

The Tomb of Doda Baba at Nawagai in the Light of Fresh Evidence

Lutf-ur Rahman

Abstract: Doda Baba's tomb is situated in Nawagae, Bajaur Agency. Owing to lack of historical and inscriptional evidence, Doda Baba was an unknown person. However, a couple of inscription have been discovered, related to 'Doda Baba', which has thrown sufficient light on the identity of the saint.

Keywords: Doda Baba, Bajaur, Inscription, Pajmal, Marhamullah

Introduction

The tomb of Doda Baba is the second existing religious monument in Bajaur area after the Mughal period mosque at Khar (Dani 1967:16; Rahman 1996:82-83) The tomb is situated at a distance of 1km from the main road in Doda village, Nawagai area. This historical tomb occupies the north-eastern corner of the main graveyard of Doda village (fig. 1). Besides, there is a wooden mosque and a *hujra khanqah* of the same saint in the proximity of the tomb. Significantly, all these buildings are ascribed to the same saint. In the absence of any substantial historical and inscriptional evidence, Doda Baba was an unknown saintly figure to us. The saint is commonly known as Doda Baba among the local people. The word 'Doda Baba' means an elder or spiritual father who spent some of his life in the Doda village and now buried there. As narrated by the local people, Doda Baba had two wives but he died issueless. It is said that both the wives have been buried in the same graveyard to the west of Doda Baba's tomb. Most of the local people of the village ascribe their family links to the family of the saint. However, the saint had no such blood relations with the indigenous people of the area except the spiritual links he had with them. As suggested by the inscriptions, due to some uncongenial political conditions the saint had to live his native country and took refuge in the Bajaur area. The tomb of the saint has been

briefly mentioned in the previous archaeological survey report on Bajaur area. In the absence of any inscriptional or documentary evidence at that time, a provisional date was given to the tomb; the date was merely based on the verbal knowledge of the local people and later on it was proved to be incorrect through the discovery of the dated inscriptions (Ali & Rahman 2005: 75, pls.2.38-39; Shakirullah 2012: 52-53).

As a final attempt to reach any conclusion on the exact origin of Doda Baba's tomb, the author arranged a visit in February, 2012. This time two inscriptions were found on the inner door of the *hujra* ascribed to the saint. The *hujra* is consisted of two small cells: the first cell has plain door while the door of the inner cell, which opens into the first cell, has rich engraved decoration including the inscriptions (fig. 2). The cells or the small rooms are built of rough stones. The walls of the *hujra* with a wooden roof are thickly plastered with mud. The *hujra* and the wooden mosque are contemporary while the tomb was built after the death of the saint (Plate 3).

The Persian inscriptions found on the door lead to answer some key questions such as the saint's real name, his family name and his original homeland. The inscriptions with a date seem to have written shortly after the arrival of the saint at Nawagai area. However, the early life of the saint and the exact date of his death are still shrouded in mystery. He seems to have appeared

in the Nawagai area as an elder and a well-established religious scholar as could be concluded from the text of the inscriptions. He chose to reside in the Doda village from where he disseminated the religious teachings among the people of the area (see inscription 1).

These inscriptions, two of the wooden door and one inside the tomb, mention the saint's name as Sahib Zada Marhamullah from *Paimal Shareef*, situated in present day Hazara Division.

These inscriptions are as follow:

(1) لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله

این حجره حقیر فقیر مرحوم الله صاحب زاده از پائمال شریف محضر بجائے ناواگئی ساخته است صادقان و صالحان را نہ برائے فاجران و فاسقان را ، غفر الله کاتبه والحمد لله رب العالمین، آمین آمین

Translation: There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah. This small cell (*hujra*) of the beggar (*dervesh*) and of humble Sahib Zada Marhamullah from *Paimal Shareef* is being constructed at Nawagai for the sincere and virtuous people but not for sinners and adulterers. May Allah forgive the writer/scribe. And praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds. So be it, so be it (Plate 4).

(2) بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

تمت تمام شده عبادت خانه بروز شنبه تیار کرده ماه محرم الحرام بدست

مسکین مرحوم الله غفر الله له سنة ۱۳۱۳ هجرى

Translation: In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. The construction of this chamber of worship (*hujra*) completed on Saturday, during the month of Muharram-al-Haram. The task of construction was accomplished by the humble Marhamullah himself. May Allah forgive him; the year is 1313H/ AD 1898 AD (Plate 5).

