

Literary Activities of Bairam Khan

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Abstract—Bairam Khan was a towering personality of Mughal empire. He served first three Mughal emperors Babur, Humayun and Akbar. He entered in the service of Babur at the age of sixteen. He was very close to Humayun and played a significant role in re-establishing the Mughal rule in India. During early years of Akbar's reign he became a strong pillar of Mughal empire. He was not only a man of sword but a man of pen also. He was a talented poet and fluent in Persian and Turkish languages. He is author of a *diwan* which proves his poetical ability. He was a liberal patron of man of letters and persons of fine arts. He was a lover of books too.

Keywords – Bairam Khan, Humayun, Manzari of Samarqand, Ram Das, Diwan Bairam Khan, whose real name was Muhammad Bairam Khan Turkoman, is also styled as Bairam Beg in some contemporary and later works¹. He was one of the most distinguished nobles of the Mughal empire and occupies an important place in the history of Mughals. He was a Persian Turk and scion of a famous clan. He was the fifth descent from Ali Shakar Beg of Baharlu Tribe of Quarqulu Turkomans of Persia. He served first three Mughal emperors Babur, Humayun and Akbar. He joined the service of Babur at a tender age of sixteen. He was always with Humayun in the days of his distress and took active part in re-establishing the Mughal empire in India. After the death of Hamayun, he played a significant role in strengthening the Mughal rule in India during the early year's of Akbar's reign.

Bairam Khan was not only a man of sword but a man of pen also. He was a man of letters and have mastery over Turkish and Persian languages. He was more expressive in his Turkish poetry than in his Persian verses.² He left a *Diwan* of Persian and Turkish verses which is edited by E. Denison Ross and published by Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1910. In his introduction to the book Mr. Ross informs us that Mr. Harinath De, knowing his interest in Turki language, handed a copy of

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Diwan to him and he at once set to work at its transcription. He further informs that “The *divan* in really two *Divans*, one being in Persian and other in Turki (Or Chaghatai), the mother-tongue of the Mughal emperors of Delhi.”³ Seven *qasidahs*, thirty eight quatrains, nineteen *fardiyat*, six *qatat* and several couplets of incomplete *ghazals* are in the Persian section of the *Diwan* of Bairam Khan.⁴ Bairam Khan wrote on various subjects. The following is the commencement of a *qasidah* which he wrote on the astrolabe –

“What globe is this whose axis rests on the centre (of the universe).
This full moon across whose midst the metors dart ?
Though it vaunts itself the equal of both Sun and Moon.
It gladly enrolls itself among the emperors slaves.
The sun's resplendent orb looms not so largely in our eyes.

As the crescents which surmount the banners of the world
famed king of kings –

Both sky and earth are ever subject to his authority,
Like the seal of a ring on the hand of a monarch as powerful as Jamshid.
This globe brings with it a golden tray full of *asharfis*.
To scatter before the feet of great kings,
The feet of the emperor of exalted dignity,
Humayun, before whom, in order to obtain honour,
The sky itself places the head of humility on the threshold of the court.”⁵

Bairam Khan wrote quatrains also, which were mainly on common and traditional themes. Followings is the example of his quatrain –

“Oh ! Thou whose street is the *Ka'bah* of our happiness,
Whose Face is the point towards which we turn in prayer !
Blest will be the time when thou graciously drawest us to Thyself,
Freeing us from the bonds of ceremonialism and conventionality !”⁶

Bairam Khan was a Shia muslim and he wrote many *qasidahs* in praise of Hazrat Ali and his descendents.⁷ The following are the opening couplets of *qasidah*, which he wrote in praise of Hazrat Ali –
Though a King be so great that his crown towers over the nine heavens,
If he be not the slave of Ali let dust be cast upon his head.

Hope not for love for the king of men from the one who knows
not his own father,

Cujus matris ignominiam discooperiut alienus.”⁸

Bairam Khan's intelligence and quick witty nature proved by an incident. One late night Humayun was in conversation with khan,

who was overcome by drowsiness. Humayun noticed this and in a rebuking manner told, “Ha Bairam Khan! It is to you that I am speaking”. Bairam Khan understood his mistake and replied, “Yes Sir, I am attentive, but since I have heard that in the service of kings a watch should be kept over the eyes, and among *darvishes* a watch should be kept over the heart, and among learned men a watch should be kept over the tongue. I was just pondering over which I should keep a watch, for your Majesty is a King, a *darvish*, and a learned man.” Humayun was pleased with his humble reply and approved it.⁹

Bairam Khan was not only a man of letters but he was a patron of learned persons also. His liberal patronage attracted scholars, poets and musicians, who come from far off places and enjoyed his favour. He rewarded them with presents, fiefs and ranks.¹⁰ After reconquest of Qandahar in 1545, Humayun appointed Bairam Khan as the governor of Qandahar. During his tenure as governor, he extended his patronage to learned men and Qandahar became a rendezvous for scholars. Mulla Qatai, Hakim Ain al Shirazi were prominent among them. Bairam Khan built a library near his residence. Mulla Qatai and Hakim Ain-al-Mulk spent most of their time in this library. Bairam Khan also joined them in discussion on various subjects.¹¹ Another learned man Mir Jan Siyaqi also enjoyed Bairam Khan’s patronage.¹² Some other scholars and poets who were connected to Bairam Khan were Hijaz Khan Badauni, Mir Mahmud the *munshi*, Muhammad Hashim, Manzari of Samarqand and many other persons.

