

# The Mystical thoughts of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani from the Perspective of Muhammad Iqbal

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## Abstract

In the intellectual world of Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (d. 1384), also known as *Shah-i Hamadan* ('the king of Hamdan') is not merely a historical figure but also a spiritual guide. This article explores the portrayal of the mystical thoughts and teachings of Hamadani in the poetry of Iqbal. Iqbal viewed Hamadani as the architect of the Kashmir's soul and a master of "active mysticism." Iqbal's relationship with Hamdani is most vividly explored in his Persian masterpiece, *Javid Nama*<sup>1</sup> written in 1932. In this poem, Iqbal meets the spirit of Hamadani in the "heaven of Mercury"<sup>2</sup>. Iqbal deeply admired Hamadani because of his critique of a "monastic" or "escapist" Sufism, and his advocacy of a socially-transformative spirituality. Iqbal famously credits Hamadani with turning Kashmir into *Iran-i Sagheer* ('Little Iran'). According to him, Hamadani accomplished this by bringing into Kashmir not just theology, but also seven hundred artisans, who introduced crafts like shawl-weaving and calligraphy. Iqbal praised Hamadani as a great mentor, a leader, and an architect for the destiny of nations. He considered him a personality who, with the help of knowledge, Sufism, and mysticism, brought prosperity to the land of Kashmir and the people of this region. For Iqbal, Hamadani was a sun who illuminated not only the land of Kashmir but also the entire Indian subcontinent and Central Asia with the light of mysticism, and the rays of art, politics and ethics.

## Keywords

Sufism, Mysticism, Kubrawiya, Iran-e-sager, Kashmir, Shah of Hamadan, Ali Sani.

## Introduction

Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, also known as '*Shah-i Hamadan*' (The King of Hamadan) and '*Amir-i Kabir*' (The Great Leader), was a Kubrawiyya saint who came to Kashmir in 781 AH/ 1379 CE along with 700 of his followers. He is considered a prominent figure in Persian Sufi literature and Islamic history. He emphasized the strict observance of Islamic precepts and considered mysticism as a path to moral perfection and service to the people. Scholars

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and scholars have called him ‘*Sultan-ul-Arifin*’ and the people of Kashmir have called him ‘*bani-i Islam* (Founder of Islam) and ‘*Ali Sani*’ (the second Ali). His role as a propagator of Sufism and mysticism in Kashmir and Central Asia provides a treasure trove of research topics.

In reality, Hamadani was more than a hermit mystic; he was the architect of a civilization that ‘illuminated’ the land of Kashmir with the title of *Iran-i Sagir* (Little Iran). He was a ‘sun’ that ‘illuminated’ not only the land of Kashmir but also the entire Indian subcontinent and Central Asia with the ‘rays’ of art, politics and ethics. His mysticism was based on change in ‘behavior among the people’. He believed that a mystic and Sufi should not be a burden on society, and for this reason, he himself was engaged in weaving hats and shawls, and encouraged his followers to earn a lawful living. By traveling to Kashmir, in addition to spreading Islam, he also promoted handicrafts, especially the art of shawl and carpet weaving, and brought this art to world fame. He emphasized the strict observance of Islamic rules, and considered mysticism as a way to perfect morality and serve the people. Hamadani is believed to have traveled to Kashmir three times, the most important of which was in 781 AH/ 1379. He went to this region with 700 of his companions and students, many of whom were Iranian artists and craftsmen. This mass migration led to religious change in Kashmir. With the influence of his scholarly discourses and debates, thousands of people in this region converted to Islam, and mosques and *khanqahs* were built. Hamadani is considered the main factor in the influence of the Persian language in Kashmir. He and his companions helped in the spread of Persian language, and its emergence as the official, literary and religious language of this region. Unlike many Sufis and mystics of his time, he was not indifferent to the affairs of the government. His most important work, *Dhakhirat al-Muluk* is a treatise on political ethics and the duties of rulers. In this book, he teaches kings that power is a tool for implementing justice and protecting the oppressed, and considers a just ruler to be the ‘shadow of God’ on earth. His works, which have been compiled into more than 110 treatises and books, are a treasure trove of Persian prose and poetry. Some of them include:

*Awrad al-Fatahiyya*: A collection of prayers and invocations that are still recited in mosques and *khanqahs* of Kashmir and Tajikistan in a special tone.

*Chihil Asrar*: A collection of mystical *ghazals* that show the depth of his love for the truth. These *ghazals* are full of mystical teachings and the poet has expressed the different stages of Sufism in this collection of *ghazals*.

