

"In the sea there are countless treasures, but if you desire safety, it is on the shore."

Hazrat Sheikh Saadi

BRIEF FACTS:

Birth Name: Makhdum Jalal Uddin bin Mohammad

Passed away in: 746 AH (1347 A.D)

IN DEPTH:

Hazrat Shah Jalal was a great Wali Allah of the Naqshbandi Silsila, and is the most celebrated personality of the region of Sylhet, Bangladesh. Hazrat Shah Jalal's influence commands great respect from Muslims of the Indian subcontinent and is regarded as a national hero by the people of Bangladesh.

Hazrat Shah Jalal's name is also associated with the Muslim conquest of Sylhet, of which he is considered to be the main figure. His place of burial is in Sylhet, and this Mazaar Sharif is visited by hundreds daily.

Early life and education

Born Makhdum Jalal Uddin bin Mohammad, he was later known as Sheikhul Masheikh Hazrat Shah Jalal al-Mujarrad (the last name means "the bachelor", on account of his celibacy).

Hazrat Shah Jalal's date and place of birth is unclear. Various traditions and historical documents differ regarding this. However, a number of scholars claim that he was born in 1271 in Konya, Turkey, and later moved to Yemen either as a child or adult, while others contest he was born in Yemen.

He was the son of a Muslim cleric, who was a follower of the great Sufi saint and Persian poet, Hazrat Jalaluddin Mohammad Rumi.

However, Hazrat Shah Jalal lost his parents in his childhood and was brought up by his maternal uncle, Hazrat Syed Ahmed Kabir, who was a very pious man.

Hazrat Shah Jalal was educated and raised in Makkah by the same uncle. He excelled in his studies and soon became a Hafiz (one who memorises the Holy Qur'an) and was proficient in Islamic theology.

Hazrat Shah Jalal was a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad Yesvi. He achieved Kamaliyat (spiritual perfection) after 30 years of study and meditation.

Travel to India

According to legend, one day his uncle, Sheikh Kabir gave Hazrat Shah Jalal a handful of soil and asked him to travel to Hindustan. In addition to this, he was told to find the place where the earth matched with the smell & colour of the handful of soil given to him. Once he had done so, he was to settle in that place, and devote his life to the propagation & establishment of Islam there.

This place was soon discovered to be Sylhet, Bangladesh.

(NOTE: Bangladesh & Pakistan used to be part of India, before each country claimed its own independence. Back then, India was also known as Hindustan.)

Hazrat Shah Jalal journeyed eastward and reached India in c. 1300, where he met with many great scholars and mystics. On his travels, he arrived at Ajmer Sharif, where he met the great Sufi mystic and scholar, Khwaja Gharib Nawaz Moinuddin Hassan Chishti, who is credited with the spread of Islam in India.

In Delhi, he met with Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya, another great Sufi saint and scholar, who gifted him a pair of pigeons of a special species, which are believed to be found today in the dargah of Hazrat Shah Jalal.

Conquest of Sylhet

Tradition says that a Hindu king named Gaur Govinda used to rule the Sylhet area, which was predominantly Hindu at the time.

Under his rule, a pious Muslim man named Sheikh Burhanuddin, once sacrificed a cow to celebrate the birth of his son (this ceremony is known as Aqeeqa). A bird snatched a piece of the dead cow's

meat and it fell on the temple of the king himself, to which he took great offence – as cows are considered sacred by Hindus. On the orders of the king, Burhanuddin's hands were said to have been cut off and his son killed. Burhanuddin went to the Sultan of Gaur, Shamsuddin Firuz Shah, to whom he submitted a plea for justice. The Sultan accordingly sent an army under the command of his nephew Sikandar Khan Ghazi. He was, however, stopped by rains and flooding. The Sultan then ordered his Chief of the Armed Forces to lead the war.

