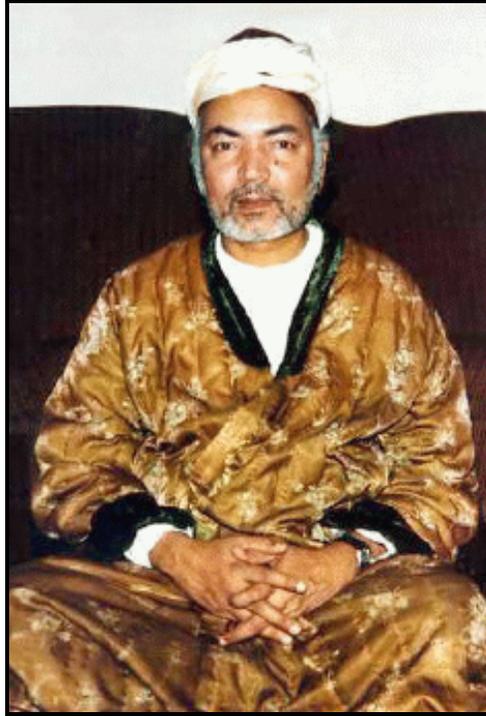


Hazrat Mirza Qadeer Shah Baig
Gudri Shah Baba, r.a.



Reflections on Dr. Baig, r.a.

by SYED MUMTAZ ALI

Every religion in the beginning is a minority affair. The Prophet of Islam and the early Muslims suffered persecution and made *Hijrah* (migration) to Medina where they established the first Islamic state within a territory not exceeding a few kilometers. In the dozen remaining years of his life, through armed conflict, diplomacy and statesmanship, the Prophet ruled over more than a million square kilometers of territory which included the whole of the Peninsula of Arabia and southern parts of Iraq and Palestine. Hardly fifteen years after his death, by the time of Caliph Uthman, the Prophet's followers ruled over three continents. They later entered Europe and expanded their domains in Asia and Africa.

These are the words of Dr. M. Hamidullah of Paris, France, which appeared in a recent issue of the *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*.

These words reminded me of Al murhoom Dr. M. Qadeer Baig who would often reassure us, in the same vein, saying that "after all, Islam began with a minority of

one [i.e., the Prophet (pbuh)]--the smallest possible minority!" These words always came with a delightful smile and a peculiar sparkle of joy in his eyes. "There is only one way to change the world really." To paraphrase his words of wisdom, he would continue on to say that "you can change it only by reforming its inhabitants individually, one by one, and one at a time. The individual with whom the reform must begin is that individual who has the ambition to reform the whole world. In other words, first change yourself, then change the world."

This is how he relayed the prophetic and sufi methodology of d'awa to his students and disciples. Blessed indeed was he with what it takes to make one a shaykh-e-Kamil, a perfect spiritual mentor! With the Grace of Allah and the blessings of the holy Prophet (pbuh) and the saints of Islam, this was the philosophy which imbued his sense of mission with an exceptional level of vim, vigour and vitality to his work, without seeking recourse to the hellfire-and-brimstone style of traditional oratorical or preachy style of teaching and instruction both in the Shariah and Tariqah.

Force of conviction and the power of passion, nevertheless, always remained an integral part of his style. Every so often, the anecdotes from the life the

Prophet (pbuh) or the great sufi scholars and masters of the path would bring tears to his eyes. Sometimes, even the non-Muslims students in his large class, in the Introduction to Islam course at the University of Toronto, would be strangely affected by such overwhelming phenomena.

On the Canadian scene, Dr. Qadeer Baig had become a legend and an institution in his own right. His exemplary life proved to be a beacon of light that not only inspired me and many others, but also illuminated the way of Shariat and the path of Tariqat.

The article entitled 'Introduction to Sufism', within this web site, characterizes his own special teaching style. Simplicity of presentation and practical utility were the two elements which always made me eager to listen to his insightful talks. He had the gifted ability to seize the attention, at once, of the audience and the students belonging to different intellectual levels. All his work in classes, lectures, seminars, public meetings, writings and informal chit-chat were marked with the depth and sincerity of his own spiritual feeling.

He carried himself in a dignified, sedate and soulful manner. He had a very refined sense of humour which so often seemed to spice up his conversation as he also enjoyed a penchant for story-telling -- particularly Sufi anecdotes. He was blessed with an incisive and analytical mind reinforced by a sharp photographic memory. Winning crucial points in arguments, and even competitive debates, therefore, seemed to come so effortlessly and so naturally to him.

Dr. Baig rested upon the solid foundation of a highly developed spiritual base. His eagerness to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh) with such meticulousness endeared him to all and sundry. Exemplary high moral character, ethical refinement, cultured manners and etiquette, enchanting mannerisms, love for excellence and for the finer things in life were some of the most outstanding traits and characteristics that made almost everyone who came in contact with him love him and respect him.

