

## IMPACT OF SUFISM MOVEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Sufism was characterized in the one hand as a phenomenon of expressing love towards almighty and on the other hand spreading the message of truth. The Sufis in India became the Ambassadors of cultural integrity and social harmony. It is a mystic dimension of Islam formally originated in the Middle East between ninth and tenth centuries AD. Safa means wisdom or Purity. "Suf" refers to Wool. It was said that the development of Sufism was highly influenced by various mystic philosophies of Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism. The early spread of Islam to India was strongly influenced by the Arab traders who were responsible to the arrival of Sufi saints to Western and Eastern coast of Indian Sub-Continent. The political situation in North India was in favor of the spread of Sufism in these regions. Later the political changes in the Caliphate empire paved the way for the vast migration of Sufis in the mainland's of South India and Ceylon. The Qadiriyya and Chistiyya orders of Sufism were the prominent Sufi orders of having many Dargahs throughout India. The Sufi Saints have contributed a lot for the Literature, philosophy and theological ideas. The main objective of this research article is to identify and analyze the impact of Sufism movement in Contemporary India. I have followed the descriptive and analytical research methods as a methodology and consulted the secondary source materials as main sources to write this article.*

**Key-Words:** *Sufism, mystic, Sub-Continent, Caliphate, Qadiriyya and Chistiyya.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sufism was characterized in the one hand as a phenomenon of expressing love towards almighty and on the other hand spreading the message of truth. The Sufi doctrines and practices were brought into India have a long and chequered history. Sufism in a mystic dimension of Islam which formally originated in the Middle East between ninth and tenth centuries.

(**Mysticism:** a religious practice in which people search for truth, knowledge and closeness to God through meditation and prayer). The first Sufi arrived India towards the close of the eleventh century.<sup>1</sup> The Sufis in India, became the Ambassadors of cultural integrity and social harmony. They brought with them, the religious fervor devotion and piety.

They also had brought with them the discipleship with spiritual leaders in those lands. They had a long experience in travellings, fastings and pilgrimages to the shrines of Saints and to Holy Mecca. The origin of the word Sufism can be traced from many roots. The lexicon root of the word is traced to “Safa” which in Arabic means “purity”. Another origin is ‘Sufi’ refers to wool, the simple cloth worn by early ascetics (simple and strict way of life through religious beliefs).

It was said, that the development of Sufism was highly influenced by various mystic philosophies of Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism.

### **Migration of the Sufis to India**

The trade in the Indian Ocean was influenced by the Arabs. The early spread of Islam to India was strongly influenced by the Arab traders who were responsible to the arrival of Sufi Saints to Western and Eastern Coast of Indian Sub – continent. The political changes in the Caliphate Empire paved the way for the vast migration of the Sufis in the Mainland of South India and Ceylon. The political situation of North India was also in favour of the spread of Sufism in these regions.

The social behaviour and philosophical synthesis were in practice by the Sufis. The Sufi Shaikhs (evolved at the spiritual level) came to occupy a pride of place in the society; most of them were patronized by the kings. Because of their powerful spiritual attainments, noble deeds and liberal out looking, they left an indelible imprint on the socio – religious set – up (milieu) of India.

### **Emergence of Sufism (Why did Sufism emerge?)**

The rise of Sufism could be associated with the disenchantment among some Muslim Ulama (scholars) and dis-integration of the Caliphate after the death of Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph. This period witnessed intense power struggle, bloodshed and empowerment of the ruling class. Many Ulama were also killed in process. Due to these tragic and anarchic incidents, the situations were completely shocked. Some scholars who were inspired by the Prophet and the early Caliph began to follow the habit of meditation and spirituality with the purpose of having a

direct experience of God. They embraced poverty and started leading a life full of piety and love for fellow humankind.

In the beginning, Sufism did not exist in a properly organized form, but, at the same time, one cannot underestimate or overlook the contributions made by the early Sufis (8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries) to the development of Sufi thought. The earliest Sufi was Hasan of Basra who had a fear of God and was very cautious that not to commit any sin or mistake in his life.<sup>2</sup> He represented a tendency towards otherworldliness, piety and asceticism and considered hunger and poverty as symbols of righteousness. Al-Hashim Sufi of Kufah is regarded as the first mystic to have used the nomenclature 'Sufi'. He believed that inner transformation (of heart) was the essence of Sufism. Ibrahim b Adham was the king of Balkh who gave up his throne and all worldly possessions and became an ascetic.

Of the many Sufi orders (Silsilas) that have arisen in the world of mystic Islam, India became the hospitable home for a large number of Sufis. The arrival of Shaikh Mu' in – ud – Din in India just before the Sultanate period heralded the beginning of a new era in the religious ethos of the country.<sup>3</sup> During the Sultanate period of three hundred years, Sufism had spread every nook and corner of the country.

