

## **SUFISM AND SOCIETY IN MEDIEVAL INDIA**

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*Largely due to colonial intervention which was characterized by engagement of the first generation Indologists with India's Classical Past, some of the great historians in early twentieth century India were devoted to the study of ancient Indian history. They shared one thing in common with the great medievalist Sir Jadunath Sarkar, that is their focus on political and administrative history. Later on, particularly after independence, under the impact of Marxist ideology, many intellectually gifted Indian historians became inclined to study the economic history of India. Some of their contemporaries did study social history, such as the social and political role of the sufi saints by consulting 'unconventional sources' but unfortunately they were not regarded as the mainstream historians in India.<sup>i</sup> Even today there is a feeling shared by some Indian historians that religion is the source of tension and it should not be brought within the ambit of historical research. Of course there are many exceptions. Actually this view was being challenged by some historians since the late 1970s and particularly since the 1980s. There are also some leftist historians among the challengers such as S. Nurul Hasan, Hirendra Nath Mukherjee, and Amalendu De. Eminent medievalist, Satish Chandra's (not a Marxist historian) magnum opus is entitled *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court 1707-1740*, (Aligarh, 1959). We can anticipate his future research interest in this work, that is the celebration of India's composite culture. He is also known for his scholarly work on the Jagirdari crisis and his interest in economic and maritime history. But if we*

*approach his multifaceted scholarly engagements chronologically, we can never miss the fact that from early 1990s he became interested in India's eclectic traditions and he studied how the Sufis and bhaktas contributed to the efflorescence of that tradition. We have intensively consulted such works for the present article.<sup>ii</sup> Satish Chandra also edited and introduced the work of S. Nurul Hasan entitled Religion, State and Society in Medieval India, (New Delhi-2005). Grand old Leftist historian, the founder Chairman of the I.C.H.R. professor R.S.Sharma wrote the preface of this volume. Nurul Hasan celebrated the role of the Sufis in strengthening India's composite culture. Historiography relating to medieval India is often characterized by a Mughal-centric approach. This Mughal-centric approach became so fashionable that Simon Digby while carrying out his research on the Naqshbandi Sufis of Deccan clearly mentioned that it was Aurangzib's Deccan. But the present essay includes the works of those scholars too who did not confine their focus on Mughal India, such as K.A.Nizami, Enamul Huq, Richard M. Eaton, Raziuddin Aquil, and also the present author among many others. Some experts on Sufism have studied it in the all India or to be more precise in the North Indian context such as S.A.A.Rizvi who devoted two bulky volumes to the South Asian Sufis. The importance of studying Sufism at the regional level was appreciated by the likes of Enamul Huq, Abdul Karim, Asim Roy, Richard Eaton, Simon Digby, Carl W.Ernst, Tony.K.Stewart, Z.A.Desai and the present author. Most of their works found mention in this essay. While reiterating the usefulness of regional approach, these scholars did not ignore the all India perspective. A comprehensive and meaningful description of sufi movement at the regional level is possible only when it is related to a broader network of Islamic mysticism the geo-cultural expanse of which may not be confined to South Asia. To avoid monotony, the present essay aims at unfolding a brief history of Sufism in South Asia as portrayed in some major works on the subject. Studying one work after another on the subject would have been a mechanical approach. We did not want to bother the*

*general readers with such an approach. However, to cater to the requirements of trained scholars we have provided the names of leading scholars and their celebrated works in the endnotes wherever and whenever necessary. Inquisitive readers might carry forward their search by checking the page numbers of relevant scholarly works on Islam in general and Sufism in particular as provided in the endnotes.*

*The tenth century is very significant in the history of Islam. This period witnessed the rise of Turks on the ruins of the Abbasid Caliphate, as well as striking changes in the realm of ideas and beliefs. The domination of the Mutazila or rationalist school of Islam was terminated by the emergence of orthodox schools that put emphasis on the Quran and Hadith. The period was also marked by the rise to prominence of the sufi mystics and silsilahs (orders).<sup>iii</sup>*

*The Mutazilites or rationalists received the patronage of the Abbasid Caliphs and used their power to persecute their rivals. They also tried to systematize theology by applying reason (aql). The orthodox elements however, condemned them as religious skeptics and persecuted them. It is not surprising that famous sufi saint Mansur Hallaj was also executed in the tenth century A.D. for his unorthodox views. The collapse of rationalist school strengthened the hands of the 'traditionalists' which culminated in the advent of four schools of Islamic law. Of these, the Hanafi school was the most liberal. The eastern Turks who later migrated to India were the followers of this school, this partly explains why the Muslims in the subcontinent, unlike their counterparts elsewhere, were often comparatively flexible in matters of faith. The decline of the Mutazilites also contributed to the ascendancy of the sufi mystics.<sup>iv</sup>*

*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(d. 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) reiterated the importance of prayer, continual fasting and unconditional love of God.<sup>v</sup> The term sufi originated from the Persian word suf meaning coarse wool. The Islamic mystics of Central and West Asia used to wear a long garment (khirqa) manufactured by suf which caused constant pinching. Such discomfort kept them awake throughout the night and reminded them about their spiritual duties such as zikr (reciting the name of God) and fiqr (remembering God).<sup>vi</sup> Wearing of a patched garment of wool (suf) also indicated that the Sufis tried to follow the legacy of the prophets, and Christian apostles and ascetics who believed in simple living and high thinking. Simple and austere lifestyle made the Sufis very much acceptable to the poor Indian masses. At the same time their sophistication in terms of cultivating literature or theology enhanced their status among the aristocracy in general and Muslim aristocracy in particular. The sufi concept of fana or spiritual merger of the devoted with Allah antagonized the orthodox ulama. Mansur Hallaj's proclamation of the doctrine Anal-Haq (I am Truth/God) was actually a reflection of the sufi belief that unification with Allah was the highest stage of enlightenment. Sufi movement got its martyr when Mansur sacrificed his life for his beliefs. The tragic death of Mansur earned the Sufis the reputation of being men who were pure hearted, sincere and indifferent to worldly gains.*

