

## P A R T II.

### **LIFE SKETCHES. HAZRAT SHAIKH AHMED KHATTU, MAGRABI (R. A.)**

The life story of Hazrat Shaikh Ahmed Khattu, the patron saint of, Ahmedabad, once the Dar-ul-Hakumat of the Gujarat Sultanate. unfolds itself with a saga of thrills and excitement. Born at Delhi (738 A. H./1338 A D ), during the reign of Mahammed Taghlg, in a family engaged in military service, and in distant relationship with the Sultan of Delhi, the child was named Malik Nasiruddin. His father Malik Ikhtiyaruddin was a man of means and position.

When Malik Nasiruddin was about four years old, one evening as usual had gone out to play along with his elder brother and a nurse. Suddenly a dust storm took the City in its grip and it plunged into darkness, so much so. that nothing was visible. The boy Nasiruddin and his nurse found them on the outskirts of the City-when the storm subsided, but separated from the elder brother. By now it was night and the nurse could not decide as to what to do. By chance a caravan had camped there. The nurse took the boy to the camp and sought shelter with the caravan which was readily given for the night.

Next morning, the caravan left for Dindwana, a place near Khattu and Nagaur in Rajasthan. The nurse instead of returning home of her master, decided and accompanied the caravan taking the boy with her and reached Dindwana. HBIB, a childless weaver, by name Najib, was in search of a suitable boy for adoption. He managed to get possession of Nasiruddin and adopted him.

Meanwhile, a noted Saint of the day, Baba Ishaq Maghrebi (R. A.) who had settled at Khattu, was grief stricken due to unexpected death of his adopted son Baba Kivamuddin. He was offered in a divine message, an even worthier child and was asked to look out for him Since then he and his friends were in look out for the promised boy.

Luckily Mawlana Saddruddin had gone to Dindwana and had occasion to visit the residency of Najib. He found Nasiruddin there, who answered all description given of the promised boy by Baba Ishaq. The Mawlana took possession of the child and brought him to Khattu. Baba Ishaq named him Ahmed.

Baba Ishaq brought up Shaikh Ahmed in a luxurious way, with the care of a mother. At night he would place him on his bosom and sing lullaby. Sometime his urine and stool spoiled his clothes, and he would get up in cold wintery nights and wash clothes and again put on the same wet ones and place Ahmed again on his bosom.

At the same time, Ahmed was being carefully imparted learning, both spiritual and temporal. He studied sciences and arts of the day. along with standard authentic religious books. Baba Ishaq initiated him into doctrines of Silsila-e-Maghrabia, i.e. Western African Sufistic Order, founded by Abu Madyan

Shuyeb (d. 597 A.H. ), in which, in times to come, Ahmed attained such distinction that he was given the title of "Chiragh" (The Lamp). His surpassing learning and piety also secured for him, the designation of "Qutub-al-Aqtab", "The Pole star of Pole Stars". Besides all his intellectual and spiritual achievements he was also a skilled archer and a great wrestler.

Baba Ishaq Maghrebi bid farewell at Khattu on Wednesday the 17th Shaaban, 781 A.H. /1379 A. D.) at the age of 120 lunar years. It was a big blow for young Ahmed. In his selection as Sajjadanahin, Baba Ishaq had bypassed inmates of the Khankah, who now became indifferent to the new Head of the Khankah. Ahmed was aware of it. However he continued to stay in Khattu, but devoted most of his time in seclusion' prayers and in wanderings, bare footed and. even without a lota (Pot). At times he took himself in mountains for the same To achieve a higher spiritual level, he decided to engage himself in a Chilla and on the third day of the demise of his spiritual. Master, he locked himself in a room, to avoid

disturbance and started with a Chilla of 40 days (a period of intense and continuous prayers) and a lived only on a few dates and a jug of water. After forty days, on Idd-ul-fitr, the local subehdar was compelled to break open the door, only to find Shaikh Ahmed extremely weak and a bare skeleton. He was taken to the Idgah for prayers in a Palki and the whole congregation rushed to pay homage to the Saint, when the prayers were over.