*Dhakhirat al-Muluk*: - A book on ethics and politics that guides rulers in observance, justice and spirituality. He wrote it at a time when many Sufis avoided the courts of kings. The saint believed that if the ruler was reformed, the entire country and society would be reformed.

*Risalah Dah Qa'idah*: - An explanation of ten basic principles for spiritual path and conduct. This treatise is one of the most widely used mystical texts of the saint.

### **Mir Syed Ali Hamadani from the perspective of Muhammad Iqbal**

Iqbal had a very special devotion to Hamadani, and considered him the architect of culture and civilization in Kashmir. Iqbal praised Hamadani as a great mentor, a leader and an architect for the destiny of nations. He considered him a personality who, with the help of science, Sufism and mysticism, enriched the land of Kashmir and its people. This brought Kashmir to a position so that it has been dubbed *Iran-i sagir*' (the little Iran). In his collection of poems titled *Javid Nameh*, Iqbal introduced Hamadani as one of the spiritual and cultural pillars of Central Asia. In his view, Hamadani's role was not limited to propagating the religion of Islam, but he considered him the architect of civilization and culture, as in the following verses:

سید السادات، سالار عجم	دست او معمار تقدیر امم
تا غزالی درس الله هو گرفت	ذکر و فکر از دودمان او گرفت
مرشد آن کشور مینو نظیر	میر و درویش و سلاطین را مشیر
خطه را آن شاه دریا آستین	داد علم و صنعت و تہذیب و دین
آفرید آن مرد ایران صغیر	با هنر های غریب و دلپذیر
یک نگا او گشاید صد گره	خیز و تیرش را بدل راهی بده

(جاوید نامہ؛ ص: 850)<sup>3</sup>

The chief of chiefs, The leader of *Ajm*

Even he whose hand was the builder of the destiny of nations.

Till Ghazali learnt the lesson of *Allahoo*,

In *Zikr* and *Fikr*, even he had been a disciple of this Learned and pious ouse.

The religious gGuide of that beautiful, emerald Valley of *Kashmeer*,

A *Prince* and a *Darvesh*, and a counselor of Kings.

To this tract of land that munificent prince gave knowledge and the fine crafts and Religion and Civilization.

By teaching the people sweet and wonderful Arts,

That man of heroic proportions created a small Iran in this charming valley.

From him one glance can open a hundred Knots:

Arise thou and let his arrow pierce thy Heart.

(*Javid Nama*, 250)<sup>4</sup>

Iqbal considered Hamadani as the architect of the destiny of nations. He believed that Hamadani was not only a preacher but also changed the destiny of the people of Kashmir and Central Asia by introducing art and crafts. Iqbal placed him on the same level as Imam Muhammad Ghazali, and also pointed out his tremendous influence on the culture of Kashmir. Iqbal points out that Hamadani brought the Iranian spirit and Islamic art to that land. Iqbal has referred to his boundless generosity in the phrase ‘King of the Sea, the Sleeve’ and has said that Hamadani brought four great gifts to the people, including science, industry, culture and religion. Iqbal considers Hamadani a man of truth who was not a hermit like other mystics. He mentions in his poems that Hamadani, despite his high mystical positions, was engaged in reforming the society and guiding the rulers of the time. In the thought of Iqbal, ‘poverty’ does not mean lack, but rather means being rich, and not depending on anything other than God. Iqbal considers Hamadani to be the embodiment of this form of poverty, so that he did not bow down before the rulers, and his spiritual power was greater than the glory of the kings of the time. That is, he was in fact a mystic with action.

### **Mir Syed Ali Hamedani in *Javid Nameh***

*Javid Nameh* is one of the most prominent and important poetics works of Iqbal, and written in Persian. The collection is one of the best masterpieces of Iqbal, which embodies the maturity and perfection of his thoughts. The subject of this collection of poems is an imaginary journey which is guided by the spirit of the Persian poet Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (d.1273). Iqbal travels through different planets and heavens, and meets and talks with the embodied spirits of great men and mystics. During this celestial journey, he presents his views on religion, politics, art, love and self-knowledge.

In one of his poems, Iqbal reaches the other side of the heavens after having passed through different planets such as the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn in this celestial journey. He meets the spirit of Hamadani once he reaches the planet of Saturn. Here, a long conversation takes place between the two, which shows the intellectual dimensions of Hamadani from Iqbal's perspective. Iqbal asks Hamadani some questions, and asks him to find the solution to them. Following are the couplets in his poem that capture the conversation:

از تو خواهم سر یزدان را کلید      طاعت از ما جست و شیطان آفرید  
زشت و ناخوش را چنان آراستن      در عمل از ما نکوئی خواستن  
از تو پرسم این فسون سازی که چه      با قمار بد نشین بازی که چه  
مشت خاک و این سپهر گرد گرد      خود بگوی زبیدش کاری که کرد  
کار ما، افکار ما، آزار ما      دست با دادان گزیدن کار ما

(جاوید نامه؛ ص: 851)<sup>5</sup>

From thee I long for a key to the secrets of *Yazdan*,

Is it not surprising that from me, he demanded obedience, but himself proceeded to create the *Shaitan*?