At this time, Hazrat Shah Jalal was requested to travel to Sylhet along with Sikander Khan Ghazi to rescue Sheikh Burhanuddin. With 360 followers, including his nephew Shah Paran, he reached Bangladesh and joined the Muslim army in the Sylhet campaign.

Knowing that Hazrat Shah Jalal was advancing towards Sylhet, the king Gaur Govinda was struck with fear, and so he removed all ferry boats from the river Surma, thereby cutting off any means of crossing into Sylhet. Legend has it that Hazrat Shah Jalal then crossed the river Surma using a prayer mat as his means of transport.

Upon crossing the river and reaching Sylhet, Hazrat Shah Jalal then ordered the Azan to be sounded, at which the magnificent palace of Gaur Govinda shattered to the ground.

With Hazrat Shah Jalal's help, the Hindus were completely defeated and crushed by the Muslim Army.

Hazrat Shah Jalal and his disciples travelled and settled as far as Mymensingh and Dhaka to spread the teachings of Islam. Some examples are Hazrat Shah Paran in Sylhet, Shah Malek Yemeni in Dhaka, Syed Ahmad Kolla Shahid in Comilla, Syed Nasiruddin in the region of Pargana Taraf, Haji Daria and Sheikh Ali Yemeni. An expedition to Chittagong was led by Khwaja Burhanuddin Qattan and Shah Badruddin. An expedition to Sunamganj was led by Shah Kamal Qattani, whose shrine is located in Shaharpara, Sunamganj.

Later life

During the later stages of his life, Hazrat Shah Jalal devoted himself to propagating Islam. Under his guidance, many thousands of Hindus and Buddhists converted to Islam.

Hazrat Shah Jalal became so renowned that even the world famous explorer Ibn Battuta, then in Chittagong, was asked to change his plans and go to Sylhet to meet this great Saint. On his way to

Sylhet, Ibn Batuta was greeted by several of Hazrat Shah Jalal's disciples who had come to assist him on his journey many days before he had arrived.

Once in the presence of Hazrat Shah Jalal, Ibn Batuta noted that Hazrat Shah Jalal was tall and lean, fair in complexion and lived by the Masjid in a cave, where his only item of value was a goat from which he extracted milk, butter and yoghurt. He observed that the companions of Hazrat Shah Jalal were foreign and known for their strength & bravery. He also mentions that many people would visit Hazrat Shah Jalal to seek guidance and advice.

Hazrat Shah Jalal was therefore instrumental in the spread of Islam throughout north east India, including Assam.

The meeting between Ibn Batuta and Hazrat Shah Jalal is described in his travelogue in Arabic, Rihlah Ibn Batuta (the Journey of Ibn Batuta).

The great Mughal poet, Hazrat Amir Khusro also gives an account of Hazrat Shah Jalal's conquest of Sylhet in his book "Afdalul Hawaade". Even today in Hadramaut, Yemen, Hazrat Shah Jalal's name is established in folklore.

Departure from this world

The exact date of his death is unknown, but he is reported by Ibn Batuta to have died in 746 AH (1347 A.D). He left behind no descendants.

The companions of Hazrat Shah Jalal later told Ibn Batuta that the saint died at the age of 150 years, and that he observed fasting in almost all the days of a year. He also performed Namaaz throughout the nights.

He is buried in Sylhet in his Dargah (tomb), which is located in a neighbourhood now known as Dargah Mohalla. His tomb is unusually large, which indicates his tall physique as described by Ibn Batuta.

His shrine is famous in Sylhet and throughout Bangladesh, with hundreds of devotees visiting daily. At the Dargah is also located the largest mosque in Sylhet, one of the largest in the country.

A distinctive quality of Hazrat Shah Jalal's Mazaar Sharif is the rare species of fish that live there. This species is one of a kind and exclusive to the tomb of this great saint, as it has not been found anywhere else on earth.

These fish, and the pigeons gifted by Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya, are considered sacred treasures of the Mazaar of Hazrat Shah Jalal Naqshbandi .