

CC-7: HISTORY OF INDIA (c.1206-1526)

IV. RELIGION AND CULTURE

(A). SUFI SILSILAS: CHISHTIS AND SUHRAWARDIS; DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES; SOCIAL ROLES

(C). SUFI LITERATURE, MALFUZAT; PREMAKHAYANS

The tenth century is important in Islamic history for a variety of reasons: it marks the rise of the Turks on the ruins of the Abbasid Caliphate, as well as important changes in the realm of the ideas and beliefs. In the realm of ideas, it marks the end of the domination of the Mutazila or rationalist philosophy, and the rise of orthodox schools based on the Quran and Hadis (traditions of the Prophet and his companions) and of the Sufi mystic orders.

The word Sufi is derived from ‘suf’ which means wool in Arabic, referring to the simple cloaks the early Muslim ascetics wore. It also means ‘purity’ and thus can be understood as the one who wears wool on top of purity. The Sufis were regarded as people who kept their heart pure and who sought to communicate with God through their ascetic practice.

Sufism or mysticism emerged in the 8th century and the early known Sufis were Rabiya al-Adawiya, Al-Junaid and Bayazid Bastami. However, it evolved into a well-developed movement by the end of the 11th century. Al-Hujwiri, who established himself in north India and was buried in Lahore and regarded as the oldest Sufi in the sub-continent. By the 12th century, the Sufis were organised in Silsilahs (i.e., orders, which basically represented an unbreakable chain between the Pir, the teacher, and the murids, the disciples). The four most popular Silsilahs among these were the Chishtis, Suhrawardis, Qadiriya, and Naqshbandis.

The Sufi orders are broadly divided into two: Ba-shara, that is, those which follow the Islamic Law(shara) and be-shara, that is, those which were not bound by it. Both types of orders prevailed in India.

THE CHISHTI AND SUHARWARDI SILSILAHS

Of the ba-shara movements, only two acquired significant influence and following in north India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These were the Chishti and Suharwardi silsilahs. The Chishti order was established in India by Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti who came to India around 1192, shortly after the defeat and death of Prithvi Raj Chauhan. After staying for some time in Lahore and Delhi he finally shifted to Ajmer which was an important political centre and already had a sizable Muslim population. No authentic record of his activities is available; he did not write any book, but his fame rose, it seems, along with that of his successors. Among the disciples of Shaikh Muinuddin (d. 1235) were Bakhtiyar Kaki and his disciple Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar. Farid-ud-Din confined his activities to Hansi and Ajodhan (in modern Haryana and the Punjab, respectively). He was deeply respected in Delhi, so much so that streams of people would throng around him whenever he visited Delhi. His outlook was so broad and humane that some of his verses are later found quoted in the Adi-Granth of the Sikhs.

The most famous of the Chishti saints, however, were Nizamuddin Auliya and Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi. These early Sufis mingled freely with people of the lower classes, including the Hindus. They led a simple, austere life, and conversed with people in Hindawi, their local dialect. They were hardly interested in effecting conversions, though later on, many families and groups, attributed their conversion to the 'good wishes' of these saints. These Sufi saints made themselves Popular by adopting musical recitations called sama, to create a mood of nearness to God, Moreover, they often chose Hindi verses for the purpose, since they could make a greater impact on their listeners. Nizamuddin

Auliya adopted yogic breathing exercises, so much so that the yogis called him a sidh or perfect.

After the death of Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi in the middle of fourteenth century the Chishtis did not have a commanding figure at Delhi. As a result, the Chishti saints dispersed, and extended their message to the eastern and southern parts of India. The Suharwardi order entered India at about the same time as the Chishtis, but its activities were confined largely to the Punjab and Multan. The most well-known saints of the order were Shaikh Shihabuddin Suharwardi and Hamid-ud-Din Nagori. Unlike the Chishtis, the Suharwardi saints did not believe in leading a life of poverty. They accepted the service of the state, and some of them held important posts in the ecclesiastical department. The Chishtis, on the other hand, preferred to keep aloof from state politics and shunned the company of rulers and nobles. Nevertheless, both helped the rulers in their own way by creating a climate of opinion in which people belonging to different sects and religions could live in peace and harmony. While Mecca remained the holy of holies, the rise of popular saints provided a useful point of veneration and devotion to the mass of Muslims within the country.

Sufism stressed the element of love and devotion as effective means of realisation of Gods. Love of God meant the love of humanity, and hence they believed that service to humanity was tantamount to service to God. In Sufism self-discipline was considered an essential condition to gain the knowledge of God by sense of perception. While orthodox Muslims emphasised external conduct, the Sufis lay stress on inner purity. Other ideas emphasized by Sufism are meditation, good action, repentance for sins, performance of prayers and pilgrimages, fasting, charity, and suppression of passions by ascetic practices.

IMPACT OF SUFISM

These liberal and unorthodox features of Sufism had a profound influence on medieval Bhakti saints. In the later period, Akbar, the Mughal emperor, appreciated Sufi doctrines, which shaped his religious outlook and religious policies. Alongside the Sufi movement, the Bhakti cult was gaining strength among the Hindus and these two parallel movements based on the doctrines of love and selfless devotion contributed a great deal in bringing both the communities of Hindus and Muslims closer together.

Sufism took roots in both rural and urban areas and exercised a deep social, political, and cultural influence on the masses. It rebelled against all forms of religious formalism, orthodoxy, falsehood, and hypocrisy, and endeavoured to create a new world order in which spiritual bliss was the only and the ultimate goal. At a time when struggle for political power was the prevailing madness, the Sufi saints reminded men of their moral obligations. To a world torn by strife and conflict, they tried to bring peace and harmony.

The most important contribution of Sufism is that it helped to blunt the edge of Hindu–Muslim prejudices by forging the feelings of solidarity and brotherhood between these two religious communities. These Sufi saints are revered even today by not only Muslims but by a large number of Hindus, and their tombs have become popular places of pilgrimage for both communities.

MALFUZAT

Malfuzat is a ten-volume collection comprising the discourses, question-and-answer-sessions, sermons and dialogues of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement. The volumes contain, for the most part, speech that was transcribed by several of Ghulam Ahmad's close disciples as it was

being communicated and was published in Ahmadi periodicals during his lifetime.

The Malfuzat contain those of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's words that he spoke in the form of an address or discussion in the presence of a congregation or gathering, including during leisurely moments, and were recorded in writing by several companions who kept a diary of his words.

Another type of Sufi literature was known as the Premakhayan texts which were different from the Malfuzat texts. The poetry of Premakhayans were an attempt related to create a synthesis of Hindu-Muslim cultures as has been suggested by Historian S. A. A. Rizvi in his book A History of Sufism in India Vol. II.

According to Historian S.A.A. Rizvi, the Premakhyan poets did choose regional folk tales as the basis of their masnawis but the praise of Allah and the descriptions and praise of the prophet, four pious caliphs, and the praise of the poet's own Pir (teacher) signals that these works were bound by traditional Islamic Sufi ideology.

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