

An Exploration Of Consequential Chapter Of Sufi Khanqahs In Indian Land

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Abstract: This article would like to show a blueprint of Sufistic culture by exploring their theory, beliefs and religious practices which spread out all the corners of Indian land in about 7th century A.D. onwards. The research employs Sufism is a popular sect which has developed as a separate mystico-philosophical or spiritual tradition of Islām, but not a separate religion like Islām. The study further recommends that Sufism is a process of the purity of heart and also is a process that amplifies unconditional love towards all classes of men. Many Sufi saints came into India by using both sea and silk routes from other countries (especially from Arabian and Persian) of the globe to preach the religious practices like Islām. In the course of doing this, the Sufi saints had to make some rules or directions i.e. Silsilahs or Orders for maintaining a good relation all over the masses. The study highlights each Silsilah or Order has several *Khanqahs* which mainly provide social service to all without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion. Thus the findings indicate that the Sufis have been building up a strong brotherhood and communal harmony among Indian people throughout the centuries.

Key Words: Brotherhood, Islām, *Khanqah*, Religious practices, Sufism, Spiritual, Silsilah.

Introduction: The globe has introduced a number of religions like - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, Islām, etc., in worldwide. The record says that the goal of all religions is almost the same but their ways of teachings, preaching's and rituals are different only in the context of their nature and practice as well. Each religion tries to save humanity and carries inner peace and tranquility. Nowadays, religion includes our care of motherland. Though this recent article is not addressing so called any religion, but it would try to examine the popular sect like Sufism, a spiritual tradition of Islām. There are many spiritual traditions in the world among them Sufism indicates intense love towards human being, God and His created world. It teaches the man of spiritual minded and the man who belongs to spiritual communities that religion is not just about reading scriptures; it is also about how people live in society, connect with each other, and find meaning in life. Thus Sufism has been maintaining an extensive responsibility for expanding a good and friendly society since very early time.

Definition of Sufism: In general, each religious sect has two sides like worldly object – inner and outer. Sufism is an inner (*Batin*) aspect of Islāmic cult, it is familiar with the Arabic term “*Tasawwuf*”, which stands upon unity of God. In Arabian society, *Tasawwuf* has been used to signify the Muslims those who engaged themselves in supererogatory prayer all time in the mosque. Hence, Sufism preaches the idea of inner purification of heart as they believe that outer purification is not sufficient for attaining peace in life. In supporting this, they propounded some Qur’ānic line like – ‘*Qad-aflaha-man-tazakkah*’ i.e. he will be rescued whose heart is pure.¹

Many views and doctrines are there regarding the origination of the term ‘Sufism’. Some says that the term ‘Sufism’ is the combination of Arabic word ‘*Suf*’ and English word ‘*Is*’, where the both terms signify rational as well as mystical aspects of the Islāmic faith. We find that when Prophet Hadrat Muhammad (s) was alive, the term ‘Sufism’ was not treated as a separate cult or tradition. Also the term “*Sufi*” has not been cited in the Holy Qur’ān, though there are some Qur’ānic words (like - *Muqarrabun*, *Sadeqin*, *Sabirun*, *Faquirun*, *Salehin*, etc.),² that depict the idea of inner purification and spiritual outlook of Islām. Hence, the term ‘Sufi’ was not uttered at that time, but it existed there in a latent form; which emerged as a movement in later time.

So, it is said that Sufism is an unbroken spiritual movement within Islām as the Sufis were spiritual in the first in virtue of his communication with God.³ They used to wear woolen dresses (*Suf*), this is the sign of the sweetness of Islāmic faith. In this context, the known writer Abū Nasr-al-Sarraj maintains that “the word ‘*Sufi*’ is derived from ‘*Suf*’, because of wearing the woolen garments that was the habit of the Prophet Hadrat Muhammad (s) and his companions.”⁴ Philologically, “the word ‘*Sufi*’ defines the coarse wool,

however, the inner import of the Arabic term Sufi is ‘Safa’ means *purity*, because, the main message of the Sufis is to clean their hearts.”⁵ Some scholars claim that Sufism is basically a training for polishing the heart of the devotee and in their terminology it is called ‘*Tazkaiyatun-nafs*’. At last, the basic principles of their sect are love (‘*Ishq*’) and the service of humanity (*Khidmat-e-Khalq*).

