



## EBĀḤĪYA

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**EBĀḤĪYA** (or EBĀḤATĪYA), a polemical term denoting either antinomianism or groups and individuals accused thereof. It occurs generally in the context of condemning pseudo-Sufis, although it is sometimes used in connection with a variety of other religious deviants. The word is derived from *ebāḥat*, which in the terminology of Islamic jurisprudence means the permissibility which is inherent in all things unless canceled or modified by specific provisions of the law; the error of the antinomians lies in their rejection of all such provisions. The principal hallmarks of the Ebāḥīya are generally identified as the rejection of all ritual worship and indulgence in sexual promiscuity.

Several early Sufi writers who were at pains to dissociate their discipline from the deviants that claimed allegiance to it did not have recourse to the term *ebāḥīya* (Kalābādī, p. 20; Qoṣayrī, pp. 20-21; Abū Naṣr Sarrāj, pp. 2-3). The earliest and also fullest treatment of the phenomenon of pseudo-Sufi antinomianism using the term *ebāḥīya* is an acephalic treatise by [Abū Ḥāmed Ġazālī](#) written in Persian, probably while he was teaching at the Neẓāmīya *madrassa* in Nišāpūr in 499/1105 (Pretzl, Per. tr., pp. 63-118). Ġazālī describes the antinomians as the most difficult group of the misguided to redeem through proof and argumentation, for they are mere idiots, cast into the lap of Satan by lustfulness and lethargy. Many of them simply welcome the special opportunities to sin that are provided by the cover of a Sufi exterior; others, however, advance arguments which may point to doubt or confusion (*šobhat*) on their part. Of the eight instances of *šobhat* Ġazālī addresses, only half—the third, fourth, fifth, and eighth—are related to a faulty understanding or



practice of Sufism: those who, disappointed with their inability to rid themselves entirely of lowly characteristics completely, abandon the struggle; those who, beholding certain paranormal phenomena in the course of ascetic practice, imagine themselves to have reached the goal and therefore to be free of all need to pray; those who, having been vouchsafed certain genuine insights, believe they have transcended the law; and those who claim that the poverty essential to Sufism includes divesting oneself even of meritorious acts. The remaining four sources of antinomian error are simply four common forms of skepticism, not tied to Sufism in any way: the belief that worship is superfluous, since God does not stand in need of our prayers; the assumption that God's forgiveness is unconditional and not balanced by His wrath; the deterministic notion that worship cannot affect man's fate in the hereafter; and the straightforward denial of resurrection and judgment. Ġazālī reserves his harshest condemnation for those whose antinomianism is rooted in this denial which, he remarks, "has become common in this age" (p. 23), and he proclaims their extermination to be the duty of the ruler.

Six of the eight sources of *ebāḥīya* listed by Ġazālī are reproduced, in a somewhat different order, by the Hanbalite jurist Ebn al-Jawzī (d. 592/1200) in his *Talbīs Eblīs* (pp. 411-18). Since there is no reason to assume that Ebn al-Jawzī knew Persian, this may indicate that Ġazālī's treatise had been translated into Arabic, or that its contents had been incorporated into an Arabic work accessible to Ebn al-Jawzī. While Ġazālī does not name any pseudo-Sufi group or individual guilty of antinomianism, Ebn al-Jawzī mentions a certain Moḥammad b. Ṭāher al-Maqdesī as exemplifying the trend (pp. 185-86). In his brief evocation of the *Ebāḥīya*, Hojvīrī (d. 464/1071) mentions (pp. 164, 334) the Fāresiān, the followers of a certain Fāres who claimed falsely to be a disciple of Ḥallāj.

In general, however, it appears that the pseudo-Sufi antinomians represented a tendency rather than a coherent school; it is in this sense that 'Abd-al-Karīm Sam'ānī (d. 562/1166) denounces as exemplifying *ebāḥīya* all who deny resurrection and disregard sexual prohibitions (*Ketāb al-ansāb*, GMS XX, f. 15b).

A writer as late as 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) defined the *Ebāḥīya* as a people who sought unjustifiably to assimilate themselves with the Sufis (*motašabbeh-e mobṭel be īšān*) while completely lacking "the adornment of their beliefs and states" (*Nafaḥāt al-ons*, pp. 9-10). Gradually, however, the term *ebāḥīya* came to lose its particular resonance, becoming virtually



interchangeable with *ḥolūlīya* (in-carnationism), *bāṭenīya* (extreme esotericism), and *zandaqa* (heresy) in a series of epithets that were affixed to heterodox movements of all stripes.

It may finally be noted that historians of Mughal India described as Ebāḥatīya a Tantric sect of Hinduism, found especially in Orissa (I. H. Qureshi, “Ibāḥatīya,” *EI*<sup>2</sup> III, p. 663).

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