In the year 790 A. H \ 1388 A. D. Hazrat Shaikh thought of going on Pilgrimage to Mecca. With this idea in mind, he went to see great people at Delhi and Nagaur, When Malik Qutubuddin Najam, the Governor of Nagaur learnt that Shaikh Ahmed was in the Town, on his way to Mecca, he got worried about the delicate health of the Traveller, and decided to stop him from proceeding further However Hazrat Shaikh escaped from the City in the darkness of the night and ultimately reached Patan, where he was well received by the father of Farhat-ul-Mulk Rastikhan, the Governor of Gujarat under the Court of Delhi. He could not get ship for the Journey at Khambhat and hence had to go to Mahim, The Rajah of Mahim welcomed the Saint and provided him with a ship. While the ship was on its way to Jeddah from Aden, while taking bath in the sea, he was on the point of drowning, but he was miraculously saved by the crew of the ship. Finally he reached Mecca, people were much impressed of his piety and learning.. Here he came in contact with eminent devines and Royal personages, from Egypt.

After he left for Medina. The journey was hazardous and tiresome and he had gone vary weak For two days, he was without food and had offered five daily prayers with only one Vazu (ablution). He had walked down the most of the distance.

When the caravan reached the outskirts of Medina, and the top of the tomb of the Messenger of Allah emerged on the horizon, he jumped down from the camel back and ran towards it chanting praises of the Holy Messenger. He stayed near the tomb in a masjid declining all offers of hospitality from the people saving that for that day he was the guest of the Apostle of Allah. No sooner had he entered the mausoleum the Chief Muzawar approached him with dates wrapped in a handkerchief and while giving them, observed that they were from Rasulallah, as he was his guest for the day. His stay at Medina was full of thrilling spiritual experiences which he used to narrate to his audience in his latter years

with great feeling. Here he saw a woman in a dream and interpreted her as symbolic representation for material abundance and prosperity. At the time of departure from Medina, he was again favoured by Rasulallah with a 10 gaz of cloth for the turban, through the Muzawar with direction that he should wrap it on his head and preach the people,

During his stay in Arabia and the journey, he came into contact with many mystics, divines, scholars and Royal personages especially from Egypt. People were much impressed with his learning and piety. He considerably extended his intellectual horizon, though his journey was undertaken under painful conditions. Way back Hazrat Shaikh landed at Thatta (Sind) by ship via Aden and visited Uchh to offer Fatiha at the tomb of Hazrat Sayed Jalaluddin Bokhari [1303-1388 A. D.), universally known as Makhdum Jehania Jahan Ghast (R. A.) Saiyed Saddruddin Raju Qattal received him with extraordinary affection and respect.

He returned to Khattu and entered the Town by night time, but entry could not remain unnoticed and the whole town rushed to his residence and spent the rest of the night with him on great festivity. After sometime, he left for Delhi and settled down at Khan Jahan Masjid, built by Khan Jahan Jaunan Shah, the Prime Minister of Sultan Firoz Shah. He concentrated on acquiring greater learning and knowledge. He had a very sharp intellect and prodigious memory. He could answer questions in detail with reference without referring to books.

In the year 800 A. H /1398 A. D. India became victim of an unparalleled catastrophe. Timur Invaded India. A fortnight before Timur's forces marched into Delhi, Hazrat Shaikh heard the rumblings of a distant storm and advised his disciple Shaidh Sadruddin Meeruti, who happened to be son-in-law of Sultan Taghlaq Shah, to migrate to Jaunpur. He insisted that the Saint should also accompany him to Jaunpur. Hazrat Shaikh replied that he wanted to be by the side of the people of Delhi in the hour of their trial and misfortune.

Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud had forsaken his Capital to the mercy of the invading Mongol hordes. After its occupation, Timur granted quarter to the inhabitants of the Imperial Capital and deputed his men to collect the ransom. Harsh treatment by the Mongol soldiers made the inhabitants desperate and they not only refused to make payment, but slew some of the soldiers. Timur's blood began to boil with rage and he ordered general massacre of the citizens, The City was sacked and put to arson and looted. Private houses were dug up for gold and silver, and thousands of citizens perished under ruthless and shining blades of the victor.

