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Role of Sufism in Spreading Shiism at Kermanshah

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Abstract

Researchers, whether Muslim or not, refer to Sufism as limbo between Sunni and Shia beliefs with an emphasis on its weak Sunni and strong Shia ties. History and expand of Shia in Kermanshah support this statement also. Kermanshah is one of the regions that provided a proper social environment for Shia to strengthen its presence due to Sufi movements and dignitaries. Meanwhile, in addition to strengthen convergence areas of Shi'ism and Sufism, some events such as the Mongol onslaught and efforts of strong figures in Sufism exacerbated conditions to spread Shiism in the region. The present research aims to examine the role of Sufism in spreading Shiism in Kermanshah, in addition to investigate areas of the convergence.

Keywords: Islam, Kermanshah, Shiism, Shia, Sufism, Kurds.

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Introduction

Entrance of Islam to Iran can be considered one of the issues that have been discussed by local and external researchers. The researchers have tried to study and explore the reasons of defeating Sassanid Empire and consequences of the failure in cultural, social, political and economic fields, in addition to investigate how Islam came to Iran. Although during long years, Islam was gradually replaced by Zoroastrianism as the dominant religion, but selecting Sunni or Shiite religions by people in different parts of the country is another issue that requires intensive think and study. Meanwhile, west regions of the country, particularly Kermanshah has allocated a special place, due to its diverse religious structure. Although, Sunni was considered as the dominant religion in most parts of Iran at the early centuries of Islam, but clear evidences of primary sources indicate tendency of people in Jebal to Shiism. Historical sources have clearly mentioned Dinawar and Gharmisin as cities with Shia people. Despite emphasizing the resources on the theme of Shi'ism in Kermanshah, recent research has been less attention to this issue. In general, Shiites' historical texts, which they have been written in the present era, have mentioned Kurdish areas and new academic articles have examined important Shiite tribes and their attitudes. Generally, this important issue has not been studied comprehensively. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze role of Sufism as one of the factors affecting this issue, by considering to reasons of spreading Shiism in Kermanshah.

A Brief History of Sufism

In the book of Introduction, Ibn Khaldun considers Sufism as a religious science that has been emerging among Muslims and therefore, there has not been existed an issue with the name and title for previous Muslims and the Prophet's ancestors (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 2980). Sufism means following to Sufi religious ideology and it is difficult to provide a comprehensive definition because we will be faced with multitude of different and often conflicting definitions and most definitions have rhetorical aspect, without giving a precise and scientific definition of Sufism (Badavi, 1996: 35). Sufi roots in Arabic language and is derived from Sofeh word. Sofeh People were some of poor and pious Muslims in early Islam who were living in queues in the Mosque of Medina and other Muslims helped them (Ibn Jowzi, 2010: 134). The similarity between characteristics of Sufis and Sofeh People has caused reflecting possibility of the derivation in books of many Sufi elders.

About the so-called Sufi, Abu Nasr Siraj has stated that Sufis were not looking for a certain type of science and special moral character cannot be attributed to them because they have been the source of all knowledge with a set of conditions. For this reason, despite to ascetics and jurists, they have not been called because of having a certain scientific and moral character (Siraj, 2003: 20). Sufi has been called as poor, mystic, behavioral native and a member of a sect of dervishes. In addition, they also called themselves as mystic people because they pay attention to the core and essence of religion (Ibid, 23).

Sufis were the first people who believed that paying attention to the worldly and luxury life is inconsistent with religion and godliness. What was important to them was salvation in the hereafter and enjoy the eternal blessings, especially meeting with the God in the heaven. However, from the mid-third century onwards, Sufis gradually established their social organization and there were emerged the relationship between disciple and master among them. Some elders also began to write articles and books and in this way, they described theoretical aspects of their religion and taught Sufi social mores to their disciples. In the third century, schools of jurisprudence or Sharia (regulation) were organized and at the same time, Sufism began to appear in the Islamic society as a significant element and its dogma and methods were released by religious systems that each of them was managed by a master that was often called by his name (Nasr, 2009: 88).

Sufi orders were divided into two distinct groups. The moderate mystics were not outside borders of the Islamic religion (such as Maarroof Karkhi and his followers such as Jonayd and Shibli). They believed that strict observing Islamic law as well as its procedures and prohibitions is obligatory. Another group of Sufis did not give much importance to implement Islamic Sharia, without directly denying it (Petroshosvki, 1975: 340).

