



## DEVELOPMENT OF A DISTINCT ISLAMIC THOUGHT: STUDYING THE EMERGENCE AND EXPANSION OF MYSTICISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

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### **Abstract:**

*The revival of new religious movements, spreading their message to ever more remote corners of the globe, has raised new questions for research. This article aims to revisit and understand the journey of Sufism as an exclusive religious Muslim Movement and thought. The article presents a complete background and journey of Sufism and it also discusses various stages of its development over the period. Lastly, the work focused on prominent Sufi Orders, which flourished and achieved great success across the country during medieval period.*

### **KEY WORDS:**

Sufis, Shrines, Islam, Saints, Chishti, Ajmer.

### **INTRODUCTION-**

Mysticism is an important branch of Islamic religious thought. The role of the Sufis in spreading the message of Islam and in maintaining the high levels of moral and spiritual life in Islamic society has been more effective than that of any other single group or sect. For the study of continent, a study of the development of Sufi thought and practice is indispensable, because it has deeply influenced the outlook of its people.

The mystical experiences transcend time and space and the limitations of the physical world of life and death; as such, the Sufi path cannot be understood or explained by any normal mode of perception or described in a physical language. It is like trying to describe the world to one born blind, or music to one born deaf. 'He who tastes, knows', or as Jalaluddin Rumi puts it, 'he who tastes not, knows', or as he put it, 'He who tastes not, knows not.' According to Hujwiri, 'the Sufi is like the disease called *birsam* (pleurisy), which begins with delirium and ends in silence; for when you have attained 'fixity', you are dumb.'

One of the Shaykhs says: *Man saffahu al-hubb fa-huwa safin wa-man Sufiyun*. (He that is purified by love is pure, and he that is absorbed in the Beloved and has abandoned all else is a Sufi). All that exists is the opposite of purity (*safa*), and things are not derived from their opposite. To the Sufis, the meaning of Sufism is clearer than the sun, and does not need any explanation. He is one who escapes from the grip of human faculties. The *Mutasawwif*, one of the groups among the Sufis, seek to reach this rank by means of self-mortification (*mujahadat*), and in his search, follows the example of his Pir. His world view is far removed from those who are men of principles (*sahib-usul*) and superfluities (*sahib-fuzul*).

Sufism is identified as the spiritual path (*tariqa*) of Islam, and it has been called Islamic mysticism by Western scholars because it resembles Christian and other forms of mysticism. In fact, there are many similarities between them and the other cultures. T.P.Hughes writes:

It might at first sight appear almost an impossibility for mysticism to engraft itself upon the legal system of the Quran and the Hadith, with the detailed ritual and cold formality which are so strikingly exemplified in Islam; but it would appear that from the very days of Mohammad for supposed mystic or spiritual interpretation, and it is generally admitted by Sufis that one of the great founders of their system, as found in Islam, was the adopted son and son-in-law of the Prophet, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. The Sufis themselves admit that their religious system has always existed in the world, prior to the mission of Mohammad, and the unprejudiced student of their system will observe that tasawwuf, or Sufism, is but a Muslim adaptation of the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophers, and which also we find in the writings of old academics of Greece, and Sir William Jones though Plato learned from the sages of the East.

However, unlike Christian mysticism, Sufism is a continuous historical and even institutionalized phenomenon in the Muslim world that has had millions of adherents down to the present day. Sufis and Sufi orders are found all over the world.

The role of Sufis in spreading Islam and in maintaining the high levels of moral and spiritual life in Islamic society has been more effective than that of any other single group or sect. Hamilton Gibb had observed that, 'through the course of Islamic history, Islam's culture was challenged, but never overpowered, for Sufi saints and other mystical thought had always come to the rescue of its most dogmatic preaching and always given it that strength and power which challenge could destroy'. For the social and religious history, particularly in the subcontinent, a study of the development of Sufi thought and practices is challenging because of their spread and profound impact.

The great gospel of Sufism-- 'Live and let Live'-- created unbounded love in the heart of a Sufi for the creation of Allah and, thus, catered for the real peace and spiritual needs of his people. For a Sufi, in order to be able to conquer his own self, purity was essential. Thus the *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* reveals, in the light of the Quran and *Hadith*, that a dervish could reach spiritual attainment by acquiring knowledge. It mentions two kinds of *Ilm*, first the Divine Knowledge that Allah alone possesses; second, the limited knowledge that is a drop of vast ocean of the all-knowing Divine Knowledge. According to another saint and writer, 'man's life without spiritual knowledge is *Zindqa* (faithlessness)'. That includes the *Shariat*, the *Hadith* and *Izma*. He and others saw knowledge as a pillar of *Sufism*. Therefore, Mohammad Habib, the medieval Indian historian, called Sufism the postgraduate creed of Islam.