*This was how an essentially quietist movement based on love, devotion and contemplation gradually became inclined towards ecstatic love with the potentiality to challenge existing social norms, religious beliefs and practices.<sup>vii</sup> Between the tenth and twelve centuries various sufi orders or silsilah's emerged. During the same period khanqahs (sufi hospices) were also being established by the renowned Sufis. Apparently, the practices and organization of the khanqahs resembled the Buddhist and Christian monastic systems. The ambulatory Nath Panthi Yogis, with their markaz (headquarters) at Peshawar, familiarized the Sufis with the practices of hath-yoga. The translation of*

*Amritkund, the Sanskrit book on hath-yoga, into both Arabic and Persian confirms the interaction between the yogis and Sufis which strengthened the composite nature of Indian culture in the medieval period.<sup>viii</sup> Like the wandering Yogis, the wandering Islamic mystics, popularly known as Qalandars had to encounter various religio-cultural groups in course of their traveling, and became liberal and unorthodox. However, they were denounced as be-shara (those who do not act in conformity with the sharia) Sufis by the orthodox elements. Many present-day qawwali singers show their respect to these qalandars and thus reflect their appreciation for India's multiculturalism. There are also Sufis who function in tune with the sharia (canon law of Islam) and are known as ba-shara. This is one of the reasons why sufi movement should be studied as a heterogeneous movement.*

*Sanai (d.1131), Rumi (d.1273) and many other Persian poets spread the sufi message of mystic union and love far and wide. Imbued with the spirit of humanity and tolerance, their verses created ripples in the Indian subcontinent. It is not surprising that the eclectic Mughal Emperor Akbar was a great admirer of Rumi.<sup>ix</sup>*

*Some of the Sufis were fond of musical gatherings (sama) in which a state of ecstasy was created. This created consternation among the orthodox ulama who argued that music is not permitted in Islam.<sup>x</sup> The Chishti Sufis were amongst 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.*

*In the thirteenth century, Delhi emerged as one of the major centres (markaz) of the Chishtis. This was possible largely due to the activities of the illustrious Chishti saint Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, who left his birthplace in Transoxiana and arrived in Delhi in the early 1220s. He was warmly welcomed by Sultan Iltutmish.<sup>xi</sup> It is useful to note that following the Mongol devastations of Central and*

*West Asia, Delhi emerged as an inviting place before many eminent scholars, religious divines and fugitive princes. After coming to Delhi, Kaki met the challenge both of the ulama and the Suhrawardis. The former wanted to oust him from Delhi and condemned Kaki as a heretic on the ground that the mystic was fond of Sama. This criticism had no impact upon Sultan Iltutmish who wanted to use sufi influence to counter the ulama. Once Kaki was about to leave Delhi for Ajmer, which is also an important centre of the Chishtis. But a huge crowd accompanied him outside the city for miles and he had to settle in Delhi. The magnitude of popularity the Chishti saints enjoyed in South Asia is amazing. However, the Suhrawardi silsilah, because of their orthodox approach, could not enjoy such popularity among the Delhiites.<sup>xii</sup> Why some of the Sultans of Delhi, such as Iltutmish, favoured charismatic Sufis like Kaki, should be studied in its broader historical perspective. The Turko-Afghan Sultans were trying to build up their empires in the Indian subcontinent where Muslim population was overwhelmed by the non-Muslim population. Particularly during the embryonic stage of empire building, strict observance of the sharia (canon law of Islam) would have antagonized the majority population. Establishment of the sharia rule in tune with the advise provided by the ulama, was not possible in the Indian environment. Many sultans who excelled in statecraft realized that an empire derives its strength from heterogeneity. Now many sufi saints epitomized India's composite culture in the sense that they had Hindu, Sikh and Muslim followers. Many Chisti 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. So offering patronage to some Sufis implied strengthening of the symbols of multiculturalism. Thus many Sultans were able to win the confidence and loyalty of the subject population who represented diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.*

*The two most prominent sufi orders in south asia during the Sultanate period were the Chishti and the*

*Suhrawardi. The Chishtis flourished in Delhi and in the surrounding area, including Rajasthan, parts of Punjab and modern UP. Bengal, Bihar, Malwa, Gujarat and later on the Deccan also experienced the waves of sufi movement. The Suhrawardis were influential mainly in Punjab and Sindh. Territories were divided between different pirs (leading sufis of different orders in such a way that Sufis of various orders could maintain a cordial relationship amongst themselves.<sup>xiii</sup> Indeed! the modern religious sects have much to learn from these predecessors.*

*Muinuddin Chishti, the doyen of the Chishti movement in South Asia moved to Ajmer around 1206 A.D. when Turkish hegemony was firmly established there and a sizeable Muslim population of Turkish ghazis and prisoners of war who had to embrace Islam under duress, came into being. The saint selected Ajmer as his centre because like Chisht (in Central Asia), it was a small town and away from the epicentre of political activity, Delhi. The saint believed that the environment in a small town was favourable for spiritual experimentation.<sup>xiv</sup> Similarly, great saint Hamiduddin settled down at Nagaur- another small town in Rajasthan. Khwaja Muinuddin was married, but led the life of an ascetic. His principal object was to enable the Muslim piety to lead a life of devotion to Allah. He was not interested in conversions, since he believed faith was an individual concern.<sup>xv</sup> Interestingly, this same spirit was reflected in the activities of rulers such as Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq and Emperor Akbar who used to venerate this saint.*

