

Impact of Sufi Movement on Socio-Religious Life During the Medieval Period: Rise and Spread of Sufism Movement in India

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Abstract

Sufism develops the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of spiritual practice to establish deep devotion, love as passion; Instead of Namaz, Hajj and celibacy, poetry, song and dance, worship and turning away from God are the norm. Like the Bhakti movement, the Sufi movement also came into its effective form in the medieval period, although its background can be seen only in the seventh-eighth century. Similarly, like the Bhakti movement, the Sufi movement was not an attempt to establish any new religion but was a peaceful campaign of Islam. The Hindu religious sentiments had received a rude set back, when the Muslim rulers plundered and destroyed the Hindu temples. Antagonism between the two different sects of people continued to grow day by day. Religious supremacy made the Muslim rulers and people to exhibit mutual hatred and hostility, towards their fellow Hindu Citizens. At this critical hour of human ignorance and mutual hatred and hostility, there appeared a group of serious religious thinkers who by their Sufi and Bhakti movement awakened the People about God and religion. They did everything to establish brotherhood, love and friendship between the Hindus and Muslims. Like the Bhakti movement, the Sufi movement was not an attempt to establish any new religion but was a peaceful campaign of Islam. The objective of both the movements was to eliminate the evils and superstitions of their respective religions and to preach to their respective followers to follow the high ideals of equality of all human beings and 'universal brotherhood.

Keywords: Sufi, Sufi doctrine, Sufism, medieval period, social change

Objective: The presented paper is a study of the social impact of the propagation of Sufism and its principles during the medieval period.

Question: Did Sufism influence all sections of the society?

Hypothesis: The objective of Bhakti movement and Sufi movement was to bring about change in the society so that social equality can be implemented and caste discrimination can be eliminated, they were successful in that.

Limitation: The development of Sufism is believed to be from the early medieval period, but the paper has only studied the propagation and principles of Sufism during the medieval period, which was mainly spread during the Mughal period.

Material: More material on Sufism is available in Persian or Urdu but as the secondary material, there is abundant material on Sufism available in English language. Therefore, for the presented paper, secondary material of English medium has been used. Which includes some papers, magazines, unpublished research dissertations, books, internet etc?

Importance of the presented paper: Sufi saints opposed the rituals prevalent in Indian society. He behaved with kindness and love towards Hindus. Therefore, their respect for Sufis increased and they started offering flowers at the shrines of Sufis with reverence. This led to the abandonment of religious discrimination and untouchability among Hindu Muslims and increased the feeling of equality and brotherhood.

Introduction

What is Sufi?

The word 'Sufi' is probably derived from the Arabic word 'Suf' which means 'one who wears clothes made of wool'. One reason for this is that woolen clothes were generally associated with fakirs. Another possible origin of this word is 'Safa' which means 'purity' in Arabic. The word Sufi is generally used for any Muslim saint or dervish. This word originated from the word Safa (pure) i.e. a devotee of God who is free from all worldly evils. Saints who follow Sufism are called Sufi saints. This is the liberal branch of Islam. Sufi saints are so lost in the remembrance of God that their every action is only for God and every action done for they is prohibited for them, hence the allurements of the world cannot distract them. The history of Islamic mysticism is largely the history of personal mystical experience. The first phase of Sufism appeared in sacred circles as a reaction against the worldliness of the early Umayyad period (661–749).

Principles of Sufism

Sufi saints believed in monotheism. He believed that "God is one, everything is in God, there is nothing outside Him and God can be attained through love by renouncing everything." They considered God to be like a beloved, for whom the lover would sacrifice everything.

1. Wahdatul Wajad

Bahatul Wajad means "Verily there is only one existence." The declaration that God is one is actually the logical conclusion of the oneness of existence. God is indestructible. Haq (Supreme Truth) and Khalq (Creation) is one Creator and there is an interdependent relationship in creation. Behind many there is one and that is God. Everything is in God and there is nothing outside Him. God can be attained by leaving all the things of the world because the essence of all things is only God

2. Purity of mind

In the formal religion of Muslims, rituals like Roza, Namaz etc. have special importance. Sufi saints had no special request for them. According to him, God resides only in the pure mind. For purity of mind, it is necessary to live a true, simple and simple life and remain detached from worldly desires.

