

Pir Gorachand: Journey from Myth to History

Abstract

The Sufi Saint or Pir Hazrat Shah Abbas Ali Razi or Makki popularly known as Pir Gorachand. He came to India in the 14th century and preached Islam in South-West Bengal with his murshid(guru) Pir Shah Jalal of Sylhet. Specifically, he preached Islam in 24 Parganas of present West Bengal with many difficulties and obstructions. He was born in Mecca in 693 Hizri(?) or 1294 C.E. His Mazar is situated at Haroa near the bank of Vidyadhari river. A Pir, a Saint, a savior of human irrespective of religion, caste and creed, Pir Gorachand is also a religious preacher, who showed path for living worldly life among his disciples(murid). He fought a battle with Raja Chandraketu to establish Islam in South West Bengal and died of his injuries in 12th Falgun, 1322 C.E. His original name is Abbas Ali Razi or Makki, but he is popular to us as Pir Gorachand, probably for fair skin and good looking. He was a historical personality rather a historical Pir with good super natural or super human power. So myth and history both are associated with Pir Gorachand.

Keywords: Abbas Ali Makki, Pir Gorachand, Sufi Saint, Preach Islam, Fought Battle, Mystical Activities, Controversy, Origin, Myth, History.

Introduction

The word Pir is used widely to address the Sufi Saint. The dictionary meaning of the word Pir is aged person or old person. It is a Persian word. The word 'Ther' used by the Buddhist is also meant aged person and the Sanskrit word 'Sthavira' is meant aged (briddha). Sometimes the Pirs are called as Sufi and a cult of Pir Parosti or worshipped is spread in Bengal. This pir-ism or pir cult is not the original production of Bengal itself. The pir cult emerged from the heart of old Sufi-ism and it is the product of Bhokara, Samarkhand, Turkisthan, Afganisthan and eastern- Persia. The newly converted Muslims from Buddhism are somehow responsible for the emergence of Pir- cult and in due course Pir – cult amalgated with the Islamic religion and popular Islam is emerged. Pir cult actually the hotchpotch of Persian Islamic culture. The Pir or Sufi normally preached Islam in various countries as well as India. We may say that Pir cult is the distorted version of Sufi-ism and mainly related to popular Islam. Theological Islam does not permit pir-cult. We may equate the Guru of Hindus, the Yogi of Nath, Ther of the Buddhist, and Pir of Mussalmans. These Pirs normally acquired extra human or supernatural and mystic power as well as mystic knowledge or mysticism. We have divided the Pirs known in Bengal into two categories, one is Historical Pir and another is Non- Historical or fictitious Pir or "unreal pirified religious objects and spirits". Here we will try to discuss the life history of the legendary Pir of 14th C.E, Pir Gorachand of Bengal and would like to trace the journey of Gorachand or Abbas Ali Makki from myth to History. How far he was a historical personality or Pir, is our central concern of discussion.

Now our focus of discussion is pir Gorachand. It is now accepted fact that pir Gorachand of 24 parganas (Haroa) of West Bengal (present) was a historical personality. Pir Hazrat Shah Abbas Ali Razi or Makki alias Pir Gorahand was born in Makka of Arab in 693 Hizri, 21st Ramadan or 1294 A.D. His father's name is Hazrat Karimullah and his mother's name is Biwi Maymuna Siddika. He was the descendant of Hazrzt Ali from father'S line and of Hazrat Abu Bakar from mother's line. His Murshid or Guru was Hazrat Shah Jalal Yemani. He was the follower of 'Kaderia' silsila of Sufi-ism.(Founder of Kaderia silsila is Hazrat Abdul Kader Jilani). Pir Shah Jalal Yemani came to India to preach Islam by the order of Syyid Kabir Razi. Hazrat Pir Gorachand also came to India with Shah Jalal. Pir Gorachand was in- charge to preach Islam in Balanda pargana of Haroa Police Station of 24 Parganas(present west Bengal). Gorachand accompanied by 22 pir

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brothers came to Balanda pargana in 1302—1322(approx). At that time Shamsuddin Firoz Shah was the sultan of Gour.¹

To gather knowledge about Pir Gorachand we need to consult all the published literary works on him. There are various Puthis, Panchali, and drama or play on Pir Gorachand. Some written literary works dealt with the life history of Pir Gorachand. To write the historical journey about Gorachand alias Pir Abbas Ali, we should have to rely upon literary sources and we need to filter it.

