

Evolution of "Mysticism" in the Indian Subcontinent

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Abstract

Sufism has a history in India evolving for over 1,000 years. The presence of Sufism has been a leading entity increasing the reaches of Islam throughout South Asia. Various leaders of Sufi orders, Tariqa, chartered the first organized activities to introduce localities to Islam through Sufism. Saint figures and mythical stories provided solace and inspiration to Hindu caste communities often in rural villages of India. The Sufi teachings of divine spirituality, cosmic harmony, love, and humanity resonated with the common people and still does so today. The following content will take a thematic approach to discuss a myriad of influences that helped spread Sufism and a mystical understanding of Islam, making India a contemporary epicenter for Sufi culture today.

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Introduction

The history of Islam witnessed the success of Sufis in the promotion of love, peace, harmony, and brotherhood. Sufi masters strengthened interfaith relations, mended the broken hearts, and sung the songs of divine love without disturbing the peace of society. Farid al-Din Mas'ud Ganj-i-Shakar, better known as simply Baba Farid, was also one of those greatest saints of India who spent their lives for the betterment of the community. He belongs to Chishti order of Sufis which earns its fame for its emphasis on love, tolerance, and openness. In order to understand him, it is necessary to first understand Sufi ideology, its transmission, and the context in which it was developed and evolved especially in the Indian Subcontinent. It should be taken into consideration that regarding the authenticity of Sufism, scholars are divided into at least three groups. The first group considers Sufism as an inevitable part of Islam whereas the second group presents Sufism as an entirely separate system that is far away from the teachings of Islam. The third group considers some of its teachings as a part of Islam and others as heresies. Each of them provides substantial evidence to prove their arguments. The aim of this work is not to discuss the lengthy debates on the authenticity of Sufism but to present an introduction to Sufi thought as elaborated by the Sufi masters. To achieve this goal, preference is given to the classical works on Sufism. Though this introduction is not exhaustive, it adequately explains the beginning of Sufism, its history, and transmission.

Origin of Sufism:

It is not clear when, why, and in which meanings the term Sufi was first used. Many in the East and West think Sufism as a phenomenon which, for them, is somewhat separate from Islam. Some even from the Muslims conclude that Sufism presents a distorted picture of Islam. Though this word earns its fame near the end of second century Hijri, advocates of Sufism argue that it does not necessarily mean that Sufism is something different from Islam. A discussion of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (986-1072) on this issue reveals that the case of word "Sufi" is much similar to the terms such as *faqih*, *mufassir*, or *muhadith* in the Islamic thought. During the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), his followers, no matter how skillful they were in *Fiqh*, *Tafsir* or *Hadith*, were not recognized by such terms. They earned the title of *sahabi* for, besides prophet, *sahabi* was and is the highest degree of nobility among Muslims. However, later, when Islam spread to the various parts of the world, an era of heresies and insurgencies erupted among the Muslim. It was the time when a group of people dedicated themselves to follow the commandments of Almighty Allah. That group started using the term Sufism for it. Consequently, the term Sufi emerged and became famous before the start of second century Hijri.

Defining Sufism:

In general, the term Sufi is used for a person who articulates the ways of and to God. Junayd Baghdadi (835-910), the famous Persian Sufi saint, explains Sufism as the eradication of veils between God and man. Another Sufi master, Abu Sulayman al-Darani (758-830), thinks that Sufism is the training of bearing of sufferings as a part of God's plan. Additionally, it trains to renounce everything but Allah. Al-Tusi writes that according to Muhammad bin Ali al-Qassab (died 970), *Tasawwuf* is the name of all those noble actions and practices that were performed by the Prophet Muhammad in a noble era in front of the noble people. Regarding

Sufism, Baba Farid adds that *Suf* (wool) is the dress of prophets and saints. This dress is not permissible for those whose inner and outer self is polluted because Sufi is a person who is purified from the contaminations of the world.

Mission of Sufis:

Al-Tusi writes that the ultimate purpose of a Sufi is to be one with Allah (SWT). Many Sufi masters think that the beginning of Sufism is knowledge. Its midpoint is practice and end is the blessings of God. Moreover, it is also added that vision and closeness of God is the wish of Sufis for which they are willing to sacrifice everything. Hujwiri notes that a Sufi sees no one other than Allah and thus, S/he relates none with Him.¹ Rabia al-Adawiyya (718-801) (Rabia of Basra), a famous Sufi saint and poet of the eighth century, once said that she wants people to worship their Lord, not for the sake of paradise or not because of the fear of hell but only to achieve His love. Therefore, Sufi is also known as a lover and being a lover, there is a sheer force of love behind her/his every deed.

