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A CRITIQUE OF CRITIQUE OF HAGIOLOGICAL LITERATURE BY MODERNIST KASHMIRI HISTORIANS

Traditional religions and civilizations are inconceivable without taking into consideration hierarchy of existence. And this can be understood or appreciated only when distinction between Nature and super-nature, rational and para-rational, scientific and occultist or mystical realms is no longer respected and one term privileged and the other silenced as in modernist humanist discourse. Miracles form the important constituent of traditional religions, Islam included. Pre-modern pre-Renaissance world may be defined with respect to its credulity towards miracles. Kashmir and Persia and unfashionable and anachronistic (to modernist sensibilities) ambience and identity as land of or land of miracle workers (two terms are almost synonymous for a traditional Kashmir). It is only at the great cost of ruthless marginalization / suppression of the Realm of unreason, the intuitive, the mystical, the 'mad', that modern scientific worldview has come to dominate. And it has penetrated very deep into historiography and our view of history. History has to be distorted to appropriate or appended traditional world history in modern humanist scientific history. To make really objective study of history of traditional pre-modern world (Kashmir) miracles have to be reckoned with seriously and not to be explained away, demythologized, marginalized or just ignored as if they are nothing but fairy tales, legendry

mythological accretions around some spiritual truth, having at best some social role and thus their cognitively and objective validity is sacrificed or rejected. This is what some modern Kashmiri historians like Prof. Khan, Prof. Rafiqi, M.D. Sofi and have done to Kashmir history, especially its mystic pararational occult traditions, its cult of or its defining identity. If one is faithful to modern rationalist Orthodox tradition, as they are, one has to marginalize miracles and deny their literal historical truth and appropriate them in some functionalist perspective and that is what they have done. My focus will be heterodox scientific developments, postmodern approach to history and some perceptive dissident modern critics of naturalism and rationalism. Miracles and mass credulity towards them has been seen mostly as a problem and hardly approached with negative capability and empathy. Miracles and Legends and interchangeably by many historians. This approach is here criticized on traditional religious or Islamic grounds, para-psychological and postmodern grounds.

Very title of Prof. Khan's chapter : 8 in speaks of author's modernist intention. It is entitled 'The Societal Dimensions of Miracles and Legends'. It emphasizes societal dimension and is either silent over or suppresses their literal historical cognitive phenomenological truth. It also brackets miracles with legends and negative connotations (in terms of cognitive validity) of term legends are thus implicitly appended to miracles also. Prof. Khan seeks to 'establish a purely historical view of the supposedly supernatural phenomena'¹. However author is cautious, unlike G.M.D. Sofi in Kashmir not "dismiss the occurrence of miracles purely on the basis of reason", for in doing so we are prone to commit a violence upon the forces of a strong tradition"². To me it is not just committing violence upon tradition but also upon latest developments in sciences like Parapsychology and postmodern critique of enlightenment reason shows. Prof. Khan repeats modernist Muslim apologia for very unambiguous reference to miracles in Quran and Prophetic traditions. He gives them only

marginal importance as if traditionalist blurring of boundaries between Nature and super-nature does not hold water. Taking recourse to exaggeration in the narration of Miraculous experience in hagiographical literature, as Prof. Khan does, will not solve the problem. Author wants to be agnostic with respect to historian's onus to authenticate existence of miracles. He says, "it is outside the domain of History to determine which of the miracles that are said to have occurred is true or false"³. So historian, according to him, may be allowed to be non-committal with respect to this. Geographical work of Baba Dawood Khaki for instance, is, by this standard, not a work of history and modern historian can not allow it much historical value. Martin Lings writes biography of Sheikh Alavi or any contemporary writer witnesses numerous miracles (like Pual Burton in India) and records it faithfully and thus it is within the domain of history to determine which of the miracles is true or false. Miracles are as "natural", as "ordinary" events as other natural events despite many secularist modernist historians assertion to the contrary, not only for believers in them but for many former hard core skeptics. Miracles, as numerous works of para-psychologists show (especially in communist Russia which hailed certain miracle workers for public services – thus taking miracles as given, as true, as fact to be interpreted) are historically objective and literally true events and thus subject matter (data) of any historical work although author's aim is "neither to establish nor cast doubts on the authenticity of miracles attributed to Nuruddin but to fathom the meaning of or truth of an objective fact lost in the labyrinth of supra-mundance events"⁴. He wants to "correct of myopic oversight concerning nature of miracle"⁵. Thus we have the right to critically evaluate Khan insights concerning nature of miracles which could be gleaned from a close reading of his work. Author offers psychological (historical) explanation of the miracles performed by Nurud-Din or Nasrudin, a patient of dyspepsia. Any miraculous element smacking of supernatural interference, he seems to reject e.g. he remarks in connection with

