

A Persian Inscription at the Tomb of Shaykh Imām al-Dīn (Peshawar) Revisited

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Abstract

Peshawar remained one of the most important trading and political center of activities throughout the history due to its strategic location. History says that the city became a capital town for different dynasties who ruled over the region and it is, in fact, this area that has been playing a vital role in making and unmaking the history of South Asia. The different archaeological and other remains of these early eras are the testimonies of the glorious past of Peshawar, particularly under the Mughals. The most significant evidences that speak about the splendid rule of the Mughal dynasty are their buildings in form of mosques, tombs and forts or numismatic and epigraphic evidence. The Persian inscription presented here is one of the most important findings which shed light on the religious beliefs and tradition of the people of the time. Although this inscription has been previously mentioned or published by different scholars, unfortunately, it is not only misread but also misinterpreted creating discrepancy in the related history. The present paper is, therefore, an attempt to give a correct reading, accurate translation of the inscription and also comments and draws a historical sketch of the Shyakh' sect mentioned in the inscription.

Key words: Palosai Pirīn, Persian Inscription, Shaykh Kabir Bala Pir, Shaykh Imam al- Din, Mughal Era

The three monuments situated at Palosai Pirīn, Peshawar, became under the focus of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1927-28, but owing to the unwillingness of the owners of the monument, the then department could not take any action for its preservation.¹ However,

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since 1966 till date many scholars and researchers have highlighted its architectural components and decorative details.² The present paper treats with a Persian inscription engraved on a marble slab lying near one of the graves at the tomb chamber of Shaykh Imḡ m al-Dḡ n. The inscription was in the possession of the descendent of the Shaykh for a long time when it was first studied by Molvi Zafar Hassan, who visited the monumental complex in 1927-28, and saw it in a very good state of preservation. In his short but informative report, published in the Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India in the same year, he had given detail of various relevant names and date of the construction of the tomb.³ The text was re-deciphered by Dani in 1994⁴; however he could not stretch its correct translation. Later on Abdur Rahman studied the inscription and commented the name of the deceased, date of his demise and names of custodians and masons who worked in the construction of the tomb from 1652-59.⁵ But his description was more or less the same as already did by of Molvi Zafar Hassan. Therefore an attempt is made here to present its correct English translation as well as to decipher those letters left unstudied by the previous authors.

The inscription is engraved on a smoothed and polished marble slab measuring 37x50x4 cm and contains thirteen lines (one on the left hand margin) of Persian text in pure *nastaliq* style. It starts with الله أكبر (Allah is the Greatest) and then mentions the date and time of the demise of the deceased⁶, the date of the foundation of the tomb, date of its completion and the names of the persons under whom supervision this project was accomplished. It is worth mentioning that this is not the only Persian inscription dated to the time of Emperor Shah Jahan found in our area of study. Another inscription of the same character and style discovered long ago at Peshawar (now in the Peshawar Museum) mentions the construction of a bridge over the River Bara in the year 1039 A.H/ A.D1629 (corresponding to the third regnal year of the emperor)⁷ gives him credit for funding the project. Inscription at the Paloṣai tomb however shows construction as the initiative of Shaykh Kabḡ r Bḡ lḡ Pḡ r, father of Shaykh Imḡ m al-Dḡ n who completed it with the financial support of his relatives and disciples.

Ahmad Hasan Dani has, in contrary to the lining of the original inscription, deciphered the text of the inscription in the following lines. The spaces below show the words left by Dani, while the underlined words reveal the wrongly deciphered/misread words:

- [10] منوره مقدسه مزار فایض الانوار کرده شد و باهالی م حاجی اسکندر خادم
[11] و استا [د] فتح محمد بتاریخ بیستم شهر شعبان المعظم سنه هزار و شصت و نه بود
[12] که کار عمارت مزار فیض آمار با تمام رسید این چند کلمه بطریق یادداشت نوشته شد
[13] کتبه حقیر حضرت علی
[14] دست عنایت حضرت شیخ کبیر بالا پیر----- (Vertically Written)

Translation:

Allah is the Greatest

All disciples, lovers and servants of the high, noble, strong Qādirī order and straight Qāsimī suborder (pathway) are informed that on 23rd of Muḥarram al-ḥaram, Wednesday Night, at the morning time, in the year 1060 [AH], the head of Mystics, lamp of scholars, leader of Creed and Religion, needy to the [blessings of] God, Shaykh Imām al-Dīn-----s/o Haḥrāt Shaykh Kabīr Bīr Pūr made his journey from the temporal world to the eternal abode. And in the year 1063 [AH] as per the instructions of Haḥrāt Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq, teacher [trainer] of religion [mysticism] and Shaykh ‘Abd al-ḥaq and Shaykh Muḥammad Faḥīl and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahīd, may Allah honour them all, construction of the sacred chamber and grave flooded with lights was started. And with the dedication of Qādirī Iskandar (servant) and Ustad [Mason] Fateh Muhammad the work of the construction of the mausoleum got completed on 20th day of Sha‘bān al-Mu‘allam 1069. These few words are recorded for the purpose of remembrance.

