

# Bound By Love: Daud Bandagi Kirmani

## A Hagiographical Narrative

### *Birth and early life*

Syed Muhammad Ibrahim bin Syed Fatehullah Kirmani, 1513-1575 (AH 919-982), more popularly known as Shaikh Daud Bandagi Kirmani was a famous 16th century sufi saint of the Qadiri<sup>1</sup> order. He was born in Sitpur<sup>2</sup> near Multan in AD 1513 (AH 919) where his great grandfather, Mir Syed Faizullah Baqi, had settled after migrating from Kirman, Iran sometime in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Daud Bandagi's father died before his birth and his mother soon after, thus he grew up under the guardianship of his older brother, Syed Rehmatullah Kirmani. After receiving formal religious instruction in Dipalpur and Lahore at the hands of eminent scholars of the time, Daud Bandagi at a fairly young age decided to relinquish all worldly and material pursuits choosing the path of austerity and asceticism instead. In the quest of spiritual enlightenment and in the desire to annihilate the 'self', Daud Bandagi spent days and months wandering in the wilderness of Mohlanwal (in the environs of Lahore). After years of prayer, meditation and relentless fasting he was able to obliterate all worldly desire, his name and his identity, thus achieving a state of spiritual contentment and closeness to God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The order takes its name from its founder, Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani a 12<sup>th</sup> century Muslim saint and preacher who lies buried in Baghdad, Iraq.

<sup>2</sup> Sitpur is in the Muzzafergarh District of Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Badaoni, in *Mutakha-ut-Tawarikh* calls him "the greatest Pole-star (*qutb*), the master and asylum of sainthood".

As Daud Bandagi had attained sainthood without the explicit guidance of any outward teacher or murshid he was initially known as an *Owaisi*<sup>4</sup> saint. Later however he formally joined the Qadiri order on the hands of Shaikh Hamid Gillani Uchi<sup>5</sup>. After becoming a member of the Qadiri Silsilah, Daud Bandagi Kirmani established his *khanqah* (hospice) in the remote village of Shergarh<sup>6</sup>. Situated between Lahore and Multan, Shergarh at that time was part of the *Paragana* of Jhenni, modern day Chunian thus the appellation of *Jhenni Wal* is sometimes attached to Shaikh Daud.

### *The Khanqah in Shergarh*

By the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Daud Bandagi's popularity as a religious sage had spread far and wide. His *khanqah* in Shergarh attracted multitudes of people of all casts and creed not just from neighboring areas but also from more distant parts of Hindustan. This is evident in the writings of the famous 16th century Muslim historian Abd al-Qadir Badaoni. In Volume III of his famous work, Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, Badaoni mentions that at the time of Bairam Khan (AD 1656-60), when he was a student at Agra, he had heard from certain *dervishes* great reports of the Shaikhs noble and majestic attributes. From that time forward he had "sowed the seed of attachment to the Saint and was in secret a slave to the desire of meeting him". Badaoni repeatedly made attempts to go to

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<sup>4</sup> After Owais-e-Karni who converted to Islam and became a great follower of the Prophet (SAW) without ever seeing or meeting him.

<sup>5</sup> Shaikh Hamid was the grandson Shaikh Muhammad Ghous Halbi Uchi who established the Qadiri order in India in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He was a direct descendant of Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jillani.

<sup>6</sup> Shergarh, takes its name from the Afghan Emperor, Sher Shah Suri. In the mid. 16<sup>th</sup> century it was part of a large area under the control of Mir Chakar Rind, the famous Baloch Sardar. He is said to have constructed a fort in Shergarh, the remnants of which are still extant in the village. The village and the fort served as a check post against thieves and robbers, especially of cattle, in the Lower Bari Doab region. Shergarh today is in the Okara District of Punjab Pakistan, located 80 miles south of Lahore.

Shergarh and pay his respects to Shaikh Daud but was desisted from this endeavor by his father.

Badaoni finally visited Shergarh in 1572 and spent four days at the khanqah of the saint. His eye witness account offers a rare glimpse into the life of the saint and the spiritual influence he had on both Muslims and Hindus alike. As mentioned before, the khanqah of Shaikh Daud had become a focal point in the area. It was an inclusive space where there was no discrimination on the basis of social status, caste or religion. According to Badaoni “almost every day Hindus to the number of fifty to a hundred came with their families and kindered to pay their respects to that holy man, receiving the high honour of conversion to Islām, and obtaining instruction in the faith.” Therefore those who made the choice of conversion did it purely on their own volition while those who chose not to were never excluded from the ambit of the saint’s compassion and generosity.

