TOMB OF PROPHET MOSES IN KASHMIR VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

Kashmir is the land of spirituality and has a long history of being the land of great sufis and saint’s. There are hundreds of tombs of sufi saints which are of a great interest not only to locals but also to outsiders. Lot of beautiful work has been done on the life of these sufi saints of the valley and most of the work done by these researchers is not only interesting but appreciable as well. However few works are merely based on the superficial information, rumours and some clues. I find one such work claiming existence of tomb of Prophet Moses in Kashmir valleys’ district Bandipora. Going through these claims added to my curiosity and I decided to get authentic and first-hand information so as to come out with a conclusion which is authentic and based on facts. This paper is my sincere attempt to get the relevant, authenticated, endorsed and first-hand information about the claims made about the presence of the tomb of Prophet Moses in Kashmir valley.

KEY WORDS: Paend, Biblical, Tomb, Moses, Hebrew, Miraj, Torah, Nabi, Rasul.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bible mentions that Lord showed Moses the “Promised land” but directed him not to enter it. “Go thee unto Mount Nabo and die, but thou shalt not go unto the land which I give to the children of Israel”. “The Lord said unto Moses, get thee on top of mount Pisgah and lift up thine eyes eastward, and Northward, Westward and southward and behold the “Promised Land”…. The land of milk and honey…. The land which drinketh the water of heaven…..The land is good and peaceable….the Land where no galley with oars shall go!” According to some legends Moses is buried near Athwattu in the land of Moab (Mowu) opposite Bandipore earlier known as Bethpor which is a derivative from the Beth-peor of Bible. The view of the valley from top of a mountain locally called Nebo-bal is as per the description of the “Promised Land”. Kashmir is locally known as Kashir and a Kashmiri is called a Koshur. Jews call Koshur something approvable and pure especially in regard to food. Many explorers and travellers from ancient times have written about the striking resemblance of Kashmir to Biblical lands. It has also been mentioned in many accounts that in ancient times Kashmiris allowed only Jews to enter the valley. A Kashmiri shepherd wearing a robe (pharan) and a skull cap tending his sheep near a village is a typical scene from some biblical movie. If Kashmir is the “Promised Land” are then Kashmiris the God’s “Chosen People?” The Jews call themselves to be the “Chosen People of God”. There are many theories about the origin of Kashmiris and some claim that they are the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel.

A lot of research was done on the subject by British anthropologists in mid-19th century who were travelling with British troops and concluded that many of the Kashmiri tribes were remnants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. One of the main theories about the Jewish origin of Kashmiris was given by the book of George Moore, “Lost
Tribes” printed in 1860 in which he not only mentioned that Solomon was in Kashmir, but also provided significant history and evidence that Moses was also here. In fact, Kashmir is considered to have the burial site of Moses. There is a grave-site that has been maintained for over 2700 years near the plains of Mowu, once called Moab, above Pishnag, once known as Pisga. This is on Mount Nebo and about 11 kilometers across from Bandipur, which was once known as Behat-poor and Beth-peor. This is considered to be the burial place of Moses. The book of Deuteronomy (34:4-6) explains that Moses died in the land of Moab and was buried near Beth-peor. “And the Lord said unto him, ‘this is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed; I have caused thee to see it with thine own eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither’. Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. It is also explained elsewhere in the chapter that Mount Nebo in the Abarim Mountains, Mount Pisga, and Heshbon are in the vicinity. The biblical land of Moab is now called the plains of Mowu, Biblical Pisga is now called Pishnag, Beth-peor was later called Behat-pur near the Jhelum River, which is called the “Behat” River in Persian. Now Behat-pur is called Bandipur, and the village with the biblical name of Heshbon (Deuteronomy 4.46) is now called Hasba or Hasbal. This area is about 80 kilometers north of Srinagar. If we travel to this area today, Bandipur (Beth-peor, meaning “the place that opens”) is near where the Jhelum (Behat) River opens into the plains of Lake Wular. Another 18 kilometers north we find the village of Hasbal, both towns mentioned in the Bible. Mount Nebo, in the Abarim Mountain range, is across from Bandipur and above the village of Pishga. Mount Nebo offers a great view of the heavenly land of Kashmir.