With the blessings and solicitude of Haḡ rat
Shaykh Kabḡ r Bḡ lḡ Pḡ r.
Written by the insignificant Haḡ rat ‘Ali.

ḡ abḡ bi has recorded almost all the names mentioned in this inscription in his famous work.⁸ He expresses on the authority of Akhund Darwezah⁹ that Shaykh Qḡ sim (the grandfather of Shaykh Imḡ m al-Dḡ n) born in 959AH/1552AD was the son of Shaykh Qadam and was a disciple of the descendants of Shaykh Abdul Qḡ dir Jḡ lani who gained fame for his scholarship and spirituality and became very influential in Peshawar and its outskirts. He was forced to leave Peshawar by the local administrators of Mirzḡ Muḡ ammad ḡ akḡ m son of Humḡ yḡ n, the Mughal emperor. He went for ḡ ajj and became follower of Qḡ diri order of Sufis and eventually became known as Shaykh Qḡ sim Sulaymḡ ni. On his return from Makkah, the Mughal court of India tried to bring an end to his fame and with the help of one known as ‘ḡ sḡ , he was called to Lahore, and then, on the orders of Jahangir, was imprisoned in the Chinḡ r fort, where he later died. The inscription alludes to his = arḡ qah (a special technique of dhikr “remembrance of God” adopted by a mystic for his students) as Qḡ simiyah “the path way of Qḡ sim”.

Shaykh Kabḡ r (1586-1644), nick name: Bḡ lḡ Pḡ r, the father of Shaykh Imḡ m al-Dḡ n was the son of Shaykh Qḡ sim who was born in Budni, a village on the eastern outskirts of Peshawar, died in India and is buried there.¹⁰

Shaykh Imḡ m al-Dḡ n, one of the 12 sons of Shaykh Kabḡ r and perhaps, the most famous of them all authored several books including *Tḡ rḡ kh e Afghḡ ni*, *Majma’ al-Anḡ b*, *Aḡ nḡ f al-Makhlḡ qḡ t*, *Aḡ wḡ l e Sher Shah* and *Asḡ r e Afghḡ ni*. His four brothers, the names of whom all appear on the memorial tablet are:

1. Shaykh ‘Abdur Razzḡ q
2. Shaykh ‘Abdul ḡ aq
3. Shaykh Muḡ ammad Fḡ ḡ il and
4. Shaykh ‘Abdul Wḡ ḡ id

Conclusion:

The present inscription, which is written in pure *nastaliq* style, is an important piece of evidence regarding historiography, genealogy and religious belief of the saint. The inscription not only reflects and testifies the use of Persian as both common and official vernacular at the time but it is also a very good example of the evolution of Muslim writing system in the area. Those sections of the inscription which were either misinterpreted or misread have been properly deciphered except one place, where letters are completely obliterated. The words left by AH Dani are:

شريفه and علامان (Line: 1)

كبير بالاخير (Line: 5)

ان (Line: 7) and

محمد فاضل و شيخ عبد الواحد (Line: 8).

The wrongly deciphered/misread words are:

بطريقه as وطريقه and تونيه as تويه (Line:2)

بست و سيوم as بيست و سوم (Line:3)

امام الحق والدين as امام العارفين (Line:4)

