

From the Archives - M.K.Raina
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Shri Bhatt – The Great Hakeem & Yogi

Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin ruled Kashmir from 1420 to 1470 AD. Son of Sultan Sikandar, under whose rule Islamic zeal attained fanatical proportions, Zain-ul-Abidin proved to be the most tolerant and benevolent ruler that Kashmir had known. It has been correctly remarked that 'history can give few examples where the policy of the father was so completely reversed by his son. Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin's rule was in the words of Srivara 'like the cooling sandal paste after the heat of a summer in a desert had departed.'

When Sultan Zain-Ul-Abdin was on death bed, and all his royal physicians had failed miserably to cure him of some dangerous disease, there appeared a noble man on the scene, who volunteered to treat the King with his knowledge and healing powers. Though there are different theories about the kind of illness, which the great king was suffering of, it is well established that he was cured by one and the only Shri Bhatta, a Yogi and renowned Hakeem of his times.

Walter Lawrence, in his book 'The Valley of Kashmir' writes, "The chief glory of Zain-ul-Abidin was his tolerance towards the Brahmans and regarding this a curious tale is told. It is said that the king was on the point of death, when a Hindu Jogi volunteered to give his soul for the dying monarch on condition that his body should be preserved in some safe place. The king took the Jogi's soul but burnt the body, and thenceforward, the real king of Kashmir was not Zain-ul-Abidin but the Hindu ascetic. Whatever may have been the cause, it is true that from the time of this illness, the king manifested every desire to repair the wrongs inflicted on the Hindus by Sikandar. He remitted the Jazia or poll-tax on Hindus, taught them Persian and encouraged them by grant of lands and in many other ways. He repaired some of Hindu temples, among others, the temple on Takht-i-Sulaiman, and he revived Hindu learning. The result of this religious tolerance was the return of the exiled Pandits.

PNK Bamzai says that no account of Zain-ul-Abidin's reign can be complete without the mention of this great physician, who cured the king. In his book 'Culture & Political History of Kashmir', the author says, "When on his recovery, the king wanted to make a valuable gift to the Pandit, the latter refused to take

it." To the offer of valuable gifts from the King, the great Hakeem is said to have told him in no unclear terms, "The only gift I will receive, is the removal of all restrictions on the Pandits imposed by Sikandar including the poll tax." It is said that the king while eulogising Shri Bhatt on his concern for the welfare of the members of his community, readily granted him the request. Bamzai goes on to say that thereafter the Pandits performed their religious functions without let or hindrance and most of them who had left the Valley at the religious persecution of Sikandar returned to their homeland.

According to one theory, the King got a poisonous boil which gave him trouble. The court physicians tried their skills but failed. Jonaraja, a great historian says, "As flowers are not obtainable in the month of Magha on account of the mischief by snow, even so physicians who knew about poisons could not at that time be found in the country owing to governmental oppressions. The servants of the king at last found out Shri Bhatta, who knew the antidotes of poisons and was well versed in the art of healing, but out of fear, he for a long time delayed to come. When he arrived, the king gave him encouragement and he completely cured the king of the poisonous boil. The king wanted to make munificent gifts to Shri Bhatta. But the latter refused to accept any. But when pressed hard, he made a request which was to the effect that the Jazia on the Brahmans be remitted and opportunities be assured to them to develop their mental and moral resources without any let or hinderance." Such was the concern, the great Hakeem had for his people. The king was, it is said, all praise for him, and was so moved, that he granted all his wishes. Quoting Jonaraja, J.L.Kilam, the author of 'A History of Kashmiri Pandits' says, "The selflessness displayed by the physician Shri Bhatta had its effect upon the mind of the king. The request was accepted and Jazia was remitted. The Brahman was freed from the position of inferiority to which he was relegated by the previous kings." According to the author, Shri Bhatta's selflessness and the acceptance of his request by the king proved a land-mark in the history of Hinduism in Kashmir. Shri Bhatta's attitude shows that the will to live as a group by themselves was very predominant amongst the Brahmans which was shared by Shri Bhatta in an equal measure with the whole lot of them. Freed from the shackles of Jazia and other handicaps, the Brahmans started their own reorganisation and rehabilitation.

