

Life and Times of Baba Farid

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Abstract: Baba Farid, also known as Baba Farid-ud-din Ganjshakar, was a 12th-century Sufi saint and poet from the Punjab region of South Asia. His contributions to Sufism, poetry, and the social and cultural fabric of the time have had a lasting impact on the region and beyond. Baba Farid's abode was at Ajodhan which is contemporarily located in Pakistan and is called as Pakpattan these days. His life of simplicity and full of austerity strikes contrast with eminent religious scholars of those times who used to live lavishly and had their Khanqahs supported by some local sheriffs or amirs. His aura had such divine spiritual blessings that people from far and near flocked in crowds of hundreds and thousands to seek solace in his company. In this paper, we will investigate the life of Baba Farid in the historical context, his key contributions and his impact on society.

Keywords: Pakpattan, Hansi, Ajodhan Qawwali, Chisti, Bhaktiyar Kaki, Hazrat Nizam-ud-din-Auliya and others.

Birth of Baba Farid:

The last phase of the twelfth century was the time when Mohammad of Ghur was successful in carving out an empire for himself in Indian Subcontinent which would be purely Islamic in character. Many Muslim families from Central Asia pressed towards India for a vibrant living space. One such person who entered Indian territories in search of livelihood was Qadi Shu'aib who left Kabul and reached Lahore with his three sons. One of his sons was named Jamal-ud-din-Suleiman and his father married him with a girl named Qarsum Bibi. It was in the house of Jamal ud-din-Suleiman and Qarsum Bibi to whom Baba Farid was born in 1175 in the city of Kahtwal, now known as Pakpattan, in modern-day Pakistan.

Baba Farid was very close to his mother and according to different theologians and experts of Sufi literature she was his first teacher. Qarsum Bibi never missed her prayers and was so devoted in the ways of almighty that once when thieves broke down into her house they were so moved by her piety and saintliness that they gave up their sinful lives and vowed to lead an honest life thereafter. Under the guidance and tutelage of such a noble lady, Farid developed a spirit of intense devotion for Lord Almighty. He used to spend his days and nights contemplating about God and his beings and he used to live a very austere life. He had developed a keen habit of keeping fasts and was always busy in recital of prayers behind the city mosque. After finishing his early education in the city he was born he proceeded to Multan in order to pursue his higher education. He joined the madrassa of Maulana Minhaj-ud-din-Trimidhi in Multan and it was there he became the Hafiz of Quran and began to recite it once in twenty four hours. He became influential in the eyes of elites and masses alike and his reputation began to increase by every passing day.

Meeting with Qutb-ud-din Bhaktiyar Kaki

During one day when Farid was reading Nafa, a work on Islamic jurisprudence, Khwaja Qutb ud-din-Bhaktiyar Kaki came to Multan from Aush and was impressed by seeing the devotion of young Farid. He had a lively interaction with Farid and asked him to become his disciple and come with him to Delhi which was then an abode of Chisti Silsilah and Khwaja was its fountain head. Baba Farid accompanied him and was admitted to the discipleship of Bhaktiyar Kaki and there he had the honor of meeting eminent Sufis of those times like Qazi Hamid-ul- Nagauri, Ala-ud-din-Kirmani, Shaikh nizam ud-din- Abu'l Muwayyid and others. He was under the tutelage of one of the most revered saints of his age and under his inspired guidance, Farid traversed the difficult stages of mystic path. Khwaja gave him a small cell in his Khanqah and young Farid busied himself with keen devotion and prayers in that small room. Bhaktiyar kaki himself supervised his disciple's work with almost a sympathetic interest. '

Baba Farid was known to perform severe penances in order to keep his devotion intact and steadfast. On the advice of his master, he also used to do 'Chillahs' which was spiritual practice of penance and solitude in Sufi Silsilahs. The main objective of this tradition was to make its practitioner attain right focus and sway him from evil thoughts and bring him closer to the God Almighty. Farid was known in his circles to push the limits of austerities on himself and there are several stories woven around him which validates this statement. He used to perform chillahs after the prayer of Isha and used to tie one end of the rope with his feet and other with the branch of a tree over the well. He then used to call someone to lower him inside the well and used to pray in the same position throughout the night. The same person would come before dawn to pull him up and thereafter Sheikh used to continue his prayers on floor. The objective of Farid for this intense penance was neither the fear of hell and nor his love for heaven, it was his way of getting closer to his God and his intense love for him. Baba Farid used to love fasting and he claimed that fasting leads a man towards self control and self control is one half of the faith.

