

THE ROLE OF KHODJA AKHRAR IN SOCIAL-SPIRITUAL LIFE OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: This article describes activity of Khoja Ubaydullah Ahrar (1404-1491), well-known representative of the Naqshbandiyya school of sufizm relying on medieval sources. It analyzes the peace-loving ideas of Khoja Ahrar and its role in spreading feelings of devotion, generosity, mercy, and kindness.

Keywords: Bagistan, Sheikh, Umar Wali, Havand Tahur, Khoja Ahrar, Shash, Tashkent, Sufi, Muslim, perfect person, teacher of Timurid princes.

Introduction. Many cities in Central Asia have reached prosperity and faced crisis during their history. As it is known, the culture of this land had fallen into decay during the period of Mongol conquest. However, during struggle for freedom against Mongols changes emerged in the religious thought of the people which in turn, caused to the formation of Sufi schools such as Kubrawiyya and Naqshbandiyya.

Sufism in Central Asia, is not only a “mystic – ascetic teaching” as some scholars mentioned, but also an influential ideological movement, which responded to the needs of its time and worked as lever for liberation movements. In other words, at that time Islam, particularly Sufi tariqahs were main source in the way of spiritual and ideological unification of Central Asian citizens. A tariqah is a school or order of Sufism, or specifically a concept for the mystical teaching and spiritual practices of such an order with the aim of seeking Haqiqah, which translates as “ultimate truth”. A tariqa has a murshid (teacher) who plays the role of leader or spiritual director. The members or followers of a tariqa are known as murid(student).

One of the main characters in social-cultural, spiritual life of Central Asia was Khodja Ubaydullo Akhror (1404–1490). Khodja Ahror was born in 806 Hijri (on Mart, 1404) on the month of Ramadan in the district of Baghistan, in Shah – Tashkent province. His father Khodja Makhmud and grandfather were educated people. Moreover, they worked in the sphere of agriculture and trade. His mother was daughter of Khoja Dawud, son of Shaeikh Khowand Tokhur[15:Alimova]. Sheikh Khowand Tokhur was a son of Umar Baghistani, a famous sheikh who was honoured by Bakhaiddin Naqshband. Khodja Ahror acquired first education in madrasahs (school) of Tashkent. When he was 20, his uncle Khodja Ibrahim led him to Samarkand, where he studied different subjects related to Islam. Khodja Ahror was especially interested in Sufism and this interest took him to Hirat when he was 24, where he met with representatives of Sufism. One of them was a famous Sufi and poet from Tabriz, Sayyid Qosim Anwor (died 1433). Khodja Ahror also met with Bahauddin Umar (died 1453) and Sheikh Zaynuddin Khavafiy (died 1439) and many others [3: 43; 4:208].

Khodja Akhror is a remarkable representative of Naqshbandiyya order in Muslim world, who implemented famous slogan of Naqshbandiyya into life “Dil ba yoru, dast ba kor” (The heart to beloved (Allah), and the hand to work).

It can be confessed that, Khodja Akhror is recognized respectfully by many western and eastern scholars. For instance, a famous historian from Afghanistan Abdulhay Khabibi in his article “Tariqat of Jami”, published in 1965 mentioned that “Sa`d Kashgari and Khodja Akhror were great spiritual leaders of their century.

Furthermore, English orientalist Charles Ambrous Stori identifies him as “great wali Khodja Akhror” in his work called “Persian literature”, at the same time Czech scientist Felix Tower said “a saint from Turkistan, famous with name Khodja Akhror, originally sheikh of naqshbandiya Nasiruddin Ubaydulloh ibn Makhmud Shoshiy” [8:46].

Various sources on the life of Khodja Akhror give plenty of valuable information and narrations by deeming him as a ‘leader of sufi orders’, ‘saint of saints’, ‘sponsor of the people’. In particular, Fakhriddin Ali ibn Husayn Wa’iz al-Kashi as-Safi (1463-1503) in his “Rashakhat ‘ayn al-hayat” (Drops from life spring) narrates that grandfather of Khodja Akhror Khodja Shakhobiddin Shashi was a peasant and trader[16:Alimova]. Feeling the approach of his death Khodja Shakhobiddin called all his relatives to farewell. At that time, Khodja Akhror was a baby and he was brought to his grandfather wrapped up with sufi *khirqa* (special wearing from rough wool). When Khodja Shakhobiddin saw baby he couldn’t stop his tears, and by putting his hand onto Akhror’s forehead, said: “*This baby will be famous to the world. He will spread shariah, strengthen the tariqah. Governors will obey him. He will show the miracles not shown by previous sheikhs*” [2:218,219; 5:43].

