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Qalandar in Persian Literature and Culture

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Abstract¹

The qalandars were a group of Sufis from the sect of Malāmatieh who expanded the practices of austerity fully appreciating the social and religious customs and rituals to the borders of insouciance and even non-conformity. Qalandarieh was well-known and at the height of its activities in Khorasan, India, Syria and some other countries around the seventh century AH, though their influence goes beyond this century. It seems that the word “qalandar” was first used as the gathering place for the followers of this sect of Sufism that was called Qalandari. However, from the sixth century, the word qalandar was used to refer to individuals. The word qalandar can be found with all its distinguishing characteristics in Persian poetry, since most of the Persian poets have somehow used the word on different occasions. In many poems, one can find the customs and rituals of the qalandars, too; and many of these poems have turned into proverbs through time. In this paper, the word qalandar and the history of qalandars and their customs and rituals are analyzed followed by a discussion of the relationship between these rituals and the Persian literature and culture using the word qalandar.

Keywords: Qalandar, Qalandarieh, Qalandariat, Sufism, Malāmatieh.

1. Introduction

It was in the first century AH that the founders of Sufism paved the way for the emergence of Sufis in the second century AH. At that time, especially in the second half of the second century AH, a group of people appeared in the

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communities of Muslims who had strange and peculiar life styles. Their lives were based on austerity, poverty, patience, humbleness, sorrow and avoiding impiety. This group was later identified as Sufis (Zarrinkub, *A Survey* 25).

The third century AH was the age of development and maturity for Sufism. Sufis formed groups and sects in this time. One of these sects was called “Malāmatieh” (literally meaning those who reproach). The followers of this doctrine strongly supported the Shariat (laws of Islam) while they also believed in piety and austerity but did not make it public. They did not have any special attire and they hid themselves among ordinary people by engaging in their everyday affairs.

A sect called “Qalandarieh” based on some special beliefs was created within the Malāmatieh. Qalandarieh was formed as one of the sects of Sufism which was connected to groups like Fatyān and ‘Ayyārān on the one hand, and had its roots in the beliefs of Malāmatieh, on the other hand (Mir ‘Abedini and Afshari 38). The qalandars were a community of Malāmāti Sufis who stretched the practices of austerity as well as rejecting the pretense to fully appreciate the social and religious customs and rituals to the borders of insouciance and even non-conformity.

There are opposing viewpoints and conflicting definitions of the character of the qalandar and the sect of Qalandarieh. Having these conflicts in mind, one can assume that the qalandars have gone through changes and modifications in the course of history, or have been different in different periods. While having a lot of common traits in their practice of Qalandari rituals, the qalandars have been different in their clothing, their commitment to piety, etc. in different periods. The true qalandars have always been in search of perfection and have relinquished all occupation with themselves and both this and the other world and have been comparable to the great figures of Sufism. However, since they have been negligent of the customs and traditions of the common people who are only seeking their own interests, there appeared a number of people who, to show their opposition to the common public, fashioned their appearance based on the

qalandars. This resulted in the notoriety of the true qalandars (Shafi'ei-Kadkani 271).

Regarding the significance of the topic and the role of the concept of qalandari in Persian poetry and proverbs, the researcher deemed it necessary to evaluate the existing studies and to look at other aspects of this topic.

There are many books and articles about the character of the qalandar, the sect of Qalandarieh and the concept of qalandari in Persian ghazals. *Qalandarieh in History (Transformations of an Ideology)* written by Muhammad Reza Shafi'ei Kadkani traces the Qalandarieh movement in different fields. In *The Rites of Qalandari*, Seyyed Abutaleb Mir 'Abedini and Mehran Afshari introduce the culture of qalandari as part of the popular culture whose study can shed light on the behavioral and ethical characteristics of Persian people. In *The Rites of the Qalandars*, Javad Borumand-Sa'id first analyzes the roots and derivations of the word qalandar, and then in each chapter introduces different groups of the qalandars and some of their rituals; after that, he brings evidences from the literary prose and poetry in different periods.