Another noted historian of Kashmir Professor Fida Mohammad Hassnain Khan claimed that prophet Moses migrated from Egypt to Kashmir after fleeing persecution by the Egyptian Pharaohs, reached Kashmir and died at the ripe old age of 120 and was buried at Mount Nebu in Bandipur, 50 km north-west of Srinagar. For defending his claims, he quoted several references from the biblical book e.g. the Old Testament states in the Book of Deuteronomy that "Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountains of Nebu to the top of Pisgah. So Moses died there in the land of Moab and he buried him in a valley over against Bethpeor". All the places mentioned in the passage are located in the vicinity of Bandipur. Additionally, on top of Mount Nebu, there exists the ruined tomb of "Musa", the Arabic equivalent of Moses, and a small isolated community that inhabits the mount looks after the tomb and calls itself followers of Musa Paigambar, or Moses the Messenger. The present custodian of the grave, Wali Rishi, 80, says his ancestors have guarded the grave for 900 years and insists that "this is the grave of the great prophet Moses". Professor Hassnain Khan claims that Moses fled to Kashmir with his followers after he was driven out from Canaan, which is nowadays Israel.

Who was Prophet Moses?

Moses, Hebrew Moshe, (flourished 14th–13th century BCE), Hebrew prophet, teacher, and leader who, in the 13th century BCE (before the Common Era, or BC), delivered his people from Egyptian slavery. In the Covenant ceremony at Mt. Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were promulgated, he founded the religious community known as Israel. As the interpreter of these Covenant stipulations, he was the organizer of the community’s religious and civil traditions. In the Judaic tradition, he is revered as the greatest prophet and teacher, and Judaism has sometimes loosely been called Mosaism, or the Mosaic faith, in Western Christendom. His
influence continues to be felt in the religious life, moral concerns, and social ethics of Western civilization, and therein lies his undying significance.

Moses was a prophet in the Abrahamic religions. According to the Hebrew Bible, he was adopted by an Egyptian princess, and later in life became the leader of the Israelites and lawgiver, to whom the authorship of the Torah or acquisition of the Torah from Heaven is traditionally attributed. Also called Moshe Rabbenu in Hebrew, he is the most important prophet in Judaism. He is also an important prophet in Christianity, Islam, the Bahai Faith, and a number of other Abrahamic religions.

According to the Book of Exodus, Moses was born in a time when his people, the Israelites, an enslaved minority, were increasing in numbers and the Egyptian Pharaoh was worried that they might ally themselves with Egypt's enemies. Moses' Hebrew mother, Jochebed, secretly hid him when the Pharaoh ordered all newborn Hebrew boys to be killed in order to reduce the population of the Israelites. Through the Pharaoh's daughter (identified as Queen Bithia in the Midrash), the child was adopted as a foundling from the Nile river and grew up with the Egyptian royal family. After killing an Egyptian slave master (because the slave master was smiting a Hebrew), Moses fled across the Red Sea to Midian, where he encountered The Angel of the Lord, speaking to him from within a burning bush on Mount Horeb (which he regarded as the Mountain of God). God sent Moses back to Egypt to demand the release of the Israelites from slavery. Moses said that he could not speak with assurance or eloquence, so God allowed Aaron, his brother, to become his spokesperson. After the Ten Plagues, Moses led the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, after which they based themselves at Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. After 40 years of wandering in the desert, Moses died within sight of the Promised Land on Mount Nebo. (Source Britannica encyclopaedia, Wikipedia)

Prophet Moses according to Islam?