He loved Islamic fine arts and was very fond of literature, poetry, and religious music. He was an accomplished poet, confining himself mostly to sufi poetry of great depth, full of mystical meaning. A Sunni, Hanafi, he belonged to the Chishtia-Qadriyya, Gudri Shahi order of Sufis. His scholarly pursuits, among other things, included his doctoral thesis (Ph.D. from University of London, U.K.) on Hazrat Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, Alf-e-Thani (RA), a Naqshbandi saint. His tender, loving, open heart gave him the qualities of selflessness, self-sacrifice and the desire to give preference to the needs of others even at his own expense.

Name and fame, desire for admiration, praise or accolades were the things he seemed to dislike most. Occasionally we would even find him referring to some

new admirer or pointing jestfully at someone among the circle of his devoted pupils and, with his especially disarming and delightful broad smile, saying: "There you are! Now, here is my enemy who is unwittingly trying to boost up my ego like a balloon!" The poor fellow who was pointed at, usually a good friend, would be the unfortunate one who, in Dr. Baig's view, was being a little too extravagant in showering praises, regardless of the fact that the victim was sincere in offering his accolades. This shows the measure of an individual, the sincerity and the calibre of his moral and spiritual stature. For the desire to be praised by others and the desire for name and fame is the last thing that leaves a person in his greater *jihad* against the human ego (*nafs al-ammara*).

Having spent a good part of his life in England and Canada, Dr. Baig was acutely aware of the difficulties inherent in Muslim minority living. He dedicated his life to the task of solving problems and resolving conflicts between the Muslim and the non Muslim way of life. He was fully conscious of the fact that solving problems was not the only rule alone to be used in measuring the propriety of various modes of conflict resolution. For Muslims, the *sine qua non* or crucial element of action is that it be undertaken with the intention of submitting oneself to Allah's will -- such that the action is done for the sake of Allah, as an expression of worship and love for Him. If the governmental authorities and judicial system of a non Muslim country have methods of conflict resolution that are rooted in principles and values that are governed by motives other than the intention to please God, or which do not serve the best interest of the Muslim community, or which contain less wisdom than do the guidelines which have been given by Allah and His Prophet, then Muslims place their spiritual and social lives in dire peril when they submit to that which is other than what Allah has ordained for those who wish to submit themselves to Him.

Many guidelines have been given to us concerning the manner in which matters of Personal Family Law should be conducted. These guidelines are vouchsafed to us in the holy Qur'an and embodied through the teachings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Dr. Baig maintained and insisted, therefore, that it is an obligation for Muslims, both collectively and individually, to seek to establish an environment which is feasible and practical in a non Muslim country and conducive to living in accordance with the way in which Allah would wish Muslims to live.

Following this description, you will find a nice little thumb-nail, down to earth, straightforward biographical sketch of the great human being that Dr. Baig was. This

is, I think, a well coordinated effort by none other than the family of Dr. Baig himself. These are the people who were fortunate to know him in a way that others could not possibly know. Their unparalleled love and affection for him clearly shines through their words. It is titled '*In Remembrance*'.

Dr. Baig now belongs to a much better world blessed with a much closer proximity to the Almighty Lord Himself, Insha'Allah. We all pray and request you to join us in prayers that may Allah (SWT) grant the soul of Dr. Baig higher and higher levels of grace, mercy and blessings. May Allah enable us to carry on Allah's work which Dr. Baig had initiated and has left for us to continue.

In Remembrance by SHAKILAH MEHRUNNISA

Dr. Mirza Qadeer Baig was born in 1931 in Ajmer, India. He had one brother and one sister. A pair of twins, however, had died in infancy. He had a happy childhood in spite of bouts of poverty. He was very much attached to his soft, good-natured mother. She would defend her children against any harsh discipline from their father. In fact, if the children were threatened with any spanking, she would put herself in the line of fire and on occasion took the slap herself.

She died when he was six, and after that his father's nature softened. His loving wife's memory would not let him even think of raising his hand to his children after that. Now, as a daily routine, he rose early to pray, say Fatehah for his wife, tend the needs of the young children and then go off to work. On the weekends they would climb the picturesque mountains of Ajmer and go to Takasehad where they would enjoy their picnics, and later their father would do their laundry by hand. These were some earliest memories of Dr. Baig.

He was very energetic for such a thin boy and often organized a bird hunting party. The group would be sent out to catch the bird and Qadeer Sahib would do the preparation and cooking -- a hobby he enjoyed in later years too. Even in Toronto sometimes he would buy the live birds and bring them home.

Although he was a leader among his group of friends and was always very active, he did not neglect his studies. He obtained high marks with ease and took extra studies at a young age. He loved to read and would strain his eyesight to read in dim light at night to conserve the scarce kerosene supplies for other family needs.

