

ATTACK ON SYNCRETIC CULTURE: HAJI MALANG (A CASE STUDY)

— Asad Bin Saif

*The macabre fang of communalism is being systematically bared in order to take away the legitimacy of fair play and justice and the viability of our precious heritage of harmonious dwelling. These voteries of Hindutva are hellbent to obliterate the fabric of integration. In the process they have loyalty only to parochial instinct and overdomineering outlook. What has been most deplorable in this regard is that, the unperturbed domain i.e., Sufism is being intruded into by such elements. For this, the Hindutva forces have raised the issue of renaming of Shri Malang in place of Haji Malang with the pernicious aim, "to liberate the **samadhi** of Macchindernath from the Muslim claws."*

The Campaign has been launched since 1982 by Mr Anand Dighe, Shiv Sena chief of Thane district, as **Malang Mukti Andolan**. Since then he has been mobilising his followers, the Shiv Sainiks, to demonstrate every year during Urs which falls on Magh Purnima (according to the Hindu calendar and this year it was on Ramdan month). According to him it is the samadhi of Macchindernath Panth, who was heir of saint Adinath, so it must be given to the Hindus to restore its original character. With the increasing clout of Shiv Sena his campaign has been gaining momentum. Earlier - years before Seva-BJP government came to power - the government used to make heavy bandobast on the day of Urs, to protect the shrine from being taken over by the Shiv Sena. This year (1996) with the Coalition government, things were simpler for the Shiv Sena as the Chief Minister Manohar Joshi, along with Uddhav Thackeray, Shabir Sheikh and Ganesh Naik visited the shrine and offered Ganapati Aarti. In fact the chief Minister was planning to rename the shrine but he backtracked due to a case in the court.

The Hindutva offensive has been a multi-pronged one. They have claimed over 2000 mosques on the ground that earlier these were temples which have been converted into the mosques during the Muslim rules. This is the latest macabre machination in the long list of the Hindutva forces.

To investigate the issue and to try to understand the designs of Shiv Sena, the **Centre for Study of Society and Secularism**, sponsored a team to investigate the issue. The team visited the shrine, interviewed the devotees, trustees and went through the gazetteers and clippings from Press reports in order to understand the ongoing controversy.

The Shrine: Haji Malang is situated on Mallanggad, on a hilltop nearly 11 km from Kalyan station. Frequent buses are available from Kalyan to visit the site. There is a small fort and the complex is at the height of around 700 feet from ground level. It takes nearly three hours to climb up on an average day but takes longer during the Urs time. On our visit we could see some freshly demarcated plots with new boards with "Shri Malang" written on them. It looked like a recent phenomena in order to give strength to their pleas. Then we went into a hotel, we began to talk to one lady, Sakuntala Patkar. She said "we people only know it as Haji Malang". She also said that "it is wrong to go for such renaming, which is certain to hurt the sentiments of His devotees. His devotees belongs to all communities, leave alone the fact that it is a Muslim Shrine". On proceeding upwards, one saw that on either side of the road — all the houses have the picture of Haji Malang shrine. It was very difficult to distinguish whether it was a Muslim or Hindu house. Later one met just at the foothill. Mr John Devashi, a Christian, from Cochin, and with a military background. He said "I stay here because I was afflicted with some grave disease and I could revive due to the blessings of the Baba." On being asked what was his opinion about the renaming. He says "I am greatly perturbed by the antics of Shiv Sena to bring the holy Shrine in the halo of controversy."

During our climb, we saw a "Medical Darvesh Trust". On it the symbol of Allah and Om was engraved. It is run by a Hindu Doctor in the loving memory of his Murshid Late Sufi Fakr Gullumullah Laghari Hyderabad (Sind, West Pakistan). It means that Sufism has transcended all barriers across all human beings of different countries.