Ebrahim Kan'ani in his article "Analyzing the manifestations of Qalandari and Ayyari rituals in Kaleidar" focuses on the characteristics and traits of qalandari and 'Ayyari in the characters of this classic novel by Dowlatabadi. In "A Comparison of the teachings of rendaneh, Qalandaraneh and Moghaneh in the Ghazals of Salman Savaji and Hafez Shirazi", Sa'id Ruzbehani and his colleagues study the intellectual trends which are reflected in the works of these two poets. Jan Muhammad Afrazi and his colleagues in "A Comparison of the Themes of Qalandari in the Works of Sheik Ahmad Jam and Hafez Shirazi" have emphasized on the hypocrisy of religious people, especially those who strictly abide by the laws, showing that this group create evils in the society which are much more disastrous than those of other groups. In "A Study of the Themes of Qalandari in the Ghazals of 'Attar and Hafez" 'Abbas Muhammadian and his

colleagues discuss the use of qalandari terminology related to the concepts of blasphemy and faith in the ghazals of the two greatest Persian poets.

2. The Etymology of the word Qalandar

Qalandar is one of the most ambiguous words in Persian language. There are many discussions about the origin of the word qalandar and there is no certainty about the root, derivations and origin of this word. In *Nezam Dictionary*, the origin of the qalandar is considered to be kalandar meaning untrimmed wood, connoting a jobless person or a beggar.

And also, “kalandar was the name of an untrimmed wood which was also called kondeh (log). Sometimes it is put behind a door to stop it from opening and sometimes holes are made into the log to be use as punishment where the feet of criminals are put through. Its meaning has changed through time and now it is modified into the Arabic spelling of qalandar” (*Jahangiri Dictionary* 1651).

Some associate the word qalandar with salandar, which “has been used to refer to someone who has abandoned his country and house. Therefore, one can also get the meaning of homeless and vagabond from it. In this case, the modified form of this word, kalandar, and sometimes qalandar, meaning vagabond and homeless, is used for men who, because of their special ideology, have abandoned this world and do not care for the pleasures of this world” (Borumand-Sa’id 13).

Some have found a relationship between qalandar and kalantar (literally meaning sheriff); in the regional languages, the spelling kalan and kalaan is very common; and kolu means bazar’s kalantar and the neighborhood’s elder and sage (Sajjadi, *The Dictionary of Mystical Terms* 233).

In many dictionaries, qalandar is thought to be the equivalent of “qallash”, which literally means cunning, sly, infamous, jobless, homeless and beggar persons” (*Borhan-e Qate’* 1036).

And in *A Complement to Terms of Sufism*, Sheikh Seyyed Akbar Hosseini believes “qallash and qalandar are the people of abandonment, those who have

relinquished the pleasures and the wants of the nafs [self]” (quoted in Borumand-Sa’id 12).

As Mir ‘Abedini and Afshari discuss, “the word qalandar has had different meanings in different centuries. The origin and root of this word is not exactly known. The Persian-speaking poets have used it as a name of place before the seventh century” (52).

Muhammadkhani and Fotuhi also record the word “qalandar” as “a place for debauchee and unprotected people who have been polluted with all kinds of sins and wrongdoings; it was a place similar to *kharabat* in which gambling was a common practice and whoever went there would lose everything altogether” (77).

Shafi’i Kadkani believes that the word Qalandar has been a place name at first:

Qalandar was a place and the people who resided in it had special characteristics, such as breaking the norms and customs of the society and ignoring the respect for many of the life values for the people of the time; these people were called qalandari based on their place of gathering and living; and the place was called qalandar. Later on, because of the modification in the word, gradually the people were also called qalandar (431).

However, from the seventh century, the word gradually lost its meaning as the name of the place and was used for the people who gathered there. This is the reason why in later centuries, the word qalandar was used for people, and the place was renamed as qalandar-khaneh (literally, the home of qalandars): “The word qalandar was usually used as the genitive for some words, like *rend* (a cunning person), such as ‘*rend-e qalandar*’, which meant the *rend* that was ascribed to the place of qalandar; but in later periods, the readers assumed that

qalandar is an adjective and not a genitive; Therefore, they gradually started using the word independently” (Shafi’i Kadkani 21).