Dr. Baig was in his early teens when he requested Dr. Ishrat to instruct him in Persian. Dr. Ishrat was a respected teacher in the locality and his teaching was in demand. He offered to instruct Qadeer Sahib if he could attend before Fajr for his lesson. Qadeer Sahib rose early, not long after the middle of the night, to attend his lessons. His immense love and respect for Dr. Ishrat enhanced this learning experience to the point that it was much more than Persian that he began to learn from Dr. Ishrat. The Persian poetry speaks of Divine Love, and the teacher emulated that same love for the student-disciple!

As a young man, Qadeer Sahib was very much committed to his education and was determined to further it, even though in his circumstances it was not at all easy to do so. Although he was very homesick in London, UK, he managed to make many friends and work very hard to support himself as a teacher while he continued his studies. He was involved with an ambitious group at the London University whose plan was to complete their education and return to Pakistani politics, clean up the society, and route out the corruption that had become rampant there. Qadeer Sahib became the editor of the *Muslim International* where they aired the views and interests of the group in particular and the views of all Muslims in general. It was a respected and scholarly journal.

Dr. Baig's father passed away during the time that Qadeer Sahib was away in London, and it was some time after his passing that Qadeer Sahib was back in Ajmer visiting the local Nawab and Shaykh Gudri Shah Baba, known as *Nawab Sahib, r.a.* The loving spiritual influence of this great Shaykh was such that the young Qadeer Sahib, it seems, was at once taken under the wings of Hazrat Nawab Sahib, the blessed mentor and the uncle of Qadeer Sahib's old teacher, Dr. Ishrat.

Ajmer is a beautiful and a unique city where the blessings of the shrine of Gharib Nawaz permeate the whole place. Whenever there is someone poor or hurting or in need of some help or guidance, he sits at the door of Hazrat Kwajah Muinuddin Chishti, r.a. and begs (or sometimes even demands)-- he does not go empty handed. Any visitor who goes there, no matter of what persuasion, will feel the power and love of that place.

Nawab Sahib was the latest link in the chain of the Gudri Shahi order. At this time, it was Nawab Sahib himself who addressed Qadeer Sahib saying: "I see so much around you, Dear One, if you would only strive in our way." This left such a profound and deep impression on Qadeer Sahib that now his direction began to change as he switched from what he intended to study to higher religious studies.

He was employed at the University of Toronto, Canada,

as a tenured professor, teaching Islam and Sufism. He had a natural gift for teaching and he met and influenced many Canadians who became interested in Sufism. He introduced them to Nawab Sahib and Nawab Sahib in turn instructed the new converts to Islam to take instruction in Sufism from Qadeer Sahib. Qadeer Sahib later said, in all his modesty and humility, "I would have never done this [instruction in Sufism as a Shaykh], only Nawab Sahib asked me to." He felt it was not in his nature, but his great and increasing love and devotion to Nawab Sahib made it his duty.

Dr. Baig undertook his duty with much dedication and with the great capacity he had for energy and love. He went into a long forty day seclusion at once at the instruction of Nawab Sahib, and adhered to this practice of an annual forty day *chillah* for the rest of his life. In seclusion, he would fast during the day. During the night vigil, he would pray, study the Qur'an, and complete the recitation and chanting of prescribed verses of the Qur'an. He seriously responded to the responsibility he had for guiding his disciples. On countless nights he would be sleepless out of concern for someone or the other of his disciples, as he genuinely loved and cared for each person who came to him for guidance. In characteristic humility he advised that Nawab Sahib was our Shaykh. He did not refer to himself as a Sufi or as our Shaykh, and was shy to say that in *muraqaba* (meditation) we should concentrate on Nawab Sahib or himself. He was reluctant to grow a beard (he finally grew one after age 50), for he hated anything that was conspicuous or showy.

He had a devoted concern for the care, welfare and betterment of the Muslim community at large. Once he led a delegation to the Middle East where he raised money for the first mosque in Toronto -- the Jami Mosque on Boustead Ave. In the late '70s, he successfully ran a campaign to take out the prejudicial school material against Islam. *What Man Believes* was one of several school textbooks to be removed from the curriculum as a result. This was the first time that any such activity had taken place in relation to an Islamic concern. The film recording the protest march, the angry demonstration and the fiery speech by Dr. Baig at the steps of Queen's Park is still shown and enjoyed on appropriate occasions.

In his later days he had become more reserved and even more soft in his nature. He died at age 57, after a two-year illness due to heart disease associated with sugar diabetes with which he had suffered most of his life.

"The mark of a good man is that of one who reminds you of God," he had said to me on more than one occasion.

To me, with the Grace of God and the blessings of his holy Prophet and the saints of the Prophetic tradition of Sufi Tariqas, there is no one who reflects God more than he, for memories of him strongly invoke an ever-increasing urge to remember God more and more. We believe that, in passing from this life, it is only the physical life that has ended and that the spiritual life continues. It is the same soul in a different form. In that form his presence was and is still very much overwhelming in the power of love that is the Chishti tradition. We feel his energy that is very much at work in our group, under the direction of Mumtaz Sahib.