this story. The hagiographical literature is replete with breaking fast with ashes mixed with water"⁶ (emphasis of his Naturalist rationalist doubts (which Khan fully subscribes here) regarding such feats are no longer defensible. Many yogis and other mystics have performed greater and more incredible in the presence of scientists. Author shows his narrow conception (which suppresses Realm of Unreason as Foucault says) in his other remarks also commenting on same Nasrud-Din he says "one should take the extravagant statements of the hagiographers regarding Nasru-Din's unbelievable feats not literally but figuratively as part of complex psycho-historical process". Many modern interpretations of Christianity and Biblical criticism which demythologize Christianity, explains away, miracles of Jesus and Sir Syed does this in modern times for Islam. I argue that nothing prevents us to take them literally. Most of us are witnesses to some miracles of local saint and faith healers. Even Jungian approach to miracles to which Prof. Khan seems to subscribe without explicitly knowing or referring to him, is agnostic towards metaphysical or supernatural reality of miracles. Modern sensibility have so much conditioned us towards, higher realms of being, towards all too real world of angels, fairies (with whom Blake shook hands, as did some and saints. Battle of Badr shows angels intervening in the battle. This story could hardly be taken figuratively and has been taken literally by traditional Islamic Demythologizing modernist attitude is evident in Khan's analysis of Nurud-Din's another miracle regarding Rishi's transformation of into fifth. He writes, "The story cited above is an example how as unadorned fact about Nurd-Din's social teaching blossomed into an elaborate legend or miracle within a short span of about 150y after his death"⁷. Author stresses embellishments put by hagiographers – on simple facts, Many miracles, contends author "seem to have designed by the common people to place the Rishis at the Pinnacle of sanctity"⁸. This shows how one is forced to distort history by prior commitment to rationalist naturalist

assumptions regarding possibility of miracles. Although Prof. Khan quite rightly points out Prof. Rifqi also follows Khan in his treatment of "one of the major drawbacks of historical works has been their author's conventional readiness to accept antimony between history and poetry and also between folklore and history what is of relevance here is also the historians's utter disregard for legends"⁹. However, he himself is respectful towards legends only because of their historical value they having affected the consciousness of people on such a great scale that whether true or false in cognitive or empiricist terms, one must reckon with them at least for the reason that history has been affected by them. He is skeptical of their cognitive or truth claim in empiricist terms. Term myth he uses mostly in negative sense; forgetting what psychology and anthropology may have to teach about its 'factual' character.

Prof. Rifqi follows Prof. Khan in his credulity towards modernist rationalist myths, that fantasizes that time honored "legends and myths" are nothing but fictions, criticizing the credulous believers in miracles. One can only feel pity for modern rationalistic credulity towards belief in omniscience of enlightenment reason.

He writes in a typical rationalist modernist tone, for instance, "Biographers; who were only credulous believers, however, in the miracles and supernatural powers of the saints, reveled in describing fantastic legends and anecdotes about Sufis"¹⁰. Author, however, has himself acknowledged that many biographers were trained traditionalists and applied canons used in science of traditions to the tradition of various Sufis. Much of hagiographical literature produced in this connection is dismissed or explained away by him e.g. he seems to dismiss Haider's account of Syed Ali with "its excursions in the realm of mythis"¹¹. He thinks that Haider wrote legends. He is incredulous towards Sayyid's claim that the prophet had ordered him to visit Kashmir to convert people there to Islam¹². He writes that these accretions

of legends and myths (like there is Jafar Badakshah's and Haider's) were further elaborated by subsequent scholars such as Wahhab, Hassan and Miskin who transformed Syed Ali into a legendary figure¹³. He criticizes Syed Ali's Tarikhi Kashmir for giving legendary material about Hamadani and Rishis writing about Rishi Nama of Baba Nasiruddin. Rafiqi writes "Much of the Nasib's account is legendary. The legends described by him are frequently coloured with romantic touches. They generally ascribe all conversion such as that of Bamud-Din and Payam-u-Din to super natural power of Nurud-Din¹⁴.

In order to explain away presence of so many of legends and miraculous stories, our authors resort to various unwarranted hypotheses. We need not invoke all these fantastic hypothesis (which sometimes appear more fantastic than the supposedly fantastic legends which need to be explained away) if we abandon rationalist incredulity towards possibility of what are called supernatural occurrences, especially in connection with saints e.g. Prof. Rafiqi writes "in order to show the supernatural powers of the Sufis for which the pious memory of later generations remembered them stories were invented" and 'it seems that the stories (of miracles, like Lalla's asking baby to take milk, weaver's incident) were prepared to show Nurud-Din's piety and innocence. They were intended to serve as a background setting for some of his verses. It is common to stories of saints all over the world, to present them as moved by impulses of virtue even before the light of conversion draws upon them¹⁵. Prof. Ashraf Wani also tries to explain away the presence of hagiographical literature prior to advent of Islam on fashionable modernist rationalist grounds. He say: "The notion of supposed supernatural powers of gurus was considerably nourished by the medieval conditions marked by mass gullibility, abysmal lack of communication fuelling rumours ... above all by injections of superstitions and cowardice, injected (through dreaded and fabricated tales and the motivated propaganda by the vested interests), into the masses who did not

