

SUFISM AND THE CHISHTI SAINTS OF INDIA

Rajni Thakur, Asstt. Professor
Dept of History, SMDRSD, College
Pathankot.

There are divergent opinions as to the origin of the word ‘Sufi’. Different opinions were put forward and its derivation was sought by some from safe (purity) ashab-i-suffa (people of the bench) and even from the Greek sophia (wisdom). It is generally recognized that the term was derived from Sufi (wool) and was applied to those Muslims holy men who wore woolen garments and devoted themselves to a life of self-renunciation, living in poverty and giving their time to prayer and meditation, who were thus called sufis. The period 1200-1500 AD, was a remarkable for the permeation of Muslims saints and sufis throughout India. New sects and movements arose midway between Hinduism and Islam.

The entry of Islam into India was followed by that of Sufism. The Sufis were peace loving and tolerant people. To make Islam emotionally satisfying they made several concessions to the practices of other creeds. The Sufi spent their time in prayer and interpreted Islam to non-Muslims. The total Number of Silsilahs (sufiorders) are 161. Each Silsilah had its own concept of community life, and its own routine of supererogatory prayers and fasts. The Sufism in India was based mainly on the teachings of the Chishti, because they were probably the largest in number. In the fifteenth and subsequent centuries there was a vast expansion. The four orders, chishti, suhrawardi, Qadri and Naqshbandi, differed among themselves. The chishtis, for instance believed in sama, in listening to song but they insisted that it was allowed by the shariah.

Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti : The Chishti order of Sufism was introduced in India by Khwaja Muinuddin Sijzi who reached here before the Turkish conquest of Hindustan. Shaikh Muinuddin was born in 1141 A.D in Sijistan province lying to the east of Persia. He was the son of Ghiyasuddin Hasan. At the age of fifteen he lost his father. In his youth Khwaja traveled widely in Islamic countries in search of spiritual guidance. In Harum, he attended Khwaja Usman Harum and became his disciple. He reached a higher degree of perfection and was spiritually benefited by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Gilani, founder of the Qadiri order of Sufi.

The Khwaja Usman directed Muinuddin to go to India 1190 A.D, little before the invasion of Sultan Muhammad Ghori. After coming to India Shaikh Muinuddin stayed for some time at Lahore. From Lahore Muinuddin went to Ajmer. Ajmer was not merely the seat of Chauhan power, it was also a religious centre, where thousands of pilgrims assembled from far and near. His success or failure in Ajmer depended the future of the Muslim mystic movement in Hindustan. The Khwaja spent many years in Ajmer and worked for the low and common people and utilized his time in the service of helpless. The entire structure of his thought stood on three principles.

- When we transcended the externals and looked around, we found the lover, the beloved and the love to be one, that is in the sphere of oneness all is one.
- To redress the misery of those in distress, to fulfill the needs of the helpless and to feed the hungry.
- Describing the qualities which endear a man to God.

“First, river-like generosity; Secondly sun like affection; and thirdly earth-like hospitality.

These principles reveal Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti’s attitude towards some of the basic problems of religion and morality. He died in 1295 A.D and was buried at Ajmer. He appointed sixty six disciples to go and propagate his principles.

Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri : Shaikh Hamiduddin (1276 A.D) popularized the Chishti Silsilah in Rajputana. He was a favourite disciple of Muinuddin Chishti. He was the son of Shaikh Ahmad. He adopted the life of an agriculture and settle down in Nagour in Rajasthan and hence he was called Hamiduddin Nagauri. In his early years he had led a very voluptuous life, but when he joined the circle of Shaikh Muinuddin’s disciples, a sudden change came upon him. He repented for his past sins and adopted the life of a mystic in all sincerity and with all its rigours. Impressed by his devotion to the mystic way of life, Shaikh Muinuddin gave him the little of Sultan-ut-Tarikan. His needs never exceeded a few maunds of grain and a few yards of rough hand-woven cloth – he himself produced and scrupulously avoided coming into contract with the government of the day. His catholicity of views is best illustrated by the fact that he could discern and appreciated spiritual virtues in Non-Muslims also.

Shaikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki : Shaikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki was a native of Aish in Fargana in central Asia. While wandering in search of spiritual betterment he came to India at the reign of Shamsuddin Iltutmish. He reached Delhi several years after his master's arrival at Ajmer. Iltutmish had great faith in Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki. Sultan Iltutmish offered the post of Shaikh-ul-Islam to him but he declined to accept it. Shaikh Bakhtiar Kaki did not associated himself with the ruler. He only extended his moral support to the sultan in the construction of Public works and centres of activities. Shaikh was very fond of mystic music. One day he was invited to an audition party. He was suddenly overtaken by a state of acstasy and for four days he could not get out of this emotional storm. On the fifth night he breathed his last. Kaki died on 1235 A.D.

Baba Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar : The most outstanding figure of the Chishti Silsilah during medieval period. Baba Farid was a descendent of royal family of Afghanistan. It migrated to India & settled in Multan at the time of his grandfather. Farid developed dislike for worldly affairs. He left his wealth and property and became a traveler studying under the guidance of Sufi teachers and saints. The greatest disciple of Baba Farid was Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi. He holds unique position among the Sufi saints of medieval India. It was under him that the Chishti Silsilah reached its highest watermark. For nearly half a century he lived & worked in Delhi. Almost all the spiritual descendants of the disciples of Shaikh Farid, as well as Shaikh Farid's own descendants accepted him as their spiritual leader.

Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag of Delhi : The last great Sufi of the Chishti order in India was a Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag. He was a notable follower of Nizamuddin Auliya. When he was twenty five years of age he made up his mind to be a mystic saint. The Shaikh led the life of poverty and avoided the association of rulers and nobles. Sultan Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah wanted Shaikh Nasiruddin to come to him and join him in his prayers at the Masjid Miri. But he declined the offer and offered his prayers in a nearby mosque. He had a very large number of followers and disciples. He wrote Abad-ut-Talibin and Intibah-ul-Mwidin.

Shaikh Salim Chishti : Shaikh Salim was a Sufi saint of Chishti order who lived in a cave in the hill of Fatehpur Sikari. He flourished in the Sixteenth century during the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar. He had profound regards for the saint and used to pay visits to him in his

cave. It is said that Salim (Jahangir) was born due to the blessing of Shaikh Salim Chishti and therefore, Akbar called Salim as Shikhu Baba. He utilized his time in prayers, meditations and spiritual studies. Like other Sufis he led married life and had children. Shaikh Salim Chishti died in the life time of Akbar and was buried near the Jami Mosque of Fatehpur Sikri.

Most of the Chishti saints lived under conditions of appalling poverty. They looked down upon possession of private property as a serious impediment to the growth of one's spiritual personality. Shaikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar built a small mud house. Shaikh Muinuddin and Shaikh Bakhtiyar never owned houses of their own. The Chishti saints distributed food and money freely to the poor, needy and distressed persons. They did not accept grant of money and land from the Sultan and rulers. The attitude of the Chishti saints towards the non-Muslim was liberal. They recognised that there were many paths to realize God.

The Chishti saints led an extremely simple and pious life. It had tremendous impact on the masses, especially the Hindus whose religion held in high esteem all those who followed the path of renunciation. The Chishti adopted a detached view towards worldly life and had no love for wealth, women and lust for power and government service. Many of the Chishti saints lived in starvation and refused to accept any grant or gifts from the state or nobles or rulers. The Chishties laid great emphasis on the socio-moral aspect of life in the interest of spiritual social service over all other forms of devotion. They had high ideas of life : Simple living and high thinking.

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