Muhammad Ebadullah (Ebadat Ullah) wrote "Pir Gorachand Panchali", from this book it is known that Abbas Ali, son of Karimullah of Mecca, came to Sylhet of Hindusthan. He was ordered by Allah to preach Islam in Hindusthan. After reaching at Sylhet he became the murid of Shah Jalal and after taking bayat (oath for discipleship), he returned back to Mecca. After meeting with his parents and siblings, Abbas Ali had started his journey to Hindusthan with his foster brother Chhondal, reached at Balanda Pargana. He established his Astana (Ashrama) at Eyajpur and ordered the king Chandraketu to give him Nazrana. Pir Gorachand tried to convert Chandraketu into Islam. He failed to convert the independent king Chandraketu of Deula or Devalaya. But many more Hindus of that area embraced Islam. Conflict aroused between Pir Gorachand and Chandraketu. Pir Gorachand marched forward with many difficulties. At last he reached at Hatigarh and fought with Akananda and Bakananda, the commander of the army of Raja Chandraketu. In the battle Akananda and Bakananda slained and pir Gorachand was seriously injured and within a short span of time (4 days) he was died, in the year 1373 C.E, 12th Falgun, at the age of eighty (80). Pir Gorachand was a bachelor. Another source told that Gorachand was died on 21st Ramadan of 772 Hizri (1374 A.D.). He was buried at Haroa on the bank of Vidyadhari River. The sultan of Gouda built a Mosque upon his grave and gave 1500 bighas of tax free land for its maintenance.²

How the historical personality Shah Abbas Ali Razi or Makki transformed into Pir Gorachand, not known to us. Probably he was a fair –skin, smart, beautiful male and he was a brave warrior, so he became "Gorachand" in the eyes of his disciple. (Wakil Ahmed, pg.166). Sree Chaitanya of Bengal was also called 'Gouranga' for his fair skin and good looking. Whatever the matter our focus point is to describe his life history to prove Pir Gorachand as historical personality. It is known from the book "Pir Gorachand", written by Abdul Gafur Siddiqui that the Queen of Raja Chandraketu, named Kamala, called Abbas Ali as Gorachand, as she was impressed and overwhelmed by Abbas Ali's oration while she was present in the discussion session between Chandraketu and Gorachand. Probably queen Kamala called him Gorachand for his fair skin and attractive look. Another view is that one Gorachand, the Hindu Thakur embraced Islam and did not change his name into Arabic and he was named as "Gorachand Pir." Sukumar Sen opined that Hindu thakur Gorachand did not change his name though he embraced Islam or converted into Islam.³ But

regarding this view evidences are unavailable. Whatever the matter regarding his origin, actually Abbas Ali Makki was a religious person and a historical person also. He was a man full of supernatural power or extra-human power. He always fulfilled the worldly desire of his disciples (Murid). His conveyance was horse. Sometime we may trace the idol of Gorachand sat on a tiger, with sword in hand, turban in the head and dressed with Choga Capkan etc. This type of attire proved that he was a warrior and obviously from outside India and may be from Middle East or Arab countries. It is also the attire of the saintly person.

Gora Pir was a non communal person and welcomed people irrespective of religion, or caste. Many Hindus were his disciples. Even in the recent century, many Hindu couples visit the mazar of Gora Pir before marriage to seek blessings. Every Friday Hindus sang "Kirtan" in the courtyard of the mazar of Pir Gorachand. Hindu milkmen wash the mazar every year on the 12th Falgun (late February) with milk. On this occasion a huge fair and an Urs Mela are organized. Hospitality offered for visitors who came here from distance places of Bengal as well as other states. A large number of Puthis and books have been written about Pir Gorachand in Persian, Urdu and Bengali. A road in Kolkata is named after his name. (Gorachand Road). Many shops and establishment at Haroa carry his name. Sometime the shopkeepers may think if they carry the name of Pir, they will be blessed by him or may win his favour to flourish the business.

