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Eminent Sufism in the earlier period

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Abstract

Sufism is an important segment of our social life. It has played significant role in developing social, cultural and political trends in India during the medieval period. The Chishtiya and Suharwardiya silsilas exerted great influence on the social, cultural and political trends of the Indian subcontinent, during the Sultanate period. In closing years of the 14th Century the Qadiriya Silsilah also appeared in the spiritual scenario of the country. Similarly, at the end of the sixteenth century the Naqshbandi Silsilah too entered into India and dominated its religious atmosphere during the whole 17th Century.

Keywords: Spiritual, sultanate, Chishti, saints, Qadiri, silsilah

Introduction

When we make a survey of the sufi's activities since the beginning of the 16th Century, we find Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, an eminent saint of the Sabiriya branch of the Chishti order, as a pioneering personality. The early Chishtis of the Sultanate period always avoided the company of rich people and ruling class. Shaikh Abdul Quddus maintained cordial relations with the contemporary rulers. The collection of his letters contains epistles addressed to Sikandar Lodi, Ibrahim Lodi, Babur and Humayun and also to several contemporary nobles and officials. The other important saint of the sixteenth century was Saiyid Mohammad Ghauth of Gwalior who belonged to the Shattari Silsilah.

He too maintained friendly relations with Humayun and Akbar. Humayun is said to have become his murid. Among the Sufis of the Qadiri silsilah in the 16th Century, Shaikh Amanullah of Panipat deserves special mentions. Akbar was so deeply influenced by his spiritual excellence that he used to consult the saint in important official matters. As mentioned above, the Naqshbandi Silsilah was introduced in India during the closing years of the sixteenth century. Its founder in our country was Khwaja Baqi Billah. Like his spiritual predecessor in Central Asia, Khwaja Baqi Billah considered it appropriate to maintain relations with the rulers and ruling class.

His Chief Khalifa and the most famous Naqshbandi sufi of the early 17th Century Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi was of the view that the ruler's position in relations to his subjects is like the position of heart in relation to body. If heart is defective, whole body will suffer. Similarly, if the ruler is not just, people will have to face difficulties. Therefore, to reform the society, it is essential to reform the ruler first of all. Sirhindi openly criticized Akbar's religious experiments and tried to win over Jahangir to rule in accordance with the laws of Islam. His son Khwaja Mohammed Ma'sum and other descendents were in close relations with Aurangzeb.

Among the Sufis of other Silsilahs in those days, Miyan Mir Qadiri of Lahore also occupies significant place. Accordingly, the whole period of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries was under the deep impact of Sufis and Sufism. Throughout the period they worked on the principles of 'love for humanity', 'service to mankind' and 'feeling of communal harmony'. Taking abode in different cities and towns of the country they attracted people of various sections to their mystic fold. They also deeply influenced the contemporary political life. Rulers and nobles also felt inclined to these spiritual personalities.

Most of the saints of our period of study, centuries, maintained cordial relations with them. However, their activities were not confined only to this extent. They also made great contributions in academic and literary fields. Several biographical accounts, *Malfuzat* of the saints, works on philosophical aspects of Sufism, brochures and treatises on litanies and practices, and the collections of letters of the Sufis were produced during the 16 & 17

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centuries. This Sufi-Literature is valuable source of our information for understanding the history of the period. The impact of the Sufis on Indian society and culture in those days can be clearly studied in this literature. The influence of their teachings on common man and also the problem of people belonging to the lower strata of society may be evaluated through these works.

The Sufi literature throws light on almost all aspects of medieval life - social, cultural and political. This literature discusses not only the Sufi ideas and thought but also provides valuable information about the social trends of the period. This also throws light on different aspects of social life of the period such as preaching of religion, social relation and communal harmony. This literature also tells us about the aristocratic trends and working of the ruling class. It helps us, to great extent, in understanding the contemporary political environment as well. As most of the Sufis of the 16 & 17 centuries maintained cordial relations with the contemporary rulers and nobles, this literature provides different types of information about the religious inclination and method of working of the rulers and also reveals their attitude towards people.

We also come to know about personal affairs of the ruling class through this literature. As for example the most eminent Sufi of the early 16th century Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi was in closed touch with his contemporary Sultans and Emperors. We find lot of informations about Ibrahim Lodi, Babar and Humayun in his biographical account, *Anwar-ul Ayun*, compiled by his son, and successor Shaikh Ruknuddin. Similarly the collection of his letters entitled *Maktubat-i Shaikh Abdul Quddus* contains several letters to these rulers. We get information through these works that the Shaikh himself participated in the first battle of Panipat from the side of Ibrahim Lodi.

He never hesitated in pointing out to these rulers any mistake committed by them. His letters are great evidence of this fact. We also come to know through his works about Babar's early difficulties in India. Accordingly, it may be said that Sufi literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reflects complete socio-political environment of the period. This literature may be held as significant source on the history of the period. As no research work has been done in this regard, this Sufi literature needs to be critically examined so that a clear picture of the socio-political life of the period may be brought to light.

The present research work fulfils this need to great extent, covers a brief history of Sufis and Sufism during the period. Biographical and other details of the Sufis of that period belonging to different silsilahs have been brought to light, provides detailed information about the works produced during our period of study. A number of works written by Sufis and their followers on different aspects of spirituality and spiritual figures have been mentioned. Actually a picture of the ideological environment in the sufidom in India during the 16 & 17 centuries has been depicted. In other words the development of *Wahdat-ul Wujud* and *Wahdat-i-ish shuhud*. An attempt has been made in to Sufis attitude towards non-Muslims, of the period in which Sufis relations with the state have been discussed.

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