

The Real Face Of Roshaniyya Movement

Abstract

Bayazid Ansari, the founder of *Roshaniyya* Movement, was basically a mystic, who had some knowledge of Islam. He had originally initiated the *Roshaniyya* movement for spreading his teachings among the people, however, he almost everywhere faced resistance from the orthodox *Ulama* and saints. According to them Bayazid Ansari had deviated from the right path. As far as the term *Roshaniyya* is concerned it was due to the nickname of Bayazid Ansari as he was known by the name of Pir Roshan or Rokhan (the illuminated guide), As regard the true status of the *Roshaniyya* movement there exists difference of views, as to some people it was a religio-cum-Sufic movement while to others it was political in nature yet to another group of scholars *Roshaniyya* was a Pakhtun nationalist movement. This paper is an attempt to analyse the said issue in order to reach an understandable conclusion.

Key Words: Bayazid Ansari, *Roshaniyya* Movement, Political, Nationalist, Sufi, *Ulama*

Introduction

Bayazid Ansari was born in the house of Abdullah, a religious scholar and a native of South Wazirista, in 1572.¹ Although he had not received proper education yet he was a sharp minded and intelligent person.² Bayazid, in childhood, witnessed problems including the Mughal invasion of India, separation between his parents and the ill-treatment of his step mother, which must have certainly affected his personality from the early childhood.

As a child, he was in search of truth, who often asked questions like “The heavens and earth are here, but where is God,³ which indicates towards the fact that he was not an ordinary kid. As perceiving of truth was not possible without the guidance of a *Pir-i-Kamil* (perfect spiritual guide) he, therefore, started search for one. However, as he was fond of new ways in Sufism he found no guide of his standard. Bayazid, after a self styled meditation of a few years, to the surprise of many declared himself as *Pir-i-Kamil*. He in a short span of time gathered a large number of followers around him and travelled from place to place for propagating his message. He, through his *Khalifas* (deputies), sent his message to influential personalities like Jalal-ud-Din Akbar and Syed Ali Tarmezi, popularly known as Pir Baba. It is said that Akbar accepted Bayazid Ansari as his Pir⁴ (Spiritual guide) whereas Pir Baba not only rejected his call but held a few debates with him on different religious issues. Although Bayazid Ansari had not just targeted the Pakhtuns to take them in his fold, however, they in overwhelming majority thronged to him while some of them opposed him mainly due to the efforts of Pir Baba and his deputy Akhund Darwaiza.

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According to some nationalist scholars the Pakhtuns joined Bayazid as they wanted to settle their scores with the Mughals and therefore, *Roshniyya* was a nationalist movement. The armed struggle of Bayazid against the Mughals and dethroning from Indian government makes his movement political as well. To address the issue, an enquiry into it seems pertinent.

An Enquiry Into The Real Status Of The Roshniyya Movement

The *Roshaniyya* movement of Bayazid Ansari was basically a religious and spiritual movement, as he himself writes: "in my childhood I heard that Allah is one and that is paradise, he will reveal himself to the believer. I then read in my youth that Allah is one, and he has no associate with him. His Being and the Beings of all other existing objects are one and the same and when I was a mature man, I was certain that there is no other Being except Allah and that the creatures and all other particles have no separate Being from Allah".⁵ Bayazid's saying confirms the fact that he was in search of "The Truth" from childhood and that his movement revolved around *Tauheed* (the unity of Allah) which authenticates that his movement was religious in nature.

Even his opponent's view his movement as religious in nature. Tabqat-i-Akbari, in this connection, states: "Bayazid propagated his wrong beliefs among the Afghans (Pakhtuns) and made many ignorant his disciples."⁶ Whether his beliefs were right or wrong, it is beyond the scope of the present study but the aforementioned statement testifies two important points. Firstly, *Roshaniyya* was a religious movement and secondly Bayazid had mainly focused on the Pakhtuns for spreading his religious thoughts. Though he had not confined his *Roshaniyya* sect to the Pakhtuns only, however, it grossly appealed to them probably due to their ignorance of the true teachings of Islam. To authentic the matter more, here is quoted the statement of Akhund Darwaiza. According to him: "Bayazid would tell his disciples that his faith (Roshaniyya) would spread to every area, and Hindustan and Khorasan would be in our possession".⁷ This statement is yet another proof that *Roshniyya* was a religious and spiritual movement and the prime objective of Bayazid was to introduce it to the whole region, including Khorasan.

