

ADVENT OF SUFISM IN PUNJAB

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In his recent article *Contribution of India Sufis to Peace and Amity*, K.A. Nizami observes, "Higher spiritual experience in all religions of the world aims at bridging the gulf between humans by imbuing them with high moral ideals. Bergson very rightly observes that 'a great mystic feels the truth flow into him from its source like a force in action. His desire is with God's help to complete the creation of the human species. The mystic's direction is the very direction of the élan of life'.

The contribution of the Indian Sufis to society lies in their sincere and dedicated struggle to find a unity for the heterogeneous elements that make up its totality. They appreciated the multi-racial, multi-religious and multilingual pattern of Indian society and, to use Rabindranath Tagore's words, 'set at naught all differences of men, by the overflow of their consciousness of God'. For them God was not a logical abstraction of unity, but a living reality who can be approached through the service of mankind. Their efforts were, therefore, directed towards the creation of a healthy social order free from dissensions, discords and conflicts. It was a herculean task but they undertook it as a divine mission. In love, faith, toleration and sympathy they found the supreme talisman of human happiness. Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya often cited in his assemblies a remark of Shaikh Abu Sa'id Abul Khair (ob. 1049) that though there were myriads of routes and roads leading to God, none was quicker and more effective than bringing happiness to the hearts of men. *Ibn Batuta* found in Damascus a trust which existed for providing balm to afflicted hearts."¹

Advent of Sufism in India was through the "land of five rivers", Punjab. For a period of over three centuries, the ruling authority and social elite were predominantly Muslims. The early stages of interaction between Islam and Hinduism were marked by reconciliation as well as confrontation between the indigenous primarily Hindu civilization of India and the exogenous and rapidly expanding culture of Islam. From eleventh century onwards, Punjab came face to face with a new religious force backed by military strength. As compared to other parts of India, "both geographically and geopolitically, Punjab perhaps experienced the marked influence of both orthodox Islam and Muslim dominations" on one hand and the impact of liberal Sufism on the other.²

The penetration of Sufism in Punjab has to be understood in the background of its evolution and systemization and resolution of conflict with orthodoxy. The growth of Sufism³ is a significant illustration of the mystical tendencies in Islam at a given

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time. So far as mysticism is concerned "it is constant and unvarying phenomenon of universal yearning of human spirit for personal communion with God"⁴ and in this basic quest the mystical experience in the elan of mystic movements in all religions of the world. "While firmly embedded in Islam and its sacred Law (The Shariat). G.S.Talib observes, "Sufism did represent that tendency of human spirit which time and again breaks free of encumbrances of formal and constricting creeds and endeavors to experience directly the infinite and ineffable."⁵ In other words, the Sufis or Muslims mystics became pioneers in expressing an attitude and code of conduct quite different from those of orthodox Muslims and Sufi program of reforms was bound up with the awakening of religious and mystic conscience and inner revolt against social injustices of the age.

As a result of political success to which Islam was exposed. Sufism also contained germs of protest against fanatical orthodoxy, dogmatism and socio-political abuse of power enjoined by the Sunni ulama over the Muslim masses. No wonder from its inception, the Sufis were often frowned upon by the entrenched Muslim orthodoxy. However Sufi tradition acquired legitimate position as the spiritual dimension of Islam and drew upon wide range of mystic experiences of earliest Sufis like Abdul Hamid Ghazali and Al Hallaj, who said "Anal Haq" (I am the Truth), which was taken up to mean that he was claiming to be God, as 'Anal Haq' is one of the ninety-nine names of Allah. Although he was publicly crucified by the Abbasid Ruler, his mystic experiences left a rich legacy of Sufism, before Sufism entered Punjab.⁶

Punjab has been vital gateway to the advent of Sufism in India, and one of the earliest Sufi centers in Punjab was that of Al-Hujweri,⁷ popularly known as Data Ganj Baksh, he was both a saint and the author of the celebrated work on Sufism titled *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* (Discovery of The Veiled) and it is widely believed by Sufis as the best book written on Sufism and it became the most important Sufi text and source of inspiration for Sufis in India.