Firstly, Sufi elders were Sunni in general, but they did not follow a same sect religion. In *Asrar al-Towhid*, Mohammed Ibn Monawar has written that after Imam Shafi'I, all Sufis have attributed themselves to the Shafi'i School (Mohammed Ibn Monawar, 1988: 20). Leaders of jurisprudence religions such as Imam Shafi'i (d. 204) and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241) have recalled some Sufis in a good manner. However, in some cases, there have been quoted some statements against Sufis by religious leaders, but there have not been mentioned about Sufis' heresy and excommunication (Ibn Jozi, 2010: 138). It is said that Ahmad ibn Hanbal was the first person who criticized Sufi and the most attacks toward some Sufis were carried out by Hanbalism (Ibid).

Mongol Invasion and Spreading Sufism in Iran

For several reasons, Mongol period is important in religious history of Iran. First, this period saw developing Shiism as a consequence of falling the Abbasid Caliphate that this led to reduce the difference between Shia and Sunni, emerging Shi'ite tendencies among the Sufis and trend to the moderate Shiism in the Sunni gatherings. In addition, there were formed some Sufi and Shiite movements with the military organizations that were pioneers of the Safavid movement (Basani, 2009: 520).

In the seventh century AH, the devastating Mongol invasion and massacre of people led to an unprecedented disaster for the Muslim world. However, the Sufism was spread in all Islamic lands as mystical dimension of Islam and by emerging famous Sufis such as Mohiye-al-Din Ibn Arabi, Jalaluddin Balkhi, Shahabuddin Suhrawardi, Najmuddin Razi, Fakhruddin Iraqi and Seifuddin Bakhazar. Sufism took its roots in Muslims' personal and social life more than before and there was increased general trend toward it.

The Mongol invasions, internal conflicts and continuous clashes of Mongol princes were the main reasons of trend to Sufism in this period. From time to time, they fought to capture a region that it has caused insecurity and social and political disorder. Due to the great mess and disorder, people turned toward abstract thoughts and separating from the mortal world and transient isolationist. Of course, the idea that the Mongol sedition is a natural and divine providence and the evil is the God's destiny hand to punish the sinner Muslims had strong and inalienable impacts on their thoughts.

In this period, most people looked for a healing or at least, a comforting medicine that reduces some of their intellectual and spiritual pains. Therefore, they turned to Sufism more than ever that gave a new richness and depth to their lives with its spiritual teachings and ways, and help them in difficulties of their life. The public welcome and orientation to Sufism was strengthened due to interest and support of the Mongol rulers day by day. In fact, though the Mongol attacks caused death and displacement of some of Sufis, but the Mongols always on the side of caution and respect towards the elders who owns them miracles and occult forces that knew they were observing and trying to harm them to be safe by the sibylline power (Zarrinkoob, 1983: 89).

Many rulers and chieftains of the Mongol like Ghazan Khan, Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh (Oljaito) and Sultan Abu Sa'id, as well as some ministers like Nasiruddin Tusi, Khajeh Rashid al-Din Fazlallah Hamdani and his son, Ghyasaldin Mohammed also tended to Sufism openly. They supported Sufis by making numerous monasteries, giving assets and dedicating a lot of their property. Some of them include the made monasteries by Ghazan Khan in Tabriz and Hamadan as well as the made monastery by Oljaito in Soltanieh.

Shi'ism and Sufism

In addition to strength the flow of Sufism, strengthening Shiism and its approaching to Sufism was another result of Mongol invasion. From beginning of this event, especially after falling the Abbasid Caliphate and conquest the Mongol on Iraq, Shiites had more opportunities to conduct their religious affairs more freely, on the one hand and on the other hand, there were gradually emerged Shiite tendencies in Sufism and a tendency to moderate Shiism in Sunni gatherings (Al-Sheibi, 2008: 87).

The most common principles of Sufism and Shia can be observed in major role of Imam, guardians, Qotb and Caliph of Allah. Of course, the role of Imam in the Shiite is beyond his role among the Sufis. For example, for a Sufi member, Imam Hussein has no special Imamate, but he is the Imam of lovers who gave up his ghost to meet his God. *Tazkerat-ul Owlia*, Attar Neishaboori is begun with Imam Baqir (AS) and ends by a description on the Imam Sadeq (AS). It suggests paying attention of Sufis to the role of leadership of the honorable people (Ghorbanzadeh, 2009: 139).