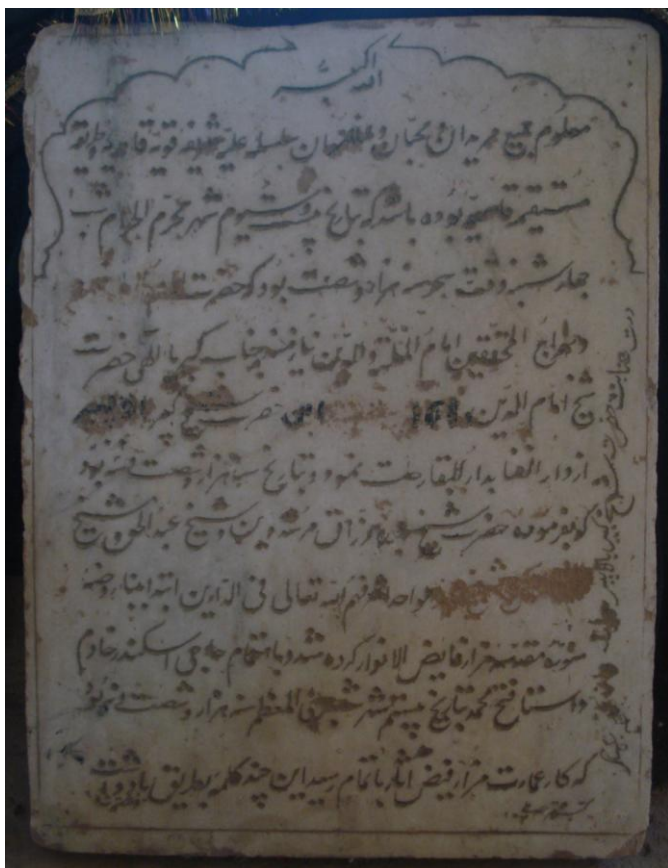
اكثرفهم الله as اشرفهم الله (Line:9)

باهتمام as باهتمام and مقدمه as مقدسه (Line:10)

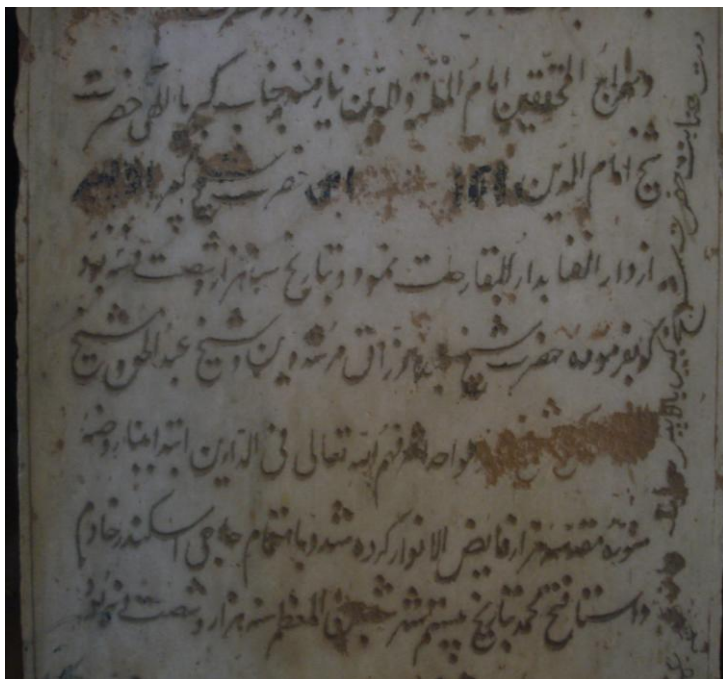
نهم as نه and بستم as بيستم (Line:11) and

كتب مختصر as نوشته شد (Line:12).

Line 13 of the inscription bearing name of the scribe has not at all been deciphered by the previous authors. Likewise, line 14 vertically written on the inscription has also been totally misinterpreted as *بين* and *حنابت* carry no sense in the present contexts. The actual words are *كبير* and *عنایت*.



Inscription on a Marble block at the Tomb of Shaykh Imām al-Dīn



Close view of the obliterated letters of the Inscription

End Notes

¹ Zafar Hassan, 1927-28: 93-4. He made a fragmentary translation of part of the inscription.

² Dani 2002: 9), Rahman, 1981: 117-26, Shakirullah 2012: 3638, Khalil, 1993-94: 28. Pl. 47, Wahid 1992; 75-85. Pl.45, and Khan, 1991: 101.

³ Zafar Hassan, 1927-28: 94.

⁴ Dani, 2002: 221-22.

⁵ Rahman, 1981: 118.

⁶ See Afghani, AH Athar. R^l Fḡ ni Rḡ bi= a au R^l Fḡ ni Tarhun, (Pashto Version). Manzoor Aam Press, Peshawar 1965: 572 who mentioned that Shaykh Imḡ m al-D n died on Wednesday 23 Muharram 1060 A.H/ 26 January 1650.

⁷ Wasi-ud-Din, 'A Persian Inscription in Peshawar City', *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1908-9*, Reprinted in 1990- Swati Publications, Delhi 1908-9: 201-4.

⁸ See ḡ ab^l bi, 'Abd al ḡ ay, Pata Khazḡ na "The Hidden Treasure" (1997) translated into English by ḡ ab^l bi, Khushḡ l, pages: 160-162.

⁹ *Makhzan-e Islṭ m*, p. 307.

¹⁰ ṭ abṭ bi, p. 162.

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