This enraged Hazrat Shaikh so much so that he decided to reprimand Timur for his inhuman and irreligious conduct. With this idea he came out of the Masjid and reached Timur's army camp (near Hauz-e-Khas), but, could not meet Timur, as he was at sleep. However, he was well received by his generals and by the sheer force of his personality, he managed to free many prisoners and saved many being executed. Among those captives, who were released on his intercession was Mawlana Ahmed Thanasari also.

There is another version also, After the occupation of Delhi, Shaikh Ahmed was also taken into custody by the army. The Prisoners were divided into groups of

forty and each group was tied with a rope like "beads in a roasey". The prisoners were starving and many died without food helplessly. Hazrat Shaikh somehow managed to have supply of 40 loaves to his companions at midnights and thus saved them. One day a sepoy came to inspect the camp. He had found that in every group 10 to 15 prisoners had died, but there was no casualty in the group of prisoners 10 which Hazrat Shaikh belonged. He inquired about the reasons, and captives told him, pointing towards Hazrat Shaikh that it was he, who gave them loaves from some mysterious source. This mysterious incident excited the superstitious curiosity of the sepoy, who rushed and reported the matter to Timur, Hazrat Shaikh was immediately called and on questioning, he replied that it was Allah, who fed people and kept people alive. His replies changed the mood and the fury of the tyrant and not only the silk of Hazrat Shaikh but the entire arrested people of Delhi were set free Badauni in his "Mantakhab-ut-Tawarikh" says:-

"On the following day, the Great Timur gave quarter to the inhabitants of Delhi, receiving from them much valuable property and many presents as price of quarter. In the meantime however, the people of the City killed some of the soldiers. Accordingly on the fourth day all inhabitants were ordered to be made prisoners and took them off towards Transoxiana: eventually Shaikh Ahmed Khattu. whose tomb is well known at Sarkhez in Gujarat near Ahmedabad went along with the army and had an interview with the Great Timur and made apparent to him his condition as a Dervish and his surpassing knowledge, moreover he argued with and confuted over and over again the learned doctors who were with the Transoxian force, and begged for the prisoners' lives. The great Timur conceived such a strong liking for him that he acceded to his request and liberated all prisoners".

"This single service of the Shaikh remained ever a debt upon the people of Hindustan: and full details of this circumstance is given at length in the Maqamat of the Shaikh." Thus the Saint rendered a single service to the defeated Country and the people. On invitation he accompanied the Mongal army to Smarkand. There he met people of great learning and piety and had many discussions with them on Religion, at times in the presence of Sultan Muhammed Bahadur, the Governor of Samarkand and grand son of Timur. He excelled so much on them with his surpassing knowledge, that it lead a top ranking Ulema of the Royal Court to admit and pass a remark saying that Ulemas of Samarkand were humbled by a Dahelvi

Shaikh Ahmed took leave of Sultan Muhammed Bahadur and began his journey homeward. His passport bore the date of 12th Jamadil Awwal, 802 A.H./1400 A. D. He first went to Balkh Then he reached Herat. There he met Shaikh Shihabudin Khilwani, a great saint. He visited the tomb of Hazrat Imam Razi (R.A.) (d. 606/1209) and blessed the Begum Agha, wife of Prince Mirza Shah Rukh, son of Timur, and declined her invitation to settle down at Herat and run a madressah to be built by her. He than went to Kandhar. Amir Saifulah, the Governor of Kandhar received him with great respect. Here also he had to turn down the request similar to one made by Malika Agha. He continued his journey and reached Multan. The Saint thought of going to Delhi, but it lay waste after

plunder and massacre, and the people had left in panic for Gujarat and the Deccan, so he turned towards Gujarat and reached Patan, the Capital of Gujarat in Rajab 802 A. H./1400A.D. when Muzaffarkhan was the nominal Governor on behalf of the tottering Taghlaq Empire of Delhi.

