



Cultural Integrity and Service to Humanity in Sufism

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The word "Sufi" is probably derived from the Arabic word 'Suf' which means 'one who wears clothes made from wool'. Another possible origin of this word is 'Safa' which means 'Purity'. The word Sufi is generally used for any Muslim or dervesh who is free from all worldly evils. The sufis emerged in Islam at a very early stage. Most of them were highly spiritual persons who were disgusted by the vulgar demonstration of wealth and degeneration of morals in the aftermath of Islam's politico - military triumph. Some of the sufi pioneers such as Hasan Basri and his disciple, the woman sufi Rabia (8th century A.D.) reiterated the importance of prayer, continual fasting and unconditional love of God. **(1)** The union of the human soul with God through love and devotion was the essence of the teachings of Sufis. The method of their realizing God was the renunciation of the world and worldly pleasures. They considered love to be the only means of reaching God. Historian Tara Chand says: "Sufism indeed was a religion of intense devotion; Love was its passion; poetry, song and dance, its worship and passing away in God, its ideal".

Sufism was characterized on the one hand as a phenomenon of expressing love towards almighty and on the other hand spreading the message of Truth. Sufism is a mystic dimension of Islam which formally originated in the Middle East between ninth and tenth centuries. By the eleventh century Sufism evolved in to a well developed movement with a body of literature on Quranic studies and Sufi practices. The Sufis started institutionally arranging their communities around the hospice or Khanqah, which was under the authority of a teaching master known as Shaikh, Pir, or Murshid. He appointed Khalifa as his successor and gathered disciples. He instituted regulations for spiritual behaviour and engagement among inmates, as well as between laypeople and the master. It wasn't until the 12th Century that Sufism began to take on the characteristics of an institutionalized religious movement, with the appearance of the major



tariqahs (Chishti, Suhrawardi, Qadiriya, and Naqshbandi). The impoverished Indian populace found Sufism to be highly acceptable due to their austere and simple lifestyle. Their standing among the nobility in general and the Muslim aristocracy in particular was also improved by their expertise in the cultivation of literature or theology. (2) Islamic mysticism (Irfan) has been one of the prime forces orienting Muslims to moral values and preaching and practicing the real Islamic spirit based on love of God and service to humanity. Sufis, throughout centuries lived peacefully, rather lovingly with other faith holders as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians and Pagans. (3) They transcended all kinds of prejudices or even considerations of caste, creed, colour, gender, race, culture and geographical divisions. They promoted liberal, horizontal ideals like tolerance and love. (4) Sufism is regarded as one of the great icons that contributed significantly to human togetherness and love. Al-Junaydi said, "Love is the inclination of the heart" meaning that the heart without any effort inclines towards God and what is of God. One of the Sufis says that "Love is concord", which means obedience to what God commands, refraining from what he forbids, and satisfaction with what he has decreed or ordained. (5) Shaikh Moinuddin Chishti, emphasizes that the aim and objective of a Sufi's life is gnosis (Marifat) of God which is not possible without purification of heart, possible only through love of God. Love of God, he maintains, produces a fire in the heart of a lover (Of Allah) which consumes everything that comes in contact with it. (6) Of the groups of Sufis who migrated to India in the late twelfth Century, the Chishtis were the most influential; this was because they adapted successfully to the local environment and adopted several features of Indian devotional traditions. The Chishti Sufis were amongst the earliest Islamic mystic migrants to South Asia. This Sufi silsilah tried to appropriate various aspects of Indian cultural traditions such as music and became extremely popular in the subcontinent. They supported *Sama*, a form of musical performance, popularly known as *Sufiyana Kalam*. In the thirteenth century, Delhi emerged as one of the major centres of the Chishtis. The magnitude of popularity the Chishti Sufi enjoyed in South Asia is amazing. However, the Suhrawardi Silsilah, because of its orthodox approach, could not enjoy such popularity among the Delhiites. (7) Many Chishti and Qadiri Sufis believed in the policy of Sulh-i-kul or 'Peace with all'. Later on, Mughal Emperor Akbar could emerge as