Islam and Sufism in India:

Although trade and commerce between Arabs and Hindus made it possible for Muslims to enter in the Indian subcontinent during the era of Prophet Muhammad, Muslim soldiers also played an important role in the spread of Islam as well. They were not direct agents of conversion, but their presence provided an opportunity for Muslim merchants to travel freely in the Indian subcontinent. Lewis Ray Rambo thinks that "[t]hrough intermarriage and the establishment of Muslim institutions, the conversion process was initiated." It argued that Sindh provided the route to both Sufis and soldiers to enter in the Indian subcontinent. Meetings of Sufis such as "Abu Ali Sindhi and Abu Yazid Bustami during ninth century and work of Hussain al-Hallaj in the tenth century strengthen the bases of Indian Sufism" that later developed into various Sufi *salās* (singular *silsila* means chain).

Major Sufi Orders in the Indian Subcontinent:

The institutional form of *Tasawwuf* is called *silsila*, *ṭarīqah* (method or guide), or Sufi order which is regarded as the third stage of the development of Sufism. It is called a *silsila* because of the chain that began from a specific Sufi master and linked back to the Prophet Muhammad. It is called a *ṭarīqah* because of the specific method that one adopts to fulfill his/her spiritual journey. There is an abundance of Sufi order in the Indian subcontinent which is generally categorized into two main types:

1. *Salās* such as *Mdariyaa*, *Shatariyya*, and *Mujaddiya* that emerged and evolved in India and spread to the rest of the world.
2. *Salās* such as *Qadiriyya*, *Naqshbandiyya*, *Chishtiyya*, and *Suhrawardiyya* that emerged elsewhere and later came to in the Indian subcontinent.

Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) noted that during his time, *Qadiriyya* order was famous in Arabia and India. *Naqshbandiyya* in Mecca, Madinah, India, and Transoxiana. *Chishtiyya* and *Shatariyya* in India and *Suhrawardiyya* in Khurasan, Kashmir, and around Sindh. All these orders trace their spiritual genealogy back to the Prophet Muhammad through *Sahaba*. In this connection, *Naqshbandi* order traces its spiritual genealogy to the Prophet through the first caliph of Muslims, Abu Bakar, and rest of the orders through Ali Ibn Talib, the fourth caliph of Muslims.

Silsila Qadiriyya:

Silsila Qadiriyya is regarded as one of the oldest order of Sufism. It is attributed towards Abdul Qadir Gilani. His vast knowledge earned him an unparalleled fame that inspired millions of people to follow his path. He emerged at a time when a big part of Muslim Ummah, due to their internal conflicts and materialistic policies, involved itself in the worldly affairs. He spent 25 years wandering in the deserts of Iraq thinking to resolve the disputes of his fellow Muslims. He was such an effective preacher who not only converted a large number of people including Christians, Jews, and Magians but also taught a number of Muslims to follow the teachings of Islam. His speeches mostly consisted upon the topics such as love of God, following of the Holy Quran and Sunnah, and *Tawakkul* (faith in God's plan). This order earned its fame mainly because of its balanced approach and its emphasis on tolerance.

Suborders:

Followers of *Qadiriyya* order claim that this order reached to Indian Subcontinent during the life of Gilani. According to some traditions, Abdul Razzaq, the elder son of Gilani, visited India and stayed there for a while. Later, the Sufis of India kept inviting the descendants of Gilani to the Indian subcontinent. *Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawuf*, first published in 1891, provides names of *Qadiriyya* suborders in India which include *Mustafiyya*, *Jaddiyya*, *Azeemiyya*, *Nizamiyya*, *Razzaiyya*, *Muhammadiyya*, *Rasulnumaiyya*, *Masudiyya*, *Anaitiyya*, *Qudussiyya*, *Durvashiyya*, *Mujaddidiyyah*, *Qudussiyya*, *Chishtiyya*, *Suhrawardiyya*, *Kbiri*, *Suhrawardiyya*, *Kabrviyya*, *Sadiqiyya*, *Mahbubiyya*, *Badriyya*, *Asghari*, *Jaddiyya*, *Mujaddidiyya*, *Hasniyya*, *Nizamiyya*, *Hasniyya*, *Nizamiyya*, *A'bdiyya*, *Hasniyya*, *Hasni*, *Asghari*, and *Hasniyya A'mliyya* *Awradiyya*.

