

Dargah of Kichaucha: Its Character, History and Significance

- Rahmatullah

Abstract

Kichaucha Sharif is also known as Dargah of the famous Sufi saint Syed Makhdoom Ashraf Jahangir Semnani. This dargah is built on a small hill, which is surrounded by a rhythm. It is located in a remote district of Ambedkar Nagar in the state of Uttar Pradesh and serves as a panacea for the distressed and depressed, a centre for deliverance or decimation of the most wicked and persistent of demons, a seminary for seeking spiritual edification and elevation, and a place of solace for mankind. Annually millions of people irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion are drawn to this sacred place for seeking the blessing of the divine saint and thereby achieve their ends. They return fully revived and deeply touched, with their diseases cured and desires fulfilled. As a mark of their heartfelt reverence to the saint, many of them repeatedly pay homage to the saint by visiting the shrine during the annual urs ceremony and on other occasions. In this direction, this paper lays emphasis on the historical background, spatial structure of the dargah, especial happenings associated with the dargah and finally the character and significance of the dargah.

Keywords: Syed Makhdoom Ashraf, Sufism, Kichaucha, Dargah, Commonality, Multi-culture

Introduction:

Syed Makhdoom Ashraf Jahangir Semnani is such an eminent and outstanding spiritual personality of the world of mysticism, whose spirituality and knowledge has illuminated different corners of the world. He established his own order through his nephew and *khalifah* and *Sajjada Nasheen* Syed Shah Abdur Razzaq Nurul Ain who is 11th direct descendant of Abdul Qadir Jilani known as Qadiriya Chishtiya Ashrafiya. The Ashrafi branch of the Chishti order had been established in different parts of the country in his lifetime and today the followers of the Ashrafi order are spread across the world in large numbers. His dargah is in Kichaucha Sharif District Ambedkar Nagar, U.P, India. His *urs* is commemorated on 28th of the Islamic month of Muharram.

Life and Times:

Syed Makhdoom Ashraf (1305-1426 A.D)ⁱ belonged to a royal family of Semnan, Iran. His father, Syed Ibrahim Semnani, was not only the ruler of Semnan but was also a holy person. His mother, Khadija, was a grand daughter of Syed Ahmad Yasavi (great Sufi saint of 12th century). Syed Makhdoom Ashraf started his education at the age of four, and his first formal lesson (commonly known as *Abjad* or *Bismillah* ceremony) was conducted. Maulana Imaduddin Tabrezi was the first teacher. In a period of one year, Syed Makhdoom Ashraf memorized Quran by heart with seven types of *qirat* at the tender age of seven.

Rahmatullah, (Ph.D), Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

Email ID: rahmatullahkhan4@gmail.com

At the age of fourteen, he completed the study in traditionalism, orthodoxy and logic.ⁱⁱ When he was fifteen years old, his father, Syed Ibrahim Semnani passed away and the obligation of ruling Semnan fell on his young shoulders. He ruled the city of Semnan for a period of ten or twelve years.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although, he ruled the city justly and in a fine manner, his heart became more and more uneasy with worldly matters. At the age of twenty-one, he abdicated the throne in favor of his brother Muhammad and set out for India having been told to do so in a dream.^{iv} Passing through *Mawara al-Nahar* (Transoxiana), he visited Bukhara and Samarqand (city of Uzbekistan) and then left for Uch (a historic city in the southern part of Pakistan's Province), where he met Jalaluddin Bukhari surnamed *Jahaniyan Jahangasht* (world traveler). After travelling for almost two years since leaving Semnan, he finally reached Bengal, where his Shaikh Alauddin Pandavi (d. 1398 A.D) was already waiting him. After spending four years in his company, he set out on journey for searching a place that indicated by his *murshid* Shaikh Allauddin Ganj Nabaat, passing through Azamgarh, and Jaunpur, he finally settled at Ruhabad an old name for Kichaucha, a village 80 km away from Faizabad.

A short time after having settled at Kichaucha he again left on his global travels, this time Makkah (twice), Madina, Baghdad, Turkey, Damascus, Kashan, Semnan, Meshad, Ghazna, Kabul, returning to Ruhabad via Multan, Pakpattan and Delhi. N. Hanif, the author of *Biographical Encyclopedia of Sufis*, is absolutely right in saying that the story of his life in the biographical accounts, such as the *Mirat al-Asrar* are legendary. Semnani travelled round the world only once; and then performed the same journey on two occasions in a supernatural way: hagiologists including the author of *Lataif-i-Ashrafi*, however failed to distinguish between the two. More reliable are the Syed Makhdoom Ashraf's own letters, although they fail to provide biographical evidence.^v

Religious and Literary Services

It is an accepted fact that the mystics of Islam have rendered valuable services to the cause of Islam in every period. The religious and literary services, done by Makhdoom S. Semnani, is the golden chapter of history of Islam in general, and history of mysticism, in particular. He lighted the candle of reformation and spirituality in the darkness of infidelity at Kichaucha and brought astray people on the right path. He was not only a great mystic but also a renowned savant of Islam having unimaginable proficiency in different branches of Islamic theology. Syed Ashraf Jahangir Semnani has written many books on different subjects. Prof. Waheed Ashraf has provided a list of 26 works in his book *Hayat-i-Makhdoom Syed Ashraf Jahangir Semnani*.^{vi}

