

# Sufism in India

What is Sufism? It is connected with the mystic philosophy in Islam. There are so many definitions of Sufism. Scholars are not united in their opinion about the definition of Sufism. Some important definitions are as under:

Prof. Arberry describes Sufism as "the attempt of individual Muslims to realise in their personal experience the living presence of Allah."

It has been defined by Dr. Tara Chand as a "complex phenomenon; it is like a stream which gathers volume by the joining of tributaries from many lands. Its original source is the Quran and the life of Muhammad. Christianity and neo-Platonism swelled it by a large contribution. Hinduism and Buddhism supplied a number of ideas and the religions of ancient Persia, Zoroastrianism, Monism etc. brought to it their share."

The view of Davis is that "Sufism is essentially a religion of love without a creed or dogma. No merciless hells leap up in the Sufi's belief. He has no one-way theory for the beyond! The ways of God are as the number of souls of men."

According to K. D. Bhargava, "Muslim mysticism or Sufism may be regarded as love of supreme beauty. The thought of the East and the West converges in the fundamentals of love."

According to Prof. K. A. Nizami, "Sufism is an independent high standard thought." On the contrary according to Abul Hussain Annuri, "Sufism is love with God and disdain towards the world."

## Origin and Growth of Sufism

There is a controversy amongst scholars regarding the origin of Sufism. Some of the views are as under:

The view of Yusuf Husain is that Sufism was born in the bosom of Islam and the foreign ideas and practices exercised no influence on it.

Dr. A. L. Srivastava does not accept this view. According to him, Sufism was profoundly influenced by Hindu thought, beliefs and practices. The very concept of a loving God and the relations between God and soul as one of the beloved and the lover are peculiar to Hinduism and were adopted by the Sufis in India. The pacifism and non-violence which were imbibed by the Sufis in India were peculiar to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Some of the ascetic practices involving starvation and torturing of the body were borrowed from the Hindu and Buddhist practices.

The view of Prof. K. A. Nizami is that the Chishtis adopted many Hindu customs and ceremonials in the initial stages of the development of their order in India. The practice of bowing before the Shaikh, presenting water to visitors, circulating a bowl and shaving the head of new entrants of the Sufi order had close resemblances to Hindu and Buddhist practices.



There is also a difference of opinion among scholars regarding the origin of the word 'Sufi'. Some opinions are as follows:

One view is that the word 'Sufi' was derived from the word 'Safa' which means pure. Those saints among the Muslims who advocated a life of purity and renunciation were called 'Sufi'.

Another view is that the word 'Sufi' came out of the word "Sooph" whose meaning is wool. Those saints who put on woollen clothes after the death of Prophet Mohammad came to be known as Sufis. Rampujan Tiwari, in his work, 'Sufism Sadhnaa Aur Saahitya' writes that 'Sufi' comes from the Arabic word 'Suf' which means wool. The saints leading a simple life wearing woollen clothes were called 'Sufis'.

Still another view is that the word 'Sufi' is taken from the Greek word 'Sophia' whose meaning is knowledge.

Still another view is that those persons were called 'Sufis' who took shelter outside the mosque constructed by Prophet Muhammad at Madina and got devoted to God.

According to Prof K.A. Nizami, "The main source of Sufism is Holy Quran and life history of Prophet Mohammad himself."

But according to some scholars, "Sufism was influenced by the Christian concept of human service and activities of Hindu yogis and practice of devotional songs."

Whatever be the truth, we cannot place the Sufi religion among the ancient religions of the world because it rose as an amalgam of many religions. The opinion of Tara Chand appears to be true when he says that "Sufism is like that sea where rivers of many regions have come together. Its main sources are Holy Quran and life history of Prophet Muhammad himself."

### Growth of Sufism

Its development was aided by Christianity. It was influenced by Hindu and Buddhist principles. The Sufi saints were promoters of a liberal spirit. They entered India from Persia and other Central Asian countries. The saints were mostly pure in their character. It developed mostly in Persia. They were immersed in love of God. Even while supporting Islam, they opposed ritualism. They tested the teachings of Islam by their experience and arguments. Before India, Basra was their main residing place where Sufis from various countries came and settled and discussed about the mysteries of the world. Majority of the Sufis were great devotees and were unhappy at the moral decline in Islam after the establishment of the Islamic Empire. These Sufis had no concern with the worldly empire. Sufi Rabia (a lady) in the eighth century and Mansur Bin Halaz in the tenth century were among the initial Sufis, who placed much emphasis on the loving relationship between God and Man. Mansur Bin Halaz was the first Sufi who proclaimed himself as the Anal Haqq. Because of his concept of all-pervasiveness of God a struggle ensued between him and the conventionalist. The rumours of these conventionalist opponents led to Mansur being punished by hanging but in spite of the mystic ideas continued to hold roots among the people. Among the Sufi Saints Ibnul Arabi was the first one to establish the principle of Wahadat-ul-Wazud (God is everywhere and is reflected in everyone). Later on, by the twelfth century Sufis became divided into twelve orders. Each order had a leader or the Chief, who lived in Khankah along with his many disciples. In the Sufis' thought great emphasis was placed on relations between the Guru or the Pir and the Shishya or Murid. Every Pir nominated his Wali or successor or who became the leader of the order after him and carried on the work of his order. The people at Khankah were divided into two sections-permanent or Mukim and itinerant or temporary.