3. The conceptual Meaning of Qalandar

Reza Qoli Khan Tabarestni (pen name Hedayat), the writer of *Riyaz al-Arefin* believes, “qalandar is meant to be in a position of freedom, from each and every commitment” (41). In *Islamic Concepts Dictionary* we read about qalandar, “the meaning of qalandar is the abstraction and abdication of both worlds” (Sajjadi 1513). *The Dictionary of Mystical Terms and Expressions* also defines the word as “someone who has freed himself from both worlds. qalandar has reached perfection is this abstraction and abdication and he attempts in breaking the norms and hiding the prayers” (Sajjadi 645)

Raja’i Bukhara’i states, “Qalandar is used to refer to a derelict and carefree dervish who is careless about clothing and rituals and prayers and whose aim is to break the norms” (551). Mir ‘Abedini and Afshari while discussing the beliefs of “Khaksarieh” comment upon the qalandar:

He has availed himself for the service, has put the shield of patience on his shoulder, has worn the hat of tavakkol (literally, trust), has withdrawn the blade of the tongue, has worn the footwear of the seekers, has put his foot on the steps of happiness and has mounted the steed of effort, has extended the hand of generosity, has held the whip of nobility, and has ridden on the steed of effort in the desert of austerity until he reaches the desired Kaaba (309).

The word qalandar has been used in a negative context, too. Shirvani in his *Riyaz al-Siyahat* identifies qalandars as “a people ascribed to Qalandarieh, who do not respect the rituals of Shariat (the laws of Islam) and think of Shariat as one of the commitments and do not observe the rituals of worship, and are constantly roaming and on the road” (482). Also, Moballeghi Abadani in *The History of Sufi and Sufism* states that “the qalandars used to shave the hair on

their heads, eyebrows, moustache and beard; they used to wear ‘dalq’, a kind of woolen dress. They believed that everything is permissible for the mystic; two important commands in Islam, which are Enjoining good and forbidding wrong, are negated in their belief and they believe that they are permitted to avail themselves of people’s properties even if they steal them” (489).

This group of people, who go by the name of qalandar, qalandari, rend, qallash, kharabati and jowlaqi, have a high place among the mystics; they attempt to hide their worship, break the norms and seek fame in infamy and carry the load of infamy. As Hafez says,

What are you saying about infamy? My fame is from infamy.
And what are you saying about fame? My infamy is from name.
We are drinkers and vagabonds and rends and voyeurs,
Who is not like us in this town? (37)

In fact, the qalandars are the ones who oppose the rules and laws and norms of the society in their everyday and social lives. The common point in the beliefs of the qalandars is the abandonment of all the belongings of this world. They believe that the motivator of the religious rituals is also the love of God.

In his *Qalandarnameh*, Khatib Farsi describes qalandar several times and believes that each letter in the word qalandar stands for an important ritual in Qalandarieh:

I will tell you about another important thing
Qalandar is made of five letters, O, brother
Every one of them has a meaning
And not everyone can boast about knowing them
Those who can, should be absolutely content
Since this knowledge is important at the beginning [of the word]
The second letter in it is **l** which means

Whoever boasts of being a faqir
 Should be benevolent all in all
 And people should see nothing except benevolence from him
 This means that with the people of his time
 He should be benevolent without any excuses
 The blessed and well-versed faqirs
 Put **n** as the third letter in the word
 Which means anyone who from the debauchery and sins
 Says his penitence at the door of God
 He should not be, until the day of doom,
 An inhabitant of the land of regret
 The fourth letter is **d** because
 Anyone who is known as a dervish
 His piety is that from no direction
 He gets astray from the path of religion
 They put the letter **r** at the end of the word
 I will tell you the reason why
 it means anyone who wants to be a qalandar,
 should make austerity his true commitment
 Austerity is a reminiscence from Muhamad (PBUH)
 In this case, austerity is fruitful. (83)

4. The Use of the Word Qalandar in Proverbs

There are many instances of the word qalandar in Persian proverbs each denoting an aspect of qalandar. The following proverbs are some of these aspects:

The night is long and the qalandar is awake (or idle).

From a qalandar a hoy, from a bear a hair.

One raisin and forty qalandars.

Qalandar says what he sees.

Not anyone who shaves his hair knows the way of qalandari.

Like the bride of the qalandars (Dehkhoda Dictionary, under the entry qalandar).

He is a qalandar and even a cottonseed is good enough for him.

For qalandar, there's no difference between departure and staying.

The qalandar was told it was time to depart; he threw the clothes made of skin on his shoulders.

Being a qalandar has nothing to do with the length of hair.

This one says go to your mother in the house; the other says go to your father who is a qalandar.

Some of the proverbs refer to the belongings of the qalandars:

He's eaten the food and he's thrown down the langar [which literally means anchor, too].