Hijaz Khan Badauni was an Afghan amir. He wrote a *qasidah* and dedicated it to Bairam Khan who gave him one lakh tankas and jagir of Sirhind as a reward.¹³ Mir Mahmud, the *munshi*, whose poetical name was Mahwi.¹⁴ had poetical talent. His poetic merit is proved by the fact that one of his *quatrain* is included in the beginning of the *Diwan* of Bairam Khan. The quatrain is following—Of being and of a place of existence there was in the beginning no trace, For all things came into being by virtue of the two letters of the command ‘Be’. Since these two letters were the key of existence.

They have become the opening couplet of the preface to the *divan* of things seen.¹⁵

It has been said that Bairam Khan purchased one of the *ghazals* of Muhammad Hashim, whose poetical name was Hashim. He is also described as Hashimi of Qandhar.¹⁶ Bairam Khan bought this *ghazal*

for sixty thousand tankas but the amount was afterwards increased to one lakh tankas. He presented this *ghazal* of Hashim as his own. The *ghazal* was that which began –

“Who am I? One who has dropped from his hand the reins of his heart.
And has fallen by the hands of his heart in the road of grief.”¹⁷

A pleasing poet Manzari of Samarqand was at Agra in the service of Bairam Khan. He wrote an epic book of kings and included in it about several incidents particularly the battle against Sikandar Sur.¹⁸ He presented it to Bairam Khan at Patyali, who made some corrections in it and told him the entire story of the battle in proper order. He also told him to make necessary corrections in one night. Manzari corrected those three or four hundred couplets in one night and read them to Bairam Khan in the next morning, who generously rewarded him. The following couplet occurs in that poem –

“The sound of the trumpet deafened the sky.

The chief was perplexed by his sudden attack.”¹⁹

Bairam Khan also patronized musicians. Famous musician Ram Das of Lakhnow was patronized by him. He was so expert in music and song that Badaoni termed him as second Tansen. He became one of the close companions of Bairam Khan due to his proficiency in his art. Bairam Khan could not control his tears after listening his sober songs.²⁰ Once he bestowed him one lakh tankas after being impressed by his song. He was himself a good musician and singer. He used to sing songs generally in seclusion but sometimes he sang in the company of his master Humayun who was himself a great lover of music.²¹

Bairam Khan was a lover of books and during his governorship of Ahmadabad he maintained his personal library. He employed several persons such as scribes, book-binders, calligraphist and painters for smooth running of his library. His one employee Maulana Ibrahim Naqqash was a man of literary pursuits and had a poetical temperament. He was a writer, gilder, book-binder and cutter also. He served in library as *Kitabdār* or keeper of books for a long time.²² After him Maushfiq Naqqash, who was an extraordinary painter appointed in library. Bahbud Mirza, a famous calligraphist and Muhammad Amin Khurasani an expert book-binder were also employees of his library. Muhammad Amin Khurasani was famous for his invention of abri paper.²³ During his tenureship as governor of Qandahar Bairam Khan constructed a library

near his residence and here he enjoyed the company of learned persons such as Mulla Qatai, Hakim Ain al Shirazi and others.²⁴

Bairam Khan proved his abilities in all spheres of life. He was a good soldier, general, statesman, administrator, man of letters and a patron of scholars and learned persons. He was himself a talented poet and was fluent in Persian and Turkish languages. He had the ability to compose and recite extempore verses. When he was governor of Qandahar, Humayun organized a feast, which includes an archery match. In this match Humayun hit a target missed by qualified archers. Bairam Khan composed the following ode to mark the event :

“Thine arrow has snatched the fastening of the ball from the crook,
It has made the curve like a meteor grazing the Pleiades.”²⁵

He was a man of generous temperament and rewarded many persons according to their merit. He rewarded three prominent men of letters and art namely Muhammad Hashim Qandahari, Hijaz Khan Badauni and Ram Das of Lakhnow one lakh of tanka each. Badaoni rightly remarks about him. “ In wisdom, generosity, sincerity, goodness of disposition, submissiveness and humility he surpassed all.”²⁶ His legacy was not only continued but enriched by his son Abdul Rahim Khan – i-Khanan also popularly known as Rahim.

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14. He was for twenty five years chief secretary to the empire of Hindustan. (Badaoni, A, Volume. III, op. cit, p. 444)
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