a great empire builder largely because of his capacity to translate this concept into practice. Offering patronage to some Sufis suggested a strengthening of multicultural symbols. As a result, numerous sultans gained the confidence and loyalty of their subjects, who came from a variety of language and cultural backgrounds. The two most prominent Sufi orders in South Asia during the Sultanate period were the Chishtis and the Suhrawardis. The Chishtis flourished in Delhi and in the surrounding area, including Rajasthan, Parts of Punjab and Modern U.P., Bengal, Bihar, Malwa, Gujrat, and later on the Deccan also experienced the waves of the movement. The Suhrawardis were influential mainly in Punjab and Sindh. Territories were divided between different pirs of different orders in such a way that Sufis of various orders could maintain a cordial relationship amongst themselves. **(8)** The most famous Chishti Sufi was Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, who settled in Ajmer, which became the centre of his activities. The People of Ajmer were so much impressed and fascinated with the personality of Chishti and they became his disciple and remained with him. He attracted everyone who came in contact with him. By leading a very simple ascetic way of life and spreading the message of love and equality, he had tried to wipe out all ill-feelings from the minds of the people of two communities i-e Hindus and Muslims.

Khwaja Moinuddin was married but lived a life of asceticism. His primary goal was to enable Muslim believers to live a life of devotion to Allah. He had no interest in conversion because he considered faith was a personal matter. **(9)** Interestingly, the same spirit was reflected in the activities of rulers such as Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq and Emperor Akbar who used to venerate this Sufi. Moinuddin's image as a Sufi man became larger after his death in 1235 - AD.

Moinuddin's stature as a Sufi reached its apex under Akbar who nurtured deep respect for him. Akbar could grasp the political importance of Ajmer. This far-sighted ruler also identified Moinuddin as a Symbol of India's Composite culture, who was respected by all, irrespective of religious beliefs. Akbar knew that in the volatile situation of Rajasthan such positive elements required strengthening. **(10)** Moinuddin exhorted his disciples to "develop river-like generosity, sun-like affection, and earth-like hospitality" **(11)** The Hindus regard the river, the sun, and the



ground as sacred. In this sense, the Sufi Shaikh represented their appropriative nature by addressing the common people in a language they understood. Such an approach increased the popularity of Chishti Sufi in Medieval South Asia. During the thirteenth century A.D., the Sufi brotherhood became firmly established in North India. (12) Prior to the Sultanate period, the country's religious ethos entered a new era. (13) During the Sultanate period, Sufism spread throughout the country. Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki was one of Moinuddin Chishti's most notable students. Flower Festival (Phool walon ki sair) is held in Mehruli near his tomb. Another great Chishti Sufi was Baba Friduiddin Ganj-i-Shakar. He put emphasis on poverty emulating the Prophet Mohammad, who used to say "I take pride in my poverty". It is useful to note that many Sufi Shaikhs used the Image of prophet as a source of authority. This was a natural Legitimizing process as they had to encounter the challenges of Islamic orthodoxy. (14) Farid also put stress on renunciation of worldly goods and attachments, control of the senses by fasting and other austerities, humbleness and service to others. (15) He was deeply respected in Delhi. His outlook was so broad and humane that some of his verses are later found quoted in the Adi Granth of the Sikhs. He avoided the company of the Sultan and the Amirs. He used to say, "Every darvesh who makes friends with the nobles will end badly". Baba Farid raised the Chishti order of the Sufis to the status of an all India organisation by his high mysticism and religious activities.

Nizamuddin Auliya was the most famous Chishti Sufi. He was the disciple of Baba Farid. He came to Delli in 1258 and settled in the village Ghiaspur near Delhi. In his life time seven Sultans ruled over Delhi, but he did not go to any of them. When Sultan Alauddin Khilji once expressed his desire to meet him, he said, "I have two doors in my home. If the Sultan would enter through one door I would go out through the other". His strong personality and Mystic ideology made him most popular. He laid much emphasis on Love which leads one to the realization of God. He also said that Love of God means love of humanity. Thus he spread the message of universal love and brotherhood. He stated that individuals, who love God for the sake of humans, as well as those who love humans for the sake of God, are favourites of God, thus, the finest way to love and worship God. However, having preached his teachings for a long time, he breathed his death in 1325 A.D. Nizamuddin Auliya regarded altruistic services as more