It's a green leaf, the gift of a dervish. (Shafi'i Kadkani 280)

In all these proverbs, the characteristics and the descriptions of the qalandars is obvious. From the sixth century AH, the qalandari words and expressions became popular in mystical poetry. The reason for the popularity of these words is that a sect of Sufis called Qalandarieh which was also known as Malamatieh and Ebahieh, saw it as its duty to oppose the norms of common people; therefore, they acted and talked against Shariat because, first, they intended to make themselves disrespectful in the eyes of other people; and second, they thought of themselves as free from sins (Moein 7506).

Shafi'i Kadkani also argues:

In the last days of the historical presence of the qalandars, a great amount of attention to appearance and commitment entered the circles of qalandars. In the word analysis of the qalandari literature, the number of these concepts and expressions and tools goes beyond hundreds of items. However, due to the mixture of this social and cultural movement with the transcendent and unique

literature which had spokesmen like Sanaei and Attar and Hafez, the negative and vulgar aspects of qalandari is regraded with a respectful eye..." (52).

The impressive thing among the traits of the qalandars is their violation of the social taboos, and when this violation of the taboos reveals itself in an artistic way in "Moghaneh poetry" in the works of Sana'i, 'Attar and others, it creates a form that is known as Qalandari literature or Moghaneh poetry (Shafi'i Kadkani 63). Moganeh poetry is a type of poetry in which elements connected to moghan, such as mogh, mogh-bacheh, kooy-e moghan, pir-e moghan, moghan wine and moghan rituals, are used. This type of poetry is meaningful and significant only in the context of qalandari poetry (Ma'dankan 155)

5. The Rituals of the Qalandars

Being a sect the qalandars had certain rituals in their physical appearance, clothing, housing and so on which will be discussed below.

Chahar-Zarb

Chahar-zarb literally means four strikes and refers to the shaving of hair, eyebrow, beard and moustache. Hafez writes about the significance of this practice in these lines:

There are thousands of meanings thinner than a strand of hair
Not anyone who shaves his hair knows the way of qalandari (137)

The qalandars usually shaved their beard, moustache, eyebrow and hair on their head and wore ragged clothes called "Dalq" made of wool. "Dak Zadan" is another term recorded in *Dehkhoda Dictionary* and defined as four strikes, meaning removing the hair on the head, eyebrows, beard and moustache.

Seemingly, shaving hair has been a common practice among the qalandars from the fifth century AH. Many researchers and writers associate the origination of this ritual to Jamal al-Din Savaji, the founder of Qalandarieh. The author of *The History of the Angel* recorded a biography of Seyed Jamal al-Din Savaji

known as Mojarrad (literally meaning celibate) which sheds light on the ritual of shaving the hair:

And he was Seyed Jamal al-Din Savaji who was a mufti in Egypt for a while and answered every question that people brought to him without even referring to a book and was therefore named Moving Library by the Egyptians, and it is said that at the end he experienced a spiritual awakening that he shaved his moustache and beard and went to Damietta which is eight days away from [Cairo] Egypt and has been in ruins from the time of Prophet Joseph and fell unconscious there. But the true account is that a Seyed Jamal was famous for his attractive appearance, so much so that Egyptians called him the second Joseph, and as Zuleikha (Potiphar's wife) fell in love with Joseph the prophet, the wife of one of the Egyptian emirs fell in love with Seyed Jamal Mojarrad, and this putting pressure him so much that he had to run away from Egypt toward the land of Damietta, and when that woman followed him passionately because of her love and Seyed Jamal Mojarrad heard this, he became distressed and prayed to God and asked Him to diminish his looks, and his prayers were answered, and the hair of his moustache and beard and eyebrows fell altogether, and when the woman reached there and saw him with that appearance, she turn her head and returned to Egypt and Seyed who was saved from that disaster, stayed in that land. Now his tomb is there and the qalandars are gathered there (Ghani 443).

The ritual of Chahar-Zarb shaving belongs to the later qalandars who have justified it in this way: “the first strike is the shaving of the beard which means relinquishing the love of this world; the second strike is the shaving of the moustache which means throwing out selfishness; the third strike is shaving the hair on the head which means dying before death; and the fourth strike is the

shaving of the eyebrows which means leaving the veil of others and forgetting everyone [except God]" (Borumand-Sa'id 51).