*It should be mentioned that many sufi saints actually became famous after their demise. Muinuddin was no exception. His image as a saintly man became larger after his death in 1235 A.D. Muhammad bin Tughluq visited his grave. Canonization of a sufi is marked by the erection of structures like dome or mosque on the tomb of the deceased sufi. For example a mosque was built near his tomb by Mahmud Khalji of Malwa during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, Muinuddin's stature as a saint 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 Muinuddin as the 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.<sup>xvi</sup> Muinuddin advised his followers to "develop river like generosity, sun like affection and earth like hospitality."<sup>xvii</sup> River, sun and earth are sacred among the Hindus. In this way the sufi saints reflected their appropriating nature while addressing the common people in a language they understood. Such an approach increased the popularity of Chishti saints in medieval south asia.*

*It brings us to another great Chishti saint Baba Fariduddin Ganj-I-Shakkar, the most famous disciple of Kaki. Farid lived at Hansi in modern Haryana, then moved to Ajodhan which was on the Sutlej on the main route connecting Multan and Lahore.<sup>xviii</sup> He put emphasis on poverty emulating the Prophet Muhammad who used to say "I take pride in my poverty." It is useful to note that many sufi saints used the image of the Prophet as a source of authority. This was a natural legitimizing process as they had to encounter the challenges of Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>xix</sup> 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.<sup>xx</sup> He was a saint of broad outlook and some of the verses, ascribed to him were included in the Guru Granth Sahib of Nanak.<sup>xxi</sup> Nizamuddin Auliya(d.1325A.D.), a chief successor of Baba Farid was the most illustrious Chishti saint of Delhi where he worked for fifty years during a period of great political turmoil characterized by the collapse of Balban's dynasty and the ascendancy of Alauddin Khalji, volatility following the demise of Alauddin Khalji and the rise of the Tughluqs. He survived those frequent changes of dynasties and rulers because of the Chishti philosophy of keeping politics at bay and not associating with the rulers and nobles.<sup>xxii</sup>*

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*The Chishti saints laid emphasis on a life of simplicity, poverty, humility and selfless devotion to God. Many of them were so obsessed with the notion of poverty that they lived in mud covered thatched houses, wore patched clothes and encouraged prolonged fasting. Like the yogis, they considered that control of senses was necessary for spiritual uplift. Muinuddin Chishti interpreted the highest form of devotion to Allah in terms of redressing the misery of the miserable, helping the helpless and feeding the unfed. Nizamuddin Auliya regarded altruistic services as more important than obligatory prayers.<sup>xxiii</sup>*

*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 saints freely interacted with Hindu and Jain yogis and discussed with them various matters, particularly yogic exercises. 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,”<sup>xxiv</sup>*

*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. They also put emphasis on the external forms of religion, i.e. namaz (prayer), roza (fasting), hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) or zakat (charity). Though Bahauddin prescribed restricted visits to sama (sufi music), the orthodox ulama became hostile towards him on that issue. When the Chistis tried to distance themselves from politics, Bahauddin believed that visits to royal courts enabled the saint to help the poor through royal support. On the other hand such visits enabled the Sultans and their associates to receive the spiritual blessings of saints.<sup>xxv</sup> The*

*Suhrawardi order had the credit to be the first Sufi order that was introduced to Bengal by Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi (d.1225), a saint of India-wide fame. However, the Persian and Urdu works provide no information about his activities in Bengal. Shaikh Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dihlawi (d.1642 A.D.) had devoted a few pages to Shaikh Jalaluddin in his famous work Akhbar ul Akhyar (in Persian), but is silent about the Shaikh's birth place (watane paidaish), and as regards Bengal, he only mentions that Shaikh Jalaluddin has started to move towards Bengal.<sup>xxvi</sup> According to Akhbar ul Akhyar, Jalaluddin Tabrizi was initially a disciple of Shaikh Abu Said Tabrizi, and then after the latter's death, of Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi.<sup>xxvii</sup> Now the silence of the Persian sources in connection with Shaikh Jalaluddin's activities in Bengal have led some scholars to depend on Shek Subhodaya, a later work in dog Sanskrit wrongly attributed to Halayudh Misra, a court poet of the last Sena king Lakshmana Sena. According to this book the birth place of Jalaluddin Tabrizi was Etawa (in modern U.P., India), the name of his father was Kafur and he had received education with the help of Ramadan Khan, a merchant. This book also mentions that Shaikh Jalaluddin arrived in Bengal before Bakhtyar Khalji's conquest of Nadia and foretold the impending Turkish invasion of Lakshmana Sena's kingdom. But according to modern scholars the stories in Shek Subhodaya are fictitious. The saint was born at Tabriz in Persia and not at Etawah.<sup>xxviii</sup> Secondly, he could not have come to Bengal before Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest. According to Fawaid ul Fuad (in Persian) the saint came to Delhi when Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish was reigning.<sup>xxix</sup> Now Sultan Iltutmish ascended the throne in 1210 A.D. So the saint could not have come to Delhi before A.D. 1210, not to speak of his arrival in Bengal before that date (Lakshmana Sena died in A.D. 1206).<sup>xxx</sup> There is a set of buildings in Pandua (Malda) which go by the name of Bari Dargah or the shrine of Jalaluddin Tabrizi.<sup>xxxi</sup> These buildings are (a) one Jami Mosque, (b) two Chillakhanas or places of worship, (c) one Tanur Khanah (kitchen), (d) one bhandar khanah (store house), (e) Haji Ibrahim's tomb and (f)*

