

A Look at the Historical Background and Current Situation of the Sanctuary (Khanqah) of Rumi's Father

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Abstract: *Balkh is one of the oldest cities of ancient Ariana, which has been well-positioned in various historical and prehistorical periods, and in the old days, it surrounded a vast territory. But today, it is a small town, 20 kilometers from Mazar-e-Sharif, the central city of Balkh province in Northern Afghanistan. Balkh is a place with a rich cultural heritage and valuable historical sites. One of the most important historical sites is the home of Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi-Rumi's father. More than eight centuries old, this house is one of the remains of the Khwarezmid architectural period of the late 6th and early 7th centuries A&H, built of adobe and mud. Now, parts of the building are collapsed which include walls, domes, arch and porch, remained to us as a heritage site near the village of Baha ud-Din Walad in Balkh District. The lack of constant and serious protection of this sanctuary (khanqah) and its associated parts have caused this magnificent building to be destroyed and demolished by natural disasters as well as the illegal excavations of unaccountable people. In this article, with a brief look at Balkh and the historical and cultural background of the Mawlana's Father's Khanaqah, the reasons for neglecting the reconstruction and basic construction of this house are discussed.*

Keywords: *Balkh, Khanaqah, Historical Monuments, Cultural Heritage, Mawlana-Rumi and Baha ud-Din Walad.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Balkh is one of the oldest cities in Ariana, considered the first Aryan capital. This ancient land, with a history of more than six thousand years, once occupied a vast territory and at various historical and extra-historical periods, was the cradle of some of the great civilizations and the bedrock of the growth of the thoughts and opinions of various nations. Balkh had a special place in the cultural, religious and commercial spheres. This magnificent ancient city has been mentioned at various times by the names of Bokhdi, Balhika, Bakhtar, Bactria, Bactra, the city of high flags, Umm al-Belad, and other names and adjectives. Balkh has seen many ups and downs throughout its life, just as much as it has experienced prosperity and destruction. Balkh, once a vast area, today is a small town 20 kilometers to the Northwest of Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of Balkh Province in Afghanistan, with a number of historical monuments and ancient structures.

One of the historic monuments is the house and khanaqah of Rumi's father, who was once a well-known preacher and fair-spoken of Balkh, Sultan Baha ud-Din Walad. He preached and held a religious discussion for his disciples in Balkh and neighboring areas. It was built more than eight hundred years ago, in the late sixth and early seventh centuries A&H, and example of the Khwarezmid architecture. Over time, much of this historic monument has been destroyed by natural disasters, lack of protection and care, and unauthorized excavation yet a small part of it is in a state of bricks, walls and clay crumbling gradually. However, this article attempts to provide a brief overlook at Balkh and to study the historical, cultural and spiritual background of Rumi's Father's sanctuary and the causes and factors neglecting the conservation, reconstruction and basic construction of the Khanaqah.

2. A REVIEW OF BALKH'S BACKGROUND AND STATUS:

Balkh, with a history of six thousand years old, is one of the oldest cities in ancient Ariana, yesterday's Khorasan and today's Afghanistan. This ancient and olden land is mentioned in the historical and transhistorical texts as "Bokhdi, Balhika and Bakhlo (βαχλο)" (Khaleeq, p.7). "In their manuscripts, the Achaemenids mentioned this city as Bactria; the Greeks as Bactra and Bakhlo (βαχλο)" as well (Kuhzad, 2010 p. 217-218). In the Islamic texts, this highly famed city was called: "Umm al-Balad, Umm al-Qura, Dar al-Ijtihad (House of diligence) and Dar al-Fiqhah (House of jurisprudence)" (Azarmidokht, 1997, p.7). And in the book, *The Virtues of Balkh*, it comes as "The Second City of the World" (Waiz Balkhi, 1971, p.5). The Ancient Balkh, ancient and historic land, in various periods had been geographically vast, "From the banks of the Morghab River in the West to Takharistan in the East and from the Bamyán Mountains in the South to the Amu (Oxus) River in the North, and at some historical junctures in its territory" (Khaleeq, 2015, p.17).

Hence, "Balkh was the cradle of Aryan culture and civilization and the first capital of the great Aryan, during its six-thousand-years of history has gone through many ups and downs. Located on the famous Silk Road, Balkh was the center of the world's trade and commerce and the hub of various cultures. Mithraism was spread from there to the Asian and European countries, and Zoroastrianism was offered to the world by Zoroaster – an Oracle from Balkh.