Closeness of Sufism and Shi'ism (especially Twelver Shia) to each other is another evolution in important changes of Sufism in seventh century. Some Sufies mad prevalence Shi'ism officially. Some members of this group include Sheykhiyeh Jooriyeh, one of the followers of Sheikh Khalifa in Khorasan and students of Ala al-Daula Simnani i.e. Sheikh Hassan Joori in Sabzevar (Sajadi, 2009: 107). One another important event in the century is to emerge Mohi al-Din Ibn Arabi, one of the most prominent and influential Sufi of the Muslim's world. With the advent of Mohi al-Din Ibn Arabi, Sufi beliefs and ideas –which until that time, they were mentioned in the works of Sufi masters incoherently- were organized and set end. Sufism was considered in science and philosophy and the science of spirituality was recognized as a branch of Islamic sciences (Nasr, 2009: 94).

Firstly, in the seventh century, Sadruddin Qûnawî and then Shah Nematollah Vali in the eighth century and finally, Seyyed Mohammad Noorbakhsh spread Ibn Arabi's Sufi way among Iranians, which it was alien to Sufism in Iran. Shah Nematollah Vali has integrated it with Shiite beliefs and the way of Nematolahei has been considered as the first Sufism way in Shia sect (Nafisi, 2006: 224).

Some researchers have considered the similarity between various teachings of Ibn Arabi and teachings of Shia as a sign of his influence from Shi'ite sources in his time (Al-Sheibi, 2008: 110). However, it should be noted that his influence on Shiite mysticism was not less than his effectiveness. Shiite Gnostics interested to teachings of Ibn Arabi that alongside his Sunni commentators, Shia commentators included his teachings on Shiite mysticism with some modifications such as Seyyed Heidar Amoli, Ibn Torkeh and Ibn Abi Jomhoor.

The role of Seyyed Heidar Amoli is more prominent than others and his works is considered as a milestone in integration of teachings of Ibn Arabi with Shiite mysticism. In *Jame-al-Asrar*, he attempts to prove Sufism and Shi'ism truth unity and he accepts ideas of Ibn Arabi in most cases, except for some differences of opinion, particularly on the issue of the guardianship (Amoli, 1968: 448).

Seyyed Heidar Amoli was a person who integrated Sufism and Shi'ism comprehensively in his book titled *Jame-al-Asrar*, at Azerbaijan and under the rule Ilkhani Governing. In this work, he tries to explain the similarities between fundamental principles of Shi'ism and Sufism and has been succeeded in this work (Corbin, 2006: 166).

Thus, the Ibn Arabi School, which was firstly rose from a Sunni environment, was warmly accepted in Shiite gatherings and it was accepted by Shiite Sufi conservatives such as Nematollahieh, Noorbakhshia and Zahabiyah. Sadroddin Qûnawî had the largest share to spread the teachings of Ibn Arabi in Iran because he was the first person who established a relationship between his teachings and Iranian Sufism and could transfer Ibn Arabi thoughts from Sami mystical language and culture to Sufism language and culture in Iranian environment (Nafisi, 2006: 224).

In many gatherings, Shiite was primarily trended because of mysticism. In the Mongol period, it became apparent in several ways including Kobraviyeh and Sohrevardiyeh were two methods in times of invasion. The Kobraviyeh School had a special importance to increase

infiltration of Shiism in Iranian Sufism. Sheykh Najm al-Din and his first generation disciples were Sunnis. The uncommon trend can be only found in the works of Saad ad-Din Hamooiyeh who believed that the Islamic nation has twelve parents and twelfth parent is Sahib al-Zaman who will return to the world to establish justice (Bassani, 2002: 517). After the Sunni Sufism that Najmuddin Kubra admits to erudition of Ali (AS) and after tolerant Sunni of Ala al-Daula Simnani, we approach to the writings of Ali Hamadani that straight and strong Sunni in religion appears beside Shiite extremist ideas on his way. Then there is coming the openly admitted Shiite of Noorbakhsh. Gradual and imperceptible transition from Sunni to Shia, which was firstly appeared in Kobraviyeh way, had a profound impact on Islam and Iran and it is the explanation for spreading Shiism in the Safavid era (Basanu, 2009: 518).

