

The New Face of Islam (Two Muslim Shrines in Eastern India) Kaipadar and Jahania Pir

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The homo-sapiens, who were the earliest form of human beings in the Palaeolithic world, gradually desired to adopt and lead a more disciplined and peaceful life, particularly after developing group existence into a society of co-existence with the onset of the Neolithic period. In order to be able to perform and discharge the social responsibilities they evolved different kinds of philosophies based on moral values and ethics which slowly took the shape of religions. Their chief aim and objective were showing mercy and compassion to all and distribution of love and kindness among fellow human beings. In the long run love for all animate and inanimate objects, suppression of narrow and selfish desires, full respect for other's legitimate claims and rights, the idea to live and let live became the mode and principle of each and every religious groups and communities. The real worth and importance of a religion, therefore, could be gauged very well from the extent it upholds and justifies human rights, values, dignity, equality, care and compassion. As a whole, it can be said that the course of the march of civilizations in history is solely for the purpose of building and construction of a just, beautiful, disciplined and organized human society which can take its followers in the right path.¹

Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam et al regard the *Gita*, *Agamas*, *Tripitaks*, *Bible* and *Koran* respectively as their holy scriptures, to the tenets of which generally they adhere.² The preachers of all these religions had given their sermons and preaching on Godhead at different points of time with a great ambition to transform this world into a divine society where there would be no room for quarrel, animosity or inimical relations whatsoever. Their main motive was to remove the sufferings of the teeming millions of their followers while establishing a just and orderly society. References may be made to the ancient sages and seers of India who uttered :

Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah
Sarve Santu Niramayah
Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu
Ma Kaschit Dukha Bhag Bhavet

Its meaning is that let all feel happy and contented. Let all be without pains and sufferings. Let all see good and noble things. Let not grief or sorrow overtake anybody.

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Very correctly this blessing was not only meant for any one community but for the entire human population worldwide. Gandhiji once remarked that Allah of the Muslims, God of the Christians and Iswar of the Hindus are but different manifestations of the same divinity.³ Infact, the best offering to the Almighty can be made in terms of unity and brotherhood of all the fellow human beings tied together in the bond of friendship cutting across all barriers like caste, creed, colour, community, gender, countries and continents. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, two important and stalwart nationalist leaders of India of the period of freedom struggle, in a fitting reply to the communalists working for the partition of greater India observed that Allah could never be confined to any one community alone as He actually belongs to the entire human race at large.⁴

The wrong and dubious interpretations of the religions in the hands of fundamental elements of late have put the world on the brink of a near holocaust and great difficulties. In the 21st century when the effort is to attain more self-sufficiency by way of developing research in the fields of science and technology and equipping the present generation with free flow of information and education religious bigotry and ugly human behaviour by some misdirected goons push the entire civilization of the day backwards to the point of animal existence from which we had opted out much earlier. The so-called faithfuls only believe and take for granted what is written in their own scriptures while making contempt of others. A sick mindset, as a result, has developed which upholds only the religion it professes claiming that it happens to be the best one and others worst. It leads to disputes, altercations and unending dialogues on many occasions even to the extent of extermination of the opposing groups or sections, as if they have no right to live. In the maze of overriding passions and emotions basic human values are thrown asunder and take a back seat. The fear that the followers of one sect or religion might grow at the cost of the other is enough to ignite the match stick and derail the peace process.

A reading of the World History and Civilisations⁵ tell us clearly that even great nations and societies got sliced and bifurcated in order to accommodate warring groups. Even thereafter wars and conflagrations continue to take their tolls of human lives. It creates more headaches, insecurity of life and property in various parts of the world. Added to all these killings, bloodshed, rapes and all such kinds of human carnage terrorism has raised its ugly head on the foundation of fundamental ideas and notions about a religion.