Whatever might have been the original form of Sufism outside India, it was transformed in its new setting in India.



### What is Wahadat-ul-wajud?

Sufism sprang from the doctrine of *Wahadat-ul-wajud* or the Unity of Being. It means in plain language that God is the unity behind all plurality and the Reality behind all phenomenal appearance. It emphasises that "there is nothing in existence except God and union with God results from an intuitive contact with Him and a complete detachment from the world and all that is other than God." This doctrine was propounded by Shaikh Muhi-ud-din Ibnul Arabi (1165-1240 A.D.) This doctrine became an acknowledged belief of the Muslim Sufis in India. In their journey to achieve union with God, the Sufis had to pass through ten stages of spiritual development in which there was excessive love and yearning for God. As a lover longs for the company of his beloved, similarly a Sufi was inspired to go as near God as possible and forget everything else. The Sufi voluntarily renounced materialistic pursuits and shunned not only government service but also any contact with the rulers and administrators. They imbibed a love for humanity and believed in poverty, vegetarian diet, pacifism and non-violence. The goal of the Sufi was emotional communion with God and service of humanity.

The Sufis in India were successful in converting a large number of Hindus to Islam. They placed before the Hindus, particularly those belonging to lower castes, the message of equality of Islam. They learned the language of the people and their religion along with their practices. They laid the foundation of the Urdu language which became the medium of intercourse between them and the Indian People. In order to win over the Hindus, the Sufi Muslims tried to look like Hindu Sadhus and adopted some of their practices and outward behaviour in order to remove suspicion from the minds of the Hindus. Sometimes they made use of trickery and the authority of the state to compel the Hindus to embrace Islam or to get them put to death by declaring them apostates if they declined to become Muslims.

### Early Sufis

One of the earliest Sufis was a woman saint, Rabia of Basra. Rabia said, "Love of God hath so absorbed me that neither love nor hate of any other thing remains in my heart." The most celebrated role in the evolution of Sufism was played by Bayazid Bustami, a Persian Saint, who introduced the element of ecstasy and mystic doctrine of the immanence of God. Abdullah-al-Muhasibi was the first Sufi writer who used the Christian Gospel. He died in 857 A.D. An important contribution to the development of Sufism was made by Hussain Ibn Hansur Al-Hallaj in the tenth century A.D. He conceived the relation of God with man as the infusion of the divine into the human soul. He provided the basis for the development of the doctrine of *Insan-i-Kamil*. (The Perfect Man) which was worked up by subsequent Sufi writers. Farid-ud-din Attar (1136-1230) wrote 114 books on Sufism. He also compiled biographies and sayings of Muslim Saints in *Tadhkirat-al-Auliya* which is considered to be a source book for the study of early Sufism. Jalal-ud-din Rumi left a vast store of spiritual knowledge in his 'Masnavi' which is considered to be the test for the study of early Sufism. According to Davis, "The Masnavi has all the beauty of the Psalms, the music of the hills, the colour and scent of the roses and the swaying of forests." The view of Reuben Levy is that "The Masnavi is an immense work which contains in its six books all the doctrines, traditions and legends of Sufism, presented in a series of parables, allegories and pseudo-historical narratives." According to Rumi, "Love is the greatest virtue which purifies the spiritual sentiments giving us the vision of the Supreme. His beloved is not confined within the Temple, Mosque or Church but resides in the pure heart."

### Ghazali

Abu Hamid-al-Ghazali (1058-1111), a Philosopher and a Theologian, provided a real metaphysical basis to Sufism. He tried to reconcile it with orthodox Islam. He put emphasis on immediate experience, ecstasy and inward transformation without which no salvation is possible. Another important authority on Sufism was Abdul Karim al Jili who wrote a treatise named '*Insan-al-Kamal*.' He also wrote a commentary on '*Futuh-at-Makhiyah*.' He believed that man attains



spiritual perfection by passing through four stages. According to him, all faiths were thoughts about one Reality. He was profoundly influenced by Hindu Vedanta.

### **Data Ganj Baksh**

After the Ghazanavid conquest of the Punjab, a large number of Sufi Saints appeared in India. **Shaikh Ismail** of Lahore was the first among them. He was followed by **Shaikh Ali bin Usman al Hujwairi**, better known as **Data Ganj Baksh**, who died after 1088. His tomb at Lahore is a popular shrine in Punjab. He was the author of several works and he might be described as the founder of the Sufi Cult in India which gained much popularity among the Muslim masses and profoundly influenced their entire moral and religious outlook. He was the author of the celebrated manual on Sufism entitled **Kashful Mahjub**. Another saint of this period was **Sayyid Ahmed Sultan Sakhi Sarwar**, popularly known as **Lakhdata**. He died at Shahkot near Multan in 1080.

The period from 1200 to 1500 A.D. is considered as the period of permeation of Sufi thought in India. During that period, a number of new sects and movements were started which formed a midway between Hinduism and Islam. **Abul Fazl** mentions "14 Orders or Silsilahs of the Sufis in India. Of those Orders, the Chishti, the Suhrawardi, the Naqshbandi, the Qadiri, the Qalandaria and the Shusttari Orders were important. The Chishtis established themselves at Ajmer and some other towns of Rajasthan and in some parts of the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Deccan. The Suhrawardi Order was confined to Sind, Multan and the Punjab. Some saints of this Order also settled in Delhi and Avadh."

### **Chishti Order**