In the Timurids period, Sufis were regarded more than ever on their sects and numbers were added. Timur and his descendants paid special attention to Sufism and mysticism so that Timur Goorkani went to visit elders many times and asked blessing. In the period, religion and Sufism are closing and intermingling together. Social developments after the Mongol invasion and later Timurid caused more and more people orientation and proximity to Sufism, mystics and monasteries. In the first period, some of the Mongol Ilkhans and their ministers were intimates of Sufi masters and provided growth of Sufism by gifts, offerings and making monasteries.

Sufism in Kermanshah

Suhrawardīya was the first method that spread Sufism in the West of Iran during the Seljuk period. Its founder was Abu Hafs Umar Suhrawardi that this way was derived from his name, but its series of teaching is returned to his uncle Abdul Ghafer, a student of Ahmad Ghazali. Abou Hafs Omar has written numerous books and taught many famous and very well-known students such as Saadi, Auhaduddin Kermani, Ahmad Yasavi (Basani, 2002: 284).

Suhrawardīya was the first developed way among Kurds in region of Kermanshah. Suhraward that is now in the realm of Zanjan was a city with a Kurdish identity so that Ibn Hoghal has referred majority of its inhabitants as Kurd people (Ibn Hoghal, 1966: 112).

Suhrawardīya is allocated to Dinawar elders due to its geography and a common ethnic identity in its sequence of generations in descent path and it has arose from ascetics and mystics of Dinawar including Mmshad Dinawari and Ahmad Dinawari (Azamipoor, 2014: 243).

Baba Taher Hamadani was one of poets and mystics in mid-fifth century, contemporary with Tugrul Beig Seljuki. He was born in the late of fourth century, so that he was a perfect mystic and authority in the mid-fifth century (about 447 AH), when Tugrul Beik Seljuki went to Hamadan (Safa, 1990: 2383). Ravandi said: "I heard when the Sultan Tughril came to Hamadan, there were three old men in the city: Baba Taher, Baba Jaafar and Sheikh Hamsha. There is a mountain in Hamadan, named Khedr. They stood there, the Sultan saw them ... kissed their hands, Baba Taher advised him to justice and charity. King wept and said I do so (Ravandi, 2007: 99).

Ahle Hagh attributes Baba Taher to their own (Petroshovski, 1975: 327). Zokaei writes "Baba Taher came under the domination of Daylmiyan and Kurds and he was one of followers of Iranian Gnostic Ahl-e Hagh that his beliefs were linked with to ideas of Zarvani-Manu and ancient Fahlawi rulling. Later the beliefs were correlated in beliefs of cults of Horoofiyeh, Jalalieh, Khaksaryh and Noghootiyeh (Zokaei, 1996: 144). Sultani considers Baba Taher along with Ayn al-Quzat Hamadani of missionaries of Mbarkshah Alavi (King of Khushin) as the right leader of Ahl-e Hagh at that time. Mbarkshah, known as King of Khushin, means well-being was grown in the fourth century and contemporary with Baba Taher in Lorestan (Soltani, 1997: 49).

Nematollahiyeh is one of religions of Shia that was founded by the Shah Nematollah Vali (d. 835 AH), a descendant of the fifth Imam of Shiites. Mīr'Abd-Allāh's was his father and his mother was a prince of Shabankareh, Fars (Ensafpoor, 2000: 104).

His monastery in Mahan, Kerman is famous for special and general public and a shrine for them. He was accepted by people and many Sufi treatises ascribed to him that the most important is his complete works. Today, Nematollahi monastery and its tributaries are active in most cities of Iran. In Kurdish areas of Iran, the monasteries have been established among the Kurds Shiite and tombstones of Kurds are loyal followers of the Sufi dynasty. Nematolahei religion was emerged at the south of Kurdistan by arriving Agha Mohammad Hassan Zargar Esfahani (d. 1297 AH) to Kermanshah and his residence in the city (Soltani, 2001: 35). Then he constructed a monastery in Kermanshah by effort and guidance of Haj Agha Bozorg Kermanshahi (d. 1311 AH). As a result, the religion obtained a place to advertise in Kurdish regions (Ibid: 38).