Recent violences in India happening on 26/11⁶ and elsewhere, in the world scenario particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 incident are subjects of careful scrutiny and close examination since they give a new dimension to terrorist activities world over. But merely by defaming Islam in the context of terrorism is highly deplorable and disturbing. An attempt to politicize the issues is even more alarming as well as distressing. As revealed Islam has got so many positive aspects which are simply lost sight of in the maze of lots of hues and cries raised against it. In areas of Eastern India, that is in Odisha, so many Muslim shrines and monuments depict and demonstrate to the world the very essence of universal brotherhood, amity, peace and tolerance leading to a new kind of synthesis in the cultures of Hindus and Muslims based on unity, friendship and co-

existence. Among them **Kaipadar** and **Jahania Pir** are two such religious fabrics, which stand supreme, teaching to one and all a new message which the people across the globe must have the heart to understand and know.

Kaipadar, the shrine of Bokhari Baba, which attracts thousands of devotees belonging to both Hindu and Muslim communities since the 12th century, is located about 40 km. away from the capital city of Odisha, Bhubaneswar.⁷ Quite interestingly the *Khadim* or the Muslim priest here does the offerings while the Hindu chef prepares the *prasad* (food offering) and a gardener also belonging to Hinduism supplies the necessary flowers and sandal paste. When the offerings are made at that time the beating of the drum invariably is done which is totally forbidden near Muslim religious places like the mosques. The *Urs* ceremony of the Muslim devotees as well as Satyanarayan *pala* of the Hindu devotees also take place here in turns satisfying both the co-religionists. It is because when the Muslims regard the shrine as *Jindapir*, the Hindus revere Him as *Satyapir*.⁸ The common aspect in all these celebrations is that both the Hindus and Muslims share each other's joys and happiness here while taking active part in it. In the evenings amid chanting of *slokas* by Hindu followers the earthen lamps (*dipas*) are lighted in order to seek the divine blessings. On Thursdays particularly a special type of *prasad*, called *khiri / kheer*, a sweet dish, is offered at the shrine and later distributed among the followers belonging to both the communities. Like eight Muslim families working as servitors, there are also some Hindu families engaged to provide flowers, garlands, sandal paste, peacock tail, *tulsi*, *agur*, *sirini* and *khiri* to the shrine. The devotees and followers generally come here to get rid of the evil spirits, diseases and mostly to seek fulfillment of their long standing wishes. They stay here for seven days, twenty-one days and in some cases months together in order to fulfil their own wishes and desires. Coming from far off places like Afganistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq and other Arabian countries including Indonesia and Malaysia they feel great solace while visiting this *Mazhar* or shrine of long standing. According to a popular estimate when the Baba at Ajmer is called *Shenshah-i-Hind*, the Baba at Kaipadar is regarded as *Shenshah* of Odisha.

As per the long held tradition of the land, Hazrat Syed Abdulla Shah *alias* Jalaluddin Shah Bukhari, a Muslim missionary of great repute, set out from Bukhara situated in Central Asia towards Hindustan in the Medieval times and reached here around 1136 A.D. after visiting Mecca and Medina. He found the place, Kaipadar, so enchanting that he wanted to say his Friday prayers here. But before that he wanted some water to quench his thirst and when he was digging the soil with an iron stick at that very moment there arrived a Hindu milkman who became his first disciple. One fine morning he found the Hazrat Baba sitting in deep penance surrounded on all sides by termites and when he urged him to come out the Baba replied that it was the right time to renounce this world for the heavenly abode. When the disciple also expressed his desire to accompany him, it was agreed. Then both of them attained *nirvana* then and there in the holy month of *Ramdan* in 1136 A.D. and what was left of them was a huge termite hill. The people, who came afterwards, started worshipping this hill facing West, draping a cloth of about 22 meters. Later on a shrine of about 100' in height was built up over the holy spot on a 5 acre land containing a mosque, *madrassa* and guest house. In 1735 king Ramachandra Deva of Khurda visited the shrine and donated some lands for its upkeep