Besides the acquisition of knowledge, Hazrat Junaid Baghdadi, the founder of Junadia order, attributes the following qualities to a Sufi:

The courage and magnanimity of Prophet Ibrahim.  
 The obedience of Prophet Ismail.  
 The patience and forbearance of Prophet Ayyub.  
 The signs of Prophet Zakaria.  
 The poverty of Prophet Zakaria.  
 The travelling nature of Prophet Isa Christ.  
 The simplicity of dress of Prophet Musa.

The *fuqr* (contentment and renunciation) of Prophet Mohammad. According to a leading Sufi from Bihar: 'The first duty incumbent upon a seeker is the practice of *Tajrid* and *Tafrid*. The one is to quit present possessions; the other, to cease to care for the morrow. The second duty is seclusion, outer and inner. Outer seclusion consists in flying from the world and turning the face to the wall in order to give up the life on the divine threshold; inner seclusion consists in cleansing the heart of all thoughts connected with the non-God, whether the non-God be earth or heaven.

There are several stages in the Sufi order—the graduation, so to speak, to the final destination of *fanaor* extinction. According to Shaykh Ali Hujwiri, 'knowledge of annihilation lies in your knowing that this world is perishable, and knowledge of subsistence (*baqa*) lies in your knowledge that the next world is everlasting ...' *Tariqa* (The path) is the path that leads to the direct experience of Allah; *Maqamat* (stages) or the experience of Allah by passing through different stages; guidance and purity of *Shaykh/Pir*, the source of spiritual nurturing; fourth, *Zikr* (*Sufi prayer*)—the Quranic term of 'recollection' of Allah; fifth, Sama music and dancing as an expression of love for the *Pir*. Although debates between the Sufi orders and the ulama raged throughout medieval India over the legitimacy of music and dance, the former did not give up. Hence music and dance are, everywhere, an integral component of the Chishti and Sabiri orders. A master (*Pir*) and his followers (*murid*) constitute a Sufi order, and the quarters where they reside are the *Khanqah* (hospice). Its popularity is dependent on the stature and reputation of the *Pir*.

Trimingham, describes the stages which Sufism and its organizational aspect have passed. The first stage was the *Khanqah* stage which lasted from around tenth to the twelfth centuries. In the real sense of the term, this stage was the true golden age of Islamic mysticism. The *Tariqa* stage, from around twelfth

to the thirteenth century, witnessed the formation of mystical orders that combined a Sufi master with his *murid*. A gradual systematization of mystical techniques, spiritual practices and rituals followed to bring the Sufi into direct communication with Allah. In this phase there emerged another category of disciples, besides the *murid*, the *Khalifa*, literally meaning “successor”, who enjoyed the Pir’s proximity.

Sufism entered its final stage – *Taifa* (Literally ‘cult association’) around the fifteenth century. In this stage, the Sufis direct communion with Allah was replaced by admiration and even Pir worship, who now occupied the position of spiritual intermediary between the disciples and Allah. Pirs, consequently, became saints–*Wali* (friends of Allah). In the Indian context, the *Taifa* phase began around the fourteenth when the shrines replaced the *Khanqah* as the physical embodiment. Worship of Sufi saints and pilgrimage at shrines became more and more popular, drawing the populace to them.

The early history of Sufism in India is obscure, but it may be assumed that Muslims with strong leanings towards mysticism were at work in the country from the time of the earliest Islamic contact with the subcontinent that began chiefly through the influence of Arab traders on the Malabar Coast. Then, the saint Syed Shah Surkh Khul Auliya arrived in East Bengal in 1053. The Koch King of the region tried to poison him, but he failed. On being influenced by his miracles, he gave out a village to the saint for propagation Islam.

After the Turkish conquest of northern India, the Chishti order spread from Multan to Lakhnauti and from Panipat to Deogir, and Jamatkhana of different orders. A traveller recorded that, ‘in Delhi and its surrounding are Khanqahas numbering two thousand. In the sixteenth century, Abul Fazl referred to the following fourteen orders in India:

- ✦ Habibiya order, founded by Shaykh Habib Ajami.
- ✦ Taifuriya order, founded by Shaykh Bayazid Taifur Bistami.
- ✦ Karkhiya order, founded by Khwaja Maruf Karkhi.
- ✦ Saqatiya order, founded by Shaykh Abu Hassan Sari Saqati.
- ✦ Junaidia order, founded by Shaykh Junaid Baghadai.
- ✦ Gazrunia order, founded by Shaykh Abu Ishaq b. Shaharyar.
- ✦ Tusia order, founded by Shaykh Alauddin Kupbra Firdausi.
- ✦ Firdusiya order, founded by Shaykh Najm al-din Kubra.
- ✦ Suhrawardiya, founded by Shaykh Najmuddin
- ✦ Abdul Qahir Suhrawardi.
- ✦ Zaidia order, founded by Shaykh ‘Abdul Wahib b. Zaid.
- ✦ Qadiriya order, founded by Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani.
- ✦ Chishtiya order, founded by Abu Ishaq Chishti.
- ✦ Naqshbandiya, founded by Bahauddin Naqshband.
- ✦ Shattariya, founded by Shattari.