Khaksariyeh is an attributed cult to a dervish known as Seyyed Jalal al-Din Heider and for this reason; it is called Jalalieh religion too. Khaksariyeh is the only cult of Sufis who were Shia from beginning. So, they obligate to follow the principles of Shia and introduce their origin to twelfth Imam of the Shiites. Followers of the religion ignore the world; they are beggar and spend their times by virtues (Sanandaji, 1996: 56). Like Nematollahi religion, Khaksariyeh religion was spread in Kurdish regions and Kermanshah due to access of Sufi masters to the holy sites in Iraq and their advertising in the area (Soltani, 2001: 405).

Seyyed Isa Barzanji, the son of Baba Ali Hamadani, the son of Seyyed Yousuf is founder of Qaderieh religion, attributed to Abdul Qadir Gilani in Kermanshah. Their ancestry to Imam Musa Kazim (AS), Ismail Mohades, one of the famous sons of Imam Musa Kazim and brother of Imam Reza (AS) is on the head of Barzinjah sheikhs (Rohani, 2006: 131).

Syed Yousuf was initially residing in Hamadan and went to Baghdad to study seminary and then returned to Hamedan again for training and guidance. In his life, he spent seven years in Egypt to guidance, hermit three years in Mecca and then traveled to Baghdad and juxtaposed with Abdul Qadir Gilani and eventually went to Merv, where he died (Modarres, 1984: 257).

Seyyed Baba Ali is one of the great scholars in eighth century that he wrote valuable works on Sufism. By ordering his father, Baba Ali went to Sheikh Mahmood Barzaghani to learn behaviors. He spent a lot of his life in travel and pilgrimage and finally, he returned to Hamadan and later died in Khuttalan. Mohammad Noorbakhsh is disciple of Khwaja Ishagh Khuttalani that he was the disciple of Seyyed Ali Hamadani too. Finally, he gifted the last robe and sat on the guidance seat and said that everyone who follows us should follow him (Noorbakhsh). He is our master, although he is apparently our student (Shooshtari, 1998: 144). After Seyyed Ali, Nematollah Vali established a method that has been remained in Iran and India. According to the above-mentioned matters, Sufis became anxious to risk their positions because of exclusive state to Alavids. At that time, Naqshbandi religious order was emerged as a Sufi rise. They rejected dynasties that were totally returned to Ali Ibn Abi Talib (AS) (Alsheibi, 2008: 312).

Noorbkhshiyani movement was begun from Tiri Mountains of Khuttalan Castles in 826 AH. But it was failed and Khwaja Ishaq Khuttalani was killed. Shahrokh could not do special action about him due to his popularity for people. So he was deported to Shiraz. In the city,

Noorbakhsh was free to circulate in Basra, Hilla, Baghdad and Shooshtar and shrine to visit Shiite holy places (Ibid, 316).

After arriving Noorbakhsh to Kurdistan, they loved him and elders served to him. There was coined in his name for some time. He went to Gilan and returned to Kurdistan again that in this time, Mirza Shahrokh was in Azerbaijan. Seyyed Isa Barzanji (d. 754 AH), together with his brother, Musa, went to Iraq because of father death (Seyyed Ali Hamadani) from Hamadan to Arab Iraq and then they went from Baghdad to a Kurdish region named Barzanjeh and teach and guide people and at the same time, they founded Barzanji sheikhs and spread of Sufi Ghaderi religion (Rohani, 2003: 136).

Sultan Isaac Barzanji, the son of Sheikh Isa migrated from Barzanjeh after his father's death due to opposition of his brothers and came to the Uraman area and Sheikhan Village (Edmonds, 2003: 199). He stayed there for whole life and died there.

Conclusion

Although the Safavid is known as official factor to formalize Sufism in Iran, but religious tendency in a society is a matter that various factors can play role in it. In other words, Sufism acceptance and tendency in Iran was a gradual phenomenon that happened over several centuries. Meanwhile, the spread of Shiism in Kermanshah was influenced by various factors including the role of Sufism. Acceptances of Sufism in Iran after invasion of the Mongols from seventh to tenth centuries, on the one hand and tendency of Shiism among them, on the other hand were the factors that have a direct impact on Sufism spread. Among Sufism religions, Nematollahiyeh and Khaksariyeh played an important role to spread Shi'ism in Kermanshah from Safavid to Qajar. Attendance of other religions and their elders such as descendants of Sheikh Issa Barzanji, Sultan Isaac Barzanji and others escalated the issue. So it seems that there is not possible to examine the origins of spreading Shiism in Kermanshah, regardless of considering the role of Sufism movements.

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