The above inscription mentions the date of the construction and completion of the *hujra* in the very presence of the saint. A wooden mosque, contemporary with the *hujra*, is located just in the north-east. The mosque was renewed and reconstructed some 70 years ago. According to the oldest local man, who himself took part in the construction of the monument, the tomb was built in about 1925 AD. Hence the construction of the tomb belongs to the British period.

Apart from the above engraved inscriptions on the wooden door of the *hujra*, there are two other short painted inscriptions inside the tomb on the northern wall in the center of the pointed arch.

The top one records the name of the painter who executed the painted decoration while the lower one mentions the name of the saint.

(3) کار خلیف

Translation: the painted decoration is the work of *Khaleef*.

Kaleef is the name of the person who executed the decorative work inside the tomb.

(4) این روضه مرحوم الله صاحب مبارک

This last inscription is partly damaged and only half of it is readable.

Translation: The tomb (*maqbarah*) of the blessed *Marhamullah Sahib* (Plate 6).

Architectural and Decorative Features of the Tomb

The tomb occupies the central point in the graveyard of Doda village in Nawagai area. These buildings, i.e. the *hujra*, the mosque and the tomb, are now completely encircled by graves of the later times. The tomb has been constructed of locally available rough stones fixed in lime plaster. The internal and external sides of the building have been provided with a 9 cm thick lime plaster. The tomb is square in shape. Each external side measures approximately 5 x 5 m.

The eastern side shows three sunk arches while the other sides are plain. The square chamber has cylindrical turrets on its corners. It is surmounted by about a 3 meter high ribbed or umbrella shape dome with a two meter high pointed pinnacle. As a protective measure from climatic conditions, the dome and the parapet have been provided with metal sheets. The soffit of the dome shows eight ribs with painted floral designs (Plate. 7).

The southern side of the grave chamber has wooden door in a cusped arch which makes entrance to the grave (Plate. 1).

The internal grave chamber is square in plan of which each side measures 4.6 m.

The centre of the chamber accommodates the grave of Marhamullah. It is made in three tiers. The northern side is marked by a triangular grave marker topped by a painted basket full of various fruits and flowers (Plate.8). The central grave of the saint is richly decorated with stylized floral designs. The dado is about 1 meter high from the floor of the tomb. It is consisted of alternate brown, yellow, orange and green coloured designs. Its upper limit is marked by a 4 inch wide running band of plaster in relief with applied blue paint. The inner walls on the north and east sides above the dado show sunk pointed arches. The western and southern walls of the inner tomb have trefoil sunk arches. The western and

northern sides of the internal walls have been provided with square niches that exhibit floral designs within the arches.

Four corner pendentives have converted the square chamber into octagon to receive the circular base of the dome. The phase of transition is formed by a half meter wide band of floral designs. Its lower and upper limits are marked by blue paint (Plate. 9).

As already mentioned, the dome is externally plain while the entire internal features of the dome are richly decorated with stylized floral designs. The painted decoration is executed in blue, green, yellow, orange and brown colours.

Conclusion

The presence of three Persian inscriptions in the sacred buildings of Marhamullah Sahib have immortalized the name of the saint in history. He came to this area from *Paimal* in the prime of his life and settled among the local people of Nawagai to inculcate religious teachings in them as may be judged from the text of the first inscription. His tomb, mosque and the *hujra* in Nawagai are symbols of honour for the people of Bajaur. The tomb of Marhamullah was built by the *Khans* of Nawagai who employed the local people for the construction work under the supervision of the relatives of the saint. May his soul rest in eternal peace and tranquility (*Ameen*).

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Plate 1: Tomb of Doda Baba, Bajaur



Plate 2: wooden door with Persian Inscription



Plate 3: The Wooden Mosque



Plate 4: The Persian Inscription



Plate 5: The Persian Inscription



Plate 6: The Painted Inscription as well as floral decoration



Plate 7: The soffit of the dome with geometric and floral decoration



Plate 8: The decorated Grave



Plate 9: Interior Decorations on phase of transition