Musa Ibn Imran known as Moses in the Hebrew Bible, considered a prophet, messenger, and leader in Islam, is the most frequently mentioned individual in the Quran. The Quran states that Moses was sent by God to the Pharaoh of Egypt and the Israelites for guidance and warning. Moses is mentioned more in the Quran than any other individual, and his life is narrated and recounted more than that of any other prophet. According to Islam, all Muslims must have faith in every prophet (nabi) and messenger (rasul) which includes Moses and his brother Aaron (Harun). The Quran states, Moses is considered to be a prophetic predecessor to Muhammad and generally attribute the tale of Moses as a spiritual parallel to the life of Muhammad, considering many aspects of their lives to be shared. Islamic literature also describes a parallel between their believers and the incidents which occurred in their lifetimes. The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is considered similar to the migration (hijra) made by the followers of Muhammad.

Moses (Musa) is also very important in Islam for having been given the revelation of the Torah, which is considered to be one of the true revealed scriptures in Muslim theology, and Muslims generally hold that much of the Torah is confirmed and repeated in the Quran. Moreover, according to Islamic tradition, Moses was one of the many prophets Muhammad met in the event of the Miraj, when he ascended through the seven heavens.
In Muslim belief, Moses is regarded as having urged Muhammad during his Miraj to reduce the number of prayers until they were only five remaining, which is regarded as being the five obligatory prayers. Moses is further revered in Islamic literature, which expands upon the incidents of his life and the miracles attributed to him in the Quran and hadith, such as his direct conversation with God. (Source Wikipedia)

II. OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS

After going through the book of George Moore, viz “Lost Tribes” printed in 1860 and the claims by noted historian of Kashmir Professor Fida Mohammad Hassnain Khan about the tomb of Prophet Moses in Kashmir, it added to my curiosity to know and verify the reality about the said claims. Ultimately after making thorough review of the book of Deuteronomy, other literature and various claims, I decided to go to Bandipora district in Kashmir valley, where the tomb of Prophet Moses is claimed to be. Finally it was the month of January 2018 when I went to the said place. It was a pleasant sunny day, when I reached ‘Booth’ (also known as Bethpora, Khurshipora) village. Bethpora is approximately 11 kilometers from main Bandipora town. There is a macedamised road through the forests which leads to Bethpora. On the way to Bethpora, an army camp is located and on our way they questioned about our visit to the area and my driver was asked to surrender his identity card till we come back. When I reached Booth village, we found tomb of Saint Bibi Aarifa (locally known as Ded Mouj) just adjacent to the main road. I entered the small gate of this tomb and found a small mosque just at the entrance of this tomb. Her grave is surrounded by wooden fencing with thatched roof and the whole surrounding area is fenced by tin sheets.

Fortunately was present one of the caretaker and custodian of this tomb namely Mr Mehrajul-Islam Reshi, son of Mr Bashir Ahmad Reshi, who is also Imam of the mosque. During my conversation with Mr. Mehrajul-Islam Reshi, he told me that Bethpora (Booth) village consists of five mohallas and this Mohalla where the tomb of Bibi Aarifa is located is known as Rozbal, and the village is known as Booth which was previously known as