As far as the political nature of the *Roshaniyya* movement is concerned it can be said that later on, it turned into a political one due to some unavoidable circumstances. The relations between the *Roshniyyas* and the Mughals remained cordial as far as the religious matters were concerned; however, later on their relations soared when a specific incident took place. As the legend goes, a caravan returning from India to Kabul was halted at a village peopled by Bayazid Ansari's followers. They asked the traders what they were doing? The traders replied that they were taking merchandise from India to Kabul and would return with different goods. The followers of Bayazid got annoyed by the reply and told the traders that the Day of Judgment was getting near, instead of doing business they should be worried about that day.⁸ The villagers snatched their belongings and destroyed them. The aggrieved party, after reaching Kabul, reported the incident to Mirza Hakim, The Mughal Governor of Kabul, and told him that Pakhtuns had gathered under the leadership of Pir Roshan (Bayazid Ansari) who had raised arms.⁹ Mirza Hakim ordered an immediate action against the culprits. He sent a cavalry of 500 men to punish the aggressors. Mughal soldiers not only killed men but took women and children as prisoners of war. Bayazid Ansari when got informed, sent

a letter to Mirza Hakim, wherein he condemned the act of his followers and termed them as insane.¹⁰ Bayazid, in the same letter, demanded the release of innocent captives. Mirza Hakim, instead of setting the captives free, issued orders for the arrest of Bayazid Ansari.¹¹ No one can agree with the logic presented by the followers of Bayazid, because Islam does not prohibit its followers from earning livelihood through proper means as the Holy prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) by himself had adopted business as a profession. However, on the other hand, Mirza Hakim should also be condemned for imprisoning innocent people and issuing orders for the arrest of Bayazid, without probing the matter. This occurrence and the later developments unveils the fact that Bayazid's followers were wrong and he openly condemned their act. Moreover Bayazid did his best to avoid any confrontation with the Mughal, however, their arrogant and uncompromising policy of the Mughals made the satiations worst which left Bayazid with no other option but to take the field against them.

Mirza Hakim assigned the task of taking action against Bayazid, to Masoom Khan, the governor of Peshawar. He at once set out for achieving his goal, however, Bayazid and his followers defeated the Mughals somewhere in present day Mardan district. Sher Afzal Khan, referring to *Halnamah*, writes: "after the battle Bayazid named that place as Aghaz Pur (the place where the first battle occurred) because here they had taken up arms against the Mughals and those who had participated in the battle were called Aghaz Puri, who would (afterwards) receive more shares in the spoils."¹² It is not exactly known that when did the battle of Aghaz Pur take place, however, *Halnamah* states that it was fought two and a half years before the death of Bayazid Ansari¹³ (1572), which means that the battle would have taken place either in 1569 or 70. Bayazid Ansari, till that time, had not raised, arms but the events compelled him to do so and as a consequence *Roshaniyya* movement took the shape of a political struggle as well. Moreover, the very name (Aghaz Pur) suggests that it was the starting point of a political resistance of the *Roshaniyyas* against the Mughals.

As far as the question of Bayazid Ansari's political goal is concerned, a reference from Akhund Darwaiza's book *Makhzan*, sheds enough light on it. According to him Bayazid, in Tirah, took loans from the people for purchasing horses and war equipments on the condition that after conquering India, they will be given handsome amount of money from the treasure of King Akbar."¹⁴ This statement is self explanatory and testifies the ultimate task of Bayazid, who wanted to overthrow the Mughals from the kingdom of India, for which he heavily relied on the Pakhtuns. Bayazid reliance on the Pakhtuns seems to be due to his dwelling among them, they becoming his followers in great number and above all he, most probably, wanted to take advantage of their warlike attitude. The political struggle of the *Roshaniyyas*, continued even after the death of Bayazid. The movement had, later on, turned into a pure political struggle. The successor of Bayazid Ansari were able to pose threat to the Mughal till 1630s, however, they could not materialize their ultimate task.