One can see different reasons for shaving the hair in the works of the Sufis. For instance, "The hair is a veil, a grand veil, which results in selfishness and getting away from God; since in the love between a lover and a beloved there is no room for even a strand of hair, they shaved their hair so that the intermediary was removed and unity was attained" (ibid). In a tract related to the rituals of shaving and in the verse book of *Tarashnameh (The Book of Shaving)* which is a work from Jalali qalandars, the meaning is revealed to be based on destruction of habits and rebellion against usual traditions of the society. In these books, shaving of the head in four strikes signifies that the seeker has abandoned the love of this world from his soul and has removed the veil between himself and the beloved. One reads in the verse book of *Tarashnameh* which is an advice book for the Jalali dervishes,

Those who know the meaning of each statement
 The seekers of religion, the men of antiquity have said
 About shaving and patching and their rituals
 About their descriptions and their meanings
 So that those who are familiar with shaving know
 That it is Chahar-Zarb, and it is evident, not hidden
 First the beard and the moustache and then the head
 After that, the eyebrow, O knowledgeable man
 For each one they have mentioned a meaning
 Our leaders who have come before us
 The first strike is the beard, O followers
 Which means the love of this world should be abandoned?
 Then do you know the meaning of shaving the moustache?
 It is letting go of all the selfishness
 Then the shaving of the head, O, you seeker of friendship
 Means the back of the head should be like the sole of the foot

The meaning of [shaving] the eyebrow is lifting the veil
And freeing the heart from the love of anyone but God
The meaning of Char are these four things
Hear this from me and keep it in your mind.
(Bertels 616-17)

It seems that the ritual of shaving has been a usual practice among other sects of the Sufis, too. It is recorded that whenever Owhad al-Din Kermani (who died in 653 AH) accepted a volunteer into Sufism, he shaved his head first and then put kherqeh (ragged clothes) on him. In the sect of Refaeieh, too, the ritual of shaving the head was done with special ceremony; the handler of shaving was called “The Old Man of the Scissors” and the act of shaving was called “running the scissors” (Sajjadi, *An Introduction to Mysticism* 234-6).

Some did not shave their hair though. There may be a story behind the proverb, “qalandari is not limited to the length of the hair.” The description of some characters in Dowlatabadi’s *Kaleidar* reveals that it was a common practice among the qalandars in Khorasan, Iran, to wear their hair and beard long (Kan‘ani 102).

The Clothing of the Qalandars

As most of the researchers point out, the qalandars did not wear proper clothes and appeared in attires that were not accepted by the norms of the society. “Like the bride of the qalandars” is a proverb that refers to the clothing of the qalandars and means without enough clothes to cover all parts of the body (*Dekhoda Dictionary*).

Nakedness

Sometimes the qalandars went completely naked and only covered their genital areas with leaves of a fig tree or other plants and believed that this is the ornament of faqr (poverty). “This clothing could not be justified with any criterion at that time; but the qalandars believed that the only condition for entering heaven is becoming naked; until the shame of becoming naked is there, the ritual of Qalandari is not observed” (Borumand-Sa’id 64).

Jowaleq

Jowaleq or Jawaliq is a coarse and inferior type of cloth which had been used for making jawal (large sack) and kiseh (bag) and in the past, the qalandars who shaved their hair and eyebrows were called Jowlaqi, and the original term is jowlakh, which refers to a wool cloth which was used to make saddlebags and is worn by the faqirs (Sabour 417).

It is evident from “The Tale of the Parrot and the Storekeeper” in Rumi’s *Masnavi* that in the time of Rumi, Jowlaq was the qalandars’ special clothing: “Suddenly there was a jowlaqi passing / His head as bald as the back of bowls and pans” (Mowlavi 260)

Longuteh (Tanureh)

“Longuteh” is a small loincloth which is worn by dervishes, the poor and the derelicts (*Jahangiri Dictionary*, under the entry Longuteh). It consisted of cloth covering the body from the navel to the knee, and was used by poor people and dervishes because it was so simple and cheap. “Longuteh” was considered a symbol of meekness and submission, so that their foot did not trespass where it was not supposed to (Borumand-Sa’id 77).

Long

Just like longuteh, “long” (waist-cloth) was a clothing for poor people and dervishes and qalandars. There are justifications for wearing long in the rituals of qalandari (Mir ‘Abedini and Afshari 202-3).

Namad and Kapang

The naked qalandars sometimes wore “namad (felt covering) and kapang” (thick woolen sleeveless coat) in order to show their monstrence and opposition to people of the world (Borumand-Sa’id 73); it is a special clothing made from wool and usually the shepherds, the rural people and the youth wear them on their clothes in the winter (*Farsi Dictionary* 2897).