The Advent of Sufis in Our Country Land: The country land like India is very liberal and rational as well. India has welcomed different cultures and religious traditions to integrate them into its society before the emergence of modern civilization. Regarding this, she says,

आनो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः | ऋग्वेद – 1.89.1

“*Aano bhadra Krtavo yantu Vishwatah.*”

That means - let the noble thoughts come to me from all directions.

Following the message, many celebrated monks and saints with divergent thoughts and cultures have emerged in its society and they worked for all communities.

At the same time, the preacher of Sufism i.e. the Sufis came in India to serve and emancipate all without any prejudices. India’s commercial contact was on another level. The Middle East countries including many Arab merchants had deep commercial contact with India. For this, they used both Sea route and Silk route. The first Muslim fleet emerged in Indian waters in the late 7th century A.D. It helped Muhammad bin al-Qāsim (694-715 A.D.) to the conquest of Sindh (Undivided India) in the beginning of 8th century A.D. It is thought that the Muslim rule started in South Asia by Muhammad bin al-Qāsim.⁶ From then onwards, many Muslim saints arrived here from Arabian and Persian lands. They had maintained very good and cordial relations with the local people, thus their relationship had gradually been established as stronger in Indian land.⁷ The names of some Sufi missionaries who successively came into India from other countries are as following:

- Shaikh Mālik Ibn Dīnār ... (d. 748 A.D.)
- Abū Hīfā Rābī bin Sāhib al-Asādi al-Bāsārī (d. 782 A.D.)
- Shaikh Saifuddīn Kaziruni (d. 1007 A.D.)
- Shaikh Sayed Husain Zanjānī (d. 1042 A.D.)
- Abū’l Hasan bin Usmān Ghaznawī al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d. 1072 A.D.)
- Khwājah Mu’īn-ud-Dīn Chishtī (d. 1236 A.D.)
- Huzrat Syeda Jaināb Khatun/ Raūshan Bibi (d. 1342 A.D.)
- Mir Sayed Jalāl ud-Dīn (d. 1383 A.D.)
- Mir Ashraf Jahangir Simnānī (d. 1436 A.D.) and many more.

Now we find that Sufistic culture reached every nook and corner of the country, as a result, large influxes of Sufi-saints were born in this land. Some names of Indian Sufi saints are as follows:

- Shaikh Abū Turab tabi-i-tabii (d. 788 A.D.)
- Shaikh Bābā Ratan (d. 1300 A.D.)
- Khwājah Nizāmuddīn Auliya ... (d. 1325 A.D.)
- Shaikh Nur Qutb-i-Alam..... (d. 1415 A.D.)
- Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janān..... (d. 1781 A.D.) and many more.

Sufi Silsilahs or Orders: In the very beginning, the saints who came from other countries had built up their own individual recognitions in this country land; but they did not establish any Sufistic order. Later on, the Sufis felt that to create unity and brotherhood among different sects of people and of cultures, they needed some strong directions to make it happen. For this, some orders (in their terminology called Silsilahs) were produced by the notable Sufi saints to spread Sufism in an organized way and also to promote the value of inter-religious understanding among different cults.

The term ‘Silsilah’ is an Arabic term whose literal meaning is ‘chain’. Sometimes, it designates the link or connection that connects two people, usually the spiritual director and his disciple.⁸ There are mainly two types of Silsilahs in Sufi fraternity: a) Ba-Shara (with law) and b) Be-Shara (without law). The role of those Silsilahs was important to elevate Sufism in a highest level. It must be noted here that each Silsilah has its own rule or school of guidance, and also they have their own particular rituals and ceremonies which are followed sincerely and strictly by its later generations. Some major Ba-Shara Silsilahs are Chishtiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah, Qadiriyyah and Naqsbandiyyah.