Dargah of Kichaucha, Ambedakar Nagar

Kichaucha Sharif is also known as Dargah of the famous Sufi saint Syed Makhdoom Ashraf Jahangir Ashrafi. Kichaucha Dargah Sharif is built on a small hill, which is

surrounded by a rhythm. This dargah located in a remote district of Ambedkar Nagar in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India serves as, a panacea for the distressed and depressed, a centre for deliverance or decimation of the most wicked and persistent of demons, a seminary for seeking spiritual edification and elevation, and a place of solace for mankind. Annually millions of people irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion are drawn to this sacred place for seeking the blessing of the divine saint and thereby achieve their ends. They return fully relived and deeply touched, with their diseases cured and desires fulfilled. As a mark of their heartfelt reverence to the saint, many of them repeatedly pay homage to the saint by visiting the shrine during the annual *urs* ceremony and on other occasions.

Historical Background

Nawab Safdar Jang founded the city of Kichaucha after the fall of Sadat Baraha in 1712 A.D. The area of Kichaucha was earlier in Jaunpur but now in Ambedkar Nagar district. The name of Kichaucha has not been mentioned in *Lataif-i-Ashrafi*. According to Prof. Syed Waheed Ashraf the name of Kichaucha must have been *Kach-Vach* since the meaning of the word *Kach* is the raised land near the bank of the river and the word *Vach* means the raised land. And since the region of Kichaucha is founded near the bank of the small river Tanvari, it could have been named *Kach-Vach* and with the passage of time, *Kach-Vach* must have become Kichaucha.^{vii} At the time of the arrival of Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf Semnani, the region of Kichaucha was populated by the Bhar community. They were neither Muslim nor Hindu. The community was involved in regular troublemaking and harassed the nearby Hindu population. The ascetics of the region also remained aloof from them. It is popularly believed that almost a century after Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf, the grandson of Hadhrat Nurulain, Shah Jafar Lad Katta Nawaz had to engage in a war against Bhars because of the reason that the Bhars had started troubling the growing Muslim community too. When the victory in the war seemed to be close, majority of the Bhar community fled the region and the descendants of Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf settled there. Thereafter, Shah Jafar welcomed the people from the Hindu community to settle in Kichaucha. And in this manner, both Hindus and Muslims began living in peace in Kichaucha. Muhammad Shah, the younger brother of Shah Jafar, renamed Kichaucha as Ashrafpur and since then the region has been known as Ashrafpur-Kichaucha. When Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf first arrived in Kichaucha, he did not stay there for long. Malik Mahmud, who was a wealthy landlord had become disciple and *khalifah* of Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf, had constructed a monastery for his *shaikh*. The work of expanding the lake, *Neer*, was entrusted to Malik Mahmud. A large number of dervishes also had settled there, remained engaged in worship and devotion, and in their leisure time, would dig the lake with a shovel in their hand and the sacred chants on their tongue. In the absence of Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf from Kichaucha, Hadhrat Kabir would be his deputy and when Hadhrat Kabir passed away, his son Muhammad alias *Durr-i-Yatim* used to carry his father's responsibility.^{viii}

There are certain indications regarding the construction of *roza* (sepulcher) in *Lataifi-Ashrafi* on the basis of which Prof. Syed Waheed Ashraf has construed the entire portrayal of the place of settlement of Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf during his days and which is mentioned below. What is meant by *roza* is that region which is in the form of small hill today at Kichaucha Dargah and which is accessed by the stairs. Its construction took about ten to twelve years and every disciple of Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf, big or small, participated in the construction. But it took around two to three years for the initial construction and the plan of construction was finalized in the first visit of Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf himself. The hilly area of the *roza* and the nearby areas of *neer* were named Ruhabad. On the top of the *roza* was constructed a hermitage for Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf and was called Wahdatabad. Outside the *roza* was a monastery constructed by Malik Mahmud in which the disciples used to gather. The name of the monastery was Kasratabad. To the east of *roza* was a place where Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf would sit with his disciples and talk about spirituality. This place would fill the visitors with a sense of peace and tranquility and therefore was called *dar al-aman*. To the north of *roza*, at some distance, is a house of worship which is known today by the name *Chahaar Guzar*. Sultan Syed Makhdoom Ashraf used to tell his companions that this place (*chahaar guzar*) is full of radiance whereas the nearby places have not the good fortune to be so, and many eminent people on the advanced path of spirituality such as *Autad*, *Akhyar*, *Abdal*, and *Rijalul-Ghaib* come here to seek blessings. My companions and followers must visit this place to receive blessings.^{ix}