Shergarh, at the time of Badaoni’s visit had become the center of the Qadiri Silisillah. The Khanqah was not only a place of worship and instruction but was also a hospice serving the material needs of the populace. Under the guidance and supervision of Shaikh Daud the Khanqah had a developed institution of Bait-ul-Mal (treasury). The endowments, gifts and contributions made by the mureeds and visitors to the saint were recorded and kept in the treasury and were distributed periodically to the poor and needy who flocked in large numbers around the Khanqah. Badaoni a witness to this, records,

The liberality and charity of the *Shaikh's* disposition were such that on certain fixed occasions, either once or twice in the year, he scattered

abroad in promiscuous charity all the money and goods that he had received gratuitously, and he and his chaste wife kept nothing in the cell that was their dwelling but an earthen pot and a piece of old matting, and when he saw that his treasure-chest was full he would again in the same manner disburse its contents in promiscuous charity, and notwithstanding this (profusion), on the birth-day and feast-day of the holy Ghaus-i-Azam (may God be pleased with him!) all the needs of the pilgrims, whether of high or low degree, who, to the number of nearly a hundred thousand souls, more or less, were gathered together, were met by disbursements from the alms-chest of his hospice, and that profusion, praise be to God, is still continued, nay rather, is increased many fold.

Although no one was allowed to stay at the Khanqah for more than three days Badaoni's obtained the rare privilege of remaining there for a fourth. Badaoni's description of his emotional state in Shergarh is in sharp contrast to his highly critical and orthodox personality reflected in *Muntakhabut Tawarikh*. Deeply affected by the teachings and personality of Daud Bandagi Kirmani he writes in Vol II. of his work,

I requested to be allowed to renounce the work and burden of worldly affairs, and to choose for myself the office of sweeping the monastery. But he would not permit it, and said that I ought now to go to Hindustan. So I took leave in such a desolate state of mind and distraction of heart, as may no other ever experience, and prepared to depart. At the moment of departure lamentation involuntarily burst forth from my sorrowing soul, and when this came to the ears of his reverence, although no one is properly allowed to remain in that monastery more than three days, he kept me there a fourth, and told me things, the sweetness of which still remains in my heart.

### *Shaikh Daud and Mullah Abdullah Sultanpuri*

The growing influence of Shaikh Daud Bandagi did not go unnoticed by the state and the religious establishment of the time. During the period of Islam Shah Suri, the son of Sher Shah, the Shaykh-ul Islam or Mukhdum-ul-Mulk (the head religious priest) was Mullah Abdullah Sultan Puri (d. 1583). The Mullah exercised enormous powers in the court, his authority and edicts as the head jurist could not even be challenged by the Emperor. He was a man of rigid 'orthodox' views and thus time and again came into direct conflict with many Sufi's and religious leaders whose teachings deviated from his own narrow interpretation of Islam. He arbitrarily leveled charges of heresy and heterodoxy on many prominent Sufi's and in some instances got them tortured and killed.<sup>7</sup> Mullah Abdullah Sultanpuri was also known for his greed and avarice. He was one of the richest noblemen of the court who had used his prominent position to amass huge quantities of wealth and property over the years.

Shaikh Daud Bandagi was openly critical of the bigotry, oppression and materialism of the Mullah. He not only denounced the persecution and murder of the Sufi's but also spoke against the hypocrisy of the religious establishment which the Mullah represented. He used to say that the "fly, which sat on filth, was a thousand times better than the Ulama that made the kings and the rich their Mecca." Mullah Abdullah Sultanpuri who had begun to despise the growing popularity and influence of the Shaikh was further

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<sup>7</sup> The most famous is the case of Shaikh Alai and Shaikh Niazi. They were influential Sufi's who were followers of Syed Muhammad Jaupuri (1453-1505 ) a self proclaimed *Mahdi*. Accused of being Mahdavi's and hence heretics they were both first brutally tortured and than subsequently killed by the orders of Mullah Abdullah Sultanpuri.

provoked by his criticism and thus was in search of a pretext to level charges of heresy against the Shaikh. The Mullah finally got his opportunity and in the name of Islam Shah Suri he summoned Daud Bandagi to the royal court in Gwalior.

Daud Bandagi with one or two attendants left Shergarh for Gwalior. The news of him being summoned to the Afghan court spread quickly in the area and was met by apprehension and anxiety by his followers. When the Shaikh reached the banks of the river Beas he found the Sardars of the Khelan tribe who along with two thousand armed tribesmen had gathered there to escort their *murshid* to Gwalior. They were ready to fight the Afghans and were prepared to lay down their lives for the Shaikh in case any harm was brought to him. Daud Bandagi chastised the Sardars on their rash decision, however well intentioned, telling them that he had been summoned to discuss matters pertaining to the Sharia (religious law) and was not embarking on any military expedition.

On reaching Gwalior, Daud Bandagi met the King, Islam Shah Suri, and Mullah Abdullah Sultanpuri. The Shaikh initially gave a speech exhorting the King and the Mullah to follow the path of righteousness and then discussed matters of religious practice and law with the Mullah. The king, greatly impressed by the appearance and conversation of the Shaikh, remarked that "such a man would never tell a lie." At the end of the dialogue Daud Bandagi finally asked the Mullah the reason why he had been called to Gwalior. Makhdoomul Mulk only then divulged the accusation. He said that it had been learnt from the Shaikh's disciples that during the zikr (remembrance of Allah), they were made to recite, 'Ya Daud, Ya Daud'. In reply, the Shaikh said that people had misunderstood, the disciples recited, 'Ya Wadood, Ya Wadood'. The Mullah, unable to pursue the allegation any further, was morally compelled to send Daud Bandagi back

with honour and dignity, otherwise, such charges of heresy were enough to bring any Sufi to the gallows.