A good number of books are written by Muslim writers to glorify Pir Gorachand. Muhammad Ebadolla of Basirhat (Piaragram) has written a book namely "Pir Gorachand Panchali" (1911). Munshi Khoda Newaj of Bardhaman wrote a book on Gorachand, namely "Balandar Pir Gorachand Razi" (1871). One drama namely "Chandraketu –O-Gorachand" (1944) has written by Mhammad Harmuj Ali of Basirhat (Shankrpur village). An important book 'Banglar Pir Hazrat Gorachand Razi' (1947-50) has written by Abdul Gafur Siddiqui of Basirhat. From these books we may gather knowledge about the life history of Pir Gorachand and various super natural or mystic activities showed by him.⁴

Abbas Ali Makki (as he was born in Makka) or Abbas Ali Razi of Makka, how and why became Pir Gorachand or famous as Pir Gorachand is not clear to us. He was a divinely saint or Pir or Darvesh, it is clear to us. He existed in Bengal as a Pir it also a proved fact, through various writings. The period 13th to 17th C.E. is the period when people from outside India, mainly from Middle East came to India to propagate Islam. Most of them had the supernatural power or mystic power as they are called Islamic mystic people. They preached Islam mixed with Islam.

Abdul Gafur Siddiqui in his book 'Banglar Pir Hazrat Gorachand Razi', tried to prove Pir Gorachand as historical personality by using various sources. According to Siddiqui Abbas Ali's father Karimullah was the descendant of Hazrat Ali. Abbas Ali was the prominent disciple of Shah Jalal of Sylhet, amongst other 360 disciples. Siddiqui depicts many more

mystic activities of Gorachand. All over the world the Sufi saints always showed supernatural activities which helped them to be popular. Process of Islamisation in various ways became smooth as the Darvesh or Sufi saint showed supernatural power. Overwhelmed by the supernatural activities and oration of the Pir, people of other religion embraced Islam. Historical Darvesh, Abbas Ali Makki transformed into popular Pir Gorachand. Individual Pir Abbas Ali became past to us but Pir Gorachand never die, he become immortal to the people of Bengal.

Various sources give us different historical background about Abbas Ali. At the age of 4 (four), in the year 697 Hizri, Abbas Ali started his education. In the 706 Hizri, at the age of 12(Twelve) he had completed his education. He acquired knowledge on Quran, Hadith and Mathematics and Grammar. He also acquired deep knowledge in "FEKAH".(Islamic Theology, explanation of Quran and Hadith). He always used to engage in Namaz, Roza and Quran discussion. At that time he tried to avoid worldly affairs. In the year 708 Hizri Abbas Ali Makki left his parents. He got tired after a long journey. He took rest in a place and slept soon. Then he dreamt of a Darvesh and got blessing from him. After arised from sleeping, he saw that he was in a hut. It was an Ashrama. The Darvesh of this Ashrama was the famous Hazrat Shah Jalal Yemani. Abbas Ali took mystical education of 'kaderia Silsila' from Shah Jalal during the year 708 to 720 Hizri. In 721 Hizri, 7th Rabial Awal, Hazrat Shah Jalal Razi, accompanied by Abbas Ali Razi and another 301 murshid started for Hindusthan. They reached Delhi in 722 Hizri, 22 Jelhaji. At that time Alauddin Khilji was the Delhi Sultan.⁵Hazrat Abbas Ali gave "Bayat" to Hazrat Abdullah in Delhi.Abbas Ali was given two Darveshi khetab by Shah Jalal. These are "Shamsul Arefin" and "Kotbul Arefin". From Delhi they came to Bengal, Sylhet, to fight with the tyrannical lord Raja Gobinda. Raja Gobinda was defeated by Shah Jalal and Pir Jalal established Ashthana at Sylhet. Then he ordered Abbas Ali and another 12 Aulia to preach Islam in South West Bengal. Abbas Ali came to Roykola village in Basirhat subdivision of 24 Parganas. This place is famous as "Baish Auliar Sthan" (place of 22 Aulia).Here they learnt some Bengali language. Many Brahmin and non-Brahmin embraced Islam by Abbas Ali.⁶ We may note that Siddiqui in his book served us some historical facts as he used dates, year, and various name of historical personalities. Then Pir Abbas Ali became a historical Pir and if Abbas Ali and Pir Gorachand are the same person, then Pir Gorachand is also a historical Pir.