Ali-Hujweri defined Sufism as "*Sufism is not composed of practices and theory, but it is morals,*" and "*Who surpasses you in good moral qualities, surpasses you in Sufism*".⁸

Not long after Al-Hujweri, regular Sufi orders of chishtis were set up ,that played an important role in the sociocultural history of Punjab from early 13th century onwards regular Sufi orders of chishtis and suhrawardis played an important role in the socio-cultural history of Punjab and though all Sufis were Muslims, that did not prevent Sufis from assimilating the language, idioms and traditions of Hindu India in their parables ,poetry and sermons and thus Islam a religion born in Arabia became acclimatized .The migration and settlement of Sufis in different regions of Northern India coupled with Moinuddin Chishti's move to Lahore, Delhi and Ajmer ,changed the spiritual ,social, cultural landscape of India. With soil of Punjab becoming, enriched with Sufis love and ethos of interfaith harmony and syncretic tendencies, it provided healing touch to the shattered and bruised masses and Punjab became feeder and tributary stream of knowledge, wisdom and large parts of Punjab rural pockets and towns became hub of Sufi saints.

Sufism in action centered around the personality of *peer or shaikh*, who is believed to be able to transmit spiritual powers to his *murid* or aspirant. Though *the Ulama* accused the shaikhs of defying orthodox Muslim theology, the Sufis saw the “Shaikhs” in the midst of *Murid*, like Mohammad in the midst of his companions⁹ and that the Shaikh was one living vice regent of the Prophet¹⁰, the contemporary Sufi works conceded the importance of *haj*, but not before service of the *shaikh* i.e., only those go on pilgrimage who have *no pir*.¹¹

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Bhakhtiyar aki, Shaikh Farid and Nizamuddin Auliya were among the most prominent and popular leaders of Chishti order in North India and became household words for piety and devotion. The Suhrawardi order was nourished in Punjab by Shaikh Bahadudin Zakaria. Later all the famous Sufi orders i.e., qadiris, naqshbandis, etc. also entered Punjab, The Land of Five Rivers, through which flows the Indus River and its five major tributaries became the major centre of Sufi activities, that gained considerable influence and strongholds at Multan, Uch and Lahore.

The most important single Sufi Saint, who left a deep and profound impact on people of Punjab was Shaikh Baba Farid.¹² He became the most popular Muslim saint, who imbibed and adjusted thoroughly to the socio-religious and cultural milieu of Punjab, marked by interaction of diverse Sufi, Nathpanthi yogic and bhakti traditions of Medieval India. After achieving a high degree of proficiency in to mystical dimensions of Sufism and practices including Chillai Makus (a 40 days course of prayers with head hung downwards), Baba Farid finally settled at Ajodhan, now known as Pakpattan (in Pakistan). He had far reaching influence in Punjab and though he had no backing of the state, that his *Jamat Khana*¹³ attracted people from different religious denominations and also scholars, merchants, Government servants, Yogis, Muslim qalandars and people from all sections and sects of Punjab, Devotees from even far flung areas of central Asia, and Afghanistan flocked to Pakpattan.¹⁴ Though engaged in his spiritual pursuits, Shaikh Farid was also a philanthropist who sincerely attended to the needs of the inmates of his *jamat-khana*. He always shielded the weak and the oppressed and his *khanqah* became a sanctuary where people took refuge from injustice and oppression.¹⁵

A characteristic feature of Baba Farid was that Punjabi literary tradition began with him and since early Punjabi literature was principally spiritually in nature, and written and sung for all caste and classes, it prepared the ground for deeply esteemed poetry of Baba Farid, cherished by people of Punjab and the inclusion of his poetry in Guru Granth Sahib by Sikh Gurus. Interestingly, Punjabi is not the predominant language of the Sikh Scripture Guru Granth Sahib. Though in Gurmukhi script, it was written in several dialects. There are 134 hymns of Shaikh Baba Farid incorporated in Guru Granth Sahib.¹⁶ The verses of Baba Farid, his secular mysticism and concept of universal brotherhood was set in different Ragas in the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. Till today Baba Farid’ saying, preserved in the holy granth in the Punjabi dialect are sung in the Kirtan in Gurdwaras and have been a great emotional and spiritual

satisfaction for rural and urban folks of Punjab.