The Suhrawardi Order: Shaykh Shiab-ud-din Abu Hafs al Suhrawardi founded this order. He was a versatile writer; his most celebrated and reputed work is *Awarif-ul-Maarif*. Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya introduced this order in Sind and Punjab. Although a few saints of this order tried to settle in Delhi and Awadh, they were overshadowed or pushed by the Chishti saints. Ultimately, they maintained their hold in the north-western region. Hence, Baba Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar named the regions of Multan and Sind as the territory of Bahauddin Zakariya. His seven sons and disciples spread the mission in Multan and Uch where the Suhrawardi order gained a strong foothold. Again, this is the region where Bahauddin Zakariya was venerated as the ‘messenger of Allah’. Baba Farid, a venerable saint of the Chishti order, described him as Shaykh –ul-Islam.

The Qadiriya order: Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166) established this order in Baghdad, but he is highly regarded throughout India as “Pir Dastgir or Pir-i-piran”, and his urs is widely celebrated on the 11th of the month, Rabi-us-sani. In 1482, Syed Bandagi Mohammad Ghur, one of his descendants, introduced the order in India. Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani followed the Quranic injunctions on the ‘good life’ and allowed no deviation to his followers. He followed, moreover, the *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet) and the Sunna, and exhorted his murshid to follow the example of Mohammad, the Perfect Man. He did not want them to lead a life of recluse but to strike a balance between spiritual bliss and a worldly life.

Shaykh Hamid Ganj Baksh, Bahauddin Zakariya’s grandson, was a man of keen mystical insights, but his mission was carried forth by his sons, *Shaykh* Musa and Abdul Qadir. The former accepted a *Mansab* of five hundred *Zaat*, given to him by Akbar. But Abdul Qadir refused. Once, Akbar summoned him. The Sufi sent a message back saying, ‘Oh my King, this is not your kingdom, and you can’t pass orders’. On getting this message, Akbar cancelled his grant of land and Abdul Qadir went back to Uch.

The Naqshbandi order: The last Sufi order introduced in India is the Naqshbandi order.

Bahauddin, the founder, used to draw (*Naqsh*) different kinds of picture. Khwaja Baqi Billah launched this order in India. On the instruction of his Pir he settled in Delhi. After three years, he died. Khwaja Baqi Billah's chief disciple, Shaykh Ahmed Sirhindi, was a contemporary of Emperor Akbar and Jahangir (1556-1605 A.D). Instead of the mystic philosophy of the Unity of Being (*Wahadut-ul-wajud*), he advocated the philosophy of apparentism (*Wahadat-us-Shahud*). He opposed Akbar's religious policies (*sulh-kul*) on the ground that it was inimical to Islam. This view Mulla Abdul Qadir Budauni, the contemporary historian of Akbar, echoed.

Jahangir and Shah Jahan came under Sirhindi's influence. His son and Khalifa Khwaja Mohammad Masum impacted on Aurangzeb as well. Their tradition was kept alive until the Shah Waliullah (1702-1762) appeared on the scene. Eighteenth-century thought was, in fact, greatly influenced by this Sufi-thinker. He laid bare the contours of the Naqshbandi philosophy at a time when the Mughal Empire, of which he was a protagonist, was in disarray. He identified the reasons why this was so, but was in no position to arrest the process. His most well-known disciple was Khwaja Mir Dard (1719-1785), the last notable mystic of the Naqshbandi order.

The foregoing discussion shows the nature of different Sufi *silsila*'s that took shape in India at different time points and also the unique traditions of Chishtis, as initiated and chalked out by Muinuddin Chishti, but later carried further and embellished by other saints of Chishti fraternity. A great part of the spiritual cum mystical heritage of the Chishtis could be traced back to the spiritual traditions laid down by Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer, though the final crystallization happened at Ajodhan under the supervision of Baba Farid. Because of the long-standing acceptability of Chishtis in India, Muinuddin Chishti, its major proponent, always stood very high in the horizon of Indian mystical tradition in general and Sufism in particular.

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