Teachings:

Most of the practices of this order are taken from *Futuh al-ghaib* and *Ghunyat-ut-Talibeen* which are credited to Gilani. Both of these works largely teach about the manners of the love of God, His innovations,

travel, dressing, meeting with others, basic rules of Islam, ethical morality, and *Tawakkul*. This order stresses to learn the basics of Islam. It makes obligatory to understand important *fiqhi* matters regarding the daily life and recitation of the Holy Quran. According to Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914-1999), Gilani's teachings are away from *rahbaniyah* (monasticism). He allows his *mureeden* to be benefited from worldly pleasures according to the needs and wants of an individual. However, along with that he also forbids to get absorbed in the worldly affairs and becoming the slave of the world. It is argued that there is a vast difference between the teachings of *Silsila Qadriyya* in the various parts of the world. However, generally, it focuses on Dhikr in which sometimes specific phrases such as names of God are repeatedly recited either loudly or silently. However, it is also written by Sufi masters of this *Silsila* that conception of Shaikh is better than Dhikr. Because through it, *mureed* will get connected to God. Strengthening relation with Shaikh will result in the intensification of love with God. Therefore, it is necessary for *mureed* to get annihilated in *Shaikh* for it will lead her/him towards God.

Silsila Naqshbandiyya:

Silsila Naqshbandiyya is one of the oldest and influential *salāsila* of the Indian subcontinent. It is often argued that teachings of the prominent Sufi masters including Abu Yazid Bustami and Junayd Baghdadi manifest in the traditions of *Naqshbandiyya* order. The efforts of Abdul Khaliq Ghijduvani (died 1179) played an essential role in its systemization and spread. He introduced silent forms of dhikr and constituted its principles. Central Asia was its main center from where it flourished to the rest of the world. It earned its fame because of its "characteristic combination of strict adherence to the divine law and active involvement in social and political affairs." Baha-ud-Din Naqshband (1318-1389) was the seventh Khawaja of this order. The impact of his work was so enormous that only because of his name, this order started identifying itself as *Naqshbandiyya*. Similar to Gilani, he also spent a part of his life as a wandering ascetic. The difference was that Gilani opted for the deserts of Iraq to quench his spiritual thirst whereas Naqshband preferred shrines and *khanaqahs* of Bukhara to find his spiritual destiny. Though he learned the ceremonies of *Tasawwuf* from Amir Kulal (died 1371), he is said to be spiritually trained by Ghijduvani himself. In the seventh century, Ahmad al-Sirhindi (1564-1624), the founder of *Mujaddidiyya* branch, provided the intellectual basis for this order. *Mujaddidiyya* offshoot received enormous success in India. The charismatic personality of Al-Sirhindi proved vital in the spread of this order. His mission was to lead his followers to adopt the path of the Prophet. Therefore, it is claimed that "[f]or Mujaddidis the path outlined by Sirhind; is nothing more and nothing less than the path of the Prophet."

Suborders:

Historically, the naming process of *Naqshbandiyya* offshoot of Sufism seems more complex in comparison to other Sufi orders. Some scholars reported that due to its strong link with Abu Bakr Siddique, in its very beginning, this order was known as *Siddiqiyya*. From Bustami to Ghijduvani, it adopted the title of *Tyfuriiyya*. The leadership of Baha-ud-Din Naqshband earned it the title of *Naqshbandiyya* and finally, it was started known as *Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya* due to the vast impact of Sirhind. According to another tradition, in earlier times this order was identified as *Silsila Khawajān* or the chain of the masters mainly because of the impact of the first six *Khawajas* of this order. It is also divided into two types on the bases of its spiritual lineage: From the Prophet to the founder and from the founder to the Shaikh. The former is called *Dahbiyya* (golden) and the later, is known as *Tarbiyyah* (training/upbringing).¹¹ *Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawwuf* tells about its 14 suborders that include *Sudniyya Mujaddidiyya*, *Quddusiyya*, *Quddusiyya Ismailiyya*, *Azeemiyya*, *Dariyya*, *Abdiyya*, *Siddiqiyya Mujaddidiyya*, *Junaydiyya*, *Barkhurdariyya Mujaddidiyya*, *Abdiyya Karimiyya*, *Dargaiyya Abu al-Ulaiyya*, *Azeemiyya Abu al-Ulaiyya*, *Hasniyya Jananiyya*, and *Hasniyya Mujaddidiyya*.