So, to have decorated the Bad and the Unpleasant,

And then from me to have expected virtue and righteousness!

What is the meaning of all this Sorcery?

May I venture to ask why this round of play with a *Gambler* of such evil repute?

A mere Handful of Dust, in such helpless condition, so wantonly and heartlessly thrown in the midst of a vast Universe,

Say Thou, Thyself, is this what has been done a worthy and an honorable act?

My actions and my thoughts are a source of the greatest torture for me;

All that I do, seems to amount only to this that, I continue to bite mine own hands with my own teeth!

(*Javid Nama*; Page: 252)<sup>6</sup>

Hamadani answers these questions as follows:

بنده کز خویشتن دارد خبر      آفریند منفعت را از ضرر!  
بزم با دیو است آدم را وبال      رزم با دیو است آدم را جمال!  
خویش را بر اهرمن باید زدن      تو همه تیغ آن همه سنگ فسن!  
تیز تر شو تا فتند ضرب تو سخت      ورنه باشی در دو گیتی تیره بخت!

(جاوید نامه؛ ص: 852)<sup>7</sup>

The person who is aware of his own self,

He can create good out of harm and evil.

For man to associate with Demons is to invite disaster;

But for him to wage a war against them is most excellent; for it contributes to his manliness and charm.

*Ahriman* should be struck with all the force of the Self;

For thou art like a sword and *Ahriman* for thee is a whetstone which sharpens thy edge.

Be swift that thy blow fall with all the greater force:

Or else, in both the worlds thou shalt be most unfortunate.

(*Javid Nama*; Page: 252)<sup>8</sup>

After receiving the answers to the questions, Iqbal talks about the suffering of the people of Kashmir, and asks Hamadani for a solution. Iqbal complains to him about the slavery and misery of the people of Kashmir, and asks Hamadani why the nation he had awakened is so helpless today. Following are the verses:

زیر گردون آدم، آدم را خورد      ملتی بر ملتی دیگر چرد  
جان ز اهل خطه سوزد چون سپند      خیزد از دل ناله های دردمند  
از خودی تا بی نصیب افتاده است      در دیار خود غریب افتاده است

دست مزد او بدست دیگران      ماهی رودش به شست دیگران  
کاروانها سوی منزل گام گام      کار او ناخوب و بی اندام و خام  
از غلامی جذبه های او بمرد      آتشی اندر رگ تا کش فسرده  
در زمانی صف شکن هم بوده است      چیره و جانباز و پر دم بوده است

(جاوید نامه؛ ص: 852)<sup>9</sup>

Under the wide heavens man is the enemy of Man,

And nations are devouring up nations.

From grief over the miserable plight of the people of this beautiful valley of *Kashmeer*,

My heart burns like seeds of the wild rue when thrown on glowing embers; and cries of a deep pain rise from my breast.

Since they happen to have received no share from the Consciousness of self,

In their own native land, they live like aliens, for whom no one cares in the least, for whose welfare no one worries at all.

For his highly skilled labor, the *Kashmeere* is paid according to the whims of others;

And the abundant fish in his mountain streams is bred to be hooked by others.

While the world over caravans march steadily to their goal,

His works and his fate remain in deplorable straits: they take no shape; they continue to remain immature.

Prolonged slavery has killed his emotions, his ambitions and his self-respect;

And the fire of his wines has died ere yet it had flowed out of the veins of his trained vines.

For there has been a time, when the *Kashmere* was a great and mighty *Saf Shikan*, a warrior who could pierce in battle the serried ranks of his enemies,

In those days, indeed, he was brave and courageous and surprisingly full of life.