*Salami Darwazah (entrance gate). The original shrine was built by Sultan Alauddin Ali Shah (A.H. 742-43/1341-42 A.D.) at the order of the saint in dream.<sup>xxxii</sup> Probably the original mosque was also built by him, which was repaired in 1075 A.H./1664 A.D. by Shah Nimatullah.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The Bhandar Khanah was erected by one Chand Khan in 1084 A.H./1673 A.D.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The inscription attached to the Lakshmana Sena Dalan shows that Muhammad Ali of Burji had repaired the astanah (place of meditation) of Shaikh Jalal Tabrizi in the year 1134 A.H./1722 A.D.<sup>xxxv</sup> The inscription in Tanur Khanah records that it was built by one Sadullah in 1093 A.H./1682 A.D.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The endowment to the shrine of the saint is known as Bais Hazari, its income having been twenty two thousand tankas.<sup>xxxvii</sup>*

*From the developments mentioned above we can deduce that building activities around the tomb or shrine of a saint used to commence decades and sometimes more than a couple of centuries after his demise. Similar thing happened with Muinuddin Chishti's shrine. As a result, these saints sometimes became more famous after their deaths. Secondly, the sultans and nobles often contested among each other in showing their respect to the deceased saint through their involvements in building activities. It is useful to note that mainly the important, influential and popular shrines received the patronage of the sultans and nobles in medieval India. It was a common legitimizing process through which the rulers and aristocrats tried to enhance their images among the nobility and the subject population. Thirdly, the existence of mosque at the site was in conformity with the Suhrawardi preference for the external rituals of Islam. The discovery of Tanur Khanah (kitchen) at the site confirms the fact that the Suhrawardis were keen to sustain the sufi ritual called langar. The latter became a symbol of Islamic egalitarianism as the nobles and the commoners received the same food served at the sufi centers. Interestingly this practice is also common among the Sikhs.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Another great Suhrawardi Sufi of Bengal was Shah Jalal Mujarrad-i-Yamani (d.1346A.D.).*

*This reputed saint 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.<sup>xxxix</sup>*

*The Chishtis also consolidated their position in Bengal. Shaikh Akhi Siraj (d.1357) was one of the most famous saints of this order who flourished in Bengal. Because of his sound knowledge, his spiritual guide Nizamuddin Awliya used to call him Aina-i-Hindustan (Mirror of India). Another illustrious Chisti saint of Bengal was Nur Qutb Alam (d.1415 A.D.). His tomb is in the town of Pandua (Malda). The Naqshbandi and the Qadiri Sufis flourished in Bengal after the collapse of the Delhi Sultanate. The Naqshbandis were orthodox, and expressed their hostility to the mystical folk songs of Bengal.<sup>xl</sup>*

*Bijapur in the Deccan flourished as an important centre of the Chishtis from 1300A.D. to 1700A.D. Apart from the Chishtis, the Qadiris and the Shattaris exercised their control in Bijapur. Another important Sufi centre in the Deccan was Gulbarga which was graced by the presence of Bandanawaz Gisudaraz (d.1422A.D.), the famous Chishti saint, who migrated there from Delhi. Bidar also emerged as an important markaz (centre) of the Qadiri silsilah, many of whom were Arab migrants. In course of time many successors of Gisudaraz became landed gentry or inamdar Sufis who received land as inam (grant) from the kingdom of Bijapur. In return for this patronage the Sufis had to pray for the perpetuity of the Kingdom. However, after Aurangzeb's campaign in that region, many of these Sufis switched over their allegiance to the Mughal Emperor who did not terminate the practice of offering inam to secure the loyalty of local Sufis. The mutually beneficial relationship between the Kingdom of Bijapur and the sufi saints confirmed the fact that the latter did not always function in conformity with the Chishti concept of keeping politics at bay.<sup>xli</sup>*

*Apart from the Chishtis, the Naqshbandis also had their base in the Deccan. However, they were not as popular as*

*the Chishtis. Awrangabad became an important centre of the Naqshbandis. The most illustrious Naqshbandi Sufis of Awrangabad were Baba Palangposh (d.1699) and Baba Musafir (d.1715A.D.). Baba Palangposh was born in a place near Bukhara. He permanently came to Deccan in 1683 and is lying buried in Awrangabad. Baba Shah Musafir was also of Central Asian origin. His father hailed from the Kubrawiyya sufi order and his mother belonged to a family of Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet).<sup>xlii</sup> Particularly the Naqshbandi Sufis used genealogy as a source of authority.<sup>xliii</sup> Thus, in the Weberian sense, Baba Musafir could successfully combine hereditary charisma with acquired charisma.*

*If the focus is shifted towards western India it would be interesting to note that the commercial city of Ahmadabad can also be described as the city of dargahs because more than a dozen major dargahs are located here. Among the important dargahs of the city are those of Piranpir, Shah Abu Turab Shirazi, Shah Abdul Wahhab, the Senior and Junior Airdrus and Pir Muhammad Shah.<sup>xliv</sup> We shall discuss the dargah of Pir Muhammad Shah for its representative value. He came to Ahmadabad from Bijapur in the eighteenth century. This renowned sufi hailed from a Qadiri background and was known for his profound scholarship and literary bent of mind. He was groomed under the paternal care of his uncle Sayyid Abdurrahman who not only exposed him to formal education in traditional religious lore but also initiated him into the basic tenets of the Qadiri silsilah from quite a young age. He visited Mecca and Medina and engrossed himself in the study of various religious sciences such as Quranic exegesis, hadith (tradition), and tasawwuf (Sufism) under the guidance of illustrious teachers.<sup>xlv</sup> It can be deduced from the above description that in those days many erudite Muslims regarded scriptural and mystical knowledge as complimentary to each other. This to a large extent buttressed their endeavours to accommodate diverse cultures and different interpretations. Logically this broadened the mental horizons of many medieval saints*