Famous Pishdadian, Kayanids, and, Parthian Dynasties in the pre-Islamic period and the Daudids and Samanids, as well as the Barmakian and Mahmoudian Dynasties, who were pro knowledge and culture-loving, in Islamic period had emerged and existed in Balkh.” (Khaleeq, 2015, p.7) It is worth mentioning that Balkh is the cradle of some of the greatest civilizations and the center of cultural, business, and different religions and sects in different eras. This land is a well-known and well-regarded territory in ancient texts. Balkh was one of the most important scientific and cultural centers in the Islamic era and was one of the four great cities of Khorasan with a constant presence of scholars with great thoughts and grace. Even though in Islamic period Khorasan was constantly being destroyed, Balkh did not give up the position of its cultural center, and Khorasan and this side of the Amu River was the center for Islamic Sciences and Religious Studies, and the origin and nurturing place of commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, mysticism and other Islamic sciences” (Habibi, 1999, p.125). Once being a glorious city in the ancient periods encompassing cast territories is now a small rural town, 20 kilometers from Mazar-e-Sharif, the central city of Balkh province in Northern Afghanistan. This ancient land has seen many ups and downs throughout history and has suffered as much destruction as construction and prosperity in various eras. As Khaleeq narrates, "In its history, this city has been totally destroyed more than twenty times during various wars; but what is clear is that this land, at least twice, once during Alexander's conquest and the next during the Mongol invasion had been dangerously destructed." (Khaleeq, 2015, p.18) Many believe that Balkh, "Particularly during the Mongol invasion, was considerably and irreparably damaged." (Ansari, 2008, p.76). According to another researcher, "Genghis Khan overthrew all the buildings of Balkh City, leaving no trace of its prosperity and livelihood." (Shojai, 2016, p.9).

However, Balkh is one of the most famous places with a valuable cultural and historical heritage that is reminiscent of the varied stellar periods of the civilization of this land. Zoroastrianism, and great poets and thinkers such as Ibn Sina Balkhi (Avicenna), Rabia Balkhi, Abu Shakoor Balkhi, Daqiqi Balkhi, Nasser Khosro Balkhi and Molana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi (Rumi), and dozens of other poets, intellectual, mystical and religious figures have emerged from this land. Based on archaeological researches in various areas of Balkh, many traces of different periods of human life have been obtained that indicate the glorious periods of civilization in this land. According to researchers in Balkh, along with other tangible and intangible cultural heritage sites, there are about 60 historical sites, most of which are located in the city of Balkh. Expansion of residential areas, farmlands and arbitrary excavations of irresponsible personal have already destroyed most of such historical sites, and others are in serious danger of collapse and destruction. One of the most precious monuments – more than eighty years old, which is in a devastating and tragic state, is the home, the sanctuary (khanqah) and the school of ‘Sultan al-Ulma’ Baha ud-Din Walad, Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi’s father, the mystic poet and unmatched thinker of the world.

A place where countless people from all over Khorasan gather to learn religious guidance, worldly teachings, mystical sermons, and inner immaculacy. And from the presence of ‘Sultan al-Ulma’ Baha ud-Din Walad; from the innermost allure, the screams and whispers of these pure dervishes and the heart burning Sufis and mystics that resonated in this realm, this holy place had a different spiritual atmosphere. The place Jalaluddin Muhammad (Rumi) was born “in the year 604 A&H”, where he spent his childhood and adolescence with his graceful knowledgeable family until their departure from Balkh, "around 618 A&H" (Keshavarz,1998), is the present spiritual environment in which Jalaluddin Muhammad received primary education there. It was, in fact, the perfect platform for his growth of the mind, language, spirituality, and the initial opportunity for the first experiences to evolve and further transcend his rich life. Frankly, the foundations of Rumi's spiritual nature and fate were laid in this sacred soil; and the foundation of the intellectuality this superior and multidimensional man was established there, the effects of which can be seen and acknowledged throughout his works.