(*Javid Nama*; Page: 254)<sup>10</sup>

Hamadani, in response to Iqbal's laments, does not abandon him to despair, but teaches him a great lesson about freedom and servitude. Hamadani acquaints him with the truth of

servitude, and says that servitude to God means freedom from all mortal powers. He tells Iqbal that the body can be sold, but the soul cannot be sold. If the people of Kashmir awaken their souls, they can break the chains of colonialism and slavery, and become free. He sends a message to the people that Sufism should not mean surrendering to oppression, but rather the Sufi and the mystic should be the source of revolution and change. Hamadani also points out to Iqbal that the captivity of the body is not important; the captivity of the soul is dangerous. The true servitude to God means becoming the ruler of the world (conquering the universe) and that man should not sink into his shell, but should rely on himself and change his destiny. Hamadani replies as follows:

تن همه خاک است و جان والا گهر	باتو گویم رمز باریک ای پسر
پاک را از خاک می باید شناخت	جسم را از بهر جان باید گداخت
رفت از دست تو آن لخت بدن	اگر ببری پاره ی تن را ز تن
گر ز دست او را دهی، آید بدست	لیکن آن جانی که گردد جلوه مست
هست اندر بند و اندر بند نیست	جوهرش با هیچ شی مانند نیست
یافتن، خود را بخود بخشودن است	خویش را نا یافتن نابودن است
رخت از زندان خود بیرون کشید	هر که خود را دید و غیر از خود ندید
خوشر از نوشینه داند نیش را	جلوه بدمستی که ببند خویش را
پیش او زندان او لرزان شود	در نگاهش جان چو باد ارزان شود
ورنه جانش یک دو دم مهمان اوست	تاز جان بگذشت، جانش جان اوست

(جاوید نامه؛ ص: 856)<sup>11</sup>

My son, let me draw thy attention to a subtle point,

Remember that the body is all dust and the thing of value in it is only the soul.

For the sake of the soul, the body should be melted and purified:

And the substance that is pure should be duly distinguished from all that is not pure.

If thou take away a part of the Body,

That part of the body shall pass out of thy hands.

But the soul that becomes intoxicated with the grandeur and beauty of the manifestation,

If thou let it slip out of thy hand, that is really the time of the great discovery and realization on thy part that it exists; that at last, it has come to thy hand.

Its Essence cannot be likened to anything else,

Apparently, it is subject to Limitations, but in fact it is not subject to any limitations at all!

To be intoxicated with the Manifestation is really to discover one's own self;

It means in dark nights to shine like a brilliant star!

Failure to discover one's self is tantamount to non-existence;

And when thou discover thyself, in fact thou bestowed that wealth on one but thine own self.

Whosoever saw himself and saw nothing other than himself,

He pulled his goods out of the prison formed by his own Person!

In his eye's life becomes as cheap and commo a thing as the wandering winds;

And when confronted with such a man, that which purports to function as his prison, begins to tremble with fear.

And then, when he waxes careless in regard to his life, his life really becomes his life:

Otherwise it is his only as a guest, only for a brief while.

(*Javid Nama*; Page: 259)<sup>12</sup>

In this meeting, what is important is that Iqbal introduces Hamadani as a revolutionary mystic and Sufi. For Iqbal, Hamadani is someone who not only recited the divine *dhikr* but also taught the people the way of life, industry and perseverance. Hamadani traveled to Kashmir three times and throughout his life was on the move to convey the message of truth. This 'restless spirit' was exactly what Iqbal wanted to awaken in the people. In Iqbal's poems and in Iqbal's thoughts, Hamadani is known as more than a hermit Sufi; he is a model of a fighting mystic and a social reformer.

## **Conclusion**

Iqbal had a very special devotion towards Hamadani, and considered him the architect of culture and civilization in the land of Kashmir. He praised Hamadani as a great mentor, a foreign leader and an architect for the destiny of nations and considered him a personality

who, with knowledge, Sufism and mysticism, enriched the land of Kashmir, and the people of this region. For him, Hamdani opened many knots with a single glance, and in fact, brought the land of Kashmir to a position that has been dubbed *Iran-i Sagir*. In Iqbal's poems, Hamadani is known as more than a hermit Sufi, but rather as a model of a mystic and social reformer.

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<sup>1</sup>. *Javeed Nama*, “Book of Eternity”, is a masterpiece Persian poem by Allama Iqbal published in 1932, detailing a spiritual journey through heavens with Maulana Rumi as guide.

<sup>2</sup>. Heaven of Mercury (فلک زحل)

<sup>3</sup>. Iqbal, Sir Mohammad; *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal Farsi (Javid Nama)*; Page No. 850; Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore: 1994.

<sup>4</sup>. Niaz, A.Q.; *Iqbal’s Javid Nama (Versified English Rendering)*; Page No. 250; Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore: 1984.

<sup>5</sup>. Iqbal, Sir Mohammad; *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal Farsi (Javid Nama)*; Page No. 851; Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore: 1994.

<sup>6</sup>. Niaz, A.Q.; *Iqbal’s Javid Nama (Versified English Rendering)*; Page No. 252; Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore: 1984.

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