Teachings:

This *silsila* has specified a curriculum that includes various sorts of *dhikrs*, *mujahidias*, and *muraqabahs*. Naqshbandi Sufis emphasize that *mureed* should go through these practices under the supervision of the Shaikh. However, it is also written by some Sufi master that if somehow companionship of Shaikh is not possible then *mureed* must recite 8 pages from the treatises of Sufis daily. Unlike *Qadriyya* order, Naqshbandi Sufis favor the silent form of *dhikr*. Shah Waliullah reports that prior to Naqshband when this order was known as *Silsila Khawajān*, loud *dhikr* was common. However, Naqshband preferred silent form of *dhikr* whereas Amir Kulal focused on both salient and loud form of *dhikr*. In this connection, Shaikh Ikram (1908-1973) writes that Naqshbandi Sufis are against loud *dhikr*. They are against *Sima'* and music as well. They mainly focus on following the commandments of Sharia. Shaikh prefers to sit among the *mureeden* rather than in isolation.

Silsila Suhrawardiyya:

Suhrawardiyya is attributed to Abu 'n-Najib as-Suhrawardi (1097-1168 CE) and his nephew Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi whose *Awariful-Maarif* is regarded as the leading work on Sufism among Suhrawardi Sufis in specific and other Sufi orders in general. It is written in *Fawaid-ul-Fawad* that Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325) learned 5 chapters of *Awariful-Maarif* from Baba Farid. He adds that Baba Farid used to teach this book with so accuracy and beauty that people wish to die while learning it from him. Baba Farid also named one of his sons after Shahab al-Din. Shahab al-Din got his education as well as Khilafat from his uncle Abu 'n-Najib as-Suhrawardi. Furthermore, he also got the opportunity to be spiritually trained by Gilani, Ghazali, and Khidr as

well. Apart from *Awariful-Maarif*, he authored 23 books on Sufism. Regarding him, once Gilani said that he would be the last among the famous personalities of Iraq. His message was spread in the Indian subcontinent through his famous Khalifa, Baha-ud-Din Zakariya Multani, who learned the mysteries of Sufism in just 17 days from him and became the founder of *Suhrawardiyya* order in the Indian subcontinent. He was appointed in Multan by Suhrawardi. Millions of people became his followers and as a result, *Silsila Suhrawardiyya* spread to every nook and corner of the country.

Suborders:

Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawuf discusses the offshoots of *Suhrawardiyya* and *Kubrawiyya* orders in a separate chapter. The author explains that similar to *Kubrawiyya*, there are 9 offshoots of *Suhrawardiyya* order as well. However, he is providing information about 10 suborders from which 6 belongs to *Suhrawardiyya* and 4 belongs to *Kubrawiyya*. These orders include *Dariyya Karimiyya*, *Azeemiyya Karimiyya*, *Kubrawiyya Karimiyya*, *Quddusiyya Durvashiyya*, *Kubrawiyya Suhrawardiyya*, *Kubrawiyya Quddusiyya Durvashiyya*, *Ahmadiyya Karimiyya*, *Uluwiyya Duriyya Karimiyya*, *Hasniyya Asghariyya*, and *Siddiqiyya Hasniyya*.