In fact, it was a milieu of interreligious contact¹⁷ and cultural transfusion between Hinduism, Islam and Sufism that with the passage of time, Sufism adopted their tradition to Indian religious traditions. It was only a matter of time before the Sufis rejecting political pressure, began interacting with the *local Hindu mystics, Yogis, tantric, siddhas and sadhus*. Over the years, many symbiotic features between Sufism and Hinduism emerged. Sufi's belief in the doctrine of Wahdat-al-wujud, or unity of being was similar to the essence of Vedanta and Upanishads. The Mughal Ruler, Akbar The Great, was with the Sufi concept of Wahdat-al-wujud as also with Hindu Vedanta philosophy and spiritual nature of Indian music. Prince Dara Shikoh, eldest son of Emperor Shahjahan, shook the Muslim world by his translation of Upanishads and Hindu scriptures and subsequent inference of leading to the Absolute. Martin Lings¹⁸ says, "Prince Dara Shikoh, Sufi son of Emperor Shahjahan was able to affirm that Sufism and Advaita, Vedantism (Hinduism) are essentially the same, with the surface difference in terminology."

It goes to the tribute of Sufi saints that Sheikh Mian Mir¹⁹, venerated Sufi saint, was invited to lay the foundation stone of Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar and thus the strong hold of Sufi saints over vast tracts of undivided Punjab, made magnificent contribution to the spiritual and cultural heritage of India, by their humanitarian vision of co-existence and mutual understanding through explicit acceptance of cultural pluralism and Punjab became the cradle of cosmopolitan society nourished by rich legacy of Sufis and Sikh Gurus.

Bibliography

1. The Contribution of Indian Sufis to Peace and Amity by K.A. Nizami, 7th July 2014, New Age Islam. Also read R. Upadhyay's Sufism in India: Its Origin, History and Politics: "Mysticism is a practical spiritual discipline based on the insight of illuminated seekers after truth". It is in fact a mission of higher religious order of any faith, which disdains strife and conflict in any form. Joy of self-realization being the essence of religion is experienced after a long spiritual practice. The mystics discard outward form of religion once they attain such joy. The concept of Sufism was therefore, to focus the mystic power on the spiritual dimension of Islam with a view to shield the believers from the outwardly and unrealistic dogma of the faith." Read also Sufi Expressions of Mystic Quest by Laleh Bakhtiar published by Thames & Hudson Ltd, December 1976 and "Sufism: An Introduction to The Mystical Tradition of Islam" by Carl W. Ernst (2nd revised edition, May 2011)
2. "Sufism and Sikhism" by C.H. Loehlin published in The Muslim World Vol. 29, Issue 4, 1939
3. The Sufis, the Mystic of Islam, derived their name from garments of coarse wool 'Suf' which they wore as a badge of poverty. They believed in God as the only reality and aimed at spiritualism of Islam from within. Conflicts in the metaphysics and ethics of formal religion were sought to be resolved through their own intuition, not through reasoned arguments.

