CHAPTER-II


(A) Ancestors:

Hazrat Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri belonged to the 36th descendant of Hazrat Abu Bakar Siddique, the first Khalifa of Khulafaye Rashedeen and father-in-law of Prophet Muhammad(sm). His genealogical chain links with Abu Bakar Siddique through 35 lineal media as follows:


It is worthy to be mentioned here that Qadi Nizam-uddin, a renowned Sufi saint and one of the forefathers of Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri, is reported to had come first to India from Baghdad and began to

reside in Delhi in the early part of the fifteenth century A.D. Later on, under the patronage of Sharqi rulers (a kingdom established at Jawnpur) he came to Jawnpur* and was appointed as 'Imam' (Leader of congregational prayer) in the Jame Masjid and Shahi Idgah of Jawnpur by the then ruler of Jawnpur, Ibrahim Shah Sharqi (804-844H/1400-1440A.D.) in about 812 Hegira as has been narrated to me by Mawlana Jafar Ahmad Siddiqee**.

(B) Birth and Childhood :-

(i) Birth: Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri, the renowned preacher of India and the saviour of Bengal and Assam from the gloominess of ignorance and infidelity, was born at Mullatola village of Jawnpur, in 12th June, 1800 A.D.(18th Muharram, 1215AH)2 in a Shaikh family which had held the office of 'Khatab' (responsibility of leading public prayer) under Muslim rule. His father Mawlavi Abu Ibrahim Shaikh Muhammad Imam Baksh was the 'Sarishtadar' (Superintendent of Deputy Collector's Office) in Jawnpur Collectorate.3 Imam Baksh was the lonely son of his parent. He was an educated and pious man. In addition to religious grandeur and reverence he had immense knowledge in Arabic and Persian languages. Moreover, he was an expert Calligraphist of the time. Regarding Imam Baksh, once a reverend noble

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* The City of Jawnpur on the bank of the river Gumti was founded by Firuz Shah Tughluq in 1360 A.D. and named it after his cousin and patron Muhammad Jauna Khan, known to history as Muhammad Tughluq.

** Mawlana Jafar Ahmad Siddiqee is a well-versed theologian and near relative of Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri and author of few books. During my field works met several times in his residence at Jawnpur in the years 1999 and 2000.

2. N. Hanif, Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis (South Asia), New Delhi, 2000, p-189: also Ijazul Haque Qudusi, Tazkeray Sufiaye Bangal, Lahore, 1965, P.329; and also Nurul Anower Hussain Choudhury, Amader Sufiye Keram, Dacca, 1995, p-278.

man had remarked:

(If Allah wishes, a clan would be cultivated from this one). 4

Exactly this blessing happened into reality through Karamat Ali. Because, the present splendour of Islam and countless religious scholars in Jawnpur truly are the outcome of the contributions of Mawlana Karamat Ali and his offsprings. 5

Hazrat Mawlana Karamat Ali was born in such a gloomy period when the performer of Islamic regulations and the followers of "Shariah" were very rare in the then society. Of course, there were educated men but with lack of practice, mosques but there were neither "Muazzin" (announcer of the time of prayer) nor "Imam" (Prayerleader); nor congregational prayers were performed. Though an anti-Islamic atmosphere was prevailing around infant Karamat Ali, yet his tender mind was not influenced by it; rather, in course of time, he himself influenced the atmosphere and changed the entire environment into a favourable ground for Islamic manner of living.

His original name, probably given by his father, was Ali. 6 But in course of time, he became popularly known to all as Mawlana Karamat Ali, because, after the attainment of maturity, he was gifted with supernatural power and by virtue of that he showed innumerable wonderous and miraculous events before men. 7 Karamat Ali was the only competent son of the efficient father. 8

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5. Ibid; p-9.
(ii) **Childhood** :- From childhood, Karamat Ali was thoughtful and imaginative. By nature, he was very calm, moderate and sober. In respect of manners and conduct he was quite different from other children. Usually, he used to remain aloof from the childish mirthfulness and merriment; on the contrary, he kept company of the seniors who were honest and wise, and very attentively listened to their religious discourses and admonitions. For this reason, some people ridiculously remarked about him—