As we know, cultural and scientific decrease lasted two centuries during Mongol occupation and finally was ended due to great reformational politics of Amir Temur. Unfortunately, after his death there was a discrepancy between Temurid princes. In such difficult situation Khodja Akhror, spoke for the sake of development of his homeland and always stood by people [7:13,14]. He always taught that it is responsibility of Naqshbandiyya Sufis to care about nation and call governors for justice: «*In this time there nothing better than going to the rulers and telling them about people who need help. We must deliver the massage of problem-tackling people to the rulers, support them and wholeheartedly help them to deal with challenges. We must give all efforts to stop the injustice and oppression*» [8:76].

During the period of Sultan Abu Said Mirzo and his son Sultan Ahmad Mirzo, Khodja Ubaydullah hold the high position. Amin Ahmad Raziyy writes about it in his work named “Haft Iqlim”: “*Khodja Nosiruddin Ubaydullah was more superior than all Sheikhs of Turkestan and Maverannahr, because of his position, greatness and abundance of his followers and wealth. He took irshad from Maulana Yaqub Charkhiy and Maulana Nizomuddin Khomush... and rulers and kings of that time were very devoted to him. They hold firmly every saying said by him as a secret pearl. Especially, Mirzo Sulon Abu Said was guided by his advices in all deals of ruling and he was never against his notion. Mirzo Sulon Abu Said walked on his foot when he was with him*” [1: 520].

Authority of Khodja Akhror reached its peak during the rule of Sultan Abu Sa’id Mirzo and his son Sultan Akhmad Mirzo[11:Alidjanova]. At that time, there were huge territory of lands and wealth in different cities and villages of Mowaraunnahr and Khorasan, which belonged to Khodja Akhror. With a decree of Abu Sa’id Mirzo the property of Khodja Akhror imposed taxes to only 1/10th part of the benefit, where others were imposed to many other additional taxes. That is why many peasants used to present their properties to Khodja Akhror and continued to work there in order to lower the taxes[14:Alidjanova].

Khodja Akhror spent all his wealth for paying extra taxes imposed to the poor people, building mosques, madrassahs and khanakahs (place where live sufis). In particular, it is famous that Khodja Akhror payed himself 250 000 dinar tax imposed to Tashkent by Umarsheikh Mirzo and additionally, gave to the tax inspectors 70 000 dinars extra [8:70]. All these gentleness were reasons to see him as a generous and good-hearted person and honour by calling Khojai Akhror.

Concerning his works, only three tractates of Khodja Akhror have survived to the present day – “Fakarot ul-orifin” (Parts of orifs words), “Wolidiya” (Devotion to the father), “Hawraiya” (Angels). In addition, some letters of Khodja Akhror to his contemporaries have remained until today. At this point, it is important to mention that, late orientalists A.Orinbaev with American scientist, professor of New-Jersey university Joe Ann Gross, have translated letters of Khodja Akhror into English under the name “Letters and murids-followers of Khodja Akhror” which was published in famous Brill Press of Holland in 2002 [10:Kalendarova].

In his letters, Khodja Akhror call for all good deeds such as caring about ordinary people and doing the best to help them in tackling their problems[9,12,13:N.Muhamedov]. Once, when Alisher Navai wanted to give up his work at court Khodja Akhror writes him such letter: *“As I have heard, sometimes you undesired to be overly respectful towards Sultan (governor). My request is that, don’t leave the court as long as you can support Muslims, improve situation of poor people and give hope to them. These days, when no one is thinking to help the others, caring about people is the best deed”* [4:204,208].

To recapitulate we can say that, mentioning the role of this spiritual leader of the nation, Khodja Akhror Wali, candidly spent all his power and energy during 25-30 years of his life to unify people as well as rulers of Central Asia, to prevent chaos. No ruler, mayor, prince could refuse this great man, called “Sheikh of sheikhs”. Because nation respected him excessively. So, we also should esteem our great ancestor.

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