know doubting and questioning¹⁶. He also say that various kinds of environmental stresses or "evil days" breed superstitions and brings the authority of Kalhana for this. He writes "Of how evil days breed superstitions, we have information from Kalhana. He says "when some Kayasthas were suspended from their services by Uxala (1101-1111) they turned to astrologers to examine their activities, dreams, omens and auspicious marks"¹⁷. G.M.D. Sofi explains some apparent miracles like the incident of Sayyid's cap whose burial with dead body of Sultan Fath Shah marked the end of dynasty by recourse to notorious notion of coincidences. He also brings authority of C.E.M. Joad and some others to explain away evidence for miracles through a reductionist strategy¹⁸. Prof. Khan also resorts to same type of strategies, although a bit more sophisticated ones to explain away the evidence for miracles of saints. Prof. Rafiqi also brings Islam's denunciation of or indifference to miracle mongering and the fact that miracles are not evidence of one's sanctity or divinity is Islam to dilute the otherwise highly concentrated mass of evidence favouring the fact of actual performance of miracles by Hamdani and others. Referring to miracle in Kali Mandir in which Brahman was chased by shoes flown in sky, Prof. Rafiqi says, that this miracle is similar to one which a Yogi is said to have performed in the court of Mohammad bin Tagluq-Sufi Malfuzaat of 14th century, also record similar encounters between Sufis and Yogis. But the performance of miracle was no part of activities of the Sufis. They rejected the supernatural poet of yogis with scorn¹⁹, calling it istidraj (conferring of benefits by God on obstinate sinner). All th great Sufi scholars were trenchant critics of such tendencies. In fact Islam came to obliterate all such religious beliefs which were founded merely on miracles and lacked any rational basis. Therefore miracles are not and should not be accepted as the rationale of the spread of Islam"¹⁹. The fact is that miracles have played a part in spread of almost every religion including Islam and they are playing this part even today. Quran refers to this in its

narrative of Prophets like Moses and Jesus, Shoaib and Hud. Biographies of many Muslim Saints and some stories of conversion refer to the part played by miracles. Even such a hard core sceptic as Josh could see Prophet in a dream – nay almost in physical, form with wide eyes (at least he smelt the scent) Prophet's continuing presence and his dimension as a sort of guide after his death forms a significant chapter of muslim life and history. Sufis have displayed miracle for providing their superiority against rivals almost in the manner of Moses against magicians, as Prof. Wani argues in his quoting convincing wealth of evidence that Sufis did perform miracles, even if under compulsion (from opposite side) Our undying and strong tradition affirms this. Miracles or intersection or transaction between Super-nature and Nature have always, occurred and are occurring everyday. Miracles may have a rational basis as Yogis and many spiritualists argue. So arguing about irrationality of miracles and thus their impossibility is unscientific and irrational. Great theosophist H.P.B. who performed numerous "miracles" says there can be no miracles because what are miracles from one level of consciousness or existence appear perfectly normal or ordinary when looked from the higher level²⁰. Modernist rationalism only needs to correct its definition of reason and include hitherto marginalized part of reason – Unreason as Foucault calls it.

Rafiqi finds stories of miracles attributed to saints mostly fabrications e.g. he says about supposedly miraculous cure of Zain ul Abideen's boils by Nurud-Din rishi that "the story bears the marks of fabrication and seems to have been concocted in order to glorify the miraculous powers of Zainudin²¹. He refers to miraculous occurrences or anecdotes as legends. Prof. Wani in contrast uses very guarded language in describing miracles. He seems to believe in their literal truth as against Khan, Rafiqi, Sofi Mohbibul Hassan and others. Khan is expert in sifting the grain of historical truth from the chaff of what he calls legendry accretions that has surrounded hagiological literature e.g. he writes about