#### *The Emperor Akbar's visit to Shergarh*

Around AD 1570 the Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar while on his way to the Shrine of Baba Fareed in Pakpattan heard about the sanctity and influence of Shaikh Daud Bandagi and decided to pass through Shergarh. The Emperor sent Sherullah Kamboh (Shahbaz Khan), an important nobleman of the court, to the Khanqah in order to obtain permission for the meeting from the saint. Shaikh Daud, who was always reluctant to associate with those who possessed worldly power or wealth, sent Sherullah Kamboh back with the message that he (Shaikh Daud) always remembered the Emperor in his prayers and thus there was no need for him (the Emperor) to come physically in his presence for the purpose of prayer and benediction.

#### *The famous disciples of Shaikh Daud*

According to hagiographical sources Shaikh Daud Bandagi Kirmani had three hundred and sixty khalifah's (deputies). The khalifah's of the Shaikh were spread all across Punjab and other parts of the country extending the sphere of influence of Shaikh Daud and the Qadiri sufi order amongst the various Jat and Rajput tribes of the region. The establishment of the Qadiri order in Lahore was also by one of the most prominent of the Shaikhs disciples, Shaikh Abu Ishaq Mozangi (d. 1577). The order was further consolidated in Lahore by Shah Khairuddin Abul Muali Kirmani (1552 – 1615), who was the Shaikhs nephew and son-in law. In Delhi the order gained prominence due to Shaikh Jamaluddin alias Shaikh Behlol Dehlavi (the maternal ancestor of Maulana Abul Kalam

Azad ) another noted disciple of Shaikh Daud Bandagi. Later, the famous Maulana Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlavi was expressly instructed by his murshid, Shah Abul Muali, to return to Delhi to carry out his scholarly and religious activities there.

*The death of the Shaikh and spiritual succession*

Shaikh Daud Bandagi Kirmani passed away in AD 1574-75 (982 AH). His immediate spiritual successor was his nephew and son in law, Shah Khairuddin Abul Muali (AD 1552 - AD 1615). Shah Abul Muali was a prolific writer and a poet. He was a renowned scholar of his time and authored many books on Sufism and on the Qadiri Sufi path. Most of his literary and poetic works are still extant and in print. Shah Abul Muali's poetic pen name was 'Ghurbati' and 'Musalmi'. Talib Amlī, the famous Persian poet at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jehangir, was a devoted follower of Shah Abul Muali. Shaikh Faizi and Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlavi also held him in very high regard.

Shah Abul Muali remained in Shergarh and controlled the affairs of the Khanqah till Syed Abdullah alias 'Naurang Noori', the son and successor of Shaikh Daud Bandagi, came of age. Abul Muali in AD 1602 left Shergarh for Lahore, where he spent the rest of his life. According to local folk lore he walked the entire distance, around 80 miles, without turning his back towards the shrine of his master, Daud Bandagi Kirmani. There are still small hamlets and wells between Shergarh and Lahore which bear the name of *Jhok Abul Muali* marking the places in that journey where he rested. The shrine of Shah Abul Muali in Lahore has historically been an important center of religious festivities especially during the two *eids* and at the death anniversary of the saint.

The annual *Urs* celebrations of Hazrat Daud Bandagi Kirmani are held in Shergarh from the 13th to the 17th of March. Tens of thousands of devotees from all parts of the country throng in Shergarh to pay homage to their *pir* who brought their forefathers into the fold of Islam more than four centuries ago.

### *The Shrine of Daud Bandagi Kirmani*

The mausoleum of Shaikh Daud Bandagi Kirmani in Shergarh is a splendid example of early Mughal architecture. The construction of the shrine was commissioned by the Shah Abul Muali soon after the death of his spiritual mentor. The architect of the mausoleum, completed in AD 1580, was Ustad Baazid. His description of designing and building the shrine is extant in the 17th century hagiography of the saint, *Maqamat-e-Daudi*.

The interior of the *Husht Phelo* (Octagonal) shrine is decorated with intricate *Naqashi* (floral and geometric wall frescoes). The eight interior alcoves and panels of the shrine are embellished with different naqashi patterns suggesting the unique signature work or style of the artists and artisans who with immense spiritual devotion built and decorated the shrine more than four centuries ago. On each of the eight interior lower alcoves are Persian couplets by Shah Abul Muali extolling the virtues of the saint.

The grave of Shaikh Daud Bandagi is in an enclosure located in the center of the shrine with the graves of six of his lineal descendants (*Sajjada Nashin's*) on either side. The exterior of the shrine has panels of intricate stucco tracery *Manabat Kari* on all sides including the outer alcoves.

The shrine, today, is under the care of the Auqaf Department and the Archeology Department of the Government of Punjab, Pakistan. In the 1980s extensive restoration work was done on the mausoleum by the Archeology Department. The work inside the shrine was mainly on the preservation of the Naqashi frescoes.

#### References:

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