In Sufi tradition, Chishtiyyah Silsilah is the oldest one and it got its name from the town name *Chisht* (in Persian *Khisht*). It was invented by Shaikh Abū Ishāq (d. 940 A.D.), who came from Syria to Chisht in Khurasan.⁹ Though in early 13th century A.D., the Silsilah was reinvigorated and introduced in India by the notable saint Khwājah Mu‘īn-ud-Dīn Chishtī (d. 1236 A.D.).¹⁰ The next Silsilah i.e. Suhrawardiyyah was introduced by Shaikh Diya al-Dīn Najib-abd-al-Qādir Sūhrawardī (d. 1168 A.D.) of Sūhrawārd, Baghdad.¹¹ Simultaneously, Qadiriyyah order was spread out in North India (mainly in Punjab and Sind) by the great Muhi al-Dīn Abd-al-Qādir Gilānī, known as Mahbub-i Subhan, Pir-i dastgir (the *Pir* who offers support and guidance by holding students’ hand) or as Pir-i-Piran (*Pir* of the *Pirs*).¹² And the final major Ba-Shara Silsilah came to be known as Naqsbandiyyah by Khwājah Baha-al-Dīn Naqshband (1318- 1389 A.D.).¹³

Apart from this, some Be-Shara Silsilahs are like: Tabaqatiya, Qalandariyyah, Binovaiya, Naushaiya, Qaysarshahiya, etc.¹⁴

Both the Silsilahs have been propagating spiritual and mystical teachings since their origination time. The purpose of introducing those orders is to promote assimilation approach amongst different communities and also to actualize the journey of divine path.

The Impact of Khanqah: After introducing Silsilahs, the Sufi saints felt that to implement the orders we needed a place or centre from where its rules can be practiced. Keeping it in mind, they started to establish the *Khanqas* in different places of our country land. History says that, in Indian sub-continent, *Khanqahs* were fully developed almost in the 11th century A.D. The main purpose of building the *Khanqah* is to follow the discipline and to practice the stated rules of the *Pir*, the absolute knower. Some rules are mandatory for the *Khanqah* like: Keep Sufi disciples’ cloths clean, cannot gossip in a mosque or any other holy place, do pray all time especially much at night, wake up early in the morning, ask apologize to Allah and remember Him, read the Holy Qur’ān, practice *Dhikr* (remembrance) at the time of prayer, etc.¹⁵

Basically, *Khanqah* is an inclusive institution where both Shariah (Qur’ān, Hadīth, and Fiqh) and Tariqah (path) are practiced for spiritual elevation towards Allāh. It helps man to develop connection with ethics and morality. Also it teaches the disciples that material things are just illusions, and we should stay away from them for the betterment. In *Khanqah*, the *Pir* guides the scholars to choose the right path regarding our deeds, so that it can spread the light of the bloom of honesty. Again the institution like *Khanqah* saves people from getting destroyed at the hands of earthy desires and ultimately protects the virtue of *Tazkia* (spiritual purification). Thus, when the Sufis made a spiritual movement within Islām, the *Khanqah* played very effective and constructive roles.

Definition of Khanqah

The definition of *Khanqah* is under controversial. Some scholars say that it has Turkish origin; others define it to be Persian, being a compound of *Khwan* and *Gah*, which means “a place where a tribal chief resides.” Later the term was Arabicized into the *Khanqah*, which is a compound of *Khan* + *Qah*.¹⁶ The meaning of “*Khan*” is ‘saint’, “*Qah*” is ‘a place where saint resides’; and ‘*Khanqah*’ means ‘a place where a living saint does reside or a demised one rests’.