Hides of animals

Sometimes the qalandars wore clothes made of animal skin which was not compatible with the culture and beliefs of others. The qalandars sometimes wore the skin on their shoulders and sometimes they used it as a carpet. It seems that in their takieh there has been a skin on which only the Pir (the sage) was allowed to sit (Mir ‘Abedini and Afshari 114-118).

The Emblem of Qalandari

“The qalandars were fighters and had a covert and underground organization always going from this town to the other and meeting with their fighter friends; however, nobody recognized them; therefore, in order to get in contact with their friends and deliver messages, they had to have some emblems and insignias called “vasleh” (patch) which was not accessible for everyone since those who possessed these vaslehs had special conditions” (Borumand-Sa’id 89).

Some of the emblems of qalandari are as follows:

Hide (floor spread made of skin of animals)

Some of the qalandars were performers; they went town to town and advertised for their rituals while they gathered people around them in the squares and chanted and performed; they used special equipments for these occasions. Seemingly, these qalandars had a table-spread with them and would spread it on the ground and put some food on it inviting others to have them; they ascribed this spread to Imam Ali (PBUH). The skin hide is known as the symbol of contentment. It is composed of four borj (constellation) and each borj has a meaning and anyone who does not know these four meanings should not receive the skin hide (Borumand-Sa'id 106 / Mir 'Abedini and Afshari 193-224)

The performer qalandars would spread the skin hide on the ground in the square and asked people to throw money or other valuable things on it. In Bardsir dialect, when someone goes somewhere uninvited and stays there for a long time, this proverb is used: "he's spread his skin hide" (Borumand-Sa'id 108). Also, the proverb, "The qalandar was told it was time to depart; he threw his skin hide on his shoulders", refers to this emblem of qalandari.

Bell

The bell was another tool for the qalandars. There was a kind of bell which was worn by the sect of Ajam in teahouses and made it ring while they were making speeches or reciting poetry; and there was another type called "Heidari bell" which was worn around the waist (Mir 'Abedini and Afshari 32). Mir 'Abedini and Afshari describe the Heidari bell as:

If they ask from whom remains the ritual of the Heidari bell, tell them it is a reminiscence of the Prophet Muhamad (PBUH) on the night he went to Me'raj (the Ascension of the Prophet to the heavens). He heard the sound of a prayer saying "heidar" [literally, lion] from inside a dome and when he wanted to enter, he was asked, "who are you?" and he said, "I am the lord of the people and the servant of the poor," and he was allowed to go in. When he went inside, he saw that thirty-nine people were sitting in a

ring and one place was empty. After an hour, he saw that that one person came, too, and had with him one grape, and he put it down on the ground and then they said: “O Prophet, come and serve this grape for all forty of us.” And the Prophet asked for a bowl and he squeezed that one grape into that bowl and he served each one of them a spoonful of that juice and when he shared that juice, he tasted from grape and it opened and he threw the seed of the grape into the juice and it dried up, and he moved the bowl and it made a sound. They imitated this act, and it became the Heidari bell. This is the proof of this bell (241).

It seems that the proverb, “one raisin and forty qalandars” which is frequently used in Persian literature alludes to this story.

The Gathering Place of the Qalandars

One of the gathering places of the qalandars is “langar” (anchor). To show their disagreement with the hypocrite pious men and pretender Sufis, the qalandars did not accept any of their customs and rituals. To distinguish themselves from the Sufis of Khaneqah, they called themselves “Langar”, like the Fatyan.

Baba-Tahir Oryan Hamedani, whose death is recorded by Reza-Qoli-Khan Hedayat to be in 410 AH, wrote this quatrain and called himself “rend” and “qalandar”; he refers to “langar” where qalandars gather, and in this way he shows the relationship between these elements:

I am that rend, whose name is qalandar
I have no spread, no house and no langar
When day comes, I’m circling around your alley
When night comes, I lay my head on clay.
(Kianinezhad 266)

Langer is one of the special words for the qalandars. It is actually their khaneqah, as the Fatyan's khaneqah is also called langar. As Zarrinkub argues, "from around the fourth century, many of the gallants quit being fighters and bandits and took to having business in the cities and established special places called langar to perform their rituals, following the model of Sufis' khaneqah" (Zarrinkub 363).

In order to distinguish themselves from the Sufis, the qalandars called their khaneqah "langar". Langar is a place where they give food to people every day (*Jahangiri Dictionary*, under the entry langar) and where they give food to the poor (*Ghias al-Ghias*, under the entry langar).