IN THE BACKGROUND OF THIS PICTURE IS THE TOMB OF BIBI AARIFA AND HER DISCIPLES AND THE BASE OF THE BIG TREE STANDING BEHIND ME IS CLAIMED TO BE THE GRAVE OF PROPHET MOSES.
Bethpore and in the revenue records it is known as Khurshiora. He further told me that they have migrated to this village from an adjacent village known as Gammandu. He further added that the tomb in this area consists of only three graves. The main grave is of the saint Bibi Aarifa (Ded Mouj). Just adjacent to this grave is the grave of Naek Reshi who was disciple of Bibi Aarifa and adjacent to Naek Reshi’s and Bibi Aarifa’s grave is the grave of Novroj sahib, who was disciple of Naek Reshi. According to Mr Mehrajul-Islam, Bibi Aarifa was actually disciple of saint Baba Shakur-ud-din Wali of Watlab area. Baba Shakur-ud-din Wali directed Bibi Aarifa to go to this area, where Bibi Aarifa meditated for the rest of her life and died at the same spot. At that time there was no habitation in this area. When I asked him about the claims of grave of Prophet Moses in this premise, he categorically refuted and denied such claims and told it is totally baseless and based on rumours. He told me that in the 1980’s a noted Kashmiri historian professor Fida Mohammad Hassnain Khan visited the area. There is a rock embedded in the soil at the base of the big tree and this rock was claimed to be the burial site of prophet Moses which is present in the premises of tomb of Bibi Aarifa. “Previously this rock was big, but we have cut it to avoid heresy and only a small portion of this rock is visible now”, claims Mr. Mehraj-ul-islam. According to Mr Mehraj-ul-islam Reshi at that time some historians had a conversation with his grandfather late Mr Wali Reshi, and they had misinterpreted, misquoted and misunderstood him and had falsely and wrongly claimed that Mr. Wali Reshi has endorsed that here is the tomb of Prophet Moses. Mr. Mehraj-ul-ismal Reshi told me that their lineage is the custodians/caretakers of this tomb since more than 900 years, but none of our ancestors claimed that here is the tomb of Prophet Moses. Mr Mehraj-ul-islam Reshi further told me that after the false and baseless claims made by some historians and authors, many foreign tourists of different nationalities have visited this place and enquired about the claim of Prophet Moses’s tomb here. They also came with the references of places which are mentioned in their religious texts and coincide with the names of places in the valley. But every time we strongly denied such type of claims. He said that in fact we have maintained a list of both national and international visitors to this place. We have maintained a diary where the names and other information related to visitors is maintained.

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HAZOOR RESHI ─ HAZIR RESHI ─ SHAH RESHI ─ SAKHI RESHI
SULTAN RESHI ─ WAHAB RESHI ─ LASSI RESHI ─ GAFAR RESHI
WALI RESHI ─ BASHIR AHMAD RESHI ─ MEHRAJ-UL-ISLAM RESHI.

**Lineage of custodian/caretakers of this tomb**

My further research on this issue got some interesting revelations during my conversation with locals and various theologians of the area about the presence of grave of prophet Moses in Booth village previously known as Bethpora of Bandipora, they categorically refuted these claims and said that there is no proof either from any religious books or from any literature, manuscripts or inscriptions which will endorse these claims. However, there is mention of names of some places and mountains in the book of Deuteronomy and other religious books of Jews and Christians which sound similar but is a mere coincidence. However according to the locals and theologians, in the ancient times there used to be a famous saint by the name of Musa. He used to visit several places for meditation. One of his halt was also at this Booth village which is presently in district Bandipora. It is said that this saint Musa made a halt at this place and meditated here for some time. The places where this saint made a stay and meditated are locally called as “Musa Peand.” Peand in Kashmiri means a place where someone makes a halt or stays for some time. One of this Musa Peand is also present at Athwatu Bandipora, on the top of Abul Mountain. Similarly there are also several places in the valley which are attributed to the name of Musa. But there is also no reliable literature or other source to authenticate if it was some local saint by the name of Musa or was it Prophet Moses. However it is all passed on from generation to generation orally. According to my research some authors and some historian mistook this local saint Musa as Prophet Moses.
Their claim is merely based on the name of mountain and some places, whose name coincidently matches with the names that are mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy, mentioning life of Prophet Moses and his migration. Therefore after a very thorough and detailed research, I not only found the claim of grave of Prophet Moses at Booth village Bandipora totally baseless, false, and wrong but also concluded it to be based on rumours.

