

ORAL HISTORY OF ZAMAN MUJADDIDI (b. Kabul 1777 – d. Cochin 1857)

Zaman Mujaddidi was a son of Haji Safiullah, direct descendant of Naqshbandi Sufi Sheikh Ahmad-i-Sirhindi “Al-Mujaddid-i-Al-i-Thani” (The Renewer of the 2nd millennium, b.1564 – d. 1624) who was from Sirhind. His tomb, the Rauza Sharif, in Sirhind continues to be a place of pilgrimage. Haji Safiullah, known as “Qayyum-i-Jahan” (Dignitary of the World), founded the Mujaddidi family in Afghanistan, where he settled as the Hazrat of Shor Bazaar in Kabul at the time of Timur Shah (1772 – 1793). Haji Safiullah died while on pilgrimage to Hajj and his shrine is in Yemen.

Originally educated as a murid under his father in the Naqshbandiya-Mujaddidiya school of Sufism, Zaman Mujaddidi became, at a very young age, more and more inquisitive and critical about the sources of compassion, challenging the notion that it sprang from the divine and feeling rather than humans had a tangible, worldly connection to each other that inspired feelings of compassion and responsibility towards one another. His “beliefs” did not have room for the conventional god of his upbringing, and so he rejected god and the notion of another world to aspire to in favor of this one, and his fellow humans who inhabited it.

Mujaddidi’s blasphemy led his father to *Aaq* (disown/disavow) his own son. As a young man Mujaddidi had begun working in the cultivation and trade of saffron and through this had heard from merchants passing through Kabul about the busy mercantile port town of Cochin in southwestern India. After he was rejected by his own family and banished from Shor Bazaar, he gathered what stock of saffron he could and left Kabul. It is said that he spent the next two years traveling the region along the Silk Route before arriving in India. Out of respect, he first traveled to Sirhind where he visited the Rauza Sharif in order to ask for his ancestor’s blessings before reaching Cochin in 1797 at the age of 20.

Mujaddidi survived through selling the Afghan saffron both while traveling and once in Cochin, where he established his trade networks between Kabul and Cochin. Living a modest life with only the basic essentials, he eventually saved enough money to settle on a plot of land near the water in Ft. Kochi and build a small home for himself. Over time, his philosophies about compassion and community came to be a constant topic of conversation among locals (particularly those of the lower castes) and before he knew it, his humble home had become a sort of humanist commune where locals came to help him grow crops, manage the grounds, debate, and discuss. His humanist, as opposed to religious, perspectives on life, equality, and responsibility have come to be considered precursors to modern Communist ideology,

Although openly critical about British colonial control of Cochin, which took effect at about the same time as his arrival there, he was staunchly non-violent. This changed in 1850 when the British, serving the cause of British mercantilist domination, came to appropriate Mujaddidi’s land in the name of the Queen. Mujaddidi and the others resisted, with some of the younger men throwing stones at the British soldiers sent to remove them. The soldiers fired upon the youth, killing several and wounding many more. Mujaddidi escaped, leaving everything behind, and it was then, at the age of 73, that he went underground and joined the Freedom Movement to overthrow the British by any means necessary, including armed insurrection. Mujaddidi was captured and imprisoned by the British in 1855 at the age of 78. He died in prison two years later, and rather than burying him in Cochin where his tomb could be visited and he remembered as a martyr, Mujaddidi’s body was placed into a simple wooden box loaded with heavy weights and chains, hoisted like cargo onto a boat, and dropped far out at sea.

In the tradition of his ancestor Sheikh Sirhindi’s *Khatanama* (Book of Letters), it is said that Mujaddidi wrote many letters and essays while in prison, further detailing his philosophies. The letters themselves were never found. However, the content of one short letter written in English (a

language learned as a result of the increasing British presence in Cochin) just before his death to a young British soldier named Samuel Allen was brought to light by the soldier just before his own death in 1905. Allen is said to have come to sympathize, admire, and befriend Mujaddidi while serving at the prison, and once his superior officers learned of his associations with an enemy of the Queen's Army, the young soldier was moved from his post in Cochin and reassigned to a station in Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka). In the letter, Mujaddidi laments the fact that he will not see an independent India and urges the young soldier to help in the Freedom Struggle:

"My Young Friend Samuel,

I am not sure if you have received my previous letters, but I will send this anyway, as I am growing weaker each day and so do not know if there will be another. I regret nothing in my life, save for not having the honor of placing my bare feet upon the humid soil of a free India. Though Afghanistan is the land of my birth and I will die forever a Kabuliwala, India is my home. I urge you not to forget our conversations and to do what you know in your heart is the only truly human thing you can do, support the Freedom Struggle in any way possible.

Hindustan Zinda-baad!

*Warmly,
Zaman*

It was not until 1867, ten years after the death of Mujaddidi, that the land so violently seized from him by British soldiers became home to Aspinwall & Co. Ltd established by British merchant J. H. Aspinwall.