, they have not been utilized and analyzed within the framework of historical methodology, but have been presented with a whole set of pre-conceived notions which are almost entirely false, their meaning and spirit distorted. Lest such cursory studies should assume the tenor of truth in the long run, I felt

prompted to prepare an annotated edition of the letters along with an English translation, for a wider readership<sup>8</sup>.

The extent collection of *Maktubāt* (Letters) are 18 in number excluding *Khutbāt* (Manuals)—meant for the guidance of general public. As the *Maktubāt* were addressed to specific individuals, they reflect the inner certainty of the author; his deserve to establish the faith in its true form, his thoughtfulness and restless zeal. They seem reflective of the author's strong feelings about the contemporary religio-political situation<sup>9</sup>.

### ***Maktubāt-e-Amir-e-Kabir: An Analysis***

The letters generally begin with the customary manner—praise to Allah, Salutations and Benedictions upon the prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The letters demonstrate the solid faith to God, sincere devotion to religion and missionary zeal of Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani. They also reflect his strict adherence to the divine law. He considers himself responsible for Islamic missionary. He considers it his own duty to struggle for bringing the common masses in general and the elite classes in a particular to right path.

The letters are free from the conventional forms of artificially pompous, phraseologies and formal type of addressees. The style of the letters is straightforward and unambiguous. The language is elegant but very forceful and free from rhetoric, verbosity and superfluity. The author, evaluates Prof. Rafique, avoids the use of uncommon allusions, obtrusive similies, metaphors and syllogism. Instead a familiar idioms and vocabulary are used to evoke the desired response of the reader<sup>10</sup>.

The letters demonstrates the author's knowledge, wisdom and intellectual competency. However, there is a touch of freshness and certainty in his argument, the Saiyid makes frequent use of the quotations from the Quran as well as from the saying of the Prophet (pbuh) including the wise sayings of ancestor scholars. In fact the letters have the stamp of his genius personality and they put the reader in intimate contact with the heart and mind of this great Sufi personage of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that the tradition of letter-writing in Islam is quite old. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) first send letters to the kings of Persia, Rome, Ethopia etc during the 9<sup>th</sup>—10<sup>th</sup> A.H, called *Sannat-ul-Wufud* in Islamic history. From there, the tradition continued

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<sup>8</sup> Rafique, op. cit., p. vi.

<sup>9</sup> There was decay in the value system, the loosening of the hold of religion on public and private life and the despicable negligence of the rulers of the time.

<sup>10</sup> Rafique, op.cit., p. 23.

and was adopted by *Khulafa-i-Rashidin*. Sufis followed the same legacy send letters to rulers and other elite officials for advising and guiding them towards the right path. The analytical study of collection of letters of Hamadani depicts the same objectives in letter and spirit.