Shatish Chandra Mitra gives us a good description about Gorachand through a "Mussalmani Puthi". He wrote, near Diganga there was a place namely Deula, still it is existed. In this place there was a king namely Chandraketu and Gorai Gazi tried to convert Chandraketu into Islam. But he failed to do so. At that time there was a Pathan ruler in Balanda. Gorai Gazi complained to him regarding Chandraketu. They fought a battle. After the death of Chandraketu, Gorai Gazi left Deulia and had gone to Hatiagarh. There, Gorachand engaged in a tussle with Akananda

and Bakananda. Bakananda was died in the battle. Gorai Gazi was severely injured and died near Haroa, nearby Balanda. One milkman (Goala), Kalu Ghosh performed his last rites. The, then Bengal ruler Alauddin (1230—1237) erected a mosque over the grave of Gorai Gazi (Gorachand) and he also granted 1500 bighas of tax free land. He died on 12th Falgun. (As quoted by Wakil Ahmed)

Muhammad Shahidullah also wrote that the real name of Pir Gorachand is Syyed Abbas Ali. His mazar is situated at Haroa near Basirhat. 12th Falgun of every year, a fair is organized in Haroa, "Pirer Mela", to commemorate the death anniversary (Urs) of Gorachand. According to past traditional rituals, on that day, the Hindu milkman of adjacent area cleans up the mazar of Gora pir with 12 mounds of pure milk. In course of time these amounts become lessened. Why the milkman Kalu Ghosh performed Gorachand Pir's last rites is not clear to us. We may consider that there was a link of Hindu culture with Gorachand. Were the Muslim disciples absent during his death time? Were the Muslims unable to perform his last rites? It is not clear to us. All these questions may arise but the answer is not available to us. Some people pointed out that Gorachand Bandopadhyay of Vasila , after embracing Islam became Pir Gorachand. But there is no concrete evidence regarding this view.⁷

Sheikh Abdur Rahim edited a journal, namely, "Mihir" in 1892. It depicted about Pir Gorachand. He pointed out that, in the article "Haroa", Haroa is a village under Balanda pargana within subdivision of Basirhat of 24 parganas district. In every year, 12th Falgun, a huge fair being organized here which lasted almost 12 or 14 days. It is organized to the honour of Gorachand. Almost 600 years ago Pir Gorachand came here to preach Islam. Here Gorachand met Raja Chandraketu and invited him to embrace Islam. Pir showed various mystical activities, such as he turned the banana made of iron into original eatable banana. Then the Pir came to Hatigarh, where two sons of Raja Mahendra, Akananda and Bakananda ruled.That king slained a human every year. (Naraboli) Pir resisted him to do so. Then battle fought between Pir and the Nanda brothers. Bakananda was killed and the pir was seriously injured by Akananda. It is depicted that if the pir might consume betel he will get well soon from his injury. But betel was not there. Hence after a few days in 12th Falgun the pir breathed his last. This story is widely publicized in 24 Parganas still the recent time.

The subject matter of every writings dealt with almost same story about Abbas Ali alias Gorachand and there are ample evidences to prove that he was a historical personality. Rather historical pir not fictitious pir of Bengal. In every historical writings or literary articles or Puthi Sahitya or any other forms of writings we have found that Pir Gorachand fought against Raja Chandraketu and Akananda and Bakananda. Some where the two brothers are armymen of Raja Chandraketu, some where they are the independent ruler. Whatever the matter Gorachand fought with them and died of severe injury after a few days.

To prove the historicity of Pir Gorachand it is necessary to relate him with the historical personality Pir Hazrat Shah Abbas Ali Razi or Makki as we call. May be Abbas Ali Razi regarded as Pir Gorachand in Bengal or if he took the name Gorachand after coming in Bengal and wanted to be familiar with Bengali name among his disciples. At that time the Bengali Muslims might bear out this type of Hindu name and sometime they did not take Arabic name. The low caste Hindus converted to Islam. So they always bear their Hindu name normally.⁸ But it is not clear to us why Abbas Ali became Gorachand and no sources made it clear to us. But probably Pir Abbas Ali and pir Gorachand is the same person.