> "(This boy has the soul of old man; so instead of mixing with the children of his age, he used to sit with elderly persons). 9

From infancy he was very talented and sagacious. His intelligence was so sharp that he could give the clear narrations of many events of that period also when he was in cradle. Even he could tell about the birth place and the fact, where the blazing lamp was kept during his birth, the correctness of which were confirmed by the elders. He himself said:

> (My birth place and the side where the blazing lamp was kept are still remaining in mind like a dream). 10

Karamat Ali began to offer 'Salat' (the Islamic ritual prayer) from the period when his age was only seven and he used to perform the five time regular prayers in accordance with the rites prescribed by Prophet Muhammad (sm) at a time when he was ten years old and enjoined others to do so

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10. Ibid, p-10.
accordingly. After the congregational prayer of dawn, usually he used to sit at the mosque-school to learn elementary education of Islam with other learners. On account of his sharp-brain, he memorised the entire 'Am-Para', the 30th chapter of the Holy Quran, within a very few days. As Karamat Ali grew older, he developed a strong feeling for Allah and ardent love for religious observances and hence he was spending long hours in prayers and remembrance of Allah. He often spent the whole night in vigils, recollecting Allah and contemplating over the injunctions of the Quran. Similarly, social service had also caught his imagination so ardently that he never hesitated in performing the toilsome jobs of his neighbours nor was there any work too low for him. From his early adolescence he kept himself engaged in the welfare and prosperity of the people. He took great care for the assistance of neighbours and helpless persons. He did regularly visit the widows, orphans, old and invalids and in time of necessity he himself performed their household deeds. Thus he became popularly known to all as a noble, honest, diligent and benevolent youth. He was also very obedient to his parent and served them very sincerely. Above these, he himself took care and performed all the domestic works of their house. In this matter he was so cautious and sincere that it was not necessary on the part of his parent to pay little heed towards any household affairs. Moreover, he showed utmost respect to the teachers, elders, erudites and righteous persons and himself took extensive caution for the ease and comfort of the guests and served them enthusiastically. He was also very sympathetic to the poors, relatives and neighbours. Very often he himself fetched water, carried firewood from the forest and did the household works on behalf of the poor and the crippled without any hesitation.

(C) **Education :-**

The primary education of Mawlana Karamat Ali started under the
able guidance of his father Mawlavi Imam Baksh, who was a man of piety and well-versed not only in Persian but also in Arabic language too. As God had endowed him with sharp memory, within a very few days, he won reputation in the field of learning religious knowledge and ethics. Besides reading and reciting the Holy Quran, as he had a powerful and cultivated intellect, he also acquired enough knowledge in Arabic and Persian languages to obtain a deep insight into the true content of faith and could write lucid and chaste Arabic as well as speak fluently in both the languages. His father's hand writing was very fine. Karamat Ali also learnt this art from him and in course of time, he became an expert calligraphist in various forms of writings. In writing, he was so skilled that he could write the complete "Surah Ikhlas" starting with "Bismillah" and his name in the end on a single rice.

Hazrat Mawlana used to write the complete Surah 'Qulhu-Allah' with 'Bismillah' and at the end his name also on a single rice). 11

Thus, the competent father had adorned the hopeful son by imparting elementary Islamic education and teaching in an appropriate age.

Completing primary education from the father, Karamat Ali acquired his higher education on different branches of knowledge like - hadith, fiqh, logic, archery, language, ethics and other religious teachings under the contemporary scholars of high reputation. Following are the different statements of several authors regarding the acquisition of his knowledge-

وقرأ بعض الكتب الدراسية على الشيخ أحمد على الجريا كونى وبعضها على مولانا أحمد الله