3. Ego destruction

Sufis consider ego destruction very important. One who takes care of me and you can never attain God. To corrupt the ego requires restraint. Therefore, great emphasis has been laid by Sufis on restraint.

4. Devotion to God

It is possible to attain Him through the Trinity by immersing oneself in God. By constantly remembering God and establishing one's identity with Him, true devotion is achieved. Complete devotion to God, free from worldly desires, is called devotion to God.

5. Universal brotherhood

Sufi saints believed in universal brotherhood. He considered all human beings to be children of God and believed that no one should spread hatred towards anyone. Only a person who has love for mankind can attain God. Serving man is a true duty according to Sufis. Allah loves only those who are kind to His servants.

6. Service to mankind

Sufi saints considered service to mankind useful for spiritual development. God can be attained only through service to the poor and the poor.

7. Faith in Guru

Guru or Murshid act as helpers in the path of attaining God. Salvation is impossible without a Guru. Therefore, like Nanak and Kabir, Sufis also had faith in Guru and all the prominent Sufi saints definitely had one Guru or the other.

8. Love of music

Sufi saints of Chishti branch considered music as a means of attaining God. He was against the religion propagated among the Muslim public and wanted to purify the heart through music. Music brings joy and listening to devotional songs awakens the feeling of love for God. Sufi saints them, while leading a simple life, patronized music and musicians. Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki died while listening to devotional songs.

Sufism Movement

There are two types of Sufi sects: Ba-Shara and Be-Shara. Ba-shara was in accordance with Islamic law (shara), while be-shara was not in accordance with (shara). Both orders were common in India, the latter being preferred by itinerant saints and Qalandars. The Sufi movement was a socio-religious movement of fourteenth to sixteenth century. The exponents of this movement were unorthodox Muslim saints who had a deep study of vedantic philosophy and Buddhism of India. They had gone through various religious text of India and had come in contact with great sages and seers of India. They could see the Indian religion from very near and realized its inner values. Accordingly they developed Islamic Philosophy which at last gave birth to the Sufi Movement. The Sufi movement therefore was the result of the Hindu influence on Islam. This movement influenced both the Muslims and Hindus and thus, provided a common platform for the two.

Though the Sufis were devout Muslims, yet they differed from the orthodox Muslims. While the former believed in inner purity, the latter believed in external conduct. The union of the human soul with God through love and devotion was the essence of the teachings of the Sufi Saints. The method of their realizing God was the renunciation of the World and Worldly pleasures. They lived a secluded life. They were called Sufis as they wore garments of Wool (suf) as their budge of poverty. Thus the name 'Sufi' is derived from the word Suf. They consider love to be the only means of reaching God. Historian Tara Chand says, "Sufism indeed was a religion of intense devotion, love was its passion; poetry, song and dance, its worship and passing away in God its ideal". The Sufis did not attach importance to namaz, hajj and celibacy. That is why they were misunderstood by orthodox Muslims.

They regarded Singing and dancing as methods of inducing a state of ecstasy which brought one nearer to realisation of God. There were some leading Sufi saints like Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, Fariuddin Ganj-i-Shakar, Nizam-ud-din Auliya etc. Sufism was a liberal reform movement within Islam. It had its origin in Persia and spread into India in the eleventh century. The first Sufi saint Sheikh Ismail of Lahore started preaching his ideas. The most famous of the Sufi saints of India was Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, who settled in Ajmer which became the centre of his activities. He had a number of disciples who are called Sufis of the Chishti order. Another well known Sufi saint was Bahauddin Zakariya who came under the influence of another famous mystic Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. His branch of Sufi saints was known as the Sufis of the Suhrawardi Order. Yet another famous Sufi saint was Nizamuddin Auliya who belonged to the Chishti order and who was a mighty spiritual force.

These Sufi saints are revered even today by not only Muslims but by a large number of Hindus. Their tombs have become popular places of pilgrimage for both communities. Sufism stressed the elements of love and devotion as effective means of the realization of God. Love of God meant love of humanity and so the Sufis believed service to humanity was tantamount to service to God. In Sufism, self discipline was considered an essential condition to gain knowledge of God by sense of perception. While orthodox Muslims emphasize external conduct, the Sufis lay stress on inner purity. While the orthodox believe in blind observance of rituals, the Sufis consider love and devotion as the only means of attaining salvation. According to them one must have the guidance of a per or guru, without which spiritual development is impossible. Sufism also inculcated a spirit of tolerance among its followers.

