

Sufi Legends in Odisha Revisited

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Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) found solid footing in Odisha since its inception. Sufis settled and devoted themselves in religious and social activities. A few of them experimented their super-natural power and showed miracles and attracted people from all communities. There are quite a large number of Sufi tombs throughout Odisha which bear testimony to high adoration they commanded from people of Odisha. Though tombs of the Sufi saints are located in all parts of Odisha but important of them are in Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Astarang, Khurda, Pipli, Kakatpur, Kaipadar, Manikptana, Satyabadi, Kendrapara, Sambalpur, Tarbha, Khariar Road so on and so forth. Sufi's of Odisha secure the adoration of Hindus and even today the Hindus on a certain day present *shirini* and *khir* on the name of Sufis. Sufism found firm footage in Odisha and all Sufi sages are important to the peoples of Odisha. Some of the important Sufi of Odisha's and their legends with their traditions are underlined in brief;

Saiyed Ali Bukhari of Cuttack and his legend

When Kalapahad, one Afghan General marched against Raja Mukunda Deva to capture Barabati fort, Saiyed Ali Bukhari, Muslim Sufi saint accompanied him to give him moral and spiritual support. During the siege of Barabati fort the saint displayed great valour, but when its

garrison was about to yield his head was severed by the sword of the enemy. His headless trunk however gave spur to his horse which carried him straight to Jajpur. Here he prayed and was sanctified and when the headless trunk set up other saints who were present there took the trunk inside and built a tomb or shrine for it. Another tomb was built in memory of the same saint at Cuttack on the spot where his head was left. In subsequent year a tomb for his horse after its death was built at Jajpur. For the people of Odisha both the places are sacred and they pay respect to Hajrat Saiyed Ali Bukhari Sahab when they visited the tomb or shrine site.⁽¹⁾

Saiyyed Jalaluddin Bukhari of Kaipadar and his legend

Saiyyed Jalaluddin Bukhari was a Sufi saint of 18th century and tradition says he was a close friend of a Hindu hermit. Both of them preached their respective religious beliefs with a spirit of religious synthesis without having any prejudice to their respective religious principle.⁽²⁾ It is said that the Hajrat Bukhari sahib saint was sitting in deep meditation for a long period of time. The white ants constructed an anthill (*Hunka*) around him and the saint remained hidden from the sight of the people forever. Hence, the tomb is stood in the shape of an anthill over which the

sandal paste is sprinkled by both the Hindus and Muslims. Tradition also says that a ship of a merchant was put into trouble in the ocean. He vowed that if he were safe he would construct the shrine of Bukhari Sahab. By the miracle the ship was saved from storm and according to the vow the merchant constructed the shrine or mazaar of the saint which still stands there. ⁽³⁾

Makhdum Jahania Jahanganst of Astarang and his legend

The shrine or mazaar of Saint Makhdum Jahanganst is located near Astarang on the sea beach. Some tradition says that, Sufi saint Makhdum with his disciples came to India from Baghdad (Iraq) in 15th century and while staying for sometime in Bengal he came to Odisha. He roamed many places in Odisha and finally settled down near Astarang. ⁽⁴⁾

Tradition goes as such that, the saint had travelled over the length and breadth of the globe on foot. It is also stated that he had come to Astarang and had stayed there for sometime on an island not far away from the sea shore. His umbrella and wooden shoe are still there as his relics. Both the Hindus and the Muslims pay their respect to the shrine. Different stories are heard about the shrine. A popular story now spread in the area where the shrine stands is that one poor man with his only son used to visit this saint daily to offer his prayer. On the advice of the saint he had asked his son not to turn his face back while returning his home. One day out of curiosity, as ill-luck, has it, the boy looked at his back and immediately after that the saint disappeared. In memory of his name present beautiful shrine or mazaar or *pirsthan* was built. ⁽⁵⁾

Legend related with Noor Bibi of Sambalpur

Since one hundred years 'Noor Bibi' shrine (Mazzar) at Pir Baba Chhak in Sambalpur

city is the symbol of communal harmony among Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. They prayed here for their betterment. According to Mohammed Ibrahim Razwi, around hundreds of years back one old Faqir couple came here from an unknown location, prayed God under the shed of two Pipal tree (present shrine site). Both of them were very pious and maintained purity in life. In course of time the holy lady died, her name was Noor Bibi. She was a saintly figure. Legend goes on as such that, every day the holy lady read one paragraph of the holy Quran before her night sleep and put one paper as a sign to continue reading in coming day. As a miracle, she found one silver coin each day in place of paper cut out which was placed in the holy Quran the others night as a sign of stop.

Everyday, the holy lady collected silver coin as a blessing of God to her and divided the silver coin into four pieces. One piece she used to give to a Faqir, second one to a destitute, third one to a disease stricken and fourth one kept herself for her maintenance. It was a sheer miracle experienced by the holy lady Noor Bibi and her husband. After the death of Noor Bibi and her husband a tomb was built there. Thereafter, the Chhak has been named as Pir Baba Chhak in the heart of Sambalpur city.