الانامي وبعضها على مولانا قدرة الله الرودولي - 12

11 Ibid. p-16.
From the above quotations it becomes clear that Karmat Ali learnt enough religious knowledge from Mawlana Qadrat Allah Rudlavi, hadith from Mawlana Ahmad Allah Anami, knowledge of logic and understanding from Mawlana Ahmad Ali Cheriyakuti, the art of reciting the Quran from Qari Syed Ibrahim Madani and Qari Syed Muhammad Iskandarani and the knowledge of jurisprudence and fiqh from Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlavi (1746-1824 A.D.) and Mawlana Shah Muhammad Ismail Dehlavi (d. 1831 A.D.). He was also taught the art of calligraphy to a great extent by Hafiz Abdul Gani, a renowned calligraphist and the art of archery by a person popularly known as Biharisonar, a famous archer of the time. Thus, within a short span of time, he established himself as a renowned scholar and celebrated erudite of the period in different branches of knowledge. Regarding education, Karamat Ali expressed his opinion that for the sake of self improvement, public welfare and emancipation as well as development of the country, all sorts of learning is necessary on people.

It is worthy to be mentioned here that when he was only nineteen
years old, he composed "Miftahul Jannat" a famous book on Fiqh in simple Urdu language easily comprehensive to common people, which is generally found almost in every family of pious Muslims. The book is so highly accepted by the people that it is already translated into eighteen different languages and also reprinted several times by the editors of each language. In short, its acceptability can be estimated from the fact that it is being included in the curriculum of essential primary education for children by almost each and every devoted Muslim of this sub-continent.

In addition to religious teaching Mawlana Karamat Ali was very curious to acquire the knowledge of martial training like archery, combat etc. With this view, he approached a reputed archer of the time, whose name was Bihari Sonar and under whom many Hindu and Muslim youths used to learn this art. Usually, young Karamat Ali remained very busy in other religious learnings and household duties, so he used to go for acquiring the training in leisure time. Some of his friends asked him not to waste time in pursuing such a training; but his reply was:

(This is also a kind of knowledge and I yearn to acquire it for the sake of religion, which may be proved useful at a time of dire necessity).

Within a very few days Karamat Ali acquired different artifices of military training. He showed great respect and cordially served his teacher as he did in respect of his parent. He arrived at his teacher's residence just after the prayer of Maghrib (evening prayer) and himself performed all the household works of his teacher. Thus, he became a most obedient and favourite disciple.

18 Abdul Batin, Sirat Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpur, Allahabad, 1368 H p-11
19 Ibid, p-17.
of the teacher. Once some of his co-trainee expressed their grievance—"the blessing of the teacher is confined to Karamat Ali. He has taught him many special artifices of martial teaching, as a result he has improved more and has surpassed us in training." Then the teacher replied—"Brother, whatever I teach, I teach it equally to every one of you and that is also in presence of you all. But there is a special Grace of Allah on Karmat Ali. Moreover, his merit, prudence and sincerity are quite different from you. He could preserve in memory and apply in practice all that I teach you. You come at day time as well as at night time too. On the other hand, he could not come at daytime as he remains busy in other religious teachings and domestic affairs. But at night he comes before you and does not hesitate to fetch water and perform my household works for my ease and comfort. Who has such respect and deliberation among you? Therefore, the grace of Allah and the blessing of teacher will remain on him forever. Hence obviously his progress also will be unique." So it is clear that his inartificial perseverance towards learning and matchless respect for the teachers make him famous as well as memorable among the mankind.

Later on, during the preaching and reforming works, this martial training had been proved helpful for him to a great extent. Proper value of this art was realised in many a critical juncture of his life. For a true spiritual guide like him of that period, it was most essential to acquire the knowledge of this art and perhaps for this motive Allah had made his young heart inclined towards this martial training. In this art, he was so expert that when in some places he had to encounter with his opponent, many skilled combatants used to surrender before him giving up their weapons and finally entered into his discipleship.

(D) Matrimonial (connubial) life and his offsprings :-

The connubial life of Mawlana Karamat Ali was quite different from others, as he had spent almost the entire period of his nuptial life in tour. He, along with his family members, led a nomadic life concerning the preaching of Islam and reforming works among the people, particularly of Bengal and Assam. Sometimes his tour in Bengal continued for several years and so he used to keep his family with him and there was a separate female boat for their accommodation.

Mawlana Karamat Ali had married four wives. Under different circumstances he had to solemnise all the subsequent marriages. He first married Zaynab Bibi, daughter of Ramdan Ali, a native of Jawnpur. It is not certain when he got married his first wife. But considering some other events of his life it may be confirmed that at the time of his first marriage his age was between 25 to 30 years. Afterwards, in course of his staying in East-Bengal, he married his second and third wives from Noakhali and finally he wedded his fourth wife from Ulidpur village of Ajamgarh district.