The journey upto the peak is tough — and yet people climb up all the way for asking for '**Mannat**' (A word representing boon and a wish). Many shops are opened on the climb — which gives good service to the tired soul. We find two **Mazars** in between which is said to be the shrine of Haji Malang's disciples and people pay obeisance to them. We also met the Hereditary Trustee or Mojabar (who serves for Mazar) Kashinath Gopal Ketkar (a Brahmin). The way he was talking and receiving the people it became obvious that out of devotion he had adopted the Muslim way of life. It was quite discerning that the manners and culture of the most of the people is very much influenced by Muslim Culture. After talking to him one thing was clear that he felt

greatly perturbed by the ongoing controversy. He clearly asserts "They don't have any sort of proof either documentary or whatsoever". He stated that "the presence of Muslims is declining during Urs because of this controversy but people come later on all the year round." On being asked what he thought of the renaming, he said "I don't like it and I am rather pained to feel such things are being fomented. It is beyond doubt that the shrine belongs to Muslim Sufis, but His devotee cut across all the communities." He further says "People of forty villages around the hill will continue to say Haji Malang because they have deep rooted devotion towards the shrine but who has the mischievous intention, will say whatever it suits them." The Hereditary Trustee also stated "Our aim is to provide good services to his devotee with out any discrimination. We are going to open a secular institute which could give ideal type of education". He dented the fanatics citadel by saying that "each and every household of Brahmins in Pune worships the statue of Junglee Maharaj, who was a Muslim Fakir."

We talked to one Irani Florist shopkeeper (Asghar Ali) who said "I am really anguished the way the chauvanistic forces have been pricking up the issues and holding at ransom the peace and tranquility of the country. We are still struggling to come out of the lacerated psyche inflicted upon us due to the demolition of the Mosque by these Communalist forces." We also talked with Dattaray Sawant a devotee from Lalbaugh Bombay, he said "Really, it is unfortunate that the issues like this is being given precedence over so many problems which deserves to be given adequate attention. I don't like this. It's wrong to support this.

One could easily see the devotion and faith cutting across different religions. Also the pain and anguish of these devotees on the raising of these controversy by the voteries of Hindutva.

The afore-mentioned views expressed by the people is corroborated by the Thane District Gazeteer (1982 revised edition) The Gazeteer says "The tomb is one of Haji Abdul Rehman an Arah missionary, who is said to have died 800 years ago. The oldest name connected with Malanggadh is that of Nala Raja, who is said to have lived on the hill, 800 years ago. During his reign, Haji Abdul Rahman arrived on the hill along with his followers. To test his sanctity, Nala Raja sent his beautiful daughter to the saint. Haji passed the test. Convinced of his virtue the kings gave his daughter to him in marriage. Its tomb lies next to his at the shrine.

The Gazeteer further states that "It is believed that the five tombs at the other end of dargah are called five pirs and are said to be of the five disciples of Haji Malang. In 1780, the British, made their advent on the hill with Colonel Hartley from Bombay and captain Jameson from Kalyan, and defeated the Marathas who had their garrison at the fort.

However, they left the place after 2 years and Marathas gained the control again. As a thanksgiving gesture, the Peshwas sent to the shrine the pall of cloth of gold, trimmed with pearls and supported in silver pots. However, neither the cloth nor the Pots are found on the tomb now. This gift was brought in a state of procession under the charge of one "Kashinath Pant Ketkar", a Brahmin from Kalyan. The present Hereditary Trustee is a descendent of the same family."

The Gazeteer continues "In 1817, Kalyan Musalman was headed by one Hydad. The hereditary guardian of the tomb did not acquiesce with Brahmin management of the shrine and laid a claim to the management with the district collector Thane. That was decided by casting the lots and Ketkar emerged victorious. The Ketkar were declared the guardian. Recently the Supreme Court has also ordered that the management should remain hereditary."

We also went through a book in Hindi which is widely available and written by K Babarab Ketkar under the caption of "Baba Haji Malang." If one goes through this book one can easily discern that it is never written anywhere as Shri Malang but as Shri Haji Malang. Somewhere this book mentions that when the Baba needed water to do ablutions which is necessary preceding prayer. He did not find the water anywhere. Then he struck the surface, showers of water emerged. That place is now called **Chashma** (an Arabic word) and from it water is made available for the needy. A story about the arrival of Haji Malang is attributed as "The hilltop had been the abode of demon and they were creating havoc with the lives of the men. One Abdul Rahman from Arab was sent by Allah to liberate the people from the tyranny of the demon. He came and freed the people from the cruelty of the demon."

The shrine is associated with annual Urs. On the night of Urs a procession with *Baba Ki Palakhi* is taken out. The palanquin is made of 40 Kgs of silver with inner lining of sandalwood. The palanquin is decorated and carried around midnight and kept for darshan for couple of hours. Traditionally the Ketkar family performs the rituals. But there are different people chipping in different functions eg, decoration by Khan family, Sandalwood decoration by Attar family from Kalyan. Palanguin is carried by Koli family and Milad readings from Holy Quran are read by Patel family. A place of honour is given to the eunuch in this procession.