Every year in the Gyarmi month Urs (Death Ceremony) celebrate with religious fervour and *Takrir* (Moulvi Lecture) and *Milad* ceremony (lecture on prophet Sunna organized). Sometimes Qawali competition was also organized and Qawali singers came to the Urs from different parts of India. Noted Qawali singers like Isa Bazar from Bombay, Ismael Azar from Kolkata, Inayat Bharti and famous lady singer Shahin Parvin have very often come to charm the Urs ceremony. The Qawali competition was discontinued after sometime due to certain other

reason. Jhasketan Sahu, the then Minister, Government of Odisha served as the President of Urs Organiser Committee. The first Muzawar (caretaker) of the shrine (Mazaar) was Sayeed Abdul Rahim. After his death his wife Munira Bi and after her death her daughter Jaitun Banu is the present Muzawar (caretaker of the shrine). In the year 2006 Urs was celebrated in the (*Gyarmi* or eleventh day of *Rabi-ul-akhir* month in accordance with Islamic *Hijra* era based on lunar movement) month of April 11th and 12th and continued for three days. ⁽⁶⁾

Sayyed Abdul Sakur Baba of Tarbha and his legend

Sayyed Abdul Sakur Baba was born in 1831 C.E. in Afghanistan. The year of his birth has been confirmed by going through the passport of Baba which is in the home of Masud Khan Lawyer ⁽⁷⁾ his father's name was Sayyed Mohammed Siddiq. He came to Tarbha in 1931 C.E. At that time his age was about 100 years. He remained here till his demise. ⁽⁸⁾ At first at Tarbha, in Sonapur district he remained in a thatched house where he prayed Namaj five times. In course of time, he made a Pucca house ⁽⁹⁾ and built a grand mosque at Tarbha. Abdul Sakur Baba cured the leprosy patient of Tarbha; he had the miracle power in which he cured many incurable diseases of the people. From the tradition as goes on he lived around 150 years and in the year 1984 C.E. on March 16th at 10 hour 5 minute he left this mundane world. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Every year Urs ceremony organized by Urs committee of Tarabha, where people from all quarters of life come and receive the blessing of Baba. ⁽¹¹⁾ Devotees from Honk Kong, Srilanka, Dubai, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan also come to receive the blessing of Tarabha Baba. The caretakers (Muzawar) of the shrine are Anwar Ali Adami and Pyar Mohammed

Khalimi. ⁽¹²⁾ In 2010 it was remarkable for religious unity and solidarity shown by both the communities by organizing the annual Urs and Biswa shanti Maha yagna simultaneously with traditional gaity and religious fervour. ⁽¹³⁾ The shrine of Sayyed Abdul Sakur Baba is the symbol of communal harmony among the different communities Odisha.

Takht-i-Sulaiman Shrine of Cuttack and his legend

Takht-i-Sulaiman shrine is one of the most prominent and commanding spot in Odisha standing on the Alti hill. It is a plain stone building consisting of a single room surrounded by a dome and bearing inscription in Persian on three black chlorite one over each door. It was erected in 1132 A.H. (1719-20 C.E.) by Shujauddin Mohammed Khan. A Persian inscription on a table on the shrine gives information that Shuja-ud-din Mohammed was its builder. ⁽¹⁴⁾

There is an interesting story with regard to the circumstances which led to the construction of the building at the top of the mountain. It is said that a holy saint called Suleman Sahib came to this area first to Lalitgiri hills and then to the present location on the top of the hill. There he went on offering prayer and meditation in the thickness of the forest. Once some Muslim commander at the command of the soldiers, passing by this way, saw a flag fluttering on the hill. The army commander and others went up the hill and made a vow that if they succeeded in winning the battle they would return and do something in commemoration of the holy saint. The army was victorious in the campaign and the shrine of Takht-I-Sulaiman was accordingly constructed. From the settlement records it is noticed that 16 *batis* land were donated from various services by Shujauddin Mohammed Khan

and Murshid Quli I and Raja Januji Bhonsale during later period.

The impact of the Sufis on the religion of the people of Odisha cannot be rejected outright. They arrived in Odisha with the purpose of preaching and teaching Islam. The establishment of *Khanqahs* helped the dissemination of Islamic spiritual and intellectual values. Their establishment of important centres in Odisha suggests the Sufis were prepared to face the Hindu religious and intellectual challenges. There the Sufis demonstrated their own way of life and the doors of some *Khanqahs* such as those of Tarbha, Dhamnagar and many more of Odisha were opened to all classes of people. The interest of Sufis in the welfare of the people in general must have also helped them to attract non-Muslims to their *khanqahs*. The advent of the Muslim saints was also indirectly responsible for including the non-Muslim to embrace Islam.

The popularity and fame of Sufism made the Odishan Muslims increasingly gullible and credulous. Both living and dead saints came to be recognized as endowed with great miraculous powers. The graves of the saints became constant centers of pilgrimage for all classes of Odishan people, who thronged there to obtain spiritual blessing for the fulfillment of their wishes and vows. Many people whom living saints were not able to impress were, in times of crisis and difficulty, attracted to the tombs of the saints. It can be worth mentioning here that, the Sufis of Odisha, however, were a great strength in maintaining the structure of Sunni Muslims social and religious order in one piece.

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