4. A.J. Arberry, *An Introduction to the History of Sufism*, Orient Longman, 1992 p3.
5. G S Talib, *Guru Nanak and Sufism*, *Journal of Religious Studies*, p29.
6. See HU : *The Sufi Way : A Journal of the Rumi Foundation India Vol. 4 - Sufis of the Punjab* (edited by Muzaffar Ali)
7. Hujwari came in 1035 and died at Lahore in 1072. He was the author of a number of works of which *Kashf- ul-Mahajub* became a very important source of mystic guidance for Sufis of North India. This article refers to early Sufi settlements in Lahore and that some of them opposed his thoughts. Refer R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystic of Islam*, Global Grey Publishers 2013, pp 236-43; as also S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, published by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, reprinted 1994 Vol .1, p.113.
8. Anne Marie Shimmel in her book, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Published by Islamic Book Trust, 2008 - ASEAN Edition) says, "Hujwari's important innovation is writing his *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* (Unveiling the Hidden) in Persian and thus ushering in a new period in mystical literature."
9. "The Study of Indian Sufism" J S Grewal, *PIHC*, Vol. 27 (1965) pg 265-267
10. Ibid
11. *Fawaa'id-ul-Fu'ad : Spiritual and Literary Discourses of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya* (Islamic Heritage in Cross Cultural Perspective) English Translation - Z.H. Faruqi, 1st Edition, 31st December 1996, p.87
12. Baba Farid's ancestors came from Kabul and migrated to Punjab in the middle of twelfth century. After completing his studies, he pledged service to Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki of Chishti order and became his murid. After the death of Khwaja Sahib, Baba Farid became the most popular and prominent Chishti saint of North India and strengthened the spiritual foundations of Chishti order in Punjab and laid stress on principles of universal love and service for humanity.
13. The term 'Jamatkhana' literally means 'a house of assembly or gathering'. Specifically, it has come to designate a gathering space for community activities and for devotional practice among a variety of Muslim groups such as the Musta'lian and Nizari Ismailis in certain parts of the world. In the predominantly South Asian Chishti order, the institution for Sufi activity was called jamatkhana and was centred on the residence of the shaykh. The Shi'i Bohra and Sunni Memon communities of India also have private places of gathering called jamatkhana. by Ismailimail, 16th June 2008, Institute of Ismaili Studies
14. *Analyzing Sufism in 16th Century India : The Case of Badauni's "Najat al-Rashid"* by Ninomiya Ayako published in *PIHC* Vol. 65, 2004
15. *Sikh and Muslim Understandings of Baba Farid* by Christopher Shackle (The 2008 Amrit Kaur Ahluwalia Memorial Lecture, April 19, 2008, UC Berkeley)
16. It was in this mutually re-inforcing spiritual relationship that evolved between Sufism and Sikhism that Guru Arjan Dev invited Shaikh Miyan Mir, leading Sufi saint of his time and Pir of Sufi Qadri order to lay the foundation of Harmandar Sahib. Indeed, the commonality of values and principles which the Gurus and Sufis had been teaching their followers, was deeply focused on humanism that Guru Granth Sahib (the central religious text of Sikhism) includes 112 couplets and 4 hymns by Khwaja Fariduddin Ganj and Shakar (1173-1266), a prominent Sufi of Chishti order, who lived in Punjab. This underscores the deep relationship between Sufism and Sikhism and the influence they had on each other.

17. In this context one can say that Sufis took a similar character too much of the medieval Bhakti movement and no wonder some of the Sufis had more in common with the bhaktas than they had with orthodox Islam and conversely some of the Hindu bhaktas had more in common with Sufis than with orthodox Hindus. The points of positive contact between the two traditions were at level of devotion where doctrines and philosophy seemed less important than honesty of worship, religious life and moral righteousness.
18. What is Sufism? by Martin Lings published December 1st 1999 by Islamic Texts Society (reprinted 2005)
19. "Mir Mohammad Muayyinul Islam, (1550-1635), popularly known as Sheikh Mian Mir was a famous Muslim Sufi saint who resided in Lahore, specifically in the town of Begumpura. He was a close friend of the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji and was invited to lay the foundation of Hrmandar Sahib, now known worldwide as Golden Temple of Amritsar." Sufi and Sikhs - Guruka Singh Khalsa, 2010.



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