*and contributed to the sustenance of India's composite culture. Pir Muhammad Shah died in May, 1750 A.D. and was buried within the walled city, near the haveli of Salahuddin Khan, where his disciples from the town of Kadi (District Mehsana) constructed his tomb, a mosque and a garden close by. The saint's mausoleum is a large domed building resembling a degenerate Mughal style.<sup>xlvi</sup> The glory of the Mughal Empire was waning fast during that period particularly after the Persian and Afghan invasions spearheaded by Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali respectively. Signs of decay could be visible in the external, material and masculine world. The internal spiritual world was still untouched by the ravages of wars and political intrigues that characterized the declining phase of the empire.<sup>xlvii</sup> Apparently the vacuum in the external world was being compensated by the developments in the spiritual world. But still the Mughal Empire and the symbols which represented it were regarded as legitimizers. Hence the Mughal architectural pattern could be emulated while building a mausoleum for a deceased sufi saint such as Pir Muhammad Shah. This process and the magnitude of its success determined the spiritual position of a particular shrine or tomb or mausoleum in the hierarchy of similar buildings.*

*Gujarat was also famous in the Mughal era as a revenue rich province largely due to its long tradition of maritime trade. Seen from that angle it would be relevant to study the material implications of sufi establishments of Ahmadabad. Pir Muhammad Shah has a considerable following among the affluent trading community of Sunni Bohra Muslims domiciled in Ahmadabad and other important towns such as Surat, Patan and Baroda. Through the munificent offerings of these wealthy businessmen murids (disciples), the sufi establishment has, over the years, amassed huge landed property in and around the dargah (shrine). The value of these lands has risen considerably and the entire estate is maintained by a registered Board of Trustees known as the Dargah Pir Muhammad Shah Committee. Its members and those of its*

*sub-committees are elected from among the members of the community.<sup>xlvi</sup>*

*The saint's Urs (death anniversary) is celebrated on a grand scale when hundreds of devotees from the city and distant places throng the mausoleum. In its spacious premises board and lodging facilities is offered to the pilgrims. On the first day the usual sandalwood ceremony is held. On the second day, the Quran is recited by a group of thirty trained people.<sup>xlix</sup> This event challenges the stereotyped notion that Sufis do not function in conformity with the sharia (canon law of Islam). Indeed! At times the Sufis can play a significant role in popularizing the basic tenets of Islam among the common people. During Urs a special dish of pulao called in popular parlance Pir Muhammad Shahi pulao is served among the participants. It is useful to note that in a dargah complex more than one sufi saint can be venerated. For example, the death anniversaries of Pir Muhammad Shah's uncle and first preceptor Sayyid Abdurrahman, of Shah Wajihuddin Alawi, and of the founder of the Qadiri order Sayyid Abdulqadir Jilani of Baghdad (d.1166A.D.), are also celebrated with the fatiha ceremonies and the distribution of sweets and eatables. In the month of Ramadan a special dish, halim, is prepared and served to fasting pilgrims who come to stay for tarawih (additional night prayers during Ramadan) prayers in the mosque.<sup>1</sup>*

*The Dargah Trust is also involved in welfare and social service activities such as organizing training classes for girls and women, promoting education by offering scholarships, books and similar facilities. There is a spacious building attached to the dargah. In one wing of that building is a large library open to the public. There are some 3000 printed books in that library available in different languages such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Gujarati and English. Availability of books in so many languages is significant. It implies that many sufi centres by reflecting their broad and liberal outlook contribute to the nourishing of India's cultural pluralism. By making*

*knowledge available in both oriental and occidental languages this particular sufi centre serves as a bridge between the east and the west. When the peace of our planet is being threatened by religious fundamentalism, sectarianism and cultural chauvinism, the UNESCO would do a great job by giving publicity to such sufi establishments in a meaningful manner. Besides, the library has a fine collection of about 2000 valuable Persian, Arabic and Urdu manuscripts covering different branches of Islamic learning and literature.<sup>li</sup>*

*Pir Muhammad Shah was a poet by his own right who composed verses with ‘Aqdas’ and ‘Shahid’ as his poetic names. He has to his credit a number of tracts in Persian and Gujari or Dakani verse. These priceless manuscripts are also preserved in the library. A number of his murids (disciples), both male and female, have composed verses in Persian and Urdu in his praise, as also mourning his death. Collections of these poems are also available in the library. These are extremely useful materials to assess Gujarat’s contribution to Urdu language and literature.<sup>lii</sup>*

*The Piranpir’s dargah in the Jamalpur quarter of the city was built in the seventeenth century over the grave of Shah Abdulkhaliq whose origin was traced from the illustrious saint of Baghdad, Shaikh Abdulqadir Jilani (d.1166). Linking genealogy to the famous saints of Middle East is regarded as a form of legitimizer by the sufi silsilahs (orders) of South Asia. So far as its architectural pattern is concerned, the usual tomb style of perforated stone-screen walls has been adopted. Many visitors throng the dargah on certain weekdays. It attracts a larger number on the Urs anniversary of the buried saint, as well as of the founder of the silsilah (the Qadiri order), which falls on 11 Jumada I.<sup>liii</sup> It is useful to remember that veneration of illustrious sufi saints who never visited India is not unique among the pious Muslims of Gujarat. It is common in Bengali Muslim piety as well. Availability of their tazkiras (biographies), particularly the tazkira of Abdulqadir Jilani in the Bengali language confirms this fact. Majority of such biographies*