and maintenance. He also made necessary arrangements for holding the regular rituals and offering of *prasad* (food) and flowers required for the shrine. Thus, a Muslim *Khadimdar*, a Hindu milkman and gardener were engaged at once for the purpose. Resembling the shrine at Mecca the *Mazhar* here facing the West has also four entry points on all four sides being encircled by the houses of both Hindu and Muslim devotees. On the south of the shrine a big mosque was built during 1923-25 and behind it there is the graveyard of the Muslims. A guest house, in the name of Usmania Sarai, is also located nearby which was constructed in 1928 by one Hazi Usman Ali of Kolkata. In the shrine complex there are seven rest shades, one kitchen, one room for keeping the huge drum and a well. The religious symbol of both the Hindus and Muslims i.e., half-moon topped by a flag adorn the peak of the shrine.

The philosophy and teachings of Bokhari Baba are both quite instructive as well as illustrative in nature. The Baba always advised his followers belonging to both Hindu and Muslim faiths about the real duties in life. With great humility he asked one and all to give up all worldly pleasures and attachments. Also to treat everybody equally well with malice towards none was another important point in his teachings. He inculcated in all a light of hope and advocated social justice, fair play, universal brotherhood, personal purity and most important of all, religious tolerance. He urged upon all to come above narrow considerations of caste, creed and colour and also that of gender. Later on, in 1872 all these tenets of the Baba got a new tone with the introduction of *Satyapir pala*, a special kind of socio-religious celebration, which convinced the people of both the communities, Hindus and Muslims alike in Odisha that Iswar and Allah are but two names of the same great divinity.⁹

Yet another shrine of great importance is that of **Jahania Pir** located on a huge sand dune to the south of Kakatpur in the district of Puri on the sea-beach itself.¹⁰ It is about 25' to 30' in height and the circumference on the top is of 100'. It is believed that the shrine was of a much bigger shape originally but now-a-days due to the disturbances caused by repeated waves of the sea (Bay of Bengal) as well as strong wind blowing over it the shape of the sand dune is slowly being reduced. However, on the top portion of the sand dune one finds a small hut covered with bamboo sticks and palm leaves. The floor of the hut is generally kept clean and a pair of wooden shoes is all that it has. Actually nobody visits the inside except a Muslim priest, who cleans it and after putting the wooden shoes (*kathau*) in the right place lights a lamp before it. A remarkable thing is that a person visiting the site usually leaves behind a walking stick or an umbrella or any other kind of stick inside since such a belief has gained ground over the time that if any one tries to bring them back then he or she would be cursed with incalculable suffering and hardship. A Muslim priest called *Saji* comes in the evening, cooks *fatia*, a kind of *kheer* (sweet dish) prepared of milk and rice, lights a lamp (*dipa*) and offers it to Jahania Pir. Of course, he reads the *Namaz* first and then does the rest of the things only afterwards.

For the daily offerings at the shrine actually 200 acres of lands almost rent free are attached to it. Out of it other kinds of rituals, and expenses incurred towards making better provisions for the pilgrims coming as far as from Iran, Afghanistan, Arab countries and Sri Lanka are usually met. Not only the Muslims but also 95 percent of the Hindus

living in the native area are devotees of the shrine of Jahania Pir. The Hindus forget their other religious obligations and gather here in large numbers particularly during the time of holding of some marriage ceremonies, sickness or fulfillment of long pending wishes and desires. Even the upper caste people here give their new born babies the name of Jahania or Jahan as per their earlier vows taken here before the birth of such babies. Some Hindus, particularly who face litigation also observe rituals called *guharia* i.e., lying in a prostrated form in the shrine for a number of days wishing judicial decrees awarded in their favour.