Hazrat Shaikh then decided to go to the Deccan and reached River Narmada. Muzaffarkhan was at that time in Rander, busy suppressing lawlessness, quelling the revolt of the Rajah of Nan-dod. On hearing about the Saint going to the Daccan, in order to stop him, he ordered that the Saint should not be allowed to cross the river by boat. Muzaffarkhan then personally came with his son Tatarkhan and requested the Saint to settle down in Gujarat, The Saint agreed and returned to Sarkhez. Here a nice house was built for him and there he conducted his Khankah and a madressah and passed most of his time in prayers and meditation. Just near the great mosque he had built an under-ground chamber for his prayers undisturbed, remains of which exist to the present day in fairly good condition

But the greater glory was yet to follow. Sultan Ahmed Shah, in the year 1411 A. D. ascended the throne of Gujarat. The very next year, with the advice and blessings of his spiritual guide Shaikh Ahmed, laid the foundation of the City of Ahmedabad on the **eastern bank of River Sabarmatli**. The Saint had suggested that four Ahmeds, whose piety and righteousness were beyond question should take part in (ho ceremony. Accordingly the Saint laid the Western boundry; tho Sultan drew (he eastern boundiy and, Qazi Ahmed and Mulla Ahmed did the rest of the boundaries. The river-bastion called Manek Burj, which is at the eastern head of Ellis Bridge over which is a Police Chowky, is the place where the foundation of the project was laid.

At this period the Saint was at the, peak of his glory. Thousands of visitors- Hindus and Muslims, rich and poor, government officers and merchants amirs and noles- Thronged in his drawing room. He maintained a large open kitchen and fed hundreds of people every day. The annual expenditure of the Kitchen was 1,25,000 Tankas. And thus he became famous being called Ganj Baksh. i.e, bestower of treasures, Hazrat Kutub-e-Alam, great grandson of Hazrat Makhdum-0-Jehania, whose tomb is at Vatva near Ahmedabad used to visit the Saint twice a year and The Saint gave him two coins every time. Once on request, he readily gave him the prayer mat and on further request gave him earthen ware meant for Wazu and had granted him permission to initiate disciple in Magrebi Silsila.

Once Hazrat Makhdum-e-Jehanio had come to Delhi. He heard that a young man was busy with intense meditation and in acquiring deep learning at Khan Jahan Masjid. He immediately left to meet that Young man, who was no oilier than Shaikh Ahmed. Shaikh Ahmed received the great Saint with profound respect. While taking leave, the sage reminded the young man not to forget him in his coming great days and deposited a sufistic robe and certain spiritual secrets with him.

Hazrat Shah Alam ( R, A. ) held the Saint in high respect and studied under him. He regularly paid visits to Sarkhez. He received the sama sufistic robe and

secrets at the age of seventeen years from Hazrat Shaikh, which his great, great grand father had deposited with the Saint long ago.

Hazrat Shaikh had reached a fairly advanced age. Many a times he uttered that the boy had not yet come. Ultimately he adopted a newly born child whose parents were converts to Islam and had died immediately on his birth. He named the child Shaikh Safahuddin. Later he succeeded the Saint as his Sajjadanashin at the age of 24 years.

The glorious career of Hazrat Shaikh ultimately came to an end. On the festival day of Idd-ul-Fitr, in the year 849 A. H: he offered the prayers and returned home, but suddenly he vomited and blood was found in it. It also came out from his nose. He realised that his end was in sight. He confined himself in seclusion, busy with prayers. Aspirants for his sajjadanashini indulged in a big controversy. Sultan Muhammed Shah " Zar Beksh " called on the saint, and inquired whether the Saint had appointed anybody as his successor, and recommended Mawlana Abdul Hai, a pious and a learned person. Pointing towards Shaikh Salahuddin, the Saint replied that the boy would carry on all rituals after him. The Sultan observed that he was still very young, On that the Saint got annoyed and in rage observed, "Do you mean that just because the Dervish would lay six feet under the earth, he would be dead? No, he would continue to take care of the boy". Sultan at once realised his error. He bid adieu and went back. On Thursday, 14th Shhwal. 849 A. H./ 14-1-1946, the Saint bade farewell to this world and thus came an end of one of the six foremost saints of India. He lived 111 lunar years, and saw, in all 9 (nine) regimes of the Sultans of Delhi and of Gujarat. People requested Sultan Mahommed Shah to lead funeral prayers, but he proposed Mawlana Mahommed-bin-Qasim, the Pesh Imam of the Jamma Masjid to perform funeral rites. The Saint was buried near Jama Masjid amidst a huge crowd.