*appeared during a period when the external, masculine and material world was being dominated by colonial presence. In the era of socio-economic and political challenges, Indian Muslim piety often used the world of the Sufis as the bastion of Islam from which they could derive peace, solace and inspiration. Like the Prophet Muhammad, the sufi pirs also emerged as their friends and their role models. However, it is useful to remember that all the pirs (sufi saints having many disciples) did not enjoy similar respect in the spiritual hierarchy. Some particular saints, such as Abdulqadir Jilani, were regarded as the universal symbols of Islam who can be surpassed only by the Prophet Muhammad. These universal symbols of Islam got priority over the local symbols of Islam (such as local pirs) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when resurgent and reformist Islam was moving from strength to strength. This was to facilitate the process of community solidarity among the Indian Muslims.<sup>liv</sup>*

*The rauza (tomb, mausoleum, shrine)<sup>lv</sup> of Shaikh-al-Aidrus is situated in the Jhaveriwada locality and is a fine mausoleum of stone of the domed and perforated stone-screen-walls variety. Shaikh-al-Aidrus hailed from a renowned saintly family of Hadramout in southern Arabia. The saint migrated to Gujarat in the fifteenth century. The tomb attributed to his son Shaikh Abdulqadir al-Aidrus is not very far from his own tomb. Junior Aidrus is better known for his prolificity as a writer and poet of Arabic. He authored many books including Al-Nur al-Safir li Ahl al-Qarn al-Ashir which is regarded as an important source for the cultural and literary history of sixteenth century Ahmadabad.<sup>lvi</sup> Junior Aidrus's case is unique from the linguistic point of view. Generally, the sufi writers and poets in South Asia manifested their creative faculties in the Persian language. There were also occasions when many sufi poets and writers expressed themselves in the vernacular languages which contributed to the growth of those local languages.<sup>lvii</sup> But Junior Aidrus used Arabic as his medium of expression. Unlike Persian, Arabic was not the official language in medieval India. Nor was it a spoken*

*language in India. But original Quran and hadith are available in Arabic. Considering this religious dimension of the language, the saint perhaps tried to legitimize his place in the spiritual hierarchy by cultivating this language. When a section of the orthodox ulama made it their habit to scrutinize different aspects of Sufism, such legitimizing drive was a natural response from sufi quarters.*

*The dargah of Shah Abu Turab, a scion of the Salami Sayyid family of Shiraz, rose to prominence at the time of Emperor Akbar's conquest of Gujarat in 1573.<sup>lviii</sup> It has been indicated elsewhere that like any other pragmatic ruler, Akbar understood the importance of maintaining a cordial relationship with the leading sufi establishments which were popular among both the Muslims and Hindus in order to enhance the stature of the Mughal Empire. Such legitimization was particularly necessary in a province like Gujarat which was being exposed to Mughal military and administrative mechanisms. Akbar trusted Shah Abu Turab who carried out negotiations with the nobility in Gujarat on behalf of the Mughal Emperor. In 1578, he was appointed as the amir-i-hajj (one who leads the hajj pilgrims) by Akbar. After performing hajj, Shah Abu Turab returned to Fatehpur Sikri with the qadam-i-rasul (the foot print of the Prophet), which was reverently received by Akbar.<sup>lix</sup> The eclectic Emperor Akbar knew how to resolve the underlying tension between the veneration of a local pir (who at times may be interested in international networking as manifested in the case of Shah Turab who led the hajj pilgrims.) and the emphasis on the universal symbols of Islam such as the qadam-i-rasul or the hajj. Thus, qadam-i-rasul and hajj could be used as source of authority both by the Sufis and the sultans in medieval south asia. This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that Shah Turab's dargah, which is situated in the old Asawal locality, to the south of the Calico Mills, seems to have been venerated mainly on account of the qadam-i-rasul, which was there until the middle of the eighteenth century. It is stated that during the Maratha insurgence, it was removed to the walled city. It has been argued, that later the*

*descendants of Shah Abu Turab, shifted it to Cambey, to which place they belonged.<sup>lx</sup>*

*Majority of the Sufi saints in South Asia accepted the concept of wahadat al-wujud or 'Unity of Being'. They believe that "The world is so closely related to Him that every thing is He."<sup>lxi</sup> (Hama Ust or 'Every thing is He'). In other words God is reflected in every thing. It implies that God is also reflected in a Hindu, so a Hindu should not be denounced as a kafir (infidel). Such an inclusive approach contributed to the strengthening of India's composite culture and further enhanced the popularity of many Sufi saints. It should be mentioned that there were also Sufis who did not share this liberal approach and embarked on a policy of exclusion. They believed in the exclusion of Hindus from important administrative and military positions and expected the Muslim rulers to administer the state in strict conformity with the sharia (canon law of Islam). That is why it is often difficult to draw a demarcating line between a section of Sufis and the orthodox ulama.*

*The Sufis played a significant role in the growth and efflorescence of vernacular literature such as Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Deccani and other regional languages. 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 music. The Chishtis used song and dance techniques of concentration and for creating spiritual ecstasy.<sup>lxii</sup>*

*Some of the early Bengali poets had been sufi-poets such as Sayid Sultan, Shah Barid Khan and Alaol. Bengali folk music, such as the baul and jari songs also owed much to Sufism.<sup>lxiii</sup> Sufis also appropriated ritual dynamics prevalent in a region or locality.<sup>lxiv</sup> For example mention can be made about votive offerings at dargah (burial place of a Muslim saint), burning incense and tying bricks at holy places with the expectation of securing fertility among*

women.<sup>lxv</sup> In this way Sufism significantly contributed to the formation of regional identities in different parts of South Asia.

