

Background to the Ismaʿili Daʿwat in the Northern Areas of Pakistan



Early life of Hakim Nasir-i Khusraw and his education:

Pir Nasir himself has referred to his vast and extensive learning in several places of his *Diwan*, such as:

Whatever kind of knowledge I heard of
I sat adjacent to its door (to acquire it).

Not any kind of knowledge was left
Of which I did not benefit more or less.

There is an interesting account of his learning in a spurious *Sargudhasht* (autobiography) attributed to him. In the *Sargudhasht* there are many things which have nothing to do with Pir Nasir's life but the description of his education seems to be quite close to what is found in his *Diwan*, which is summarized by Mawlawf Abdar-Razzaq Kanpuri, who translated his *Safar-namah* into Urdu, as follows:

After the four stages (of growth), when he attained the rational faculty, he was sent to school in his sixth year. By the age of nine he had memorised the entire Qur'an. During the following five years he studied literature, grammar, prosody, and arithmetic. After acquiring elementary education, he studied astrology, astronomy, geomancy, Euclid and the Almagest for three years. At the age of

seventeen he began his studies in literature, jurisprudence, exegesis of the Holy Qur'an and *Hadith*. He studied specifically Imam Muhammad Shaybani's *Jami'-i Kabir* and *Siyar-i Kabir* and in connection with his Qur'anic studies he studied some three hundred commentaries, both those included in the syllabus and others on his own initiative. Thereafter he studied Greek philosophy for fifteen years. He remained in Balkh until adulthood. In addition to Persian which was his mother tongue, he knew Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Hebrew and Hindustani (Sindhi). His knowledge of Hebrew is confirmed by his *Safar-namah*.

At the age of thirty-two he studied the Old Testament, the Psalms and the Gospel under Jewish scholars and then he studied them critically himself for a further six years. He also studied the Metaphysical Logic and Physical Logic system expounded by the sage Jamasb, medicine and mathematics and finally Sufism, Spiritualism, Evocation and Talismans. At the approximate age of forty-four, Nasir-i Khusraw emerged as a matchless sage, philosopher, scholar, dialectician and poet. He acquired all these sciences in Balkh, Bukhara, Iraq and in the province of Khurasan, where the leading authorities of these sciences lived at that time. Nasir was so well known in his time for his erudition that even the Jewish and Christian scholars sought his help to study their own religious books.

Hakim Nasir's Wisdom-filled Dream:

He says in his *Safar-namah*: I used to drink wine. The Holy Prophet said: "Tell the truth, even if it be against your own

selves". One night in a dream I saw someone saying to me: How long will you continue to drink this wine, which destroys man's intellect? If you were to stay sober, it would be better for you.

In reply I said: The wise have not been able to come up with anything other than this to lessen the sorrow of this world.

To be without one's senses is not repose, he answered. He cannot be called wise who leads men to senselessness. Rather, one should seek that which increases reason and wisdom.

Where can I find such a thing? I asked. He said: He who seeks, finds. And then he pointed toward the *qiblah* and said no more.

Some scholars think that the dream which Pir Nasir-i Khusraw has mentioned is an example of him having been influenced by an Isma'ili *da'i*. This is most probably true, because he quite often uses allegorical and parabolic language in his writings. It is true that a great *da'i* prohibited him to drink and indicated to him the Imam of the time, who is the fountainhead of intellect. Such a systematic and luminous dream is not possible if one is drunk.

Pir Nasir-i Khusraw in Yumgan:

Professor Bertels in his work "Nasir-i Khusraw and Ismaʿilis" has written that the valley of Yumgan became the true seat of the *Hujjat* of Khurasan (i.e Nasir-i Khusraw). He writes that it is not wrong for people to say "Shah Nasir", because the close circle of the *daʿwat* considered him to be the king of knowledge and wisdom. He says that Nasir-i Khusraw in Yumgan continued the chain of *daʿwat*. He used to send letters inviting people to the Ismaʿili Tariqah, as is found in his *Diwan*:

Har sāl yakī kitāb-i daʿwat
Ba-atrāf-i jahān hamī firistam

Tā dānad khasm-i man kih chun tū
Dar dīn nah daʿī-ū khwār-ū sustam.

I send a letter of *daʿwat* every year to all
directions of the world;

So that the adversary may know that in religion
I am not weak, abject and idle like you.

In many of his *qasaʿid* he says: Although I live in a cave far
from and cut off from my familiar country, in the eyes of
my friends I am esteemed and respected.