When actually Hazrat Muhammad Jahania came to Kakatpur and founded his shrine here and from which exact date the rituals began to be performed by the *Sajis* is a matter of controversy and therefore, little obscure in the absence of concrete historical facts and records. What is available now is in the form of a lot of legends and folklores. The diary maintained by Jahania during his life time called *Musafar Nama*, written in Persian, was translated first of all into Urdu in 1904 by one Gulam Ali of Delhi and printed at Lucknow.¹¹ Most probably he made for Hindustan from his native land Persia and after visiting Mecca he reached here during the period of Sultan Jalaluddin Khalji, the founder of Khalji dynasty, in 1290-96 A.D. Calling himself *Naosa* or the grandson of Prophet Mahammad he visited places after places in the country and finally came to Utkal i.e., modern Odisha. The people here finding him very wise and kind hearted started regarding him as *Mukaddam*. Thus, he became known as Mukaddam Jahania Pir who could perform so many magical tricks among other such feats during his life time for which the common people attributed divinity to him. One such was that for the purpose of meditation he was daily going inside the sea to a tiny island and again returning to the mainland. The sea as was believed usually receded when Mukaddam Jahania was passing through it. But one day he did not return. Then the people collected his stick, umbrella and wooden shoes (*kathau*) from the sea-shore and started worshipping them by erecting a hut on a sand dune in his honour. Anyway, the shrine continues to evoke a lot of respect and awe not only among the local populace, among which, there are both Muslims and Hindus, the later of course numbering more, but also many devotees coming from outside the state and country.

Kartik Purnima, a holy day in the Hindu calendar falling usually in the month of November every year, happens to be the most auspicious day here when a lot of crowd turns over to offer their prayers and seek divine dispensation and blessings. The most amazing fact is though basically a Muslim shrine the turn over of Hindus on this particular occasion when a big fair takes place, is comparatively more. They chant *Hari nama*, hold *Sankirtans* and offer various kinds of fruits like banana etc. as the *prasad*. The Muslim priest performs the rituals and takes out a portion of the *prasad* as *chanda* as his share. He also receives *dakhina* in the form of small changes for doing this service from the Hindu devotees who feel elated and contented.

The actual philosophy emanating out of the Jahania Pir shrine is that everybody should be treated equally. No discrimination on the ground of caste, creed, colour and religion are allowed. Further, no question of high and low is raised. No issues relating to communalism or fundamentalism ever touched anyone's heart in the last so many hundreds of years. In the place of egoism or disregard for other religions one finds

universalism reigning supreme all the time here. It is basically because preceptors like Jahania Pir in the past had conducted their religious discourses and sermons here without creating any kind of ill feeling, hatred or communal disturbance to the discomfort of religions of other faithfuls.¹²

Islam has thus a new face here, a new dimension in Odisha, and as per the Census of 1981 it happens to be the third most important religion in the state.¹³ In Balasore there is a shrine called Bhujakhia Pir in the honour of a Muslim saint, Shah Swaleh Muhammad and at a little distance away at Dhamnagar another such shrine in the honour of another Muslim saint, Maulana Habibur Rahman also exists. The devotees belonging to both Hinduism and Islam coming from all over the country and even abroad gather here during the time of annual *Urs* for *Fateha* and *Sirini*.¹⁴ There is also another big shrine in Cuttack, the old capital of Odisha, called Kadam Russol, which is visited both by Hindus and Muslims regularly to offer their homage. Odisha thus actually teaches a new way of life to one and all on the basics of Hindu-Muslim unity, cooperation and fellow-feeling while burying deep all kinds of hatred, ill feeling and communal instincts.

The terror attacks like 9/11 in USA, London train bombings and those in Madrid, the NATO storage area near Peshawar in Pakistan and more recently 26/11 in Mumbai confirm that the terror masters are a determined lot who remain at large and are actually focused as they prepare for the next, even more horrendous strike.¹⁵ However, the battle against terrorism must be fought and won not only by making stringent laws but by trying to change the hearts and minds of the people who attempt it believing that they espouse a holy cause and perform a divine mission.¹⁶ The root causes that nurture terrorism of all kinds and hues must be rooted out by holding democratic discussions and debates which have been a liberal tradition of India. In the extremely volatile world of the 21st century if we have to be accepted as a modern society one has to be tolerant of different views and learn to integrate them, or refuse and change them in an orderly civilized manner. The lessons learnt from Odisha may come handy in this important respect.

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