*If Sufis learnt from non-Muslim traditions, the local, Indic, traditions (local, foreign, Indic are sensitive categories which must be handled with care), were also influenced by the principles of Islam as represented by the Sufis. The dynamics of Sufi Islam was resonated in the teachings of Kabir and Nanak as they criticized idolatry, and meaningless rituals and laid emphasis on monotheism and egalitarianism. In the case of Sikhism, important sections of the Guru Granth Saheb are borrowed from Sufi poetry.<sup>lxvi</sup>*

*The proximity of the Sufis to non-Muslim traditions helped the former to play an important role in conversion and Islamization, even if many of them may not be working with a concrete agenda of this sort. Yet the presence of charismatic Sufis was the principal factor in the conversion of large sections of south asian population to Islam. Sufi institutions, khanqahs (sufi dwelling) and dargahs, emerged as centres where Muslims and non-Muslims assembled for worship and sought blessings and benediction. The process of conversion commenced with devotion towards a particular Sufi, leading to the emergence of syncretic sects, symbolizing only half conversion. Eventually, there emerged communities of Muslims who professed Islam formally, but continued with their practice of local customs and traditions, which invited the criticism of puritanical, reformist Islam. Reformist movements gathered momentum from 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards.<sup>lxvii</sup>*

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## **NOTES AND REFERENCES:**

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<sup>i</sup> By unconventional sources I mean works not produced by court historians, such as *malfuzat* or table talk in which great sufi saints of medieval India were involved, *maktubat* or letters exchanged between great sufi saints, and *tazkira* or biographies. All these sources can be regarded as important social documents. See K.A.Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1983, Chapter 7.

<sup>ii</sup> Satish Chandra's major works during this phase are *Mughal Religious Policies, the Rajputs and the Deccan*, Delhi, 1993, *Historiography, Religion and State in Medieval India*, Delhi, 1996, *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals: Delhi Sultanat 1206-1526*, Delhi, 1997, *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals: MUGHAL EMPIRE (1526-1748)*, Delhi, 1999. For Hirendra Nath Mukherjee's view on the subject please see his pamphlet entitled *From Amir Khusrau To Abul Kalam Azad: The Commingling of Cultures in India*, published by The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 1999.

<sup>iii</sup> Satish Chandra, *Medieval India; From Sultanat to the Mughals, vol-I*, P.235. Satish Chandra was very close to Syed Nurul Hasan but should not be regarded as a Marxist historian.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p.236.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>vi</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, New Delhi, 1997. Amit Dey, 'Sufism in India' in *Abakshay* (a bilingual journal), 2004.

<sup>vii</sup> Chandra, *Medieval India*, p. 237.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.* Amalendu De, *Theological Discourses in Indian History*, Presidential Address, 2003-04, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

<sup>ix</sup> S Nurul Hasan, *Religion, State and Society in Medieval India*, New Delhi, 2005, p.72.

<sup>x</sup> Chandra, *Medieval India*, p.237.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, p.239. For details about Kaki, Chishtis and *sama*, see Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India, vol-I*, New Delhi, 1986 (Reprint).

<sup>xii</sup> Chandra, *Medieval India*, pp.239-40.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid.*, p.238.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid.*, p.239.

<sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xvii</sup> Amalendu De, *Theological Discourses*, p.9.

<sup>xviii</sup> Chandra, *Medieval India*, p.239-40. For information about individual sufi saints of south asia see N.Hanif, *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis; South Asia*, New Delhi, 2000.

<sup>xix</sup> Arthur Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, South Carolina, 1998. Amit Dey, *The Image of the Prophet in Bengali Muslim Piety: 1850-1947*, Kolkata, 2005.

<sup>xx</sup> Chandra, *Medieval India*, p.240.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, p.241.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.241-42.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.243-44.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Abdul Haq Dihlawi, *Akhbarul Akhyar*, (in Persian), p.47.