3. A LOOK AT THE HISTORICAL RECORD AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE SANCTUARY OF RUMI’S FATHER:

The house and Madrasa of Maulana’s father, which is also known as Khanaqa (Monastery)/Madrasa (the school) of Sultan Ulama Bahauddin Walad, is one of the remnants of the architecture of the Kharazmshahi period (late 6th and early 7th century of Lunar Year as cited by Khaleeq, 2015, p. 178). Now after more than 18 hundred years, many parts of this building have been destroyed by natural disasters and the excavations of unauthorized, unprofessional and unaccountable individuals. Only part of this magnificent building has remained. Now, this historic monastery which is cut into pieces from the wall, yard and cemetery are located just 20-kilo meters far from Mazar-i-Sharif city in northern Afghanistan alongside other historic and trans-historic places. The monastery of Maulana’s father is located beside a village called Bahauddin which is situated outside the eastern walls of Balkh district and is derived from the name of Maulana’s father. This monastery is made of raw square clay bricks with thick walls and high dome roof, and there are numerous rooms for students and travelers to come for study and stay. (Khaleeq, 2015, pp. 178-179) As stated earlier, attached to this monastery is the village of Bahauddin which is actually derived from the name of the father of Maulana. Within a few hundred meters from this monastery, a playground is seen which is believed that once upon a time Maulana in his early childhood ages used to play with his playmates in this playground. (Khaleeq 2015, p 179)

There is also a canebrake nearby which Maulana and his little playmates used to play in. Considering this evidence, the researchers believe that the existence of this canebrake is not unrelated to Maulana's subsequent life as the canebrake is symbolically portrayed in the ideas of Maulana later and are widely reflected in Masnavi. Thus, what has left from this monastery shows that its engineering work is very precise and standard with the usual architectural style of its time. In this building, all the requirements for its use have been taken into consideration in the area in which the monastery was built. While designing this building, the architects thought about designing in a way to accommodate more people, provide doors and windows suitable for air-conditioning and light radiation and considered the heat and cold conditions with thick walls of mud and brick with special strengths. So, this historic building has a tall dome in the middle and four other tall domes on either side with skylights. Its base is made of raw bricks measuring 27 x 27 x 4 cm and walls with a diameter of 110 cm that today a large part of the main dome and its surrounding domes and walls have been destroyed. The arch ruins, porches and small chambers with dome roofs can be seen in the corners of the building. (Azimi, 2011, p. 50) The remnants of the building are believed by some explorers and archaeologists to be the remnants of a Madrasa (school) owned by Maulana's father which some others also call it Khanaqa (monastery) of Sulta-al-Ulama. The other researcher believes that "the design of the building is very similar to Khanaqa (monastery) and the design of the main hall, and the cells in the southern part of the building are very magnificent which shows the art of the people of past centuries. (Mukhtar, 2002, p. 50) Now that the building is part of a house, a Madrasa (school) or part of a Khanaqa (monastery) or part of a complex, is not much discussed, it is important that such a grandiose legacy with this spiritual grandeur and historical legacy that is located in Balkh is not in good shape and is collapsing and being destroyed. This ancestral home and the Madrasa of Maulana's father has been destroyed after this noble family moved from this area due to obvious and covert reasons like opposing of folks from Kharazmsha's ruling office against the inner attitudes of Bahauddin Walad and of course the fear from the invasion of Mongols who surrounded this city. Thus, after this noble family left Balkh, the monastery was abandoned and destroyed by the flood of the Genghis Army in 618 AH/1221 AD. (Khaleeq, 2015, p. 179)

Since this house and monastery were abandoned, not only family member of the Sultan Walad have been left to protect and take care of this place, but also as witnessed by history, even the close relatives of Maulana's father and their families traveled along with the caravan of their predecessor, Sultan-al Ulama. They left Balkh and abandoned their homes, gardens, and farms. In fact, since then no one has been protecting it and doing nothing to rebuild it. According to Khaliq: "In recent centuries, the follower of Naqshbandi has rebuilt parts of this Madrasa and its rooms and converted it into their own monastery to organize their spiritual events. (Khaleeq, 2015, p. 180) Now what is left of the whole old building is the donated land belong to this Madrasa including an old cemetery to the southeast which is about 9 acres, and among the trees, the tomb of Hussain Khatebi the ancestor of Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi is placed and a few tombs without written tombstones are seen that belong to the elders of the Naqshbandieh. (Khaleeq, 2015, p 180) So, what is left of this historic place in Balkh is considered as part of our valuable historical and cultural heritage. In fact, it is a memorial of the family of Maulana who created world-class valuable works such as Divan Shams, Masnavi Manawi, Majalis Sabaa, Fieh Mafia and Maktubt. Maulana with his works invoked and still invokes the world in an unprecedented way to think of the world and invokes humanity with the soul and essence of mysticism to become acquainted with religion and the world and introduced profound philosophy through his worldview.

4. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SANCTUARY OF RUMI'S FATHER :

The monastery of Rumi's father which is known as one of historical and cultural monument throughout the history and in particular in the modern era, and Balkh has been immortalized with the name this family's offspring, but as required, nothing has been done to protect and preserve the only memorial of the family. Although the construction work of a protective umbrella over the remnants of the monastery by the Afghan government has recently been underway following the advocacy pressures of cultural and civil activists and the devotees of the Rumi, it is not sufficient and this historical monument must be reconstructed and renovated as soon as possible. We all know that as the birthplace of the Rumi, Balkh is a source of pride for our people. As Wasef Bakhtari (2016) said " His razor-sharp mind leaped from the height of the profound cliffs of vulgarity and rottenness of personality and lewdness and in that weird sunset of history, the light of forgiveness rose from his poetry and each of his poetry was a Paladin fist which descended on the cursed people of the day. He was a personality which the greatness and glory of his thought and words after 800 years, made the UNESCO name the year 2007 before him and on this occasion, make his glorious badge so that alongside with the other scientific and cultural symbols of the world, his badge is given to knowledgeable personalities.

Regretfully, the least attention has not been paid in the modern era to the remnant of Rumi's family. It should be said with regret that nothing has been done to protect, preserve, reconstruct and renovate the monastery. No one has even prevented destructions and arbitrary diggings and expansion of residential houses, gardens, and farmlands in the surroundings of the monastery. Hence, the house, monastery, school and mosque, which once upon a time scented and lightened this land is now turned into a dark and its remnants of are disappearing even in the existence of the devotees and companions of the Rumi, but not have taken any step and will never do so.

In particular, over the past 20 years, major projects have been implemented and amounts of money have been spent on reconstructing, renovating and creating historical monuments, but no small step was taken for the protection of the monastery. The resonance of the enchanting voice of, Bahauddin Walad, this knowledgeable preacher is heard from the collapsed barracks and towers of the monastery and the fragrance of the Rumi's breaths, is sensed from the morning breezes and the cheering voices of the underage Jalaluddin and his companions are heard from the lanes and gardens of the monastery. A place which is still the spiritual backrest of Balkh and Balkhis and the resting place of the devotees of the Rumi. Throughout our modern history, there has been plenty of opportunities to reconstruct the monastery, and in the meantime, there have been challenges facing it. But there have been many opportunities, and in particular, in more than one and half a decade, no effort has been made to reconstruct this important monument. By the way, lack of attention to the reconstruction of the monastery and having no grace on this center of knowledge, love, and mysticism can have various reasons, but eventually, it can demonstrate a lack of wisdom of our statesmen and boldness of our people. Such an act shows a lack of commitment of local authorities in Balkh and the central government in supporting cultural monuments that underestimate the great literary and scientific pride and ignores the significant spiritual values. The excuses and shortcomings of government officials in delaying the construction of the monastery are unacceptable. Let it not remain that all those who have been in charge of cultural matters within the government as well as local officials and lost golden opportunities over the past two decades and paid no attention to the reconstruction of the monastery are held accountable and should be responsive.

We all know that after the 2002 and formation of an interim and transitional government, and then the elected government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, one of the commitments of the international community was rebuilding and renovating of various sectors in Afghanistan. These commitments have been implemented into practice following the financial and technical support of different countries. Amongst them, the friendly country of Turkey, which says Rumi is closer to Turkey than others, proposed the Afghan government to reconstruct the monastery and its related attachments. Head of Balkh Information and Culture Department Saleh Mohammad Khaliq, in a book dubbed "Balkh Ancient Sites and Monuments" has said:" that in 2004, Turkey has announced its readiness to rebuild the monastery and construct a mosque, guesthouse, library, conference hall, parking and a garden, and in 2008, Turkey considered a three-million USD budget to rebuilt its and its annexes. Simultaneously, in the winter season of 2013, a delegation from Turkey submitted a map to the leadership of Balkh for building a complex belonging to the monastery at an area of 35 acres of land, but no practical step has been taken in this regard. In 2014, Balkh Provincial Spokesman said that Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) had promised to reconstruct and build this monastery at the cost of eight million USD, and in addition to rebuilding, it will build, a mosque, ablution place, guest house, Conference Hall, library, parking and green environment with gardens and surrounding walls at an area of 20 acres of land. The only thing that happened at that time was the replacement of 35 houses from the area which was known as part of challenges in the reconstruction work. Finally, the stone foundation of Mawlana Jalaluddin Balkh's residential town was laid in the Balkh district by TIKA in midst of 2015 which is used by residents of the district. But whatever has still remained uncompleted, is the main and principal work on the reconstruction of the monastery and its attachments.