important than obligatory prayers. **(16)** At a time when the Turks turned a blind eye to the Islamic concept of brotherhood and looked down upon the ordinary people, the Sufi attitude of non discrimination helped to reduce social tensions. The principal concern of the Sufis was the amelioration of the condition of Muslims. However, their care and concern did not exclude the Hindus. The Chishti saint freely interacted with Hindus and Jain yogic experiences. Once being greatly impressed by the devotion of a group of Hindus, Nizamuddin Auliya remarked before his friend poet Amir Khusrau “Every Community has its own path and faith, and its own way of worship.” **(17)** Bahauddin Zakariya, the founder of the Suhrawardi Silsilah in India, did not believe in starvation or self- mortification. Unlike the Chishtis, the Suhrawardis accepted royal grants and believed that money was necessary to help the poor. While the Chishtis tried to distance themselves from politics, Bahauddin believed that visit to royal Courts enabled on the one hand, the Sufis to help the poor through royal support and on the other hand such visits enabled the Sultans and their associates to receive the spiritual blessings of Sufi Shaikh. **(18)** The Suhrawardi order had the credit to be the first Sufi order that was introduced to Bengal by Shaikh Jalaluddin Tebrezi, a Sufi of India-wide fame. According to Akhbarul-Akhyar, Jalaluddin Tabrezi was initially a disciple of Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi **(19)** another great Suhrawardi Sufi of Bengal was Shah Jalal Mujarrad - i - Yamani (d. 1364.A.D). This reputed Sufi was also a great warrior, and was largely responsible for the propagation of Islam in the whole of Eastern Bengal and Western part of Assam. **(20)**

The chishtis also consolidated their position in Bengal. Shaikh Akhi Siraj (d. 1357) was one of the most famous Sufis of this order who flourished in Bengal, because of his great knowledge. His spritual guide Nizamuddin Auliya used to call him Aina-i-Hindustan. The Naqshbandi and Qadiri Sufi also flourished in Bengal after the collapse of the Delhi Sultanate. The Naqshbandi were orthodox and expressed their hostility to the mystical folk song of Bengal. **(21)** Bijapur in the Deccan flourished as an important centre of the Chishtis from the 1300 A.D. to 1700 A.D. Apart from the Chishtis, the Qadiris and the Shattaris excercised their control in Bijapur. Another important Sufi centre in the Deccan was Gulbarga which was graced by the presence of Banda Nawaz Gisudaraz, the famous Chishti Sufi, who migrated there from Delhi.



Bidar also emerged as an important centre of the Qadiri silsilah, many of whom were Arab migrants. Apart from the Chishtis, the Naqshbandis also had their base in the Deccan. However, they were not as popular as the chishtis. Aurangabad became an important centre of the Naqshbandis. The most illustrious Naqshbandi Sufis of Aurangabad were Baba Palangposh (d. 1699 A.D.) and Baba Musafir (d. 1715 A.D.).

Ahmadabad, the commercial metropolis, is also known as the "city of dargahs" because it is home to over a dozen notable dargahs. The city's famous dargahs include those of Piranpir, Shah Abu Turab Shirazi, Shah Abdul Wahhab the Senior, Junior Airdrus, and Pir Mohammad Shah. (22) He moved to Ahmadabad from Bijapur in the 18th century. This well-known Sufi came from a Qadiri family and was known for his extensive studies and literary interests. Pir Mohammad Shah has a considerable following among the affluent trading community of Sunni Bohra Muslims domiciled in Ahmadabad and other important towns such as Surat, Pattna and Baroda.

The Sufis in India became the Ambassadors of cultural integrity and social harmony. They brought with them, the religious fervor, devotion, and piety. The social behaviour and philosophical synthesis were in practice by the Sufis. The Sufi Shaikhs came to occupy a pride of place in the society; most of them were patronized by the king. Because of their powerful spiritual attainments, noble deeds, and liberal outlook, they left an indelible imprint on the socio - religious set-up (Milieu) of India.

Sufis never hesitated to assimilate the spiritual insights from other faiths. They were more akin to the Quranic verse: "For everyone there is direction to which one turns, so view with each other in good deeds."

Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia once went for a morning walk along the Yamuna River in Ghiyaspura and came across some Hindu women adoring the rising sun. When he saw these women performing homage, he told his poet disciple Khusrau. (23) 'For every people there is religion and direction to which they turn to pray.' These words were literal translation of the Quranic verse, deeply reflecting Nizamuddin Auliya's approach towards other religions. Nizamuddin Auliya used to recite very often:

(He who is not my friend - may God be his friend! And he who bears ill- will against me, may his joys increase. He who puts thorns in my way on account of enmity, may every flower that blossoms in the garden of his life, be without thorns). (24)

Sufis adopted an attitude of sympathy and understanding towards all creeds. They said, "O you who sneer at the idolatry of the Hindu, learn also from him how worship is done." Sufis believed in universal brotherhood and never made any individual distinction between the people of different creeds, races, communities and sects. The concept of God, people, and existence of the universe is very clear and lucid in the Quran. This enlightened and influenced the Sufis and they put it into use through preaching and practice. As Jami has explained: "Jami you have become the slave of love, so you just forbade pride in genealogy because in the path of love, you are the son of such and such- is meaningless." (25)

1. The fundamentals of Sufi ideology rest on the relationship of love that exists between God and man. They helped in developing a more humanitarian approach in religious life with stress on service to mankind and a belief that love of God was not possible without the love of mankind. (26) Sufis, unlike the Ulemas, did not keep themselves aloof from Indian masses. They knew Arabic and Persian but they adopted local idiom and preached the message of love and universal brotherhood in local languages. They also adopted local customs and traditions and thus drew Indian masses near Islam. Thus, they played much greater role in spreading universal values of Islam than the doctrinaire Ulemas. As Ibn Hujveri had rightly commented: "You will not find God in the books on jurisprudence; see the mirror of your heart, because no book is better than this." (27)

Islam as practiced by the Sufis was somehow more influential than the Islam of the ambitious Turkish conquerors. Sufis believed in equality and fraternity of mankind. They abjured narrowness of mind and opposed communal, sectarian and caste barriers, which cause conflict and destroy social harmony. The outstanding Sufis who played a revolutionary role in the social, cultural and religious life of India were Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Rajasthan, Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar of Punjab, Shaikh Bahaduddin Zakariya of Punjab, Shaikh



Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi, Mir Saiyid Ali Hamedani of Kashmir, Saiyid Muhammed Gaisu Daraz of Deccan, Shaikh Latif, Shaikh Jalal Thaneshri and others. These Sufis had divided the whole north India and some parts of south upto Deccan into their vilayats (spiritual territories). Sufis worked in Kashmir, Sindh, Punjab, Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat; Maharashtra, Awadh and Deccan. Through their unparalleled moral standards and sweet spiritual voice, they propagated Islam in India and opened a new epoch in Islamic history for a better understanding of other religions, cultures. Human values and good inter-religious relations were stressed upon. **(28)** In the socio-religious life of Deccan, Burhanuddin Gharib, Saiyed Zainuddin Dawood, Shaikh Ainuddin Bijapuri, Sayed Mohammad Gaisu Daraz and Shaikh Sirajuddin Junaidi played a significant role. Saiyed Gaisu Daraz played a very conspicuous role in the Deccan. Hindus also frequently visited him and stayed in this Khanqah without any inhibition. **(29)** He also read Sanskrit books to know the methodology of Hindus. **(30)** Gaisu Daraz wrote *Mairajul Ashiqin* in Daccani, which is a symbol of composite culture and social integration. The liberal attitude of Sufis created pleasant atmosphere and their Khanqahs became the centre of cultural synthesis and communal harmony.

A Chishti Sufi of Delhi, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, devoted himself fully to the service of mankind. Like him, other Sufis believed in God as well as the unity of mankind, performed important social roles in the caste ridden society. In their spiritual philosophy, love of Man and rendering service to him, irrespective of birth or creed was the part of their worship of God. **(31)** A few examples may be cited here highlighting the fact that these Sufis went to the extent of ignoring the Shariah Law if it came as an obstacle to the cause of human good. For instance, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya once narrated to his disciples for their indoctrination the case of his Teacher Maulana Alauddin Asuli of Badaun that a Hindu Women from the village of Kancha (near Badaun) who was sold as a slave to the Maulana and she converted to Islam. One day, the Maulana found her sad with tears in her eyes and on being asked the reason; she told him that she missed her son. Moved by her grief, the Maulana asked her whether she would be accepted back by her husband, if set free. She replied in the affirmative. Next day, when it was still dark, the Maulana went with her in the direction of her village but turned back when pressed by the

woman to leave her there, because the villagers being rebels could kill him. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya used to comment on this episode from the point of view of Shariah Law. The Maulana could be accused of abetting apostasy. But his association with Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi during his early days had infused humanism in him. Therefore, he could ignore the Shariah Law, in order to console the victims of torture and exploitation. (32)

