

## Influence of Sufism on the Socio-Cultural Life of India: A Study

**\*Dr. Harish Chandra**

### **Abstract**

The relevance of the topic is determined by the necessity of further research of cultural and spiritual traditions in India, for the study of the history of Islam spread and establishment, and for development of the Sufi doctrine formation theory. Taking into account the local history aspect of the topic, we note that now we are seeing a gradual restoration of Sufism in Tatarstan. It is a reference to the past of Sufism in the region, an appeal to the religious heritage of the Tatar people. The leading approach to the study of this topic is the theoretical and conceptual, historical and scholarly understanding of continuity in the sequential study of this topic. This article aims to achieve the following aims: the analysis and evaluation of Sufism as a constituent of Indian culture, aimed at ensuring the implementation of modern ethical and aesthetic concepts of Sunni Islam, their transformation in the mass consciousness of the Muslim peoples of India.

**Keywords:** Spiritual, Traditions, Aspect, Consciousness.

### **Introduction:**

Sufis strictly follow Islamic law belonged to Islamic jurisprudence – a core subject of legal education. Resultantly, the muridins also observe the principles of law as they are bound to follow the teachings of Allah and secondly the footsteps of their murshid. Therefore, Sufis and Sufism play a significant role in the implementation/enforcement of law which is highly necessary for the deterrence of crimes and protection of society. In Sufism and mysticism, there are different kinds of tariqa based on the chain of pedigree, slightly similar to the cast and creed. The major difference in cast group and pedigree in tariqa is that any person can be chosen by Allah to be a saint. It is not compulsory that all individuals from a particular will be saints and sheikh. The most popular tariqa in west is Mevlevi order used with the name of Mevlana Jalal ad –Din Muhammad Rumi in Turkey. In South Asia four main tariqas are generally popular: Chishti, Naqshbandi, Qadri, and Suharwardi. The Qalandri tariqa has its roots with Buddhism and Hinduism. The Sufi saints belong to these tariqas are chosen people who act as representatives of Allah. They are spiritual heads who mend and ameliorate the rotten and decayed societies morally, ethically and politically; as well as they show the path to their followers (muridin) to know and love Allah.

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**History of Sufism:**

Islamic mysticism had several stages of growth, including (1) the appearance of early asceticism, (2) the development of a classical mysticism of divine love, and (3) the rise and proliferation of fraternal orders of mystics. Despite these general stages, however, the history of Islamic mysticism is largely a history of individual mystic experience. The first stage of Sufism appeared in pious circles as a reaction against the worldliness of the early Umayyad period (661–749). From their practice of constantly meditating on the words in the Qur’ān (the Islamic holy book) about Doomsday, the ascetics became known as “those who always weep” and those who considered this world “a hut of sorrows.” They were distinguished by their scrupulous fulfillment of the injunctions of the Qur’ān and tradition, by many acts of piety, and especially by a predilection for night prayers.

**Traditional Culture:**

The Ghaznavids started constructing various schools called madrasa between 901-1151, which were linked and aligned with masjids (mosque). This mass movement created peace in the educational systems of India. The study of the Qu’ran and hadith, starting in North West India, was supported by existing scholars. Due to the Mongol invasions, the academic diversity of Indian citizens increased multiple-fold during the Delhi Sultanate. The cultural and literary life of the capital of Delhi started to enrich numerous intellectuals from regions such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. There were two main classifications among the religious elite that existed during the time of the Sultanate. Exclusive religious scholars who had studied those Islamic legal branches of study were noted as the ulama. They were geared towards Sharia and tended to be more conservative in terms of Muslim traditions. Sufi mystics, or fakirs, were the other group of religious elites. This was a more multicultural community, also more accepting of the practises of non-Muslims. Although the devotion to sharia practise remains a Sufi pillar, in India, early Sufis focused on proselytising through service work and supporting the needy. The emergence of the prevalent spiritual approach to Islam during the Delhi Sultanate was not a replacement for madrasa education or conventional scholarship.