The entire complex is decorated with marble, tiles and glass. Approximately, from about 600 years, it has been a place of pilgrimage centre of as well as a healing centre for people suffering unremitting anguish caused from afflictions of any kind in particular that caused by demonic characters like evil spirits (*Aaseb*, *Bhoot*, *Paret*, *Shaitan*), Witches (*Chudail*), *Jinns* or spells of witchcraft (*Jadu-Tona*). The shrine of Kichaucha is very famous among the populace for the grant of material benefits, which includes relief from material troubles and fulfillment of desires, and more specifically known for releasing evil spirits. Such is the aura and fame of the saint that the renowned Sufi Hagiographer Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlavi in his memoir of Sufis, *Akhbarul Akhyar* of the sub-continent attests that just spelling the name of Hazart Ashraf Jahangir Semnani drives away evil spirits.^x

In this age of information technology, the popularity of this dargah has grown by leaps and bounds and in any time of the year the dargah is packed with devotees and the sick from far and wide a place. The reasons for the great fame of the dargah are three-fold. The primary one being the personage and blessings of the saint himself, the second one being the legacy of his scholarship specifically on Islamic mysticism preserved in his own works and other books, and the third one being presence of learned and spiritual personalities in all eras among his descendants through his successor Syed Abdur Razzaq Nurul Ain. There have been many spiritual and learned men in the saint's family springing up in all generation right

from the time of Ashraf Jahangir himself, spreading his spiritual message and blessings to the humanity. Moreover, why not- as the presence of a *wali* among his descendants in all generations has been prophesied by Syed Makhdum Ashraf himself.

Among important aspect of the shrine is that it has generated scope of business and employment with the mushrooming of shops, hotels, guest houses, transport vehicles, Islamic schools etc. People in large numbers form Uttar Pradesh itself and states of Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Delhi have been thronging Kichaucha all the year round.

Urs-i-Makhdoomi

Urs of Syed Ashraf Makhdum Semnani takes place in the Khanqah-i- Ashrafia Hasania Sarkare kalan with great pomp and show. Pilgrims from different parts of India and abroad come in large number by road, by train and by plane. Khanqah-i-Ashrafia Hasania Sarkare kalan looks packed to the capacity. No place is left where there are no pilgrims. All around the dargah of Makhdum Semnani one may observe sea of human beings irrespective of caste and creeds chanting *Ya Makhdoom*. All followers of Khanqah-i- Ashrafia Hasania are provided meals in their rooms from the night of 26th Muharram up to 29th Muharram. Hadhrat Sajjadah Nashin supervises the management of *Urs* with great care in order to provide all amenities to the pilgrims of Makhdum Semnani. Everyone is impressed to see hospitability and sincerity.^{xi}

Conclusion

Syed Makhdum Ashraf Jahangir Semnani is such an eminent and outstanding spiritual personality of the world of mysticism, whose spirituality and knowledge has illuminated different corners of the world. He established his own order through his nephew and *khalifah* Syed Shah Abdur Razzaq Nurul Ain known as Qadiriya Chishtiya Ashrafiya. His dargah has been considered a place of pilgrimage as well as a healing centre for people suffering from evil spirits (*Aseb, Bhoot, Paret, Shaitan*) witches (*chudail*), *jinns* or spells of witchcraft (*Jadu-Tona*). Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlavi said that spelling the name of Ashraf Jahangir Semnani drives away all kind of evil spirits.

Note & References

ⁱ The exact year of the birth and death of Syed Makhdum Ashraf is debatable since different resources quote different years. However, after verifying details from various sources, Professor Syed Waheed Ashraf, in his book, (2017) *Hayat-i-Makhdum Syed Ashraf Jahangir Semnani*, Gujarat, Makhdum Syed Ashraf Academy, p. 85, concludes that the year of the birth of Sultan Syed Makhdum Ashraf is somewhere between 1305, and 1308 A.D. and the death between 1426 to 1429 A.D.

ⁱⁱ Ansari, Bazmee A.S. (1960) "*Ashraf Djangir*", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., [EI2], eds. Gibb H.A. R., Kramers J.H., et. al., Leiden: E.J. Brill, vol, I, p.702

ⁱⁱⁱ Syed Waheed Ashraf, (2017) *Hayat-i-Makhdoom Syed Ashraf Jahangir Semnani*, Gujarat, Makhdoom Syed Ashraf Academy, p. 89

^{iv} Ansari, Bazmee A.S. (1960) “*Ashraf Djhangir*”, *op. cit.*, p. 702

^v N. Hanīf, (2000) *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis, South Asia*, Delhi: Sarup & Sons, p. 28

^{vi} Syed Waheed Ashraf, *op. cit.*, p. p. 226

^{vii} Syed Nurussyidyn Madani, (2019) *The Life and Times of Makhdoom Syed Ashraf Jahangir (RAH)*, Kindle, p.31

^{viii} Syed Waheed Ashraf, *op. cit.*, p. 129

^{ix} *Ibid.*, pp. 130-31

^x Shaikh Abul Haq Dehlavi, (2004) *Akhbar Akhyar*, tr. by Maulana Subhan Mahmood, Maulana Muhammad Fazil, Lahore: Royal Park, p. 353

^{xi} <https://www.islamicblog.in/syed-makhdoom-ashraf-jahangir-semnani-r-a-biography>,
retrieved on 15/01/2022