Shaikh Friduddin Ganj-i-Shakar and his spiritual successor, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, have been opposed to the institution of slavery but, as usual, they never liked to raise a storm by questioning the validity of anything approved by the doctrines of Shariah Law. They would, however, inspire their disciples through their teachings or by their personal examples. Their devout disciples used to set the slaves free. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya inspired his murids to purchase slaves and gift them liberty. For instance, When Mir Hasan Sijzi Joined the circle of the murids of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, he not only granted Freedom to his old slaves but also went out of his way to help them. (33) Once in Deogiri Amir Hasan Sijzi's old servant Malih purchased a girl from her parents for five Tankas. At the Time of departure of the army for Delhi, the parents of the girl Came with ten tankas and requested Malih with tears in their eyes to accept the amount and return their daughter as they could not part with her easily. By chance, Amir Hasan Sijzi was present there. Having found them in grief and desperation, he was moved by their plight and said to Malih that he would like to purchase the girl, and paid him ten Tankas. Then the girl was returned to her parents along with the ten tankas they had brought for payment as her price. Having heard it, shaikh said, "You have done well". (34) In fact, the love and service of mankind had become the part and parcel the Sufi's life mission. Sufis served people with selfless devotion and zeal.

Sufi Shaikhs managed to immerse themselves in Indian Society, because of open-endedness and fluidity of their beliefs and practices, their respect and tolerance toward local existing customs and traditions, and their tendency to incorporate and accommodate a wide range of belief system within their own. The Sufi Shaikhs learnt, wrote and preached in local languages, studied canonical philosophical and mythological texts; interacted with religious scholars and holy man belonging to other religions traditions; adopted local customs and



practices, and often practiced Islamaized form of such customs (35). This process of mutual interaction and multi-directional exchange gave rise to new socio-cultural practices and traditions, and even led to the development of new languages.

Sufi Khanqahs became centres of popular religiosity, cultural synthesis and communal harmony. The Sufi Shaikhs also organized mass movements against oppressive rulers and landlords from their khanqahas.

The Sufis promoted communal harmony with their actions and vision of life devoted to the welfare of people attracting the caste - ridden and oppressed lower sections to their organization's fold. Titus rightly said, "It was through Sufism that Islam really found a point of contact with Hinduism and effective entrance to Hindu heart. (36) R.K. Megh held the opinion, "we can thus conclude that whenever there is a crisis of cultural identity, or the romantic spirit is resurrected, the Sufi heritage would speak with a thousand tongues to us all." (37) Akbar, the Mughal emperor, appreciated Sufi doctrines which shaped his religious outlook and religious Policies.

It implies that many Sufi centres by reflecting their broad and liberal outlook contributed to the nourishing of India's cultural pluralism. The Sufis played a significant role in the growth and efflorescence of vernacular literature, the classical language-Persian- continued to receive patronage from the court as the language of power and administration. The Sufis massively contributed to the spread of poetry and musics. The Chishtis used song and dance techniques of concentration for creating spiritual ecstasy.

The most important contribution of Sufism is that it helped in developing the bond of solidarity and brotherhood, between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Sufi Shaikhs are revered not only by Muslims but also by a large number of Hindus and their tombs have become a common pilgrimage site for both communities. Sufism influenced both rural and urban areas and had a deep political, cultural and social impact on the masses. The Sufis had made significant efforts to preserve the peaceful coexistence of diverse religions. Sufis led to a process of Exchange and Interaction with various local cultures in India. They played an important role in the process of urbanization, dissemination of learning and promotion of communal harmony.



They mingled with poor people and spread their faith through community services. They stood for cultural co-existence. The idea of cultural co-existence became the norm of mutual relations during medieval period In India. This is the great legacy which Sufis have left for the succeeding generations of India. Respect of cultural diversity is perhaps the greatest contribution of Sufis to Indian civilization. The Sufis were true humanitarians and they performed several works of public welfare in order to serve humanity. They criticized and condemned the evil practices prevalent among the Hindus and Muslims and thus tried to purify the society.

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