**Sufi Thought and Practice****Important Aspects**

The mystics drew their vocabulary largely from the Qur’ān, which for Muslims contains all divine wisdom and has to be interpreted with ever-increasing insight. In the Qur’ān, mystics found the threat of the Last Judgment, but they also found the statement that God “loves them and they love him,” which became the basis for love-mysticism. Strict obedience to the religious law and imitation of the Prophet were basic for the mystics. By rigid introspection and mental struggle, the mystic tried to purify his baser self from even the smallest signs of selfishness, thus attaining *ikhlaṣ*, absolute purity of intention and act. *Tawakkul* (trust in God) was sometimes practiced to such an extent that every thought of tomorrow was considered irreligious. “Little sleep, little talk, little food” were fundamental; fasting became one of the most important preparations for the spiritual life. The central concern of the Sufis, as of every Muslim, was *tawḥīd*, the witness that “there is no deity but God.” This

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truth had to be realized in the existence of each individual, and so the expressions differ: early Sufism postulated the approach to God through love and voluntary suffering until a unity of will was reached; Junayd spoke of “recognizing God as He was before creation”; God is seen as the One and only actor; He alone “has the right to say ‘I.’” Later, *tawhīd* came to mean the knowledge that there is nothing existent but God, or the ability to see God and creation as two aspects of one reality, reflecting each other and depending upon each other (*wahdat al-wujūd*).

The mystics realized that beyond the knowledge of outward sciences intuitive knowledge was required in order to receive that illumination to which reason has no access. *Dhawq*, direct “tasting” of experience, was essential for them. But the inspirations and “unveilings” that God grants such mystics by special grace must never contradict the Qur’ān and tradition and are valid only for the person concerned. Even the Malāmatis, who attracted public contempt upon themselves by outwardly acting against the law, in private life strictly followed the divine commands. Mystics who expressed in their poetry their disinterest in, and even contempt of, the traditional formal religions never forgot that Islam is the highest manifestation of divine wisdom.

The idea of the manifestation of divine wisdom was also connected with the person of the Prophet Muhammad. Though early Sufism had concentrated upon the relation between God and the soul, from 900 onward a strong Muhammad-mysticism developed. In the very early years, the alleged divine address to the Prophet—“If thou hadst not been I had not created the worlds”—was common among Sufis. Muhammad was said to be “Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay.” Muhammad is also described as light from light, and from his light all the prophets are created, constituting the different aspects of this light. In its fullness such light radiated from the historical Muhammad and is partaken of by his posterity and by the saints; for Muhammad has the aspect of sanctity in addition to that of prophecy. An apocryphal tradition makes even God attest: “I am Aḥmad (= Muhammad) without ‘m’ (i.e., Aḥad, ‘One’).”

### Sufi Culture

#### Syncretic Mysticism

Islam was not the only faith that introduced the spiritual elements of Sufism to India. Because of the prominence of mysticism spreading across India, the Bhakti movement also received appreciation. The Bhakti movement was a regional revival of Hinduism through devotional deity worship that connected language, geography, and cultural identities. This idea of “Bhakti” originated in the Bhagavad Gita, and between the 7th and 10th centuries, the first sects arose from South India. The rituals and religious viewpoints were very close to Sufism, and the line between Hindus and Muslims was frequently blurred. Bhakti devotees linked puja (Hinduism) to songs about saints and life theories; to sing and pray, they would meet frequently. The Brahman Bhaktis, similar to those promoted by Sufi saints, developed metaphysical philosophies.

#### Rituals

Visiting Sufi saints' grave-tombs is one of the most common practises in Sufism. These have developed

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into Sufi shrines and are seen in India's cultural and religious landscape. Ziyarat is the practise of visiting any place of significance; the most famous example is a visit to the Masjid Nabawi of Prophet Muhammad and the grave in Medina, Saudi Arabia. The tomb of a saint is a place of great veneration where blessings or baraka proceed to meet the holy deceased person and are considered (by some) to help devotees and pilgrims who visit. Kings and nobles gave huge gifts or waqf to conserve the tombs and renovate them architecturally in order to display respect to Sufi saints. Over time, these gifts, ceremonies, annual commemorations developed into an intricate system of agreed norms. Around prescribed dates, these types of Sufi practise created an atmosphere of mystical and religious traditions. Many orthodox or Islamic purists oppose these grave visiting practises, especially the desire of the venerated saints to receive blessings. Nevertheless, centuries have survived these rituals and seem to be adamant.