Other ideas emphasized by Sufism are meditation, good actions, repentance for sins, performance of prayers and pilgrimages, fasting, charity and suppression of passions by ascetic practices. These liberal and unorthodox features of Sufism had a profound influence on medieval Bhakti saints. In the later period, Akbar, the Mughal emperor, appreciated Sufi doctrines which shaped his religious outlook and religious policies. When the Sufi movement was becoming popular in India, about the same time the Bhakti cult was gaining strength among the Hindus. The two parallel movements based on the doctrines of love and selfless devotion contributed a great deal to bringing the two communities closer together. However, this trend did not last long.

Major Sufi saints and their thoughts and principles

Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti (1143-1234)

Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti was a great Sufi Saint of India. The Chisti order was established in India by him. He was born in 1143 A.D. in Seistan in Persia. He came to India around 1192 A.D. shortly before the defeat and death of Prithvi Raj Chauhan and settled on at Ajmer. It is said that some of the Hindu families influenced Prithviraj to drive out Muinuddin Chisti from his state. Accordingly Prithvi Raj sent the chief priest of Ajmer, Rama Deo, with an order to Muinuddin to leave his state. But Rama Deo was so much impressed and fascinated with the personality of Chisti that he became his disciple and remained with him. In this way he attracted everyone who came in contact with him. He had a large number of followers. By leading a very simple ascetic way of life and spreading the message of love and equality, he had tried to wipe out ill- feelings from the minds of the people of two communities i.e. Hindus and Muslims. Of course no authentic record of his activities is available. He did not write any book but his fame rose with the fame of his successors. However living for a long period of more than ninety years and spreading the message of love and universal brotherhood he breathed his last in 1234 A.D.

Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakar (1176-1268)

Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakar was another great Sufi Saint of India. He was popularly known as Baba Farid. He was a great disciple of Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti. He spent most of his time in Hansi and Ajodhan (in modern Haryana and the Punjab, respectively). He was deeply respected in Delhi. He was surrounded by a large number of people whenever he visited Delhi. His outlook was so broad and humane that some of his verses are later found quoted in the Adi-Granth of the Sikhs. He avoided the company of the Sultan and the Amirs. He used to say, "Every darvesh who makes friends with the nobles will end badly". Baba Farid raised the chisti order of the Sufis to the status of an all India organisation by his high mysticism and the religious activities. He breathed his last in 1268 A.D.

Nizam-ud-din Auliya (1235-1325)

Nizam-ud-din Auliya was the most famous of the Chisti Saints. He was the disciple of Baba Farid. He came to Delhi in 1258 and settled in the Village Chiaspur near Delhi. In his life time seven Sultans ruled over Delhi, but he did not go to any of them. When the Sultan Ala-ud-din Khilizi once expressed his desire to meet him, he said, "I have two doors in my home. If the Sultan would enter through one door I would go out through the other." Nizam-ud-din's strong personality and mystic ideology made him most popular. He laid much emphasis on love which leads one to the realization of God. He also said that love of God means love of humanity. Thus he spread the message of universal love and brotherhood. He said that those who love God for the sake of human beings and those who love human beings for the sake of God are favorite to God. This is the best way to love and adore God. However, preaching his teachings for a long period he breathed his last in 1325 A.D. After him, the Chistis did not stay around Delhi; they dispersed and extended their message to the eastern and southern parts of India.

Implications and conclusion

The most important contribution of Sufism is that it helped in developing the bond of solidarity and brotherhood between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Sufi saints are revered not only by Muslims but also by a large number of Hindus and their tombs have become a common pilgrimage site for both communities. Sufism or Tasawwuf is a mystical sect of Islam. While Sufi saints talk about internal purity, orthodox Muslims emphasize external conduct and religious rituals. Sufism believes that God is the beloved of the lover, that is, the devotee is eager to meet his beloved (God). Sufism influenced both rural and urban areas and had a deep political, cultural and social impact on the masses. Spiritual bliss became the ultimate goal and people could raise their voice against all forms of obscurantism, lies, religious formalism and hypocrisy.

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