- xxvii *Ibid.*, p.47. Another Persian text entitled *Fawa'id ul Fuad* (p.180) confirms that Shaikh Jalaluddin was the disciple of Shaikh Shihabuddin. Noted medievalist Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, in his *Tarikh Mashaikh i Chisht* (in Urdu, vol-I, Delhi, 1980, p.179) has provided a genealogy of the Suhrawardi order.
- xxviii Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal*, Dacca, 1959, p.95, Abdul Karim, *Corpus of Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, Chittagong, 1992, p.348, Muhammad Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, Dhaka, 1975, pp.146, 160-168, *Shek Subhodaya*, edited by Sukumar Sen, Calcutta, 1927, cited by Enamul Haq, in his *History of Sufism*, p.160 ff.
- xxix Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawa'id ul Fuad*, Lucknow, 1885, p.236.
- xxx Abdul Karim, *Social History*, p.94.
- xxxi Abid Ali Khan, *Memoirs of Gaur And Pandua*, edited by H.E.Stapleton, Calcutta, 1931, pp.97-106.
- xxxii Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz us Salatin*, Bibliotheca Indica, 1898 A.D., pp.94-95, cited by A Karim, *Social History of the Muslims*, p.94.
- xxxiii Khan, *Memoirs*, p.100.
- xxxiv For inscription see *Memoirs*, p.102
- xxxv *Ibid.*, p.103.
- xxxvi *Ibid.*, p.104.
- xxxvii A Karim, *Corpus*, p.348.
- xxxviii Sunita Puri, *Advent of Sikh Religion; A Socio-Political Perspective*, New Delhi, 1993, Chapter 4.
- xxxix Amit Dey, *Sufism in India*, Kolkata, 1996, pp.22-25.
- xl *Ibid.*, pp.26-28.
- xli Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur; 1300-1700; Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*, (First published in 1978), New Delhi, 1996.
- xlii Simon Digby, *Sufis And Soldiers In Awrangzeb's Deccan*, New Delhi, 2001.
- xliiii Buehler, *Heirs of the Prophet*, pp.82-97.
- xliv Z.A.Desai, "The Major Dargahs of Ahmadabad" in Christian W. Troll edited, *Muslim Shrines in India*, New Delhi, 2004 (Second edition), pp. 76-97.
- xlvi *Ibid.*
- xlvi *Ibid.*
- xlvi A comprehensive picture of factionalism and intrigues that accentuated the decline of the Mughal Empire during the eighteenth century has been provided in Satish Chandra's book entitled *Parties And Politics at the Mughal Court*.
- xlvi Desai's article "Dargahs of Ahamadabad" in Troll edited *Muslim Shrines*, p.92.
- xlvi *Ibid.*
- <sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93. **Fatiha recitations after death:** Some Muslims hold gatherings on the third, seventh, tenth, fifteenth or fortieth days after the death of a person, in which passages of the Quran are recited and meals served. However, these practices are not compulsory (*farz*) and were not done by the Prophet. They are simply expressions of respect towards the memory of the dead person, and condolence towards the bereaved left behind, and are really matters of culture and not of Islam. It is quite incorrect to imagine that the soul of the departed one will benefit from these gatherings and practices, or that the soul would suffer in some way or be punished if these things were not done. We can always cherish

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the memory of our deceased, and pray for them- but the intensity or number of our prayers are not the basis on which Allah will judge the soul. If a person believes he or she is *more* compassionate or just than Allah and therefore can beg, bribe or influence Him to change His will towards any particular soul, this is really a form of *shirk* (polytheism). It is certainly misguided. There is nothing special that happens to the soul of the deceased on these days. *Vide*, Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood, *A Basic Dictionary of Islam*, New Delhi, 1998, rpt. 2000, p.71. Muslim ambivalence towards some ritual dynamics associated with Sufism is reflected in the above paragraph.

<sup>li</sup> Muhammad Zuber Qureshi, “The Library of Hazrat Pir Muhammad Shah at Ahmadabad,” in C.W.Troll edited, *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries*, vol. 2, New Delhi, 1985, pp.282-300. Cited in Z.A.Desai’s article mentioned above.

<sup>lii</sup> Desai, “Dargahs of Ahmadabad,” p.93.

<sup>liii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>liiv</sup> Amit Dey, *Image of the Prophet*, chapters 2 and 3. How the advent of print in Muslim society posed a serious threat to the institution of Sufism has been dealt with in chapter 2 of my book.

<sup>liv</sup> Makhdoom Sabri, *Concise Twentieth Century Dictionary; Urdu Into English*, Delhi, 2001, p.409.

<sup>lvi</sup> Desai, “Dargahs of Ahmadabad” p.94.

<sup>lvii</sup> Amit Dey, *Image of the Prophet*, chapter 1. For a list of Persian texts on Sufism see Amit Dey, *Sufism*, chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>lviii</sup> Desai, “Dargahs of Ahmadabad”, p.94.

<sup>lix</sup> *Ibid.* The veneration of *qadam-i-rasul* was not unique in Gujarat. This happened in medieval Bengal as well in the Gaur-Pandua(Malda district) region. I carried out fieldwork in Bangladesh in the year 1996. I was escorted by two Dhaka based poets, Asim Saha and Kajalendu De along the river Sitalakshma until we reached a place where *qadam-i-rasul*

was being venerated. The place was in the vicinity of Narayangunj, near Dhaka. Initially the caretaker of that shrine was skeptical about the purpose of our visit. We understood that under the spell of aggressive Islamization, practices such as the veneration of *qadam-i-rasul* were being condemned as *shirk* (polytheism) and *bida* (innovation). But when the caretaker was convinced that we were not journalists sponsored by Islamic orthodoxy, he even allowed us to take photographs of the shrine and the ritual dynamics related to the veneration of *qadam-i-rasul*.

58. *Ibid.* Late maritime historian, Ashin Dasgupta has shown that trade and commercial activities flourished during *hajj* which led to the growth of *Hajj* Market in the Arab world. Like Emperor Akbar, sufi Abu Turab, who led the *hajj* pilgrims, must have been aware of this market. It would be interesting to study Sufism in this broader context of trade and commercial activities. In this context we can mention that in the ancient period, the Buddhist monasteries often flourished along the established trade routes. Professor Ashin Dasgupta discussed *hajj* market in his Bengali book entitled *Upakule Juganta: Sholo Satak, Portuguese Abhighat O Asiar Banijyer Punarbinyas*, Kolkata, 1999, pp.18-21.

<sup>lxi</sup> Neeru Misra edited, *Sufis And Sufism; Some Reflections*, New Delhi, 2004, See Iqbal Sabir’s article ‘Impact of Ibn Arabi’s Mystical thought...’

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<sup>lxii</sup> Dr.Raziuddin Aquil's lecture. Delivered at the Department of History, University of Calcutta, on 27 March, 2006.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Dey, *Image of the Prophet*, Chapter 4.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Dey, *Sufism*, Chapter 1.

<sup>lxv</sup> *Ibid.* Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Dr. Aquil's lecture mentioned above.

<sup>lxvii</sup> *Ibid.* And Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism, Culture and Politics; Afghans and Islam in Medieval North India*. New Delhi, 2007.

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