Baba farid loved companion of his teacher Bhaktiyar Kaki but he was never impressed with the hustle and bustle of Delhi. After completing his education he went to Hansi and spent near about twelve years there. He never accepted rich and lavish gifts from the nobles but believed in the dictum of living a simpler life and he followed this dictum to the very end of his life. After his teacher's demise in Delhi he was made head of the Sufi Silsilah in Delhi and now he had to live in that city irrespective of his wishes. Delhi was a very different and difficult place for Farid as he was always summoned at one place or another. He had to spend time in useless engagements and feasts which were, according to him, futile and aimless. It was at that point of time when a man named Sarhanga met him and cried rivers of tears and complained to him that while in his stay at hansi meeting with him was easy but in Delhi it was not in the capacity of commoners to meet him anymore. This episode made Farid's mind up and he decided to leave Delhi because he wanted to be accessible to the common folks and not exclusively to the rich and pedantic people of Delhi. He thereafter decided to live his life at Ajodhan and marched to that very place and remained there till he breathed his last on October 15, 1265.

Baba Farid's poetry:

Baba Farid's poetry, which is in the Punjabi and Persian languages, is known for its spiritual depth and simplicity. His verses, known as "shlokas" or "slokas," are replete with references to love, devotion, and the pursuit of the divine. His poetry has been a source of inspiration for generations of Sufis and spiritual seekers, and his verses are still recited and sung in the tradition of qawwali, a form of Sufi devotional music. His poetry was very simple and bereft of complex intricacies woven by expert poets. He used to address everyday problems by his verses and presented solutions to these problems by offering simple solutions of living a pious and sinfree life and getting close to God. His poetry has inspired countless individuals to seek a deeper understanding of spirituality and to cultivate love and compassion in their lives.

Service To the poor:

Baba Farid's impact on society was not limited to his poetry and spiritual teachings. He was known for his compassion and his efforts to help the poor and the marginalized. He set up langars, or community kitchens, where free meals were provided to anyone in need, regardless of their social status or religious affiliation. This act of service, based on the principles of equality and inclusivity, became a hallmark of the Chishti Sufi order and continues to be practiced by Sufi communities around the world. His emphasis on service and the upliftment of the downtrodden continues to be a source of inspiration for social activists and philanthropists. The langar tradition, which he initiated, has evolved into a powerful symbol of communal harmony and solidarity, transcending the boundaries of religion and caste. The impact of Baba Farid on society can be seen in various ways.

Impact on other saints:

One of the key figures associated with Baba Farid is his contemporary, the Sufi saint and poet Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. Nizamuddin Auliya was a disciple of Baba Farid and later went on to become one of the most revered Sufi saints in the Indian subcontinent. His teachings and spiritual lineage, known as the Chishti Nizami order, have had a profound impact on the culture and spirituality of South Asia. Baba Farid also had his impact on Bhakti Saints of next centuries and his themes and imagery were used vividly by Sant Kabir and several of his hymns have a found a central place in the Guru Granth Sahib of Sikhs.

Another influential figure in the field of Baba Farid studies is the Punjabi poet and philosopher Bulleh Shah, who lived in the 18th century. Bulleh Shah was deeply influenced by the teachings of Baba Farid and incorporated them into his own poetry. Like his predecessor, Bulleh Shah's verses are known for their spiritual depth and universal appeal. He is revered as a Sufi saint in his own right and is considered a key figure in the Punjabi literary tradition.

Conclusion:

The life of Baba Farid is a testament to the enduring power of love, compassion, and spiritual devotion. His impact on society, through his poetry, teachings, and acts of service, continues to be felt to this day. While there are challenges and criticisms associated with his legacy, the profound influence of Baba Farid on the cultural and spiritual fabric of Indian subcontinent cannot be denied. As we look to the future, there is much that can be done to spread the memory of Baba Farid and to promote his message of peace and harmony.

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