As he says in his *Rawshanaʿi-namah*:

Za Hujjat īn sukhānhā yād mīdār

Remember these words of the *Hujjat*
Who sits in Yumgan like a king.

The above-mentioned book notes that Pir Nasir had correspondence from Yumgan with the centre of the *da'wat* in Egypt. It also notes that Pir Nasir wrote most of his philosophical works in Yumgan, including *Rawshana'i-namah*, *Jami' u'l-Hikmatayn* and *Zadu'l-Musafirin* (pp. 185-86).

The Centre and Source of Da'wat-i Nasiri:

It is clear as broad daylight that the light of the Isma'ili *da'wat* spread to Chitral, the Northern Areas, Sariqul and Yaraqand, from Badakhshan. The fountainhead of the light of the lamps of knowledge and wisdom and recognition of Imam, which were lit by *Pirs*, *Da'is*, *Mu'allims* and their representatives was one only, which the celebrated Pir, by the command of the exalted Imam, had prepared with great difficulties in Badakhshan. The treasures of this immense light were in the form of voluminous books, as well as in the form of an army of knowledge able to fight against the darkness of ignorance having been equipped with the knowledge and wisdom of Nasir.

There is no doubt that just as Hazrat Hasan-i Sabbah had established a physical fortress (in Alamut), Pir Nasir made a fortress of knowledge and wisdom in Badakhshan which, Hulegu Khan, or even thousands like him could not destroy.

The proof of this is Pir Nasir's precious books which are a source of pride not only to the world of Isma'ilism, but are also found in educational and intellectual centres all over the world.

Hakim Nasir-i Khusraw accomplished the duty of *da'wat* with great boldness and wisdom and made the best use of the time available to him. That is, when freedom and opportunity were available, he performed the *da'wat* and *jihad* with his tongue and when things were made difficult by his adversaries, he used his pen, so that the chain of *da'wat* and sincere advice would continue forever.

Beginning of the Ithna'ashari *Madhhab* in Hunza:

In olden times the religion of Islam was alien to the inhabitants of Hunza. Their rites consisted of cremating the dead or burying them with some of their possessions. From circumstantial evidence, it seems that the traditions of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism were widespread in the area. People used to worship *boyn* (pl. *boyo*) which is a small animal like a puppy. The *boyo* used to live under juniper trees or on rocky land. People placed some offerings of butter, milk or the blood of sheep for them. It was considered a good omen if they appeared and liked the offerings.

It is said that when 'Ayashu bin Mayuritham became the ruler of Hunza, he married Shah Khatun bint Abdal Khan of Baltistan and it is because of this marriage that the *da'wat* of Islam first came to Hunza from Baltistan in the form of

Ithna'asharism and then gradually spread in the surrounding areas. Nonetheless, for a long time people used to revere *boyo* despite being advised against idolatry by the preachers of Islam.

Beginning of the Light of the Isma'ili Da'wat in Hunza:

In Hunza, the first ruler from the dynasty of 'Ayashu was Girkis. The fifth ruler from this dynasty 'Ayashu Sughay bin Mayuritham married Shah Khatun bint Abdal Khan of Baltistan and the Ithna'ashari *madhhab* began in Hunza.

The nineteenth ruler of this line was Silum Khan who, in the last days of his life, personally accepted the Isma'ili *madhhab* and feeling lonely, asked Pir Shah Husayn ibn Shah Ardabil: "Who will perform my funeral rites and ceremonies?" The Pir answered: "God willing, at that time one of the Isma'ili *da'is* will come".

When Silum Khan was on his death bed, he was worried about his funeral rites and prayers and waited for someone to come to fulfil the promise of the Pir. Therefore, he constantly asked his confidantes to see if anyone was coming. Finally the news came that a rider was coming from far away. He was Pir Shah Husayn ibn Shah Ardabil. He consoled Silum Khan according to the promise and when Silum died, he performed his burial rites and the funeral prayer.

Note: Huzurmukhi Khalifah Mihrban Shah (1910-1991) bin Gulbahar Shah told us on the authority of Khisanay Sayyid that during the Imamatus of Mawlana Qasim Shah (a.s.), Taj Mughul conquered Hunza after conquering Gilgit. However, it appears that he did not make proper arrangements for the true *da'wat*, and people forgot this sacred *madhhab*. All this happened approximately six hundred years ago.

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