From the ninth century, establishing langars was more popular in India where, due to cultural and geographical conditions and the influence of the Indian ascetics, the dervishes were freer and more carefree than the Sufis in other regions; therefore, the khaneqahs and the langars in Khorasan were usually hosting dervishes and qalandars and jobless people and those who pretended to be dervishes; and the managers of these langars hospitably tolerated the unfavorable behavior of these people. These jobless and pretender dervishes were the inhabitants of the langars. Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Jami criticizes these groups; in other words, he finds a good excuse in the condition of the inhabitants of Shah Qasem Anvar's langar to criticize all the lewd and jobless and beggar Sufis (Ashrafzadeh 56).

These were the people who were notorious for their gluttony and blemished the name of the true qalandars, as Sa'adi says, "The hakims eat in intervals and the devout eat half-full and the pious eat as much as they can to stay alive and the youth eat until the dish is empty and the old eat until they are sweating; but the qalandars eat until there is no place for breath in their stomach and no food left in the spread for anyone else...." (Sa'adi 178).

At any rate, as Borumand-Sa'id states, "langars were the gathering places for the qalandars where they stayed and had food. The founders of these langars were esteemed men and some of the famous Pirs (sages) who were qalandars

themselves. It seems that later on some opportunist persons started misusing the langars, and some inappropriate langars were established by some vulgar people and turned into places of perversity” (353).

The proverb, “He’s eaten the food and he’s thrown down the langer” which is frequently used in Persian literature refers to the practice of staying in langars by the qalandars.

Zavieh

Zavieh is another place in which the qalandars gathered. In *Dehkhoda Dictionary* we read about the zavieh of the Qalandarieh, “it is a zavieh established outside Cairo for Iranian dervishes from Qalandarieh sect and its founder is Sheikh Hasan Jawaleqi Qalandari.

It seems that zavieh is the same as langar, or is another name for it which is more common outside of Iran, and so is “takieh” which, like langar and zavieh, is a gathering place for the qalandars, and perhaps the other name for both of them is takieh where the poor are taken care of and where the faqirs (literally, the poor) gather (*Ghais al-Ghias*, under the entry takieh), and it is the equivalent of khaneqah and the house of dervishesh and faqirs where they are fed. Takieh is the gathering place of dervishes, and also a place in which poor travelers or people who are specially recommended are taken care of gratuitously (*Dehkhoda Dictionary*, under the entry takieh). Among other places for the qalandars to gather in, in addition to langar and zavieh, are abandoned cemeteries (Khatib Farsi 858) and also kharabat (Borumand-Sa’id 349).

Traveling world wide

Traveling is a distinguishing trait of the qalandars. Since the qalandars did not have any attachment to anything and anywhere, and were not committed to a family and a hometown, they were always on the road and going from town to

town and gaining experience and communicating with everyone. They had dedicated their lives to the propagation of the rites of qalandari, so, they were traveling all the time. In this case, they did not need a house or a family and they went to places like takieh and langar for their temporary stays to rest and have some food. The qalandars were irreconcilable with having a wife and children and a house and daily routines and were averse to everything that tied them to a place or a commitment and did not commit themselves to anything or any place in order to be able to travel freely and without care. The qalandars lived and travelled in groups and because they did not sojourn in any place, they were called “Sayyah” [literally, travelers]. The purposes of these travels were discovering the world and gaining experience and spending the years to become ripe. They invited people to the rites of qalandari with different methods in different cities (Borumand-Sa’id 16-23).

It seems that the proverb, “for the qalandar there’s no difference between staying and departing” refers to the practice of traveling and celibacy by the qalandars because no matter if they are staying or traveling, they are free from the bonds of home and family and wife and children.

Celibacy

Celibacy was the dominant characteristic of the qalandars, as Sheikh Jamal al-Din Savi was called “Sheikh Jamal-e Mojarrad [the Celibate]”. “Mojarrad, meaning naked, lonely and singular in the language of Sufism is referred to someone who has relinquished all the pleasures of the world and has cleaned himself from all the ethical villainies and has abandoned money and belonging and has made himself ready for journeying toward God; the ones who are known as Mojarrads are those who practice the characteristic of celibacy” (Mir ‘Abedini and Afshari 15).

Celibacy was a prerequisite of qalandari, so much so that Obeid Zakani says, “Regard celibacy and qalandari as the source of happiness and the principle of life” (381).