In the words of Qaid al-Lughat, “*Khan*” denotes “Prince or King or Chief”; and “*Khana*” prescribes “Residence” or “Market”. Sometimes it means “Master”.¹⁷ On the contrary, the scholar Shaikh Nasir al-Dīn Chiragh pens that it is a compound of *Khanah* which means a house, and *Qah* denotes practices or acts of worship.¹⁸ Some articles demand that *Khanqah* is entitled as “*Rabaat*” which is derived from “*Rabita*” and “*Rabita*” is, in effect, a term for the *check post* constructed at the boundaries. The scholar Misbah al-Lughat writes that *Rabaat* is a house where the poor persons would be fed.¹⁹ Despite so many meanings of the word *Khanqah*, lexicographically it denotes a house where mystics live and pray, in order to follow the rules of that particular institutional discipline. In a word, *Khanqah* means the separate houses of spiritual worship in Islām.

The Structure and Feature of Khanqah

In general, the *Khanqah* has two parts and many cells (the Sufis’ resident). One part of *Khanqah* is the main hall, where their systematic life is followed and common devotional practices take place. The teacher relaxes on the other part in front of the *Mihrab* at the time of ceremonies and felicitations. In *Khanqah*, religious idioms such as the “*Shahada*” and the name of the founder are painted over the niche. Also there are some special rooms in *Khanqah* for practicing *salaah* (5 time prayers), attending lectures which are given by Shaikhs (teachers); and for practicing *dhikr* (remembrance of Allāh), *muraqaba* (meditation), etc. It is usually seen that there is a separate mosque, whilst kitchens and other rooms, and most of the cases a

bathroom, are attached. Apart from this, for the newcomer and residential both are given the food and lodging, and especially for the residents, garments and other bonus are provided.²⁰

In addition, Chishtiyyah *Khanqah* i.e. the *Khanqahs* of Chishtiyyah Silsilah were consisted of a big hall (*Jama'at khanah*), where the Sufis lived a community life. The *Jama'at khanah* was decorated by belongings-bedding, books and rosary. The Sufis of the *Khanqah* used to sleep on the floor without making any discrimination, not even on the basis of piety, was permitted to prevail in there. In *Jama'at khanah* there was a *Langar Khana* means free public kitchen, which was opened to all irrespective of religion, class, caste, doctrine, age, gender or social status for serving food. So the hospitality is noticeable in Chishtiyyah *Khanqah*.

The Suhrawardiyyah *Khanqah* was more magnificent, better furnished and well organized than Chishtiyyah *Khanqah*. It provided several kinds of accommodation for the inmate as well as for the many visitors who used to come here. They solved the common man's problems in the month of Ramazan. On the contrary, Qadiriyyah *Khanqah* distributed the valuable gifts once or twice annually. And the Naqsbandiyyah *Khanqah* taught students a good lesson on religious sciences. There were around fifty slaves, mostly Indian, worked and provided service to the needy man in the Naqsbandiyyah *Khanqah*. Also a setup of madrasa was there to teach essential lessons free of cost; and for the poor students, financial aids were provided in general. Thus people got various benefits from those *Khanqahs*.

Some basic features of the *Khanqah* are as follows:

- Students acquire knowledge about different subjects like *Fiqh* (Islāmic jurisprudence), Hadīth (Prophetic teachings), etc. as *Khanqah* holds many books including various sciences.
- It gives shelter to those who do not have their own house.
- It guides students to improve the inward and outward both ways uniformly.
- *Khanqah* teaches the students to ask apologize to Allah for their past evil deeds.
- In *Khanqah*, the scholars learn that time is precious and should value of it.
- The man from any sect (Muslim or non-Muslim) is heartily welcomed there.
- The *Pir* of the *Khanqah* helps individuals in purifying the self (*nafs* or *ego*) and also assists the people to improve their characteristics in enjoining good and forbidding evil in the community.