... milk incident in the life of Nurud Din... The popular tradition about Lal Ded's influence on Nurud Din through insistence on legendary materials contains kernel of historical truth... There is incontrovertible evidence showing occurrences what are called supernatural events and miracles and the only question is to give a rationale for them. Granting their mythical character from empiricist point of view. Mechanism of miracles may be debated but not their existence per se. Calling them legends and myths and then trying to make sense of history amounts to sheer distortion of facts and history. And one is then forced to invent rationalist mechanist legends and myths to explain away their continued presence. Parapsychology, now a responsible branch of science, takes miracles for granted on pure empirical grounds and then proceeds to account for them. Our historians are compelled to reject medieval historians of Kashmir (indeed almost any historian before 20th century) were unanimous in their attesting to the literal truth of miracles. They are duty bound to reject the numerous Sufi Mulfuzaat, biographies and autobiographies of Sufis and their truthful disciples e.g. Khakhi's biography of Makhdoom Sahib, numerous contemporary sources that attested to their truth or factuality, and lastly the méemory of countless people who have passed this fact of medieval culture from generation to generation. It is hardly a contested fact that on the eve of penetration of Islam in Kashmir the writ of Tantric gurus ran large in the valley. They performed mind boggling magical feats. Lalla says, disdaining miracle performance by Sadhus (thus granting their factual or empirical or literal truth, condemnation of certain practice follows only when it is already existing, Rafiqi reiterates that Sufi, were trenchant critics of miracle performances, thus implying that miracle were performed and Sufi's criticism was not directed at literal fictions.)

To stop a flowing stream, to cool a raging fire
 To walk on feet in the sky; to milk a wooden cow.
 All these in the end are but base jugglery²³.

Kalhana mentions widespread use of witchcraft in Kashmir where Tantric gurus were revered because of fear²⁴. It is impossible to concede that these stories of miracles were invented because they occur in such biographies of saints as that have been attested by Masters themselves and most biographers were not credulous fools but pious historians who did not reject empirical evidence at their hands. There is hardly any logical or scientific basis for calling the whole tradition of miracles a legend a myth, especially in case of Kashmir because it is identified as Pir Waer, some supposed "myths" and "legends" about Hamdani are as follows:

01. That he was simultaneously present in 40 houses to dictate his famous Chahal Asrar. Now this is reported about Abdul Qadir Jeelani (RA) and Rumi which have been seen in 72 and 17 houses by people at the same time. It is reported of many saints like Habibullah Nowsheri that they used to offer some prayers in Mecca – Now this "myth" is reported about many purely secular men in history also that they were simultaneously seen at two different places. Everyone of us can perform this feat, including Prof. Rafiqi, we know how to delink consciously our astral bodies and send them anywhere in the Universe.

HPB in her Isis Unveiled quotes many such actual performance. Our spiritualist, occultist or general parapsychological literature is replete with such case histories. We just need to suspend our disbelief and concede with Hamlet "There are more things in the heavens and the earth than your imagination has even dreamt of."

02. That he defeated Brahman of Kali Mandi by what parapsychology would call levitating technique. Even a street magician can levitate shoes and hurl them on anyone of why not the saint who does possess genuine knowledge of occult science.

03. That he was of and on guided by Prophet to do this or that. Although this could be critiqued on religious grounds. But there is no ground for criticizing it on scientific grounds. Parapsychology and even psychology offer numerous parallels to this kind of guidance from both living and dead people to even ordinary people, not to speak of psychics or mediums.
04. That he possessed power of precognizance; he was recognized by many saints without either or two parties having even met. He says that Sheikh Burhan ud-Din Sagar ji, Jibril Karvi, Nizamud-Din Gauri and Abu Bakr Tusi had seen him (his soul) in this world prior to his birth. Again this story is made credible in the light of Occultist and spiritualists evidence.
05. That he could telepathically know of Burhan ud-Din Haqqani's death. Now this is too commonplace a fact to be discussed. Baba Dawood Khaki in Dastoor-us-Salikeen writes about his Sheikh that he built mosques by conquering spirits. Now this could be dismissed as myth by our enlightened rationalists. But all of us perhaps are witness of this feat performed routinely by many pairs who control spirits. If they could be used for evil purposes why not for building mosques I do not want to prove historical veracity of this incident but only to prove that we have no right to veto such miracles on rational grounds.
06. That he guided Rupi Righi through – Jism i-barozi. For a modern student of occult science this is very simple and need not be dismissed as legend or myth.
07. That he had power of precognizance. Precognizance is well known capacity to foretell many details of future and many men, not only saints do possess this.
08. That he met in waking state Sheikh Najmud-Din Kubra who had died long before at that time. He possessed such paranormal powers as Khaki mentions this thus we have little justification for discrediting this as inauthentic.

Rumi has said "Water, air, earth and Fire and all the four elements of universe are put under the control of saint".

Now there remains one important objection against many of such miracles is their supposed impossibility from Tawhidic point of view. Now if occurrence of such miracles which smack of ilm alghaiib, defeating taqdir, assuming some attribute of God etc, are contrary to then Quran too is antitawhidic which is absurd conclusion for it too apparently qualifies Tawhid at many places. Only problem is with those minds who unnecessarily see the conflict where there is none. Tawhid is not incompatable with any fact, any miracle or and God's omnipotence is not qualified thereby.

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