The qalandars went so far in celibacy that they regarded having a wife and house and family as being attached to this world; they suffered austerity by keeping away from women and marriage. The examples for this austerity which the qalandars suffered for keeping away from women and marriage are abundant; for instance, the ring that the followers of Heidarieh wore in order to keep away from marriage (Ibn Battuta 194), the story of Sheikh Jamal al-Din Savaji turning into a qalandar (ibid, 6-25), the adjective “mojarrad” that comes after his name and some other qalandars, and the title “mojarradi” which is a rank for Baktashi qalandars, given only to those who have not married and stayed celibate to the end of their lives (Mir ‘Abedini and Afshari 34).

There is a Persian proverb which refers to the celibacy of qalandars and their irresponsibility toward women, children and family: “This one says go to your mother; and that one says go to your qalandar father.”

Vagrancy and Beggaring

The qalandars were a group of dervishes who earned their daily bread by beggary shared whatever they earned with other needy persons (Zarrinkub 224). This beggaring is called “parseh zadan” (literally, vagrancy) by the qalandars. Parseh is an abbreviation of parseh which means beggaring (*Borhan Qate* 384) and “parseh zadan” is the roaming of the dervishes for asking, and the act of a follower to go to the bazar and the alleys like a beggar at the order of the Pir (the sage) to read poems and perform other activities of the beggars to kill his traits of arrogance (*Dehkhoda Dictionary*).

In actuality, the piety and relinquishing the worldly pleasures by the qalandars resulted in their vagrancy and beggaring. Being homeless and constantly on the road, the travelling qalandars did not have any place to stay; therefore, they acquired their daily bread by begging and shared whatever they acquired among themselves and other beggars (Zarrinkub 224).

In fact, the lack of a sense of belonging to their own land and their non-commitment to social norms of Ayyaran which had entered into the traditions of qalandari were driving this class or some of its members to constant travelling and beggary in the course of social revolutions. As Afshari notes in his article “Gallantry and Qalandari and Iranian Folk Culture”,

These dervishes come to the bazar three or four hours every day and each group has an arrangement: an old and a young dervish walk together from this shop to the other and teach people religious matters; the old dervish makes a speech and the young dervish answers him in intervals, it is as though the old dervish is delivering a sermon These dervishes, usually walk in villages and cities and sing songs or practice naqqali [the traditional art of reciting narrative poems in public] in city squares, and narrate stories about kings and legendary heroes for the people.... And sometime, the dervishes give insignificant things such as a green leaf or flower or fruits or noql (tiny traditional candy) to passers-by and get some money instead (124).

It is assumed that the root of the proverb, “a green leaf, the gift of a dervish” stems from this practice.

Silence and Reclusiveness

The qalandars always chose to be silent and reclusive and did not talk to anyone except when necessary. Keeping away from people and reclusiveness is also another part of austerity undertaken by the qalandars. The qalandars’ keeping away from women and being silent are the signs of their distance from the world and its people. Ubayd Zakani says, “Say our regards to people who are happy and light-spirited and benevolent and qalandar-natured” (Ubayd Zakani, 2004: 380), and Kashani, the author of *Mesbah ol-Hedayeh*, writes: “Their utmost attempt is to negate the norms and habits and keep away from the commitments of the ties of relationships and their present asset is nothing but carelessness and joy in the heart” (122). It can be assumed that the proverb, “from

a qalandar a hoy and from a bear a hair”, refers to this habit of silence and reclusiveness of the qalandars.

Asceticism

Qalandars take it upon themselves to live a life of austerity and to endure any type of hardship in order to tame their nafs (soul) and prevent it from rebelliousness. One of their usual practices was staying awake at night for the purpose of praying (Khatib Farsi 42). Assumingly, the proverb “the night is long and the qalandar is awake” comes from this practice. The proverb also refers to being patient and unhurried in doing one’s job.

Conclusion

The qalandar can be found with all its distinguishing characteristics in the works of different poets and proverbs. Most of the poets have used the word qalandar on occasion. Referring to the qalandars and their customs and rituals have resulted in the appearance of a type of literature called Qalandariat, which refers to those poems that negate everything and everyone and their concepts are based on carelessness toward the world, recklessness and nonchalance.

The qalandars’ customs and rituals gradually found their way into the works of verse and prose and each writer started commenting on the name and the rituals of the qalandars based on their own understanding. Some of these poems turned into proverbs through the ages and found their way into the everyday language of the people. Regarding the time of the creation of these proverbs, each refer to the qalandars’ rituals of the same period.

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