With the above discussion, it is said that *Khanqah* helps the students to achieve knowledge of the self (*nafs* or *ego*), actually how to purify the self from worldly attachments and desires, and even how to struggle against materialism.²¹ So it holds the unique features to connect people with their own institution.

Some Practices and Rituals of *Khanqah*

In Silsilah or order, some common practices are offered, these are like: a) Ritual, prayer and fasting, b) Remembrance of the 'spiritual lineage', c) *Dhikr* (Remembrance of Almighty God), d) spiritual retreats by on time, and e) for enhancing listening power, listen to music.²² These are the chief practices and all secondary practices come under those five practices. Now the study underlines some practices of *Khanqahs* which became famous in later time.

- i) *Dhikr*: It denotes a recollection of Almighty God. Actually, it means the repetition of the names of God or other direction either silently or aloud, as a form of meditation.²³ At the time of *Chilla* (meditation) - for forty days, twenty one days, eleven days, and some go for years depending upon their love of God and Prophet Mohammed (s); *Dhikr* is uttered. It is a particular kind of worship. Through this prayer a devotee attains the final bliss. As *Dhikr* banishes fear of death and removes all kinds of obstacles, difficulties, pleasure, pain, etc.
- ii) *Sama*: It is basically 'hearing' or 'listening' or 'audition'.²⁴ It creates a pleasant environment where many people come to join within a short span of time. Not all, but some Sufi writers have been writing devotional poetry and song and setting the mystical music continuously since early time. Also the Sufis think that ecstasy can be achieved through *Sama*.
- iii) *Qawwali*: In the *Khanqah*, the Sufis organized very often *Qawwali mahefil*.²⁵ They believed that the song is the cause of enthusiasm. And the common people usually assumed *Qawwali* as a relief from earthly affairs and entertainment.
- iv) *Urs*: In Sufi fraternity, *Urs* is considered as a festival. It is celebrated at *Dargah* (saint's shrine or tomb). The Sufis regard that a saint is the lover of God, and after the death they will meet God, the beloved.²⁶ When this festival is arranged, numerous devotees who naturally belong to

different faiths, come and assemble on that particular place, and pay mutual respect for each other without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion.

All these are designed for Sufis so that they might experience union with Almighty God and annihilation of self. Besides, the practices like *Qawwali*, *Urs*, etc. can assemble large influxes of men (both Muslims and non-Muslims) together under one roof in a short amount of time. It is a clear indication of brotherhood and communal harmony.

After studying Sufi thesis especially the activities of *Khanqah*, we can look at some of the findings:

- i) The Sufis adopted many local languages, customs and ceremonials in the initial stage for the development of Sufism in India.
- ii) They developed the creative social and rational energies within the community to become a bearer or an instrument of a social and Cultural Revolution.
- iii) In India, when the caste system was in a strong position in 7th century A.D. and all the benefits of civic and moral life were repudiated to the lower castes people, Sufis entering was a new hope as their main aim was to remove all inhuman fanaticisms and to extend the Islāmic teaching of equality and brotherhood in society.
- iv) Here, *Khanqah's* role is highly significant in some specific grounds like - for prolonging social stability, disciplined life, exchange of mind and thoughts, and for constructing good people and community as well.
- v) *Khanqah* is a place of knowledge and worship where all sections of men come to purify themselves. Besides, *Khanqah* provides different kinds of benefits (such as - the food free of cost, valuable gifts, money to needy one) to man and also comes up with social and spiritual services.

Conclusion: The present society has become highly modern or scientific, but our ethical values are declining day by day; as a result, our peace and tranquility are being disturbed, and pushing us toward a more barbaric stage. The research finds that Sufism is a real torch bearer of Islāmic tradition, where the goal of all tradition is to achieve mental peace, solace and meaning of life. Through the ongoing research we assume that the spiritual sect like Sufism can provide peace, tranquility and solace in our life through their egalitarian outlook, unsuppressed love and the service of humanity.

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