It is tough to trace the perfect timing of Pir Gorachand and when he came to India and preached Islam in South-West Bengal. Shamsur- Rahaman Chowdhury wrote that Hazrat Shah Pir Abbas Ali came to Delhi with his murshid (Pir) Shah Hassan in the year 1322, C.E., during the reign of Sultan Giasuddin Tughlaque. Here lies contradiction of Abbas Ali pir. Most writings showed Abbas Ali's Pir was Shah Jalal, here Samsur Rahaman showed Shah Hasan. In the year 1323.C.E , when Giasuddin Tughlaque invaded Bengal to suppress rebellion, Darbesh Abbas Ali Makki came to India with the Sultan's army.⁹ According to Abdul Gafur Siddiqui's description Pir Shah Jalal accompanied by Gorachand came to Delhi in 722 Hizri . Alauddin Khilji was the Delhi Sultan of that time. Sir Jadunath Sarkar wrote that Alauddin Khilji's reign is 695 Hizri to 715 Hizri. Alauddin died in 1316 C.E and 722 Hizri equals to 1322 C.E, so it impossible to take the theory that Shah Jalal and Gorachand came to Delhi during Alauddin's reign. The matter of fact is that if we take the theory that Shah Jalal came to Sylhet in 703 Hizri , then it is true that Alauddin Khilji was there in Delhi Sultanate. If we took the theory that Pir Gorachand came to India accompanied by Pir Shah Jalal , then the date will be in and around 703 Hizri. If we take the matter that Pir Abbas Ali alias Pir Gorachand came to South-West Bengal to preach Islam with another 22Aulia then we may say that he came to Bengal in and around middle of 14th century or last quarter of 14th century.

Aims of The Study

Many scholarly works had been done on pir cult of Bengal and role of pir in preaching Islam. Many Biographical works on various pir has also been done and published. But a few of them throws light on the early pirs of Bengal. In this paper I would like to throw light on an early Sufi saint or pir of 14th Century, Pir Gorachand. Many scholars divided the Pirs of Bengal into two broad categories, one is historical pir and another is non-historical pir or fictitious pir. In this research paper I would like to categorize Pir Gorachand as historical personality or historical Pir of South- West Bengal. There are various Pirs in Bengal, those who have no historical trace. They are worshipped by local people with superstitious belief. Though there are myth about Pir Gorachand regarding his origin and timing etc. But there are ample evidences regarding Pir Gorachand which proved that he was a historical personality. Hope this

paper may partially fulfill the gap in the historiography of pir cult in Bengal.

Conclusion

Pir Shah Jalal Yemeni and Pir Abbas Ali Makki came to Bengal and preached Islam, which is historically proved or there are historical evidences. Hazrat Shah Abbas Ali Makki alias Abbas Ali Razi alias Gorachand is a historical personality and a historical pir. In Bengal there are various Pirs, worshipped (Pir Parosti) by local people, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. But many of them are fictitious or non-historical pir. But Pir Gorachand is a historical Pir, who came to Bengal to preach Islam and in his mission he was successful. He converted many Hindus into Islam & Muslim population in South West Bengal increased in the 14th C.E. He preached the greatness of Islam to the local people. Overwhelmed by his personality and attractive face and power of oration many Hindus accepted Islam as their religion. Pir Gorachand showed some miraculous activities which prompted to spread Islam. Like other Sufi Saint Pir Shah Abbas Ali saved Hindu and Muslims from the oppression of tyrannical ruler and the local people. He also ended his life in the battle with the tyrannical ruler Akananda and Bakananda. Actually 13th to 17th C.E is the period of the expansion of Islam in Bengal, which was done mainly by the Sufi Saint and their followers. The Sufi mainly came from Middle East through North India. In Bengal they became Pir and mixed up with the popular Islam,. Why Pir Shah Abbas Ali is famous as Pir Gorachand is not clear to us but he is a historical Pir, it is clear to us, though there are many myths regarding Pir Gorachand.

Footnotes

1. Das, Girindra nath, *Bangla Pir Sahitya Katha*, pg, 111
2. Ali, Newaz, *Article on Gorachand in google.com*.
3. Sen, Sukumar, *Islami Bangla Sahitya*, pg,82
4. Ahmed, Wakil, *Banglar Pir Sahitya-O-Sanskriti*, pg,167
5. Das, Girindra Nath, *Bangla Pir Sahitya Katha*.
6. Siddiqui, Abdul, Gafur, *Balandar Pir Hazrat Gorachand Razi*.
7. Das, Girindra Nath, *Bangla Pir Sahitya Katha*, pg, 116
8. For details see, *Changing Muslim Identity in Bengal, 1871-1947* by Molla, Nasiruddin, published by Kunal Books, New Delhi, 2018.
9. As quoted by G.Das in *Bangla Pir Sahitya Katha*.
10. To gather vivid account of pir Gorachand one may consult Wakil Ahmed and Girindra Nath Das. *In south Bengal various folk tradition is widespread regarding Pir Gorachand and his fictitious activities*.

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