As per Ketkar, the offerings given at the shrine are a mixture of both Hindu and Muslim traditions. Devotees offer **chaddars**, coconuts, flowers, and sheet of flowers.

Sufism, Shrine and Syncretic Culture.

The essence of Sufism is to seek spiritual solace by indulging in altruistic love and serve the humanity at large without any discrimination. It inculcates propriety in relations towards fellow beings. Sufism has provided immense cementing factor for the diverse society. Most of the Sufis fought against the tyranny of all-powerful monarchs and lords. Theirs mystic morality struck at the roots of parochialism, Casteism and religious exclusiveness. Its core teaching is "Unity of being" (**Wahdut-ul-Wajud**) which is incompatible to the fundamentalist because it teaches unity among human beings, just contrary to the fundamentalist assertion.

Sufism had made Akbar a great secular monarch of medieval history, where this period is known as religious intolerance. The two Sufi brothers Faizi and Abul Fazal indoctrinated Akbars mind in favour of secular approach and Sulh-e-Kul (Harmony for all) became his ethics of ruling. The great enemy proved to be his great friend due to his practising conciliatory philosophy.

The quatrine which inscribed in a house both in Hindi and Urdu. Just where the climb starts, shows the essence of Sufism:-

Kisi dard mand ke kam aa

Kisi doobte ko ucchal de

Ye nigahan maast ki mastiyan

Kisi badnaseeb pe dal de.

(Come to the rescue of the despondent

Save the lives of the drowning

Yours sight of instilling rejuvenation

Oh! Cast it on the hapless one)

Haji Malang is an embodiment of Sufi-culture which is very popular and prevalent amongst the people. Its trustees are non-Muslims, devotees, cut across all the religions and all recognise it as a **dar-gah** of the Haji Malang.

Shiv Sena Attack on Syncretic Culture

The last few decades have seen the ascendancy of Hindutva, an upper caste political agenda, donning the garb of nationalism and subsuming popular, sub-culture, under the steam-roller of Brahminical practices. Hindutva is trying to impose the Brahminical ethos and practices under the garb of Hinduism. This upper caste bias is to

homogenise the society in the colour of Brahminical practices. The very traditions which creates confluence through accomodation is under attack. The Hinduism being propagated by Hindutva forces is identified with Brahminical orthodoxy, accepting the authority of Vedas and Brahmins. A huge chunk of people especially the poor veer around non-vedic gods like Vithoba and follow the trends like Bhakti and Sikhism (which later became a full-fledged religion) Similarly Sufism has come to occupy a good deal of social space amongst large number of people. The present strategy of Hindutva movement is to propagate, Brahminical Hinduism" as the religion of this land. For a Hindu Rashtra to come in, all their identities have to be destroyed to create a homogenous culture. The present attack of Shiv Sena on Haji Malang is, one in the chain of such attempts to forcibly destroy the syncretic culture and replace it with Brahminical culture. How the Sufism goes against Brahminical ethos. Once a Sufi was given a scissor, he said instantly "why are you people giving me a scissor. I need a niddle because my mission is to sew not to cut".

The political compulsion of Shiv Sena has resulted in it trying to proliferate its influence – enhance their area of influence. They have tried to strike at the chord of the ignorant people and frustrated youth which could accrue the benefit in terms of voting. But given the people's adherence, this policy will not give the benefit the Shiv Sena is intending. People seem to be adamant and don't like to budge from the truth. The question arises; from whom does the Shiv Sena want to liberate the shrine-whether from Ketkar, Joshi or Patil. All these trustees are non-Muslims but they proclaim it in impeccable voice as a Muslim shrine.

It is rightly said that "a dictator has no notion, no connotation, but they have only own-will." This imposition of own-will has caused havoc in the past with the peace and tranquility for the society so it deserves to be exposed in order to safeguard our peace. It does not augur well for the country as diverse as ours.

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The Gazetette mentioned here is the Thane District Gazette (1982 revised edition) and the clippings are from:

(i) Afternoon Feb 7, 1996 Haji Malang where controversy brew, Ranjit Khome and Sudhakar Olwe.

(ii) The Asian Age 5th Feb 1996, Multi religious shrine services through centuries, By Hepzi Mutiah.