### **Early Sufis and their orders**

Khawaj a Muinud – din, the founder of Chishtiyya order in India was considered as an early Sufi – Saint of North India. He was born about A.D. 1142 at Sistine. The Sufi mystic traditions became more visible during the rule of Delhi Sultanate.<sup>4</sup> The Saint figures and mythical stories had made inspiration on Hindu Communities. The medieval North Indian Society was highly influenced by the Cosmopolitan Culture of Bahadad and Persia. The Ghaznavi and Ghorid Courts accelerated Sufi – intellectualism in India. During the thirteenth Century A.D. the Sufi brotherhood became firmly consolidated in Northern India.<sup>5</sup>

The political scenario in Northern India was in favour of the spread of Sufism in India. After the Mongol invasion of Bahadad, the Sufi Saints had chosen India, as their safe abode and destination for settlement.<sup>6</sup> The court of Delhi Sultanate had occupied with Persian intellectuals.

Sufism became the main ingredients in all mediums.<sup>7</sup> They acted as advisers to Sultans, bridge between the commoners and rulers. But most of the practicing Sufis rarely had political aspirations.<sup>8</sup>

Among the religious elite of Medieval India, Ulamas and the Sufi Mystics or Fakirs had tolerated with non – Islamic traditions. They had mingled with poor people and spread their faith through community services. There were number of Sufi Saints who had led a very popular and discipline life in North India. Sufi Saint Shaikh Nizamud-din-Awliya (AD 1238 – 1325) had stressed love as a means of realizing God. It implied the love of humanity.

Amir Khushro, the noted scholar and the royal poet of Delhi Sultanate who accepted the mission and became the disciple of the Sufi who is also buried at Dargah of Nizamudin Awliya. He was responsible for the Mass conversion of the people to Islam. He founded the Chisti Nizami order. He saw the reign of seven rulers of Delhi Sultanate. There were 70 branches of Sufi orders.

The famous Suhrawardi order Sufi Saints were Shaikh Sadrudin Arif, Amir Husayan and Ruknuddin. Saint Ruknuddin was highly respected by the Delhi Sultans, from Alauddin Khilji to Muhammad – bin – Tughlaq. This order got spread to Tiruchirappalli and Andhrapradesh in South India.<sup>9</sup>

Another order Naqshbandiyya, became an influential factor in Indo – Muslim life and for two centuries it was the Principal spiritual order in India. Khwaja Baqi Billa was an influential Sufi personality and protested the state policies of Mughal emperor Akbar.<sup>10</sup> The four different Sufi orders were highly responsible for the spread of Islam in North India.

## **SUFISM IN SOUTH INDIA**

The Hindu rulers of India needed Arab traders and provided them with all facilities and treated them like other subjects. These early missionaries and their progress enabled the spread of Sufism all over Tamil country.<sup>11</sup> Many new Sufi centers were emerged in coastal regions as well as central parts of Tamil country.

Dargahs became prominent tombs of Saints. The disciples of early pioneer Sufis were responsible to spread of Sufi movement in the neighbouring states. They became the ambassadors of Sufism and social integrity.

### **Impact**

- Development of Literature and Poems.
- Stressed the importance of ‘fana’ or annihilation in seeking God and believed in Unity of Existence was the ultimate truth.
- Active role in politics and Indian religion.
- Princess Jehanara of Mughal dynasty was a notable female Sufi Saint of Qadiriya Order and authored two Sufi Manuals. Munis al Aswah or the confident of spirits and an incomplete biography of her spiritual mentor Mulla Shah.
- The Sub – continent Sufi orders embraced local traditions from ascetics belonging to other religions. Inter religious dialogues were held.
- The situation of Indian Sufism has been historically summarized by Evelyn Underhill as follows the Muhammadan Mysticism appearing in the eighth century AD with the beautiful figure of Rabia, the Muslim female Saint (AD 717 – 831) and continued by the Martyr Al – Hallay, attains literary expression in the eleventh century by Ghayali (AD 1055 – 1111) and has its classic period in the thirteenth century in the work of mystic poets Attar (AD 1140 – 1234) Saadi (AD 1184 – 1263) and Jalaludeen Rumi (AD 1207 – 1273). Its tradition is continued in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by the rather erotic mysticism of Hafiz (AD 1300 – 1388) and his successors and in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the poet Jami (AD 1414 – 1492).<sup>12</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

The most remarkable feature of the medieval and contemporary period of Indian History was the emergence of various schools of thoughts. Sufism played a twin role spreading loves towards almighty and spreading the message of truth. The Sufi saints played an important role in

the Indian Contemporary Society. The Arabian trade influenced them to settle in the coastal parts of India. Due to their preaching and profess, there were many religious, social and political changes had taken place. Therefore Sufism had a great impact in the Contemporary India.

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