Teachings:

Similar to the other orders of Indian Subcontinent, *Silsila Suhrawardiyya* also focuses on dhikr. They prefer a silent form of dhikr. Similar to Naqshbandi Sufis, *Suhrawardi* masters also developed a curriculum for their *muredeen*. Moreover, promotion of the Khanaqahi culture is also one of the important features of this order. Although Khanaqah was introduced to Sufism since the 3rd century Hijri, it was only the efforts of Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi that Khanaqah emerged as an organized system in Sufism. Five complete chapters (13 to 18) of his *Awariful-Maarif* thoroughly deals with the principles of Khanaqah.ⁱⁱⁱ His own Khanaqah was divided into various sections in which he used to share both introvertive and extrovertive knowledge with the followers. It is said that along with many other Sufi saints, famous Chishti Sufis such as Baba Farid and his predecessor Khawaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (1173-1235) also acquired their spiritual training from the Khanaqah of Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi. Though there are various similarities between *Chishtis* and Suhrawardi Sufis, differences between both orders are also noted by the scholars. Shaikh Ikram writes that unlike *Chishtis*, "Suhrawardi were more careful in following the rules of *Sharia*. They gave very little value to *Sima'*. They were not much tolerating to other religions. They were more involved in Dawah and more fond of traveling in compare to *Chishtis*."

Silsila Chishtiyya:

Historically, *Chishtiyya* order is considered as the oldest Sufi order of in comparison to *Qadiri*, *Naqshbandi*, and *Suhrawardi* *salasil*. Abu Ishaq Shami (died 940) is regarded as the first master of Chishti Sufis. This order earned its name from a place Chisht where Shami was appointed by his Shaikh Mumshadh al-Dinawari (d. 299/911-12). Abu Muhammad is said to be the first *Chishti* Sufi to visit the Indian subcontinent. However, Moinuddin Ahmad Chishti (1142-1236) is regarded as the founder of Chishti order in the country. Although, he was *mureed* of Khawaja Usman Harooni, his habit of traveling allowed him to learn the treaties of Sufism from the hundreds of Sufi masters of his time including Abdul Qadir Gilani and Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi. A large number of people converted to Islam at his hand. His strict adherence to *Sharia*, love for both Hindus and Muslim, and enormous success earned him the titles of "The Messenger of Hind" and "The King of Hind". His successor, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, followed the path of his Shaikh. He was so famous among the people of Delhi that when once, on the order of Moinuddin Chishti, he was leaving the city, men and women gathered around wailing and requesting his Shaikh not to take him away from them. It was Kaki's brilliance that searched out Baba Farid who further strengthen the basis of Chishti order and trained Sufi masters such as Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325) and Alauddin Sabir Kaliyari (1196-1291).

Suborders:

Chishti order of Sufis is mainly divided into two larger offshoots among them one is attributed towards Nizamuddin Auliya and other is towards Sabir Kaliyari. *Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawuf* provides information about 11 suborders of *Silsila Nizamiyya* that includes *Quddusiyya Durvashiyya*, *Chishtiyya Azeemiyya*, *Quddusiyya Chishtiyya*, *Quddusiyya Chishtiyya Saeed*, *Quddusiyya Chishtiyya Ulul'azm Abdaliyya*, *Quddusiyya Jyuniyya Chishtiyya*, *Saluniyya Chishtiyya*, *Dariyya Chishtiyya*, *Safuriyya Munawariyya*, *Chishtiyya*, *Chishtiyya Fathiyya*, and *Chishtiyya Hasniyya*.

Teachings:

Among *Chishtis*, it is necessary for *mureed* to get a sound knowledge of Islamic sciences before *Bait*. Baba Farid himself first asked by Kaki to acquire extrovertive education before joining the order. Similar to other Sufi orders such as *Suhrawardiyya* and *Qadiriyya*, *Chishtis* focuses more on the louder form of dhikr. During their chants, they add special emphasis to the word "Allah".^{iv} Unlike Qadiri and *Naqshbandi* Sufis, *Sima'* earned more fame in their circles that also played an essential role in the rapid spread of this *silsila*. Shaikh Ikram argued that because of its practices such as *Sima'* and poetry, the environment of India proved more accommodating for *Chishti Silsila*. Moreover, similar to *Suhrawardiyya*, this order also finds it necessary to train their *muredeen* in their *Khanaqahs*. *Chishtis* are more open in their approach and therefore, not only welcome non-Muslims in their circles but also make them their *muredeen*.

Variations are evident in the method of teaching, training, and practice of these orders. However, fewer differences and more commonalities are observed among them. The basic teachings, for example, following the Holy Quran, *Sunnah*, and Shaikh along with practices and states such as *Mujahida*, *Muraqaba* (meditation), *Jazb* (unintentional love of God), and *Sluk* (quest for the closeness of God) are their common characteristics whereas when, how, with whom, and where different Sufi practices should be performed can be marked as general differences among the Sufi orders.

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