### **Construction and Additions**

The original dargah was made of wood, write Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence in *Sufi Martyrs of Love*. A stone canopy was built over it later. When Mahmud Khilji, the Sultan of Malwa, conquered Ajmer in 1455, no concrete structure had been built over the grave of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. The first concrete evidence we get of construction in the dargah complex is the cupola of the shrine that was embellished in 1532, as indicated in an inscription written in golden letters in the northern wall of the tomb. This is the beautiful dome we see today. In keeping with Indo-Islamic architecture, a lotus adorns the dome and a golden crown offered by Nawab Haider Ali Khan of Rampur sits on top of it.

Most of the additions made to the shrine were done during the reign of Akbar, by the emperor himself. Akbar first visited the shrine in 1562 after he heard wandering minstrels singing the praise of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti as he was returning from a hunt. He decided to proceed to Ajmer immediately. Thus began his annual pilgrimage. In 1568, Akbar offered a deg, or brass cauldron, for cooking of langar. This was ensconced at the entrance. Another cauldron was offered by Jahangir in 1614. It is placed opposite the first cauldron. Both cauldrons are in use today. Devotees offer sacks of rice and wheat for the gruel that is cooked here. Only vegetarian food is cooked in this dargah. Akbar gave instructions to build mosques and khanqahs in Ajmer in 1569. The Akbari mosque of red sandstone is probably a result of those orders. An elegant mosque was also built by Shah Jahan in 1637 and is to the west of the shrine, along with the Shah Jahani Darwaza.

### **Impact of Sufism**

The massive geographic presence of Islam in India can be explained by the tireless activity of Sufi preachers. Sufism had left a prevailing impact on religious, cultural, and social life in South Asia. The mystical form of Islam was introduced by Sufi saints. Sufi scholars traveling from all over continental Asia were instrumental and influential in the social, economic, and philosophic development of India. Besides preaching in major cities and centres of intellectual thought, Sufis reached out to poor and marginalized rural communities and preached in local dialects such as Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi versus Persian, Turkish, and Arabic. Sufism emerged as a "moral and comprehensive socio-religious force"

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that even influenced other religious traditions such as Hinduism. Their traditions of devotional practices and modest living attracted all people. Their teachings of humanity, love for God and Prophet continue to be surrounded by mystical tales and folk songs today. Sufis were firm in abstaining from religious and communal conflict and strived to be peaceful elements of civil society. Furthermore, it is the attitude of accommodation, adaptation, piety, and charisma that continues to help Sufism remain as a pillar of mystical Islam in India.

**Objective of study:**

1. Know and understand significant aspects of the history of the wider world; the nature of ancient civilisations; the expansion and dissolution of empires; characteristic features of past non-European societies;
2. Understand historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance, and use them to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses

**Research Methodology**

Research may be defined as systematic collection of data and other materials and the detailed examination of the elements for the advancement of knowledge in any subject. Research strives to find answer of intellectual and practical questions through application of logical methods.

**Primary sources:**

Primary sources are original documentations of certain incidents, things, persons or work. They empower students and researchers to get as close as possible to the real events and facts. So far as the primary sources of my research program is concerned I had visited many university libraries, college libraries, district libraries, national archives, cultural academies, museums, and other institutions of my use.

**Secondary sources:**

Secondary sources generally translate, investigates and explains primary sources. These sources are one or more footsteps removed from the original events and thus sometimes lacks the closeness of the original subject matter.

**Conclusion**

Khwaja Gareeb Nawaz spent his whole life making sure that he remained humane when times were most hostile. He has been preaching the teachings of Shari'ah in all his soft and hard times. He made himself so at home at his adopted land that when he died he was most mourned by those who did not belong to his creed. Khwaja Gareeb Nawazis portrayed as a person who stood up to the diverse challenges of the day but without offending the people he chose to live with. He was the person who

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was able to perfect the art of love in the midst of hate and follow the right path of Islamic law. The spirit of Moinuddin soars beyond the single-dimensional image of him as a man of one religion. He emerges as a major cultural broker, a person whose only politics was that of love. His history is an invitation to ordinary people that it is possible to balance the material with the spiritual here in his life.

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