III. DEATH OF PROPHET MOSES ACCORDING TO ISLAM

Abu Hurairah narrated: 'The Angel of Death was sent to Moses. When he came to Moses, Moses slapped him on the eye. The Angel returned to his Lord and said: You have sent me to a slave who does not want to die.' Allah said: 'Return to him and tell him to put his hand on the back of an ox and for every hair that will come under it, he will be granted one year of life.' Moses said: '0 Lord! What will happen after that?' Allah replied: 'Then death.' Moses said: 'Let it come now!' Moses then requested Allah to let him die close to the Holy Land so that he would be at a distance of a stone's throw from it. According to some Islamic scholars, the holy land requested by prophet Moses to Allah is the land of Al Aqsa Mosque. Abu Hurairah added: "Allah's Messenger said: 'If I were there, I would show you his grave below the red sand hill on the side of the road.'"

The Messenger of Allah (S) was asked about the location of the grave of Prophet Musa (a.s.). He replied: “Near the highway adjacent to the red hillock.”

Narrated Abu Huraira: The angel of death was sent to Moses and when he went to him, Moses slapped him severely, spoiling one of his eyes. The angel went back to his Lord, and said, "You sent me to a slave who does not want to die." Allah restored his eye and said, "Go back and tell him (i.e. Moses) to place his hand over the back of an ox, for he will be allowed to live for a number of years equal to the number of hairs coming under his hand." (So the angel came to him and told him the same). Then Moses asked, "O my Lord! What will be then?" He said, "Death will be then." He (Moses) said, "(Let it be) now." He asked Allah that He bring him near the Sacred Land at a distance of a stone's throw. Allah's Messenger said: "Were I there I would show you the grave of Moses by the way near the red sand hill." [Sahih Bukhari]

(Hadith Explanation) In Ahmad ibn Hanbal and at-Tabarani we find the hadith that “the angel of death used to come to people in a visible form. When he went to Musa (alaihis salam), Musa put out his eye.” Ibn Khuzayma said: “Some of the heretics refuse to acknowledge this and say that if Musa recognized him then how did he not take him seriously? If he did not recognize him then would he not have retaliation from him for putting out his eye? The answer is that Allah (subhana wa ta’ala) did not send the Angel of Death to Musa desiring to take his soul at that moment. He sent him to him to test him. Musa punched the Angel of Death because he thought that he was a human who had entered his house without his permission and did not know that he was the Angel of Death. The Shariah allows for the putting out of the eye of anyone who looks into a Muslim’s house without permission. The angels came to Ibrahim (AS) and Lut (AS) in human form and they also did not recognize them at first. If Ibrahim (AS) had recognized them he would not have offered them food. If Lut (AS) had recognized them he would not have feared for them from his people.”
Another one of the people of knowledge said: “He hit him because he came to take his soul before giving him a choice since it is established that no prophet is taken without being given a choice. This is why, when he gave him a choice the second time, he submitted.”

From this hadith we learn that angels can take on human form. We also see that prophets do not cling to the life of this world. They know that the real life is the life of the Hereafter and though the time of death may be painful, since it must be gone through, they’d rather be done with it. Postponing something painful doesn't make it less painful, rather, only makes one live in dread.

The exact place where Musa (upon him be peace) is buried is unknown but tradition holds that Salahuddin Ayyubi once had a dream where he was shown this spot. He had a mosque built on the site which was further expanded by Sultan Baybars in 1269 CE. The Maqam is located 11km south of Jericho and 20km east of Jerusalem.

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IV. CONCLUSION

The claim that there is a tomb of Prophet Moses in Booth area of Bandipora is totally baseless. However there is a possibility that Prophet Moses may have visited the Kashmir valley after migration from Canan (present day Israel). But there is no proof of his tomb anywhere in the valley. Various researchers and historians are just taking clues from the book of Deuteronomy and mere on the basis of names of the places which coincides with the names mentioned in this religious text are claiming the presence of Tomb of Prophet Moses in Booth area of Bandipora.

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