Residents of Balkh have constantly reacted to the current status of historical monuments, in particular, the monastery of Rumi's father in Balkh and civil institutions, academicians, social media users, media outlets and people have launched advocacy program and criticized lack of attention in this regard. At the end of 2018, a number of civil society activists decided to launch an advocacy gathering in regard to a lack of implementation of the program on the reconstruction of the father of Rumi's monastery. After consultations and coordination meetings, at the end of 2018, a large number of academicians, civil society activists and the devotees of the Rumi held a gathering at the conference hall of the human rights commission in Mazar and called senior government officials and local officials in charge of cultural matters in the gathering. In this advocacy gathering, the cultural and civil institutions demanded the reconstruction of the monastery and its attachments. In this meeting, head of Balkh information and culture department and an official of Balkh governor's office said that the reason the central and local governments, national and international bodies had failed to implement the reconstruction work of the monastery was lack of security in Balkh district which has been one of the key challenges. The security situation in Balkh has deteriorated over the past two years, but the decision to reconstruct the monastery was made 15 years back between Turkey and Afghanistan and the security situation was entirely satisfactory during this period. The project could have been implemented during the 15 years, which regretfully was not put into practice. By the way, whatever has been highlighted by officials as a challenge facing the implementation of the reconstruction and renovation of the monastery was unacceptable by participants of the gathering. The urged the local government officials to follow up on the issues with the central government and Turkey. Amidst the advocacy protests concerning the reconstruction of the monastery, in the first months of 2019, the Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah held a meeting with an official of the Chief Executive Office's cultural and art department to restart the reconstruction work of Bahauddin Walad's school. But, nothing changed and no practical step was taken hereinafter.

Eventually, the Afghan presidential palace tasked an entity to begin the protective umbrella for the monastery which has been completed after a while. In the end, it should be said that building a protective umbrella over the monastery is a good step by the government and it can be a good step to protect the remnants of the monastery from winds and rainfalls, but it should have been built several years ago. The reconstruction work of the monastery and its attachments is one of the demands of our people, that should begin urgently so that not only the monument of the family of the Rumi's is rescued from destruction, but also with its renovation, this place should be turned into a magnificent house for gathering of the devotees of the Rumi and an attraction site for tourists in the region and beyond.

5. CONCLUSION:

According to what we have said in this article in connection with the birthplace and home of Maulana's father, we can conclude that Balkh with a brilliant civilization background as on the oldest cities in Ariana had a high and graceful status in various historical and extra-historical periods. Today, it is considered as one of the places of great cultural and historical heritage that has survived varied periods of life of the people of this land. Balkh once used to be a vast area today is a small town just 20 kilometers far from Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh Province. One of the most important historical places which are ruined and is in a tragic state is the home of Maulana's father, the Khanaqa and the Madrasa of Bahauddin Walad. It is one of the remnants of Kharazmshahian architectural period of the late 6th and early 7th centuries A.D. Unfortunately, this unique legacy of Maulana's family in Balkh has been diminished both in the past and in the honorary era. Not only any serious care and protection not been restored, but also not even prevented from its own destruction and illegal excavations. The monastery and the Madrasa that once upon a time it gives life spirit, glittering and fragrant to the residents, now it is strangely plunged into destruction.

In the distant past, if nothing was done to protect and rebuild this historic place, it had its reasons, but in the latter days, especially over the last two decades, despite all the opportunities and facilities provided for the construction of historical places and cultural heritage, there has been no work from international states and institutions to pay for the reconstruction of this house and the renovation of its sites. The reason behind why no attention has been paid to the construction of this building can be rooted in the lack of commitment of the local government and central government officials to protect the cultural heritage, especially the house of Maulana's father. Still, the reason for underestimating the great literary and scientific elements is the lack of commitment to the spiritual values on this land. Thus to conclude, many factors can be attributed to the lack of commitment to rebuilding Maulana's father's house in Balkh, but part of it was lack of strong willpower, lack of a clear policy in coordinating foreign-aid agencies' assistance for the construction of the house, excuses and breaking the promise by donors and the lack of public participation in the preservation and restoration of cultural and historical heritage. Additionally, the security challenges and other factors have also barricaded the process to restore and reconstruct this historical place. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that in recent days the Afghan government started building the protective umbrella which is appreciable; however, the main demand is to continue the work of a protective umbrella and then reconstruct/rebuild the monastery and Madrasa as needed.

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