As far nationalist face of *Roshaniyya* movement is concerned, many nationalist and progressive writers are of the opinion that Bayazid Ansari was the first nationalist protagonist due to his struggle for Pakhtun unification. Ali Khan Mahsud, in this connection, writes:

“Roshaniyya movement was the first movement in the area in which the Pakhtuns participated as a nation. Due to this movement the Pakhtuns fought continuous wars against the Mughal domination. Due to these reasons the British also failed to subdue the Pakhtuns.”¹⁵

He has linked up the struggle of Bayazid with that of anti-colonial movement of Abdul Ghafar Khan in the 20th century. Likewise Yar Muhammad Maghmoom adopted the same argument by designating Bayazid the nationalist leader of the Pakhtuns. The approach of the majority of these writers is the same i.e to establish a link between the anti-British Khudai Khidmatgar movement of Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the 20th century and the anti-Mughal *Roshaniyya* movement of Bayazid Ansari in 16th century. They anticipate Bayazid as the first manifestation of the nationalist tendencies which culminated in the emergence of Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Yar Muhammad writes:

“The uprising of the Pakhtuns under the leadership of Khushal Khan Khattak, Aimal Khan Mohmand and Darya Khan Afridi against the Mughals and that of the Pashtoons under the leadership of Bacha Khan against the British was the continuation of the *Roshaniyya* movement.”¹⁶

However, comparing Bayazid Ansari and Abdul Ghafar Khan (Bacha Khan) is out of context. The former was a religious person whereas the latter was a secular politician. Bayazid's primary task was to take people in his fold whether they were Pakhtuns or not. If he had started a war and had a political goal fixed before himself, it was due to the folly of the Mughals. Abdul Ghaffar Khan on other hand from the beginning desired and took steps for the social and political awakening of the Pakhtuns exclusively, which makes him a nationalist in true sense of the term. Besides, he was not in favour of the use of force and wanted to resolve the problem through peaceful means. These characteristics of Bacha Khan's movement differentiate it from that of Bayazid Ansari's. It is very strange to make comparison of the two in nationalist disposition. Bayazid, as mentioned earlier, had sent messenger even to those who were not Pakhtuns which is an ample proof that he was not a nationalist as projected by some writers. Rather, he dreamt the expansion of his sphere of influence beyond the borders of the Pakhtuns areas. Therefore dubbing the *Roshaniyya* as a Pakhtun nationalist movement is out of place as there is no evidence to support its nationalist assertion.

Conclusion

It is a fact that the *Roshaniyya* movement of Bayazid Ansari had gained enormous popularity during the Mughal era. Bayazid and his successors proved a hard nut to crack for the imperialists, who wanted to crush them at any cost. As stated earlier *Roshaniyya* was a religio-cum-sufic movement which, initially, had nothing to do with politics. Bayazid Ansari wanted the people of India in general and the Pakhtuns in particular to come under his banner on the basis of his beliefs. The orthodox *Ulama* and saints, vehemently opposed his beliefs as these were contravention to Islam.

As regard the political status of it we have already discussed in detail that the *Roshniyya* movement turned into one due to some unavoidable circumstances. Its leader considered it essential to overthrow the Mughals and establish his own

rule in India as well as Khorasan. It was because he saw no other option as the Mughals were bent upon to eliminate him and his followers. Bayazid Ansari taking up arms against the Mughals seems to be the case of standing up against the tyrant rulers. One can say that it had become political not as the first choice rather due to a compulsion.

Roshaniyya was definitely not a nationalist movement as portrayed by a few modern day scholars. Making a connection between it and Khudai Khidmatgar movement of 20th century is out of place. As Bayazid Ansari lived among the Pakhtuns so naturally they were the first one to listen to his teachings and become his disciples. Although Bayazid had focused on the Pakhtuns for the propagation of his beliefs, nevertheless, he did not confine his message to them only. Above all if the Pakhtuns had responded to his call, it was only due to his teachings, not for the Pakhtuns cause.

References

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 - ¹⁰ Ibid, 49
 - ¹¹ Ibid
 - ¹² Sher Afzal Khan Barikoti, *Bayazid Ansari*, (Lahore: Millat Educational Printers, n.d), 83.
 - ¹³ Akhtar Khan, 67.
 - ¹⁴ Akhund Darwaiza, 125
 - ¹⁵ Ali Khan Mahsud, *Da Pir Rokhan Tar Bacha Khan: Da Pakhtano Milli Mubarezy ta Katana* (Peshawa: Danish Khparandoya Tolana, n.d), 61.
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