Fifteen children were born from the wombs of Karamat Ali’s four wives. By first wife he had three sons and six daughters, second wife was childless, third wife had only one son and the fourth wife had two sons and three daughters.

Children from the womb of his first wife (daughter of Jawnpur).

Sons :-

1. Hafiz Abdullah (he was the eldest son of Karamat Ali and died during his life time).

2. Hafiz Ahmad (1250-1316 H/1834-1899 A.D.). He died in Dhaka and his tomb is still existing in the South-West side of Chowk Bazar Jame Masjid, Dhaka.

3. Mawlana Hafiz Mahmud (d.1296H/1879A.D.). He died at Jawnpur and his tomb is attached to the eastern door of Mollatola Jame Masjid, Jawnpur.

Daughters :-

1. Umme Kulsum Bibi.
2. Umme Salma Bibi.
3. Umdah Bibi.
4. Sugrah Bibi.
5. Johura Bibi.
6. Muna Bibi.

His second wife (daughter of Noakhali) was barren.

Children from the uterus of his third wife (daughter of Noakhali).

1. Mawlana Sufi Muhammad Hamid. He died at Sanua of Noakhali district and his tomb is also existing there.

Sons :-

Children from the uterus of his fourth wife (daughter Ulidpur, Ajamgarh).

1. Muhammad Umar alias Bara Miali. He also died at Sanua and was buried there.

2. Mawlana Abdul Awal(d.1339H/1920A.D). He died in Calcutta
and was buried in the garden of Abdur Rahman Khan at Maniktola. 22

Daughters :-

1. Ayesha Bibi.
2. Hazira Bibi.
3. Masuma Bibi.

Regarding his children, Abdul Batin has mentioned-

Except Bara Miah, all the sons of Hazrat Mawlana were outstanding erudites of contemporary time and like their father Hazrat Karamat Ali, all of them always remained busy in preaching Islam and religious services). 23

(E) Bay'at and acquisition of spiritual Knowledge :-

It is already mentioned that Mawlana Karamat Ali had attained perfection in different branches of Islamic knowledge at an early age. As he was well-versed in Urdu, Arabic and Persian languages, so almost in all the time, he remained busy in acquiring knowledge through the study of various books. Afterwards, when he was eighteen years old, he became very eager to acquire spiritual knowledge. This thirst of spiritual knowledge made him restless and his curious mind was seeking a genuine guide for this purpose, particularly, a person from the family of Shah Waliullah Muhaddis Dehlavi.

22 Abdul Batin, Sirat Mawlana Abdul Awal, Allahabad, 1369 H.P 188.
(d. 1763 A.D), whose family had the reputation of bringing forth the revival (renascence) movement in India for the deliverance of Muslim Community from polytheism, innovation, superstition and other anti-Islamic usages and numerous influential as well as competent scholars like Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824 A.D), Sayyid Ahmad Shahid (1786-1831 A.D.), Shah Ismail Shahid (1782-1831), Mawlama Abdul Hayy (d. 1827) were born in or influenced by this family.\textsuperscript{24}

Karamat Ali already made up his mind to go to Delhi and to take Bay'at in the hand of any of those scholars, but in the meantime fortunately he came to know that Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, being inspired by divine influence from his mentor Shah Abdul Aziz, was spreading the gleam of spiritual knowledge all around like the rising sun. Meanwhile, he along with his prominent disciples had arrived at his birth place Rae-Bareli and was halting in the 'Khanqah' (hospice) of Shah Ilmullah. Rae-Bareli was nearer to Jawnpur in comparison to Delhi. Karamat Ali took this golden opportunity and obtaining father's consent immediately arrived at Rae-Bareli and attended the company (divine assembly) of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid. On first sight Ahmad Shahid recognised his inner spirit and receiving his bay'at comprised him into their mystic chain.\textsuperscript{25}

Karamat Ali also became highly pleased as well as enthusiastic mixing with the galaxy of scholars, assembled under the alluring guidance of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid. All the scholars united under their mentor with a view to quench their thirst for spiritual knowledge. Like others, this auspicious and delicate gathering was very lucrative for Karamat Ali too. Regarding the magnificence of this noble assembly Karamat Ali himself had expressed in

\textsuperscript{24} Nurul Anwar Hussain Chowdhury, Amader Sufiaye Keram, Dhaka, 1995, p-281.
During the period associated with his teacher, Karamat Ali engaged himself in mystical exercises, devotion, remembrance and contemplation in order to attain the perfection of spiritual knowledge. He also avoided every act which are regarded as unlawful by the 'Shariah'. He used to spend most of his time in litanies, meditation and prayers. Therefore, obviously the grace of Allah and the special blessing of his mentor was alighted on Karamat Ali, which raised him to the higher position of mystical consciousness known as the gnosia or 'marifat'. Thus, being blessed with the grace of Almighty and his heart illuminated by the light of Allah, within only few days Karamat Ali had widened the dimensions of his spiritual experiences by attaining even higher stages yet untraversed and unknown by other mystics. He became so clear witted in spiritual apprehension of truth that a mere suggestion was sufficient for him to understand all the mysteries. Observing the rapid progress and hidden spirit of Karamat Ali in respect of acquiring the spiritual knowledge, his mentor Sayyid Ahmad Shahid became highly satisfied and only after one week of his oath of allegiance (bayat), he conferred on him deputyship (Khilafat) in order to initiate as well as

instruct other people through Mawlana Shah Ismail Shahid, one of his prominent
deputy and ordered him- "Go, and now engage yourself in the task of guiding the
people on the spiritual path." 27

After this order, when in spite of his unwillingness, he took decision
to return home, then the mentor had advised him-

( By the grace of Allah, purpose is fulfilled and it is too fulfilled very fast ;
now observe all the affairs and get them clear, halting a few days more
as a guest ). 28

The above directions of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid towards Karamat Ali,
are the clear evidence of the fact that within a short period, the latter remained
under the fruitful guidance of the former, became ripe in experience and pro­
found in knowledge as well as fully capable of guiding others on the path of spiri­
tual journey. According to the wish of his mentor, Karamat Ali stayed another
eighteen days in his companionship and had attained the higher stages of mysti­
cal experience which had illuminated his heart with depth of spiritual knowledge.
On account of his sagaciousness within these eighteen days he acquired as much
divine knowledge as requires eighteen years for others. 29 He became so ex­
pert that we find a wealth of information on essential sufistic teach­
ings and practices and a lucid exposition of the doctrines in his discourses
and sermons delivered later on at the time of his preaching

After Karamat Ali had gone through the initial stages like recollection of God, subduing of egoism, denial of everything other than God, affirmation of God, etc. he was taught many important methods and spiritual virtues of all the renowned sufistic orders as - Qadiriyah, Chishtiyah, Naqshbandiyah and Mujadidiyah. Karamat Ali had also fully grasped the spirit and principles underlying these orders, which are necessary for entering upon the mystic path or 'tariqah' leading to the inner essence of religious experience. He knew that neither mysticism breaks the mould of the sacred law nor the 'Shariah' stifles the 'Tariqah'. But both are complementary to each other, both constitute an integral part of religious traditions; they together contribute to spiritual vitality essential for creating a moral-religious society free of all social ills. Due to this Karamat Ali was received with the highest marks of distinction at the places he visited and thousands of people turned up to listen to his discourses. His Sermons were esteemed as a dynamic social and religious phenomenon of the lives of the people and they accepted him as their spiritual guide. He asked the people to shake off their superstitious beliefs, challenged their irrational customs and usages, urged them to take to the path of righteousness -- the way shown by the apostles of God. He also told the people that true and undefiled religion consisted of the observance of all the religious devotions and complete adherence to the practice of the Prophet (sm). In response to his sermons innumerable people were moved to tears, they repented for their sins, their lives were changed, as if they were re-born in Islam; the un-Islamic customs and practices were given up; mosques began to attract